



# 53 CURRENT DIALOGUE

December 2012

**Special Issue: Christian Self-Understanding in Relation to Judaism**

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## Editorial

It is good to be able, in this issue of *Current Dialogue*, to present the report and papers of the consultation held in Istanbul in June 2010 which explored “Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism.” This is the third of our special issues of *Current Dialogue* which have focused in turn on consultations exploring Christian self-understanding in the context of Buddhism, then Islam, and now Judaism. We are grateful for the warmth and appreciation with which the re-launch of *Current Dialogue* in December 2011 has been greeted.

Although the meeting in Istanbul took place before I joined the staff of the WCC (and at the time I had no idea I would be doing so), I participated in the meeting as a representative of the Anglican Communion. You can tell this from two of the papers included in this collection, one of which gives quite a bit of my own personal history.

I am grateful to my predecessor, the Rev. Dr Shanta Premawardhana, for organizing that 2010 consultation. Like him, I remember it as a particularly stimulating—though also challenging—gathering. It brought together Protestant and Catholic theologians from Germany, other parts of Europe, and the USA who work intensively on Jewish Christian dialogue concerns, to engage in conversation with Middle Eastern and Orthodox theologians. In a significant development, there were also three Jewish observers present. Such a cross-regional and cross-confessional conversation is quite unusual. It was apparent during the course of the gathering that theological reflection by Christians in this field cannot be entirely separated from political pressures and concerns relating to the Middle East. That is also clear from some of the papers presented in this collection. But apart from specific regional issues, there is the fundamental question of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism—what can briefly be summed up as the question of “supersessionism” or “replacement theology.” It was obvious at our meeting that the Christian world does not yet speak with one voice on this issue.

Perhaps with a special kind of appropriateness the issue also contains the obituary of the Rev. Johan Snoek who was, I believe, the first person to be appointed to the WCC staff with specific responsibility for Jewish-Christian relations.

I also want to thank Shanta for producing the report of the meeting, and, with the help of Ms Yvette Milosevic, for taking the initial steps to ensure the publication of these papers. Additionally I want to thank Ms Marietta Ruhland, the administrator in the department, for her intensive work in layout and dealing with the administrative side of the production, and Michael West of WCC publications who somehow has the gift of making things possible.

It is with pleasure and anticipation that I announce some good news: an additional colleague will join us shortly for the interreligious work of the WCC. The Rev. Dr Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, currently a lecturer at the United Theological College in Bangalore, India, starts work here in Geneva in January 2013 as a Programme Executive. Peniel will focus particularly on concerns relating to Buddhism and Hinduism. I am very much looking forward to his arrival and to being able to work with him. (Perhaps this is also an opportunity to advertise a recent book edited by Peniel, *Asian Theology on the Way: Christianity, Culture and Context*. It is published in the SPCK International Study Guides series. It gives a good indication of Peniel’s wide interests).

Next year (2013) we will be working toward the forthcoming assembly of the WCC to be held in Busan, Korea in October-November. It promises to be an interesting period; I am sure this will be reflected in next year’s issues of *Current Dialogue*.

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This issue of *Current Dialogue* was already well into production when news came on 13 November 2012 of the death of Rt Rev. Kenneth Cragg at the age of 99. As well as being a professional and intellectual inspiration, Bishop Cragg was also a personal friend of mine. With a friend and colleague Professor David Thomas I edited the Festschrift *A Faithful Presence* presented to Bishop Cragg by the Archbishop of Canterbury for his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2003. What I had not been fully aware of until I started to work for the WCC however, was the important role Bishop Cragg played in the 1960s and early 1970s in the development of the WCC's own work in Christian-Muslim relations. I hope therefore that in a future issue of *Current Dialogue* it will also be possible to offer a tribute to Kenneth Cragg which will take seriously this aspect of his work and ministry.

Clare Amos

*Programme Coordinator, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation*

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## **A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation on Christian Self-Understanding in Relation to Judaism**

**Istanbul, Turkey - 17-20 June 2010**

**Rev. Dr Shanta Premawardhana**

### **Introduction**

A consultation on Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism was convened by the World Council of Churches in Istanbul, Turkey, 17-20 June 2010. It was held immediately prior to, and at the same location as, the annual meeting of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), providing the participants an opportunity to attend that event as well.

Acknowledging that over the years, Jewish-Christian relations have developed most extensively among those from the global North, this consultation sought to bring together Christian theologians from many parts of the world and from several confessional traditions. Christians with expertise in forms of Jewish-Christian dialogue familiar to European and North American contexts engaged with Middle Eastern, including Palestinian, Christians as well as Christians from Asia and Latin America. Participants came from Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, and Evangelical traditions. Jewish observers were also invited and participated in the discussion.

Churches around the world have shaped their self-understanding in very different contexts of Judaism: some with little direct experience of a living Jewish community, some in close engagement with the State of Israel, some in long-standing shared cultural encounter with Jews, some in the shadow of the Shoah. While the aim of the consultation was to seek ways to expand theological space for mutual affirmation between Christians and Jews, its methodology encouraged and required the participation of, and dialogue

among, these diverse Christian perspectives. Taking account of the conviction that theological rigour requires Christians to seek critical reflections from colleagues who are adherents of other religions, the consultation also included Jewish observers. This broad Christian participation as well as the presence of Jewish observers constituted an intentional methodological step forward. This document is intended to be a record of the proceedings and seeks to provide a foundation for future conversations.

This consultation on Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism, while valuable for its own sake, is part of a larger conversation on religious pluralism and Christian self-understanding. Following consultations on Christian self-understanding in the contexts of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism, a comprehensive document is expected to be drafted in time for the World Council of Churches' General Assembly in November 2013.

### **Content of the Meeting**

On the first day of the consultation participants heard presentations from geographical regions, confessional traditions, and a variety of other perspectives. These presentations are gathered together for publication in this issue of *Current Dialogue*. Participants engaged in lively discussions in response to these thought-provoking contributions.

At the end of the first day of the consultation, a Listening Group reflected back with questions which provided a framework for the rest of the consultation.<sup>1</sup>

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On the second day, participants formed three groups to discuss the following topics:

1. Are there biblical and theological justifications for replacement theology? If replacement theology restricts theological space for mutual affirmation, can this consultation create a framework that offers an alternative hermeneutic to the churches?
2. Are there biblical and theological objections to affirming Jews as people of the covenant? How would such an affirmation affect Christology, Ecclesiology, and theologies of justice, mission, and evangelism? Would affirming Jews as people of the covenant require the privileging of Jewish-Christian dialogue?
3. Jewish-Christian relations and tensions are loaded with biblical language and metaphors that are used to give added weight to political positions. What criteria can this consultation propose for articulating a proper biblical hermeneutic that overcomes the tendency to overload the political discourse with religious language, and expands the theological space? How do Christian theological perspectives aimed at expanding the theological space affect Christian considerations of the modern State of Israel?

In the afternoon the groups reported the results of their conversation. The following are summaries of their discussions. They should not be received as representing the consensus of the consultation except where it is indicated.

### **Group reports**

#### **Group 1**

The group discussed key words such as “fulfilment,” “replacement theology,” and “supersessionism.” It agreed that “fulfilment” may provide some capacity for developing Christian self-understanding. While “replacement theology” and

“supersession” carry proper descriptive meanings in some, particularly Orthodox Christian, traditions, these terms are categorically problematic when negatively applied *vis-à-vis* Judaism. Therefore, the group welcomed the challenge of developing new or rediscovered hermeneutical metaphors for the relationship between Judaism and Christianity which would allow for the distinctiveness of Christianity and also enlarge the space for Christian-Jewish encounter. Some examples are companionship on the path to God, the olive tree (Rom. 11:17-24), and the wrestling and embrace of the brothers Jacob and Esau (Gen. 32, 33). The metaphor of Christianity as a translation of Judaism was offered as a potentially productive one, although the consultation did not have the opportunity to discuss it adequately.

The consultation agreed that given their theological heritage, serious grappling with these key words continues to be a vital topic for Christian reflection. Concerning the new metaphors, the consultation raised two questions: Does each of the metaphors open the door to expand theological space for mutual affirmation of other religions? Do these metaphors preserve sufficiently the distinctiveness of Christianity which the “fulfilment” approach seeks to express? The consultation commended deeper exploration of these concepts and metaphors.

#### **Group 2**

The group reported its consensus that while there are Christians who voice objections to understanding Jews as remaining in covenant with God, such objections are far outweighed by biblical and theological perspectives that affirm Jewish covenantal life in its distinctiveness. It was stressed that the biblical covenantal tradition has universal aspects that reach out to all humanity. The ongoing covenantal faith of Jews can affect how Christians understand basic

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theological categories while not negating previous Christian traditions.

The consultation, acknowledging a general consensus in Jewish-Christian relations that Jews should not be specifically targeted for conversion to Christianity, also recognized the impact of this question on broader Christian theologies of mission and evangelism. The consultation also agreed that Judaism and Christianity share many scriptures, traditions, and a common context from which the two traditions emerged, and that the Jewishness of Jesus when he lived on earth is an important point of convergence. However the historical development of Judaism and Christianity as two distinct religions must be honoured.

**Group 3**

The group affirmed that biblical interpretation should be guided by a hermeneutic of justice and love; ours is a ministry of reconciliation because God's concern is for all human communities (2 Cor. 5:18 and Ps. 122:6). The group noted with appreciation the call in the *Kairos Palestine* document to approach all neighbours in love. The Bible must be read contextually. Interpretation must take into account not only the context of the story, its composition, and its interpretive history through the centuries, but also the context of the reader. Some Western Christians have developed a tradition of interpretation in which the specific contexts of the long history of systematic persecution of Jews, including the Shoah, are taken seriously. Arab/Palestinian Christian interpretations have their own context, for example, Nakba and the military occupation and life within predominantly Muslim milieux. When reading the Bible, Christians must expect to be challenged by the texts they encounter. The Bible will not always affirm its readers' positions; it offers both hope and admonishment.

The consultation agreed that Christians can suffer from the temptation to

manipulate the Bible for their own ends, sometimes even to promote injustice, oppression, violence, and dehumanization. Some biblical images and theological themes have been compromised by their role in the heritage of Christian anti-Judaism. For example, the modern State of Israel, a political entity, is sometimes instrumentalized to promote Christian theological ends, such as Christian Zionist readings of the biblical text that construct Jews as characters in a Christian eschatological drama.

At the same time, the use of scripture to yield powerful images of repentance and reconciliation and to affirm the Church's bond to the Jewish people must be acknowledged. The mutual consultation of Christians from varied contexts, as exemplified in this consultation, can be a helpful methodological practice, both to counteract the temptations to manipulate the texts and to lift up texts that make reconciliation possible.

The consultation struggled with the terminology as well as with the substance of some questions. There was a great deal of discussion, for instance, regarding the question of whether some Christian theological perspectives developed since the singular contribution of *Nostra Aetate* (excluding evangelical Christian Zionism) have contributed to harming Palestinian interests, especially the interests of Palestinian Christians. Some referred to the body of thought as "Western post-Holocaust theology," but others objected to this label. While many participants agreed that this question was substantive, others felt that the terms needed more precise definitions which do not diminish its very important theological contributions to Jewish-Christian relations.

**Further Impulses**

In addition to the perspectives and questions raised by the discussion group reports and the resulting plenary conversation, the consultation also pointed

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to the following questions for further reflection:

- How does the integral relationship between Christianity and Judaism inform Christian understanding of how God relates to people of other religions?
- Should Christians see Christology as the hermeneutical framework in which to understand the church and its relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people, or should they see God's history with Israel as the hermeneutical framework for understanding Jesus Christ and the church?
- In what ways might biblical and related scholarship about the Jewishness of Jesus (in terms of his humanity) and the Jewish roots of early Christianity enrich the self-understanding of Christians everywhere? What does this work of Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism mean to Christians who live countries that have no contemporary Jewish presence?
- What implications do various Christian self-understandings *vis-à-vis* Judaism have for the current situation in the Middle East and *vice versa*? How can Christians best carry out their vocation as ministers of reconciliation within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
- During this consultation, Palestinian participants communicated their perception that theological justification of the State of Israel by some Christians has contributed to Palestinian suffering. How can the insights of Palestinian Christians further Christian self-understanding?
- Especially in situations of conflict, how can Christians find new ways to explore how liturgy, lectionaries, hymns, educational books, and other materials and practices in the life of churches might counteract the heritage of contempt toward Jews and Judaism and build a healthy,

respectful, grace-filled perspective on our relationship to them?

Meeting in this ancient seat of Christianity, the consultation agreed to conclude its report by calling to mind the words of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I:

*The common spiritual origins of Christians and Jews seem today, more than ever, to offer a fruitful ground toward the rejection of the consequences of mutual prevailing hostility during the past, and the establishment of a new relationship between them, genuine and authentic, rooted in the willingness to work towards mutual understanding and improved knowledge of each other.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The summary questions raised by the Listening Group on 18 June 2010, which were then used as a resource for further discussion, were as follows:

1. Churches around the world have shaped their self-understanding in very different contexts of Judaism: some thoroughly apart from a living Jewish community, some in close engagement with the State of Israel, some in long-standing shared cultural encounter with Jews, some in the shadow of the Shoah, etc. To what extent do the insights from these contexts inform Christian self-understanding in other settings? How can all these experiences be received by the churches as mutual gifts?
2. Concerning definitions: is there a difference, and if so, what is it, among fulfilment, replacement theology, and supersessionism?
3. What are our sources for the formation of Christian self-understanding? What is the relationship between this self-understanding and the questions of ethnicity and identity? How do Jewish understandings of Christianity influence our self-understanding?

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4. What is the difference between "people of God" and "people of the covenant"?
5. How does our theological self-understanding translate into a relationship with national identities and political states?
6. Does a Christian accommodation of Jewish messianic expectations necessarily dilute the Christian distinctiveness? Is this accommodation a negative or positive development in Christian self-understanding?
7. What does Christian witness mean in the world today if Christians move away from proselytism, evangelism,

and mission as these have previously been understood? Is there something special about our relationship with Jews that precludes our evangelism of them in ways that it would not be so with people of other faiths or of no faith? Here we understand evangelism as having another person identify with Christian faith.

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings of the Third Academic Meeting between Orthodoxy and Judaism, 21-24 March 1993 (Athens, Greece), "Continuity and Renewal" in *Immanuel*, vol. 26-27 (1994).

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## Themes in Catholic Post-Nostra Aetate Theology

Dr Philip A. Cunningham

### Introduction

The Second Vatican Council's 1965 declaration *Nostra Aetate* inspired a series of official Catholic Church documents about Jews and Judaism that continues to the present. Vatican commissions, national conferences of Catholic bishops, and Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have issued numerous statements concerning Christian-Jewish relations. Although only partially internalized among Catholics worldwide, these texts have developed over four decades into a system of interlocking ideas.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that these materials, together with their counterparts in other Christian communities, represent an unprecedented Christian affirmation of Judaism's positive theological significance for the Church—a constructive endeavor that has not been seriously pursued since New Testament times.

The concepts expressed in Catholic documents could be conveniently organized into those that are negatively phrased and those that are positively phrased. In the former category are statements that reject elements of the perennial Christian "teaching of contempt" (to use Jules Isaac's phrase). Positive statements are those that make an affirmative claim about Judaism or about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

The pages that follow present a selection of pertinent quotations, but limited to Vatican documents or addresses made by popes or Vatican personnel. Many more relevant statements could be assembled from national conferences of Catholic bishops from many parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, this summary does not cite every possible reference. The quotations that follow are meant only to illustrate a

particular point, not exhaustively authenticate it.

Without discussing the relative weights of authority of the many germane Catholic documents, it is helpful to appreciate certain aspects of the hierarchical and centralized authority structure of Catholic polity. The statements of the Second Vatican Council, a gathering of Catholic bishops from around the globe, including the pope, the bishop of Rome, possess a very high degree of teaching authority. Most important for this outline, of course, is its Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*). This text underwent a long gestation process and was extensively reported upon in the public media.

Participating in *Nostra Aetate*'s authority to a lesser degree are the implementing documents of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. This commission was established in 1974 by Pope Paul VI to put *Nostra Aetate* into practice in the Church's life and to be the Vatican's liaising agency with the Jewish community worldwide. Its 1974 "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, 4" and 1985 "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church" offered important theological and historical principles for building the new relationship with Jews and Judaism.

The commission's title concerning *religious* relations with Jews is noteworthy. It reflects a distinction introduced because of contentions at the time of the Council. Motivated by the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, some regional bishops were concerned about possible retaliation against Christian minorities should the

Council issue a statement that might be viewed as pro-Israeli, while the governments of largely Islamic Middle Eastern nations objected to any positive reference to Jews. Broadcasts such as this one on Jordanian radio in January 1964, during Paul VI's visit to the area, were typical of state-sponsored rhetoric: "Two thousand years ago, the Jews crucified Christ, and fifteen years ago they attacked the people of Palestine... Truly of all the world religions it is the Jews who are the enemies of God, Truly, the crimes of the Jews shall never be forgiven them."<sup>2</sup> Such polemic certainly underscored the need for authoritative Catholic teaching about Jews and Judaism that would repudiate the perennial "teaching of contempt," and likely contributed to the Council's overwhelming 1965 vote in favor of *Nostra Aetate* by 1763 to 250.

However, recognizing the charged atmosphere in the Middle East, the declaration asserted a difference between political and religious matters, which would later be maintained in the title of the eventual Vatican Commission for *Religious Relations with the Jews*: "Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any person, 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, and displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, *Nostra Aetate* and the documentary trajectory it launched were seen by bishops from around the world as demanded by religious fidelity to the Gospel. The distinction between the spiritual and political realms would also reappear in the 1985 "Notes" when that document discussed the significance of the Land of Israel for Jews (see I, B,2,c below).

Also important to this developing teaching trajectory were studies conducted by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, sentences

from which are quoted below. Taking their direction from Pius XII's insistence in 1943 that biblical scholars should make use of critical tools and methods in interpreting the scriptures, these studies of the Pontifical Biblical Commission—conducted under the auspices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—have made many relevant observations about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible and about the dangers of reading the scriptures so as to promote antipathy to Jews.

It should be noted that a few of the quotations that follow are presented in square brackets. These denote current or cutting-edge concepts expressed by individual Catholic officials that do not (yet) possess the higher degree of teaching authority commanded by the other quotations. They are included in order to show the developing trajectory of thought and where further research is needed. A discussion of some current theological questions follows in Part II.

## Part I: Quotations from Vatican and Papal Statements

### A. Ideas expressed negatively

1. The Jewish people cannot be held collectively responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. "[W]hat happened in [Jesus'] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today."<sup>4</sup>
2. The Jewish people are not doomed by a divine curse to wander the earth without a homeland, living on the margins of (Christian) society. "Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not

conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

3. Antisemitism is “opposed to the very spirit of Christianity.”<sup>6</sup>
4. “The history of Israel did not end in 70 A.D. It continued, especially in a numerous Diaspora which allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness—often heroic—of its fidelity to the one God.”<sup>7</sup>
5. Biblical interpreters must “avoid absolutely any actualization of certain texts of the New Testament which could provoke or reinforce unfavorable attitudes toward the Jewish people.”<sup>8</sup>
6. “The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbor.”<sup>9</sup>
7. “It would be wrong to consider the prophecies of the Old Testament as some kind of photographic anticipations of future events. All the texts, including those which later were read as messianic prophecies, already had an immediate import and meaning for their contemporaries before attaining a fuller meaning for future hearers.”<sup>10</sup>

Since Christian readings of Israel’s scriptures are “retrospective ... It cannot be said, therefore, that Jews do not see what has been proclaimed in the text, but that the Christian, in the light of Christ and in the Spirit, discovers in the texts a surplus of meaning that was hidden there.”<sup>11</sup>

## B. Ideas Expressed positively

### 1. *Historic Christian sinfulness toward Jews*

- a) “There can be no denial of the fact that from the time of the Emperor Constantine on, Jews were isolated and discriminated against

in the Christian world. There were expulsions and forced conversions. Literature propagated stereotypes, preaching accused the Jews of every age of deicide; the ghetto which came into being in 1555 with a papal bull became in Nazi Germany the antechamber of the extermination.”<sup>12</sup>

- b) “For Christians, the “heavy burden of conscience [for the collective behavior] of their brothers and sisters during the Second World War must be a call to penitence.”<sup>13</sup>
- c) “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 the merits of all her children.”<sup>14</sup>
- d) “But it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts. Did anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians make them less sensitive, or even indifferent, to the persecution ... against the Jews by National Socialism ... ?”<sup>15</sup>
- e) “[C]utting itself off from its Jewish roots for centuries weakened the Church, a weakness that became evident in the altogether too feeble resistance against the [Nazi] persecution of Jews.”<sup>16</sup>

### 2. *The proper Christian disposition toward Jews today*

- a. “We recognize with utmost clarity that the path along which we should proceed with the Jewish religious community is one of fraternal dialogue and fruitful collaboration.”<sup>17</sup>

- b. Christians must “strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism; they must strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.”<sup>18</sup>
- c. “Christians are invited to understand [Jews’] religious attachment [to the Land of Israel] which finds its roots in Biblical tradition, without however making their own any particular religious interpretation of this relationship. The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law. The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God’s design. We must in any case rid ourselves of the traditional idea of a people *punished*, preserved as a living argument for Christian apologetic....

We must remind ourselves how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times, taking its start from a patrimony which we long shared, so much so that ‘the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church’ (John Paul II, 6 March 1982).<sup>19</sup>

[As a result of decades of dialogue, “we Catholics became aware with greater clarity that the faith of Israel is that of our elder brothers,

and, most importantly, that Judaism is as a sacrament of every otherness that as such the Church must learn to discern, recognize and celebrate.”<sup>20</sup>]

### 3. *The Jewishness of Jesus*

- a. “Jesus was and always remained a Jew ... fully a man of his ... environment—the Jewish Palestinian one of the first century, the anxieties and hopes of which he shared. This cannot but underline both the reality of the Incarnation and the very meaning of the history of salvation...”<sup>21</sup>
- b. “Jesus’ human identity is determined on the basis of his bond with the people of Israel. By taking part in synagogue celebrations where Old Testament texts were read and commented on, Jesus also came humanly to know these texts; he nourished his mind and heart with them, using them in prayer and as an inspiration for his actions. Thus he became an authentic son of Israel, deeply rooted in his own people’s long history.”<sup>22</sup>

### 4. *The “Old Testament” has great non-christological revelatory value.*

- a) “Typological reading [of Israel’s scriptures] only manifests the unfathomable riches of the Old Testament, its inexhaustible content and the mystery of which it is full, and should not lead us to forget that it retains its own value as Revelation that the New Testament often does no more than resume.”<sup>23</sup>
- b) “In Judaism, [scriptural] re-readings were commonplace... What is specific to the Christian re-reading is that it is done ... in the light of Christ. This new

interpretation does not negate the original meaning.”<sup>24</sup>

## 5. *Biblical interpretation*

- a. “Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Each of these two readings is part of the vision of each respective faith of which it is a product and an expression. Consequently, they cannot be reduced one into the other.”<sup>25</sup>
- b. “The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life ... Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations.”<sup>26</sup>
- c. “The Gospels are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work ... [S]ome references hostile to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus. To establish this is of capital importance if we wish to bring out the meaning of certain Gospel texts for Christians today.”<sup>27</sup>

## 6. *Futurist eschatology and messianic expectations*

- a) “[T]he 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’ (Zeph. 3:9).”<sup>28</sup>

- b) “[I]n underlining the [unfinished] eschatological dimension of Christianity we shall reach a greater awareness that the people of God of the Old and the New Testament are tending towards a like end in the future: the coming or return of the Messiah—even if they start from two different points of view. It is more clearly understood that the person of the Messiah is not only a point of division for the people of God but also a point of convergence.”<sup>29</sup>
- c) “Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulus to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like them, we too live in expectation. The difference is that for us the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us.”<sup>30</sup>
- d) [“But whilst Jews expect the coming of the Messiah, who is still unknown, Christians believe that he has already shown his face in Jesus of Nazareth whom we as Christians therefore confess as the Christ, he who at the end of time will be revealed as the Messiah for Jews and for all nations.”<sup>31</sup>]

## 7. *Christianity and Judaism are intrinsically linked.*

- a. “It understood that our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities.”<sup>32</sup> “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.”<sup>33</sup>

- b. “The Church and Judaism cannot ... be seen as two parallel ways of salvation and the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all, while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty...”<sup>34</sup>
- c. “Deep down, those vicious [Nazi] criminals, by wiping out this people, wanted to kill the God who called Abraham, who spoke on Sinai and laid down principles to serve as a guide for mankind, principles that are eternally valid. If this people, by its very existence, was a witness to the God who spoke to humanity and took us to himself, then that God finally had to die and power had to belong to man alone... By destroying Israel, by the Shoah, they ultimately wanted to tear up the taproot of the Christian faith and to replace it with a faith of their own invention: faith in the rule of man, the rule of the powerful.”<sup>35</sup>
- d. [“The universality of Christ's redemption for Jews and for Gentiles is so fundamental throughout the entire New Testament ... that it cannot be ignored or passed over in silence. So from the Christian perspective the covenant with the Jewish people is unbroken (Rom 11:29), for we as Christians believe that these promises find in Jesus their definitive and irrevocable Amen (2 Cor. 1:20) and at the same time that in him, who is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4), the law is not nullified but upheld (Rom. 3:31). This does not mean that Jews in order to be saved have to become Christians; if they follow their own conscience and believe in God's promises as they understand them

in their religious tradition they are in line with God's plan, which for us comes to its historical completion in Jesus Christ.”<sup>36</sup>]

**8. Jews and Christians both have a duty to prepare the world for God's kingdom of justice and peace.**

- a) “As Christians and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing for the world [see Gen. 12:2ff.]. This is the common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, to be first a blessing to one another.”<sup>37</sup>
- b) “We must also accept our responsibility to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah by working together for social justice, respect for the rights of persons and nations and for social and international reconciliation. To this we are driven, Jews and Christians, by the command to love our neighbor, by a common hope for the Kingdom of God and by the great heritage of the Prophets. Transmitted soon enough by catechesis, such a conception would teach young Christians in a practical way to cooperate with Jews, going beyond simple dialogue (cf. *Guidelines*, IV).”<sup>38</sup>

**Part II: A Current Theological Exploration of Christian Self-Understanding in Relation to Judaism**<sup>39</sup>

It is evident to Catholic theologians around the world that *Nostra Aetate* has given rise to challenging and still unresolved religious questions, especially concerning the relationships among Jesus Christ, the covenantal status of the Jewish people, and understandings of salvation. In this section, I would like to summarize the work of one sustained research project into these subjects.

From 25 to 28 September 2005, an international conference was held in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University, “*Nostra Aetate* Today: Reflections Forty Years after Its Call for a New Era of Interreligious Relationships.” Hints of an emerging consensus in papers delivered at this conference led the organizers to initiate a transatlantic theological research project with the encouragement of Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. The participants were primarily Roman Catholics because the purpose of the consultation was to pursue a core question for Christian theology from within a Catholic perspective. However, the group greatly benefited from the participation of some Lutheran and Jewish scholars. Its meetings over the next five years focused on this question generated by *Nostra Aetate*:

*How might we Christians in our time reaffirm our faith claim that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all humanity, even as we affirm the Jewish people’s covenantal life with God?*

This “meta-question” was studied in the context of forty years of post-*Nostra Aetate* developments, which included the publication of the important teaching documents summarized above, the flowering of extensive dialogue between Catholics and Jews on several continents among both leaders and ordinary members of both communities, an intensive promotion of Catholic-Jewish relations during the long pontificate of John Paul II, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the State of Israel, and perhaps most iconically the sight of a pope praying, both at the Vatican and at the Western Wall, for God’s forgiveness for Christian sins against Jews, and committing the Church to fellowship with them.

Consultations occurred in subsequent years in Italy, Belgium, Germany, the

United States, and Israel, exploring these questions:

- What is the significance of the belief that the Word of God became incarnate as a Jew?
- How do we understand “salvation”?
- What is the relationship between covenant and salvation?
- How is Jesus Christ constitutive of salvation?
- How does the Shoah (Holocaust) challenge how Christians think of Christ as saviour?

In pursuing these and other matters, a number of overarching theological principles became increasingly apparent and a general consensus about them emerged. These can be outlined as follows:

#### **A. Principles when theologizing about the Church of Christ and the Jewish people**

##### **1. *There is a need for profound humility.***

- a. God’s transcendence and freedom must always be acknowledged (Note Rom. 11:33: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”).
- b. Both the Church and Israel are “mysteries,” in the theological sense of that word. There is a transcendent aspect to their existence that humans cannot fully grasp.
- c. There are limits to the abilities of human minds to fathom the Holy One and to what human language is able to express about transcendent realities. Tensive language is unavoidably used as in Chalcedon’s “united but unmixed”



description of the human and divine natures of Christ.

- d. The Holy One has not fully revealed to either Israel or the Church everything that God might be doing within the other community. Christian theologians should recognize that they have certain “blind spots” with regard to the Jewish people's covenantal life with God since they do not experience God in the exact same ways that Jews do. Essential in this regard is the Vatican's injunction “to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience” [1974 “Guidelines,” Preamble].
- e. A shameful history of the Christian vilification, oppression, and marginalization of Jews precludes triumphalism or “boasting” (Note Rom 11:25: “[L]est you become wise in your own conceits”).
- f. We are “only at the beginning of the beginning,” in the words of Cardinal Walter Kasper, of developing a Christian theology of the Church's relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people.

**2. History is essential for the work of Christian theology and the Bible must be interpreted with historical and literary critical methods.**

- a. “[C]utting itself off from its Jewish roots for centuries weakened the Church, a weakness that became evident in the altogether too feeble resistance against the [Nazi] persecution of Jews” –Cardinal Walter Kasper, 24 May 2010].
- b. There were historical consequences of the long-lived assertion that Jews were collectively cursed by God for all time because of the crucifixion of Jesus. Even today, the Gospel passion narratives might be carelessly construed, almost out of

habit, to delegitimize Judaism after the time of Jesus.

- c. Although the New Testament contains the seeds of an eventual split into two religious communities, no New Testament book definitively rejects the Jewish tradition but sees the Church as connected to it.

**3. Salvation is relational, eschatological, and intertwined with covenant.**

- a. “Salvation” is so multi-layered and textured that the Catholic Church has never specified a formal definition. In the Christian tradition, the experience and anticipation of salvation has been richly described in terms of redemption, reconciliation, sanctification, and incorporation into the divine life, or as being freed from sin, oppression, meaninglessness, or death.
- b. Salvation involves relationship with God, both as individuals and communities.
- c. Salvation leads toward the reign of God, which is mysteriously experienced as both “already” and “not yet.”
- d. In official Catholic teaching since *Nostra Aetate* there is a recurring recognition of an innate spiritual bond between Christianity and Judaism. Both are distinctive covenantal communities that cannot be seen as totally apart from one another.

**4. All aspects of the “Christ Event” reveal the word of the saving God.**

- a. The incarnation of God's Word in the first-century Jew, Jesus.
- b. The ministry of Jesus as a faithful son of Israel, making the reign of God tangibly present among his people and exemplifying life in Covenant.

- c. His execution in service to the coming of God's reign.
- d. His resurrection to transcendent life, which brought the Church into being as an assembly sustained in the Covenant through the Spirit of the living Christ present in its midst.

**5. The trinitarian tradition pertains to the relationship of Christ and the Church to Israel.**

- a. It is possible to develop a trinitarian narrative of salvation history in which person-in-relationship, not substance, is the ultimate ontological category and God's "to-be" is "to-be-in-communion."
- b. If Jews dwell in covenant with God, then—from a Christian viewpoint—they must be in an enduring relationship with the Triune God, including God's Word, which is inseparably united with the now-glorified Jew, Jesus.

**6. Nostra Aetate has implications for all branches of Christian theology and life, including ecclesiology, liturgy, and education.**

- a. Ecclesiologically, Vatican II's sacramental understanding of the Church and its description of the Church as the people of God opened new vistas for seeing the Jewish people of God as dynamically related to the Church.
- b. Liturgically, how can the paschal mystery be enacted so as to better celebrate the whole saving work of God from creation to its fulfillment?
- c. Educationally, "religious teaching, catechesis and preaching should be a preparation not only for objectivity, justice, and tolerance but also for understanding and dialogue. Our two traditions are so related that they cannot ignore each other. Mutual knowledge must be encouraged at every level. There is evident in particular a

painful ignorance of the history and traditions of Judaism, of which only negative aspects and often caricature seem to form part of the stock ideas of many Christians" [CRRJ, "Notes," VI, 27].

**7. Christian theology can no longer ignore the Jewish religious experience.**

Therefore during the consultation's work, various Jewish colleagues participated in order to ensure accuracy when speaking of the Jewish tradition and to share insights from Jewish traditions of thought.

**Conclusion**

Even this cursory overview of post-Vatican II Catholic teaching and one recent research initiative illustrates that an enormous amount of renewal has occurred from the days, not too long ago, when a draft of a papal encyclical could argue that there existed an "authentic basis of the social separation of the Jews from the rest of humanity. This basis is directly religious in character. Essentially, the so-called Jewish question is not one of race, or nation, or territorial nationality, or citizenship in the state. It is a question of religion and, since the coming of Christ, a question of Christianity."<sup>40</sup> Such reasoning is literally unthinkable in Roman Catholicism today.

However, the process of renewal is still ongoing. Deep-seated assumptions and attitudes that have prevailed for nearly two millennia cannot be not transformed in 45 years. It might be argued that in some parts of the world the Christian encounter with living Judaism has given rise to questions little considered since the time of the New Testament, questions that touch upon the central nervous system of Christian self-understanding. As the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches expressed it in 1967, "There is no doctrine of Christian theology which is not touched and

influenced in some way by confrontation with the Jewish people.”<sup>41</sup>

This visceral impact of today’s Christian engagement with living Judaism can deter further dialogue or further research. Ongoing political conflicts and injustices that involve Jews, Christians, and Muslims can also impede continued renewal. Despite these real difficulties, faithfulness to the gospel requires that Christians continue to travel along the challenging road of rapprochement with the kinfolk of Our Lord Jesus Christ, “authentic son of Israel.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the online collection of Christian documents on the website of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian relations at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements>.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, 5 January 1964; quoted in John M. Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter Between Christians and Jews* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1986), 182.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, §4. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, §4.

<sup>5</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, §4.

<sup>6</sup> Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4,” 1974, Preamble.

<sup>7</sup> Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church,” 1985, VI, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” 1993, IV, A, 3.

<sup>9</sup> PCRRJ, “Guidelines,” III.

<sup>10</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible,” 2001, II, A, 5 - §21.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, II, A, 6 - §21

<sup>12</sup> Edward Idris Cassidy, “Reflections on the Vatican Statement on the *Shoah*,” 28 May 1998.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, “Address to the New Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See,” 8 November 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” 1998, V.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Kasper, “Recent Developments in Christian-Jewish Relations,” Liverpool Hope University, 24 May 2010.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, “Address to Representatives of Jewish Organizations,” 12 March 1979.

<sup>18</sup> PCRRJ, “Guidelines,” Preamble. Note that one can hold that Jews remain the “Chosen People” and still disregard Jewish self-understanding: “Israel remains the chosen people, for its election has never been revoked ... [St. Paul] holds out still the possibility of salvation to the Jews, once they are converted from their sins, and return to the spiritual tradition of Israel, which is properly theirs by their historic past and calling...” Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, *The Hidden Encyclical of Pius XI* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1997), 251, 250.

<sup>19</sup> PCRRJ, “Notes,” VI, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Kasper, “Address on the 37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*,” Rome, 28 October, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> PCRRJ, “Notes,” III, 12.

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, “Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission,” 11 April 1997.

<sup>23</sup> PCRRJ, “Notes,” II, 7.

<sup>24</sup> PBC, “Jewish People,” II, A, 2 - §19.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, II, A, 7 - §22.

<sup>26</sup> PBC, “Interpretation,” I, F.

<sup>27</sup> PCRRJ, “Notes,” IV, 21, A.

<sup>28</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, 4. With this phrase the Council fathers intended to postpone any hopes for the conversion of Jews to Christianity into God’s mysterious plans for the eschatological future.

<sup>29</sup> PCRRJ, “Notes,” II, 10.

<sup>30</sup> PBC, “Jewish People,” II, A, 5 - §21

<sup>31</sup> Walter Kasper, “The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavour of the Catholic Church,” Boston College, 6 November 2002, 3.

<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, 12 March 1979.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, “Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome,” 13 April 1986, 4.

<sup>34</sup> PCRRJ, “Notes,” I, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Benedict XVI, “Address at Auschwitz,” 28 May 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Kasper, “Crucial Endeavour,” 3.

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<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, "Address on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," 6 April 1993.

<sup>38</sup> PCRRJ, "Notes," II, 11.

<sup>39</sup> This section is adapted from the "Introduction" of Philip A. Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary C. Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix, and Jesper Svartvik, eds., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company / Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> The quote is from a draft encyclical, provisionally entitled *Humani Generis Unitas*, that was prepared in 1938 for Pope Pius XI. The pope died before the draft could be reviewed. See Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, *The Hidden Encyclical of Pius XI* (Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1997), 246-259, esp. 247.

<sup>41</sup> "The Church and the Jewish People," V.

<sup>42</sup> John Paul II, "Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission," 11 April 1997.

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## **Replacement Theology, Christian Zionism and the Anglo-American Protestant Tradition of Judeo-centric Prophecy Interpretation**

**Rev. Dr Robert O. Smith**

The development of Christian self-understanding through the context of Judaism is an important agenda for Christian theology. This agenda is a relatively recent movement within Christian theology. Within Western Christian contexts, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, it is only within the past 150 years or so of biblical study and 70 years or so of theological reflection that this agenda has taken hold and borne important fruit. On the other hand, Christian theologies of Judaism—or more precisely, Christian theologizing about Judaism—have a much longer pedigree, and not just in Western Christianity but in Christianity as a whole. This presentation will discuss the contemporary American Christian Zionist rejection of replacement theology and explore how this movement is nevertheless based on a theological tradition that constructs Jews for its own theological purposes.

When John Hagee, pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, was introduced to national audiences in 2005, he was surrounded by leaders of the organized Jewish community in the United States. As his organization, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), was unveiled, Hagee participated in an intense vetting process with several prominent Jewish leaders. Hagee's commitment to supporting the political proclivities of the State of Israel was not in doubt. The Jewish leaders' concerns focused more on the question of whether or not Hagee believed that Jews needed to convert to Christianity in order to be in right relationship with God. This long-standing Jewish concern<sup>1</sup> regarding Evangelical support for the State of Israel was boiled down to one question: Did he support proselytizing Jews?

Although Hagee was eventually able to convince several major Jewish organizations that his support for the State of Israel did not come at the expense of Jewish souls, he was less successful with his fellow Evangelicals. In 2006, the Jerusalem Post reported that Hagee and Rabbi Aryeh Scheinberg, also of San Antonio, had convinced fundamentalist leader Jerry Falwell that Jews did not need to have faith in Jesus to enjoy the benefits of salvation. Falwell countered, calling the claim "categorically untrue."<sup>2</sup> While some leaders, like Anti-Defamation League (ADL) director Abraham Foxman, continued to express suspicion regarding Hagee's ultimate motives, Hagee was invited to deliver a keynote address to the March 2007 American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) policy conference.<sup>3</sup> The Jewish community's approach to Hagee can be seen as a pragmatic embrace. "I don't like his politics or his theology," Jack Moline, a prominent rabbi said of John Hagee before speaking at Christians United for Israel (CUFI)'s 2007 gathering in Washington, DC. "But we live in a time when friends of Israel are few and far between. We have to recognize that we are receiving support from the Evangelical community that we are not receiving from our traditional friends." When asked if Evangelical theology made him uncomfortable, he responded, "I'll be happy to talk about the theological context after we achieve a safe and secure Israel."<sup>4</sup>

For his part, Hagee is no less pragmatic. Indeed, Hagee epitomizes the movement now known as Christian Zionism, which I have come to define as political action, informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area

claimed by what is now the State of Israel. While Moline's pragmatism is political, Hagee exhibits a doctrinal pragmatism as he seeks to thread the needle between his Jewish and Evangelical audiences on the question of whether or not Jews need Jesus to be in right relationship with God.

Hagee's pragmatic journey begins with his repudiations of "replacement theology," attacks that resonate with many concerns raised by mainline Western scholars engaged in Jewish-Christian theological dialogue in the post-Holocaust era, what has also been called "Christian Holocaust theology."<sup>5</sup> Although he does not quote him, Hagee would probably agree with Franklin Littell's observation that "[t]o teach that a people's mission in God's providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbo of history, has murderous implications which murderers in time will spell out."<sup>6</sup> One response to this theological mystery has been to propose that God may have more than one covenant for different peoples. Irving Greenberg, for instance, has proposed a form of "covenantal pluralism."<sup>7</sup> It is difficult for many Christians (and no doubt many Jews as well) to square this "dual covenant" solution with the biblical witness. Hagee offers a different way.

In his 2006 book, *Jerusalem Countdown*, Hagee takes a strong stand against replacement theology: "Paul makes it very clear that the root of the tree is Jewish, and many natural branches (the Jewish people) are yet attached to the olive tree. Israel has a prominent and equal place in the economy of God forever. Paul's description demolishes replacement theology."<sup>8</sup> What Hagee puts in its place, however, keeps Jesus squarely at the center of Jewish suffering and redemption. Hagee highlights "the promises of redemption to be fulfilled by Messiah, who is Jesus Christ" and offers 18 annotated comparisons between Jesus and Moses that establish them "as God's appointed vessels to the nation of Israel." In the coming global tumult known in dispensational theology as the Tribulation,

the vast majority of unbelievers, including Jews, will perish. Nevertheless, some Jews will survive: "God promises that by His sovereign grace a 'remnant' would be saved by the grace of God, a group of survivors who have the opportunity to receive Messiah, who is a rabbi known to the world as Jesus of Nazareth." Most Jews, Hagee says, cannot convert now, before the Tribulation, because "God, by His own hand," has caused "divine blindness concerning the identity of Messiah to come upon the Jewish people." Jews "have been judicially blinded to the identity of Messiah."<sup>9</sup>

Between *Jerusalem Countdown* and Hagee's next book, *In Defense of Israel* (2007), we see a dramatic shift in the pastor's portrayal of the identity of the Messiah. Following his spirited argument against the medieval logic that Jews, as a people, are responsible for Jesus' crucifixion and thus are to be persecuted, Hagee sets out to prove that Jews did not reject Jesus as their messiah, a theme presumably favorable to Hagee's Jewish friends. In contrast to his book of the previous year, one of Hagee's first proofs in the later book is a distinction between Jesus and Moses: "If God intended for Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel, why didn't he authorize Jesus to use supernatural signs to prove he was God's Messiah, just as Moses had done?"<sup>10</sup> Several of Hagee's concluding statements represent his point well: "The Jews were not rejecting Jesus as Messiah; it was Jesus who was refusing to be the Messiah to the Jews." "He refused to be their Messiah, choosing instead to be the Savior of the world." "The Jews did not reject Jesus as Messiah; it was Jesus who rejected the Jewish desire for him to be their Messiah."<sup>11</sup> The conclusion Hagee draws from all of this argumentation is that the gospel of Jesus (not quite the Christ) was intended for Gentiles alone: "That's why the Great Commission commanded, 'Go ye [Jews] into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature...' Gentiles were considered creatures. Jesus even referred to the Gentiles as dogs. The

message of the gospel was from Israel, not to Israel!" Therefore, proselytizing of Jews is a fruitless endeavour: "It is time for Christians everywhere to recognize that the nation of Israel will never convert to Christianity and join the Baptist church in their town."<sup>12</sup> A second edition of *In Defense of Israel* was published soon after the first, the result of a loud outcry from Hagee's Evangelical constituency. In the chapter addressing these topics, now titled "The Myth of Replacement Theology," Hagee completely revises his theology of Jesus' messianic vocation and reintroduces the concept of "judicial blindness" that was absent in the book's first edition, perhaps to the chagrin of Jewish friends, who often do not take well to long-standing antisemitic tropes.

Whatever the reason for these dramatic shifts in Hagee's understanding of Jesus' purpose and identity, one gets the sense that debates about church dogma are not his central concern. Indeed, despite these discrepancies (in the span of one year), there is much that is common between the two books and Hagee's other writings. What is consistent in Hagee's critique of replacement theology is his insistence that God's covenant relationship with the children of Israel was not changed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. "If God is a covenant breaker, he lied to Abraham and to David," Hagee insists. "If God is a covenant breaker and has cast aside the Old Covenant for the New Covenant, how can we be sure he won't cast aside the New Covenant...? That is the message of replacement theology. I reject that message!"<sup>13</sup> On this point, Hagee does not diverge much from the consensus built by the "Holocaust theology" of the past few decades; Hagee's Christian Zionism, however, diverges in kind from the "liberal Christian Zionism" Stephen Haynes has identified as a prominent outcome of the Holocaust theology movement.

Although, according to Haynes, "Christian Holocaust Theology represents a renewed theological and practical backing for Israel

in response to the ambivalence and hostility toward the Jewish state that has come to characterize the Christian mainstream," regularly informed by a "compensatory Christian Zionism [that] is often accompanied by a less than critical perspective on Middle Eastern politics,"<sup>14</sup> its primary Christian motivation is repentance for the sins of Christians against Jews. Endorsement of Jewish empowerment in the State of Israel and defense of that state within Christian spheres therefore becomes a historically informed moral responsibility. While one may disagree with the theological and policy recommendations that emerge from the perspective of Christian Holocaust theology, it is a movement sincerely committed to redressing the wrongs of Christianity against Jews from a stance of permanent penance. The Christian Zionism promoted by John Hagee is far more self-concerned.

In John Hagee's writings, it is clear that the State of Israel is less important for the benefits it brings to Jews than for the verification that nation-state provides to the system of prophetic interpretation on which Hagee's faith is founded. The State of Israel is for Hagee the point of theological reference *par excellence*, both against replacement theology and for his dual covenant views.<sup>15</sup> As he says, "On May 15, 1948, a theological earthquake leveled replacement theology when national Israel was reborn after nearly two millennia of wandering." It is this State—in its founding, expansion, and preservation—that provides Hagee's prophetic keynote: "Their rebirth was living, prophetic proof that Israel has not been replaced." Since the Israelite covenant holds, so too does "God's blood covenant with Abraham for the royal land grant of Israel."<sup>16</sup> Hagee then spends much of the remainder of *In Defense of Israel* doing precisely that, even twice explicitly defending the policy of preemptive military strikes against suspected threats.

In his more theologically-oriented *Jerusalem Countdown* a year before, Hagee offered five “biblical reasons” Christians should support Israel, which included the observations that “Ishmael, father of the Arabs, was excluded from the title deed to the land in Genesis” meaning that “therefore, modern-day Palestinians have no biblical mandate to own the land” and the assurance that “when you do things to bless the Jewish people and the State of Israel, God will bless you.” Even when more theological, Hagee’s vision remains thoroughly political. He includes this warning within his biblical reasons: “America, the Arabs, the European Union, the United Nations, Russia, China—indeed, all nations—are in the valley of decision. Every nation that presumes to interfere with God’s plan for Israel, including the United States, stands not only against Israel but also ultimately against God. God is rising to judge the nations of the world based on their treatment of the State of Israel.”<sup>17</sup> Christians, it seems, must recognize not only that has Israel not been replaced in God’s economy, but that Israel is the sole criterion of righteousness and salvation.

The State of Israel provides the logic of Hagee’s theological system because the state is a fulfillment of prophecy or, more precisely, because the renewal of Jewish political sovereignty over the Holy Land is a verification of the system of prophecy interpretation on which contemporary Christian Zionism is based. This analysis holds for Hagee and for many other Christian Zionists, whether or not they are explicit Christian Zionists like him. Replacement theology—which, in its various forms, accords little or no Christian theological significance to the State of Israel—is fundamentally incompatible with this belief system. Hagee is sincere in his belief: for him, the State of Israel seems as essential to his Christian faith as it is for the self-understanding of many Jews. Nevertheless, this sincerity, and the political activity it engenders toward the preservation of the State of Israel, is

directed less at the well-being of Jews than it is at the preservation and verification of Hagee’s own Christian theological perspective. This is so because if Israel were truly under existential threat, or if the State of Israel were somehow to cease to exist, Hagee’s entire worldview would crumble and his system of prophecy interpretation would be invalidated, leveled by a theological earthquake.

The theological system that informs the Christian Zionism of John Hagee and many others is fundamentally tenuous since it is dependent on the vagaries of political developments. Just as it claims to have been confirmed by political developments, it can be disproven in the same way. While this theopolitical predicament could generate anxiety, the system depends presently on maintaining the status quo in which Israel freely projects its hegemony in the region and thoroughly manages any international process toward peace with its Palestinian neighbours. From this perspective, the only peace to be expected is a false peace brokered with a gullible State of Israel by the coming Antichrist.<sup>18</sup>

On its surface, Hagee’s repudiation of replacement theology appears to echo and adopt the theological conclusions of mainstream post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian dialogue. Those theological conclusions include the commitment of Christians to refrain from theologizing about Jewish existence and purpose, given the historically confirmed effects of that area of inquiry. By contrast, Hagee’s self-concerned and self-verifying approach to Jewish-Christian relations does not hesitate to construct Jewish existence (along with past and future Jewish suffering) for expressly Christian theological purposes. As Israeli journalist Gershom Gorenberg has noted, Christian Zionists like Hagee see “Jews as actors in a Christian drama leading toward the end of days... [R]eal Zionism, as a Jewish movement, is a movement aimed at taking Jews out of the mythological realm and



making them into normal actors in history, controlling their fate and acting for pragmatic reasons connected to the here and now. So what's called Christian Zionism," Gorenberg concluded, "is actually very distant from Zionism."<sup>19</sup> Just as Hagee's theology is incompatible with replacement theology, it is irreconcilable with Christian Holocaust theology that works to preserve Jewish empowerment and self-determination in the post-Holocaust era. The list of concerns grows when one considers Hagee's statements and writings regarding the divinely ordained purpose of the Holocaust, the status of the Roman Catholic Church, and perhaps of greatest contemporary importance, Hagee's virulent endorsement of the most hawkish policies for Israeli and American military forces. It seems that for some Jewish leaders, especially in the United States, the combination of Hagee's militarized and politically mobilized faith and his commitment not to proselytize Jews is enough to excuse the rest of his positions.

However distinct Hagee's perspective may be in the contemporary theopolitical scene, it has a strong pedigree in English and American Protestant thought. Many have sought to locate the theological foundations of contemporary Christian Zionism in the nineteenth-century movement of premillennial dispensationalism formulated by Irish preacher John Darby and his associates (Edward Irving, James Brookes, Cyrus Scofield, and others). Although Hagee and many other contemporary American Christian Zionists do indeed hold to many elements of Darbyite dispensationalism, including Darby's relatively unique belief in the any-moment rapture of the truly faithful, I have grown convinced that dispensationalist doctrine alone does not adequately explain today's movement. In fact, my research has convinced me that Protestant interest in constructing Jews as central figures for Christian eschatological expectation and the tendency to allow those convictions to inform political speech and action are both present in

early expressions of the English Reformation. These commitments were imported into North America along with Puritan pilgrims and their spiritual leaders (including John Cotton and Cotton Mather).<sup>20</sup> Rather than understanding today's Evangelical Christian Zionists as exponents of peculiar nineteenth-century theological commitments, it is important to understand them as heirs of an Anglo-American tradition of Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation.

In the United States, John Hagee has gained as much notoriety for his anti-Muslim and anti-Catholic views as for any teaching concerning Jews. In fact, his positive and negative constructions of religious others are intertwined. This characteristic is consistent with the Anglo-American tradition of Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation, in which constructions of Jews as friends are dependent on similar constructions of enemies. Since the tradition was forged in the crucible of the Reformation era, it is not surprising that Muslims and Roman Catholics would be cast in the roles of the enemy: as Luther put it, the Turk and the Pope were the two heads of the Antichrist. English Protestants, more focused than either Luther or Calvin on the book of Revelation, added to standard Protestant resistance to the "Turko-Catholic threat"<sup>21</sup> a positive role for Jews within Christian eschatological expectation. The resulting construction of theopolitical reality finds its contemporary echo in thinkers like John Hagee.

The first full-length, English-language commentary on the book of Revelation, contained in John Bale's *The Image of both Churches*, was published in 1545.<sup>22</sup> Seeking to celebrate England's growing Protestant commitments, Bale largely echoes themes from Luther and Calvin concerning Catholicism, Islam, and the Antichrist. At the same time, he departs significantly from Luther and Calvin by introducing a new field of thought concerning Jews and their place within Christian apocalyptic hope. Although Bale

does not envision any Jewish return to an earthly Jerusalem and is confident that the true Protestant church has fully replaced Judaism as God's chosen people, the national conversion of Jews to true Protestant faith is nevertheless, for him, part of God's cosmic plan in human history. Bale had a close relationship with fellow exile John Foxe, whose *Actes and Monuments* (first ed. 1563, often known as the *Book of Martyrs*) had a profound effect on English national consciousness. Through these seminal theologians, a debate regarding the place of Jews within Christian eschatological expectation began among English Protestants. This debate was sustained for several decades despite the fact that Jews had been officially expelled from England in 1290 by Edward I. Aided, perhaps, by the relative absence of one of its primary subjects, Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation quickly became a theme within English Protestantism.

The next major step in the development of the Anglo-American tradition of Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation came with Thomas Brightman's *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, another full-length commentary on Revelation first published in 1609.<sup>23</sup> Brightman's *Apocalypsis* presented a realized and realizable eschatological vision that called Puritans to be heavily involved in manifesting their millennial hopes; at the same time, he assigned a central role to Jews in defeating the Turko-Catholic threat. Brightman's interpretation of Revelation 16:12—"The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east"—interprets those kings to be Jews, who will convert as a nation to Protestant faith:

*But what need there a way to be prepared for them? Shal they returne agayn to Ierusalem? There is nothing more sure: the Prophets playnly confirme it, and beat often upon it. Yet not to the end that the ceremonial worship should be restored: but that they mercy of God may shine unto*

*al the world, in giving to a nation now scatered over al the face of the earth, & dwelling no where but by leave; their fathers habitations, wherein they shal serve Christ purely and sincerely, according to his owne ordinance onely.*<sup>24</sup>

This national conversion is not for its own purposes alone. Through their conversion, Jews will be conscripted into a Puritan army central to the realization of Protestant eschatological hopes: "after the Conversion ... Gog and Magog, that is the Turke and the Tartar with all the wicked *Mahumetanes* shall utterly perish by the sword of the Converted and returned *Iewes*."<sup>25</sup> Brightman drew a line around Puritans and Jews against Catholics and Muslims. This line separated two English opponents, Puritans and Anglicans (in the guise of Catholics), while pairing each of them with a mythologized companion, Jews for the virtuous Puritans and Turks for the popish heretics. Refusing to accept Jews as Jews, Brightman instead constructs Jews as reified proto-Puritans who function for the outworking of his own apocalyptic vision within his own apocalyptic drama.

Brightman's contribution was extended by Henry Finch, whose commentary on selected prophetic themes was published anonymously in 1621 as *The Worlds Great Restauration, or, The Calling of the Iewes*. Finch focuses on a dual restoration for Jews: their national conversion to Protestant faith, and their being restored to the Holy Land. In Finch's vision, the Church of Jews becomes primary, while in the New Jerusalem, Gentiles will be the Jews' servants and helpers: "All the Kings of the Gentiles shall bring their glory into they citie, and fall downe before thee ... Blessed shall they be that blesse thee, & cursed shall they be that curse thee."<sup>26</sup> It was this political vision that caused Finch to run afoul of King James. Finch sharpened both the English Protestant commitment to the Jewish restoration to Palestine and the literalist hermeneutics that read this political restoration into the prophetic narrative. While literalism was a

feature of the Protestant interpretive tradition, Finch presents a very specific point of literal interpretation that provides the key to his entire interpretive universe: “Where *Israel*, *Iudah*, *Tsion*, *Ierusalem*, &c. are named, the Holy Ghost meaneth ... really and literally of the *Iewes*.”<sup>27</sup> Finch’s literalism—limited to the functions of Jews within prophetic interpretation—is carried forward by the literalisms of premillennial dispensationalism, Fundamentalism, and contemporary Evangelicalism, including the biblical approach adopted by John Hagee.

Joseph Mede stands with Brightman as a primary shaper of Puritan prophetic interpretation and eschatological hope. Although Mede was not as politically involved as Brightman, his eschatological system, best known for its nascent premillennialism, amplifies his Judeo-centric approach. Mede’s hope for the national conversion of Jews to Protestant faith is inextricably tied to his hope for the ultimate extermination of the enemies of the faith. Mede thus completes the process of transposing the enemies of Christendom into being also the natural enemies of Jews, who are presumed, as proto-Puritans, to be natural allies, so that the “conversion and restoration of Israel” will be synchronous with the “destruction of the Turkish empire.” For Mede, the two parts of the future composite church of Gentiles and Jews will have “its own peculiar enemy; the former the Roman beast, with its uncircumcised origin; the latter, the Mohammedan empire, over a circumcised people, and of an Ismaelitic origin, ominous to the descendants of Isaac.” Mede is certain that the coming “extermination of both [enemies]” will be “accomplished at the coming of Christ.”<sup>28</sup> The rhetoric employed by John Hagee echoes Mede both in its identification of Arabs, including Palestinians, as being racially descended from Ishmael (thus delegitimizing any claim they have to land presumed to be covenanted to the descendents of Abraham through Isaac alone) and in Hagee’s understanding of

Jews as natural allies against all threats. As Hagee said during his 2007 AIPAC policy conference keynote address, “If a line has to be drawn, draw the line around both Christians and Jews; we are united; we are indivisible.”

The millenarian visions articulated by Brightman and Mede became very popular among English Protestants after the breakdown of Parliamentary censorship in 1640. Brightman’s and Mede’s writings were published by Parliament, partially as a means for wresting the biblical foundations of authority away from the throne. The popularization of millenarian and Judeo-centric themes in these tension-filled years would prove explosive. One outcome was a January 1649 petition to Thomas Fairfax and the Protestant War Council, requesting “that this Nation of England, with the inhabitants of the Netherlands, shall be the first and the readiest to transport Israel’s sons and daughters on their ships to the land promised to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for an everlasting inheritance.”<sup>29</sup> This petition is, by the definition I have proposed, the first example of Christian Zionism.

In that same climate, Menasseh ben Israel, a rabbi in Amsterdam likely in conversation with many Baptists and other non-conformist English Protestants residing there—including the authors of the petition received by Fairfax—began exploring the possibilities of turning English Protestant interest in Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation to the benefit of his own people. Ben Israel’s book, *Hope of Israel* (1650), was an effort to compile testimony concerning the whereabouts of the ten “lost” tribes. If Daniel 12:7 was to be interpreted to mean that Christian eschatological hope could not be realized until Jews were scattered throughout the earth, then England’s ban on Jews would have to be rectified before Jesus could return. This Jewish interpretation of Christian hope formed the

basis of ben Israel's correspondence with Oliver Cromwell.

For this discussion, the most salient point in ben Israel's book is the theological essay by the book's Christian translator, Moses Wall. Wall's "Considerations Upon the Point of the Conversion of the Jewes" provides an interesting turning point in history of Judeo-centric Christian speculation about the ultimate purpose of Jews in God's plan for God's church. For Wall, the fact that Jews have not yet converted in large numbers is the last sign that remains to be fulfilled before Christ's kingdom can be established. Nevertheless, the lack of contemporary evidence is no cause for joining those who believe in "the hopelesnesse of their repentance," for it has become apparent that "their Conversion shall be the work of God" similar to their deliverance from Egypt. Instead, Christians "ought much to minde their Conversion, exercising thereupon our faith, our prayers, and also our enquiries."<sup>30</sup> After these introductory remarks, Wall, in a manner strikingly similar to Hagee's, offers several reasons to "love the Jewish Nation." There, Wall returns to the hope of Jewish conversion: "That of the ordinary way of Christianizing a person, or people, seemes to me not of use here," he says. After "many ages" of applying those methods to Jews, the goal has not been accomplished. "I then conclude, that their conversion shall be in an extraordinary way, it shall be the worke of our Lord Jesus, and of his good Spirit."<sup>31</sup> Wall's irenic attitude toward Jews and general lack of concern for active efforts to proselytize and convert these "brethren in Abraham" can be understood both as a natural path of Judeo-centric approaches to Christian hope and as a dramatic reversal of longer-standing comprehensions of Jewish-Christian relationship. His attitude is an important precursor to the views of many in the contemporary Christian Zionist movement.

English Christian engagement with Jews proved that Jewish conversion as a nation to the Protestant faith would not be an

easy task. This fact complicated the long-standing timeline of national conversion leading to national restoration to Palestine. It became clear that restoration to the land rather than conversion to Christianity was the more pressing need for Christian eschatological expectations. Thus we see a shift in English Protestant thought between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, between the assertion that "the conversion of the lewes ... may be more desired then our owne salvation"<sup>32</sup> to serious considerations in 1815 that "it seems most likely that the restoration of the Jews to their own land, will take place before their conversion to Christianity."<sup>33</sup>

The latter view was likely inspired by the writings of George Faber, who speculated a few years earlier that while "a large body of the Jews will be restored in a converted state by some great maritime power," presumably the British empire, "Another considerable body of the Jews ... will be restored by land and in an unconverted state by the Antichristian faction; and that for mere political purposes."<sup>34</sup> By the time William Blackstone synthesized early 20<sup>th</sup> century premillennial dispensationalism in the 1908 edition of his magnum opus, *Jesus is Coming*, listing "the gathering of Israel, in unbelief" as one of the signs pointing to the coming Rapture, this gathering had become a matter of historical fact through the secular Jewish political movement known as Zionism.<sup>35</sup> Even with these shifts, the Anglo-American tradition of Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation, with its focus on constructing friends and enemies for faithful Christians and for God, remained central to American popular Christianity. These beliefs and the eschatological significance they accord to political movements involving Jews and the State of Israel remain a consistent feature of American popular consciousness. The contemporary mobilization of Christian Zionism in the form of Christians United for Israel, among other organizations, seeks to draw from this deep tradition within American culture and popular religious thought.

As I was drafting this paper, a Jewish friend reminded me that a discourse is interesting not because of its factual reality or its logical structure but because society takes it as a valid option; that fact alone makes it by default interesting to analyze. There is no doubt that contemporary American Christian Zionism has been accepted as a valid option within North American religious and political thought. Beyond that reflection of some basic American commitments, Christian Zionism draws our attention because it is a discourse that profoundly affects the lives of many in the Middle East, including Israelis and Palestinians. It can do this because organizations like CUFI have great levels of access to policymakers and opinion shapers. CUFI conferences have been addressed by sitting United States senators and representatives (including Joe Lieberman, Rick Santorum, and Sam Brownback) and by former Israeli prime ministers such as Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu and have featured a "Middle East Briefing" presented by former CIA director James Woolsey and former Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon. In that company, calling support for Israel "God's foreign policy" serves to reinforce certain American and Israeli patterns of engaging the world, patterns that have far-reaching consequences for global wellbeing. Given the export of Christian Zionist commitments through American Evangelical missionary enterprises, the movement has become a global concern as well.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, since contemporary American Christian Zionism is built on a foundation formed by a centuries-old tradition of Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation and that tradition's self-referential constructions of Jews, Muslims, and other Christians (including Roman Catholics and, today, Palestinian Christians who are suspected of being nothing other than *dhimmi*—members of a protected but restricted religious community under Islam—forced to support Islamist political aspirations) the movement raises profound questions for

Christian faithfulness and self-understanding.

<sup>1</sup> See especially Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and idem *Philosemites or Antisemites? Evangelical Christian Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and the State of Israel*, Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism 20 (Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Ilan Chaim, "Falwell: Jews Can Get to Heaven," *Jerusalem Post*, 1 March 2006. Falwell's response was reported widely. See "Falwell Denies Report That He Believes Jews Don't Need Jesus," Associated Press, 2 March 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Abraham H. Foxman, "Jews and Evangelicals: Support for Israel Isn't Everything," *Time Magazine Online* (www.time.com), 16 January 2007 and James D. Besser, "Hardline Pastor Gets Prime AIPAC Spot," *Jewish Week* (New York), 9 March 2007.

<sup>4</sup> James D. Besser, "Growing Acceptance Seen Of Fiery Pastor," *The Jewish Week* (New York), 4 May 2007.

<sup>5</sup> See Stephen R. Haynes, "Christian Holocaust Theology: A Critical Reassessment," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 553–85. Haynes's first note admits that there is some objection to this phrase.

<sup>6</sup> Franklin Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 2. There are of course many similar observations from a large group of scholars, including John Pawlikowski, Alice and Roy Eckhart, and Franklin Sherman, among many others.

<sup>7</sup> See Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Covenants of Redemption," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 141–58.

<sup>8</sup> John Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2006), 185.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 133, 144, 158, 170, 175.

<sup>10</sup> John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel: The Bible's Mandate for Supporting the Jewish State*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2006), 137.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 140, 143, 145.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 134, 148, see also 145.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>14</sup> "This posture, which can be called liberal Christian Zionism or 'Christian Israelism' (a term coined by A. Roy Eckardt), is one the Holocaust Theologians regard as a distinguishing characteristic of authentic post-Holocaust Christianity as well as a prerequisite for meaningful Jewish-Christian dialogue. Conversely, they argue, Christian opposition to Israel is in reality the familiar disease of Christian anti-Judaism in a more subtle, but no less virulent form." Haynes, "Christian Holocaust Theology," 562. See also *ibid.*, 568.

<sup>15</sup> The fulcrum of his theology is certainly not the cross of Jesus, nor, as we have seen, the messianic mission of Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> Hagee, *In Defense of Israel*, 149, 150, 162.

<sup>17</sup> Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown*, 196, 197, 201.

<sup>18</sup> See John Hagee, *The Beginning of the End: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Coming Antichrist* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1996). At the time, Hagee was convinced that the rhetoric within Israel regarding the achievement of a peace agreement to honor Rabin's memory opened the door to the establishment of the peace agreement with Israel that would 1) signal the approaching beginning of the seven-year period of Tribulation, and 2) the imminent Rapture of the church.

<sup>19</sup> "Gershom Gorenberg on Christian Zionism," "Fresh Air," public radio station WHYY, 18 September 2006, available at [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org). See also Gershom Gorenberg, "Unorthodox Alliance: Israeli and Jewish Interests Are Better Served by Keeping a Polite Distance from the Christian Right," *Washington Post*, 11 October 2002, A37.

<sup>20</sup> On the importing of this tradition into the American context and the American context's fundamental continuity with English Puritan thought, see Richard W. Cogley, "The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the 'Judeo-centric' Strand of Puritan Millenarianism," *Church History* 72, no. 2 (June 2003): 304–32; Sarah Hutton, "The Appropriation of Joseph Mede: Millenarianism in the 1640s," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture: The Millenarian Turn*, ed. J.E. Force and R.H. Popkin (Alphen aan den Rijn, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 2001); Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), esp. chap. 6, "First Phases of Puritan

Millennialism"; Stephen J. Stein, "A Notebook on the Apocalypse by Jonathan Edwards," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 29, no. 4 (Oct. 1972): 623–634; Reiner Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus: The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Typology in New England," *The New England Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Sept. 1990), 357–395; *idem*, "Israel Redivivus: The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Typology in New England," *The New England Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1990): 357–95; and Reiner Smolinski, ed., *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of "Triparadisus"* (Decatur: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> For this phrase and its meaning, see Nabil Matar, "The Idea of the Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought: From the Reformation until 1660," *The Durham University Journal* 78 (Dec. 1985), esp. 25.

<sup>22</sup> John Bale, *The image of bothe churches after revlacion of saynt Iohan the evangelyst* (Antwerp: S. Mierdman, 1545). A second, expanded edition was published in London in 1570: John Bale, *The image of both Churches after the most wonderfull and heauenly Reuelation of saint Iohn the Euangelist, contayning a very fruitfull exposition or paraphrase vpon the same. Wherin it is conferred vvith the other scriptures, and most auctorised histories. Compyled by Iohn Bale an exyle also in thys lyfe, for thefaithfull testimony of Iesu*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Thomas East, 1570).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Brightman, *Apocalypsis apocalypseos. Id est, Apocalypsis D. Ioannis analysi et scholiis illustrata: ubi ex scriptura sensus, rerumque predictarum ex historijs eventus discutiuntur. Huic synopsis praefigitur universalis: & refutatio Rob. Bellarmini de Antichristo libro tertio de Romano Pontifice, ad finem capitis decimi septimi inferitur* (Francofurti: Prostat apud viduam Levini Hulsij, 1609), first published in English as Thomas Brightman, *A revelation of the Apocalyps, that is, the Apocalyps of S. Iohn illustrated vvith an analysis & scolions where the sense is opened by the scripture, & the events of things foretold, shewed by histories. Hereunto is prefixed a generall view: and at the end of the 17. chapter, is inserted a refutation of R. Bellarmine touching Antichrist, in his 3. book of the B. of Rome* (Amsterdam: Iudocus Hondius & Hendrick Laurens, 1611). All citations are from this first English edition.

<sup>24</sup> Brightman, *A revelation of the Apocalyps*, 440–41.

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Brightman, *A commentary on the Canticles or the Song of Salomon wherein the text is analysed, the native signification of the words declared, the allegories explained, and the order of the times whereunto they relate observed / by Thomas Brightman ; unto which is added brief notes out of severall expositors of the Revelation touching the rising and fall, progresse and finall destruction of the enemies of the church with some other observations out of divers writers* (London: John Field for Henry Overton, 1644), 1055.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Finch [Anon.], *The Worlds Great Restauration, or, The Calling of the Iewes* (, 1621), A4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Mede, *Clavis Apocalyptica*, 430, 431, 429, 396, 397–98, 396–97.

<sup>29</sup> The petition was sent by Ebenezer and Joanna Cartwright, who were English Puritans residing in Amsterdam

<sup>30</sup> Moses Wall, “Considerations Upon the Point of the Conversion of the Jewes,” in Menasseh ben Israel, *The hope of Israel* (1651)?], 46, 47, 48.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–54.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Morton of Berwick, *A treatise of the threefolde state of man wherein is handled, 1 His created holinesse in his innocencie. 2 His sinfulness since the fall of Adam. 3 His renewed holinesse in his regeneration* (London: R. Robinson for Robert Dexter and Raph Jackson, 1596), 336.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, “Of the return of the Jews to their own land in the Millennium; being a brief answer to the difficulties suggested in a piece written by the late Dr. Edwards, and republished in the U.C. Mag. Vol. 11. No. 10,” *The Utica Christian Magazine* 3, no. 1 (July 1815): 37–8.

<sup>34</sup> George Stanley Faber, *A Dissertation on the Prophecies, that Have Been Fulfilled, are Now Fulfilling, or will Hereafter be Fulfilled, Relative to the Great Period of 1260 Years; The Papal and Mohammedan Apostacies; The Tyrannical Reign of Antichrist, or the Infidel Power; and the Restoration of the Jews*, Volume 1, first American ed. (Boston: Andrews and Cummings, 1808), 268, 247. This book was immensely influential. After several editions, it was renamed and reprinted in three volumes in 1828 as *The Sacred Calendar of Prophecy*, 3 vols. (London: C. & J. Rivington, 1828).

<sup>35</sup> William E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*, presentation ed. (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1916), 228.

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<sup>36</sup> See Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), esp. 145–48. See also Paul Gifford, “The Complex Provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology,” in *Between Babel and Pentecost; Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, ed. Andre Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratini (New York: Hurst, 2001), 62–79.

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## Contemporary Christian Self-Understanding:

### *Populus Dei or Corpus Christi?*

Rev. Dr Jesper Svartvik

From its inception the World Council of Churches has addressed the crucial and critical issue of Jewish-Christian relations.<sup>1</sup> Already at its first Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, the WCC called upon “all the churches ... to denounce anti-Semitism, no matter what its origin, as absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Anti-Semitism is a sin against God and man.”<sup>2</sup> Given that its *Sitz im Leben* was Europe—the continent where Christendom had formed generation after generation for almost two thousand years—and that it was issued only three years after the end of the Second World War and its unprecedented antisemitism in abhorrent practice, this statement is powerful, brave, and remarkable. Nevertheless, all those who concur with this statement have to ask themselves: what does it mean “to denounce anti-Semitism, no matter what its origin”? What are the practical consequences?

We find a number of answers to those questions in another well-known statement, issued in early post-war times by the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) in 1947, the Seelisberg declaration. The ten points of the Seelisberg declaration can be summarized as two emphases: (1) the revoking of the deicide charge and (2) the re-Judaizing of Jesus of Nazareth. On these two directives hangs the entire declaration. Those are important tasks: to oppose the vitriolic blood libel and to encourage biblical scholars and theologians to present Judaism not as Jesus’ theological contrast but as his historical context.

The third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, in New Delhi in 1961, addressed the deicide charge:

*In Christian teaching, the historic events which led to the Crucifixion should not be so presented as to impose upon the Jewish people of today responsibilities which must fall on all humanity, not on one race or community. Jews were the first to accept Jesus and Jews are not the only ones who do not yet recognize him.*<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that this statement commences with the deicide accusation, but concludes with a soteriological announcement. To paraphrase it provocatively as an admonition: “Please remember that not all Jews are like the Jews, and also that there are non-Jews who are like the Jews; Judaism is wrong, but please remember that not only Jews are wrong.”

Hence, what is lurking around the corner is—as is so often the case—soteriology. The thorny issue of Christian mission to the Jewish people was addressed in the so-called Bristol Report. This report, which was presented in 1967<sup>4</sup>, argued that if the Church uses the *corpus Christi* (body of Christ) discourse when defining itself, and if the body of Christ is “the definitive community of salvation,” then the Jewish people will necessarily be outside of this community, and will somehow have to be “made fit” to be included in the soteriological entity. However, if the Church uses the *populus Dei* (people of God) discourse, then Jews as Jews can be understood as being included in the people of God. The Bristol document states:

*[I]t is possible to regard the Church and the Jewish people together as forming the one people of God, separated from one another for the time being, yet with the promise that they will ultimately become one. Those who follow this line of thinking*



would say that the Church should consider her attitude towards the Jews as theological and in principle as being different from the attitude she has to all other men who do not believe in Christ. It should be thought of more in terms of ecumenical engagement in order to heal the breach than of missionary witness in which she hopes for conversion.<sup>5</sup>

In short, the Bristol document suggests that the *populus Dei* theme is better than the *corpus Christi* motif. However, this article challenges that assertion. I am inclined to go in the opposite direction, i.e. to argue that the *populus Dei* discourse—to a much higher degree than the *corpus Christi* discourse—circumscribes the possibility to provide “theological space” for non-Christians.<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Some Problematic Aspects of the *Populus Dei* Discourse

Although the *populus Dei* discourse is time-honoured and cherished, I suggest that it is intrinsically problematic.

a. The most obvious disadvantage of the idea of being the people of God is that this peoplehood becomes a possession of the members of a faith community. Pluralism by definition becomes a theological threat: if we are too dissimilar, we cannot both belong to the inside group. This problem will not be solved simply by including the Jewish people in the epistemologically Christian people of God, i.e., to say that Judaism is a Christianity. In addition, it should be added that early Christian writers actually seemed to argue in favour of the opposite. If we apply the anachronistic terms “Judaism” and “Christianity,” it is most likely that Paul in Romans 9-11 argues that Christianity is a Judaism, not that Judaism is a Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

b. Another disquieting drawback of the *populus Dei* discourse becomes manifest as we scrutinize the phenomenon of Christian Zionism. Many who identify themselves with that movement seem to be completely indifferent to the plight of

the Palestinian people. Not even Christian Palestinians, i.e., sisters and brothers in Christ, are of interest to those groups who support settlements in the West Bank and Jewish extremist movements. By identifying the Jewish people as “the people of God,” numerous Christian Zionists become immune to the plight of those who are in need.

It should be added, however, that Christian Zionism is not identical with what Jews refer to as Zionism. As a matter of fact, Christian Zionism actually has very little in common with Jewish Zionism. Christian Zionism, a phenomenon found primarily within Evangelical Christianity, has three distinctive features:

i. a focus on territoriality in the Middle East, especially the State of Israel, particularly on Jerusalem, and even more on the Temple Mount, al-Haram ash-Sharif.

ii. Furthermore, it is a distinctly Christian apocalyptic discourse,

iii. in which Judaism and the Jewish people are instrumentalized for a higher, apocalyptic (i.e. Christian) purpose. We see here clearly the fundamental difference between Jewish Zionism and Christian Zionism: whereas Jewish Zionism is an inner-Jewish reflection of Jews’ self-understanding in and outside of Israel, Christian Zionism is about the role which the “other” plays in one’s own theological scheme. It is not a self-understanding, but an other-understanding. This observation should give us pause, as Jews for two thousand years have been the theological “other” in Christian theology.

c. There is, however, another problem as well which must not be forgotten. Not only Christian Zionists are insensitive to the self-understanding of the peoples in the Middle East. The *non possumus* (“we cannot”) theology governed Roman Catholic theological understanding of a Jewish presence in the Middle East until the Second Vatican Council, perhaps

even up until the beginning of the 1990s. In our post-*Nostra Aetate* times we easily forget the centrality of a supersessionist Christian theology for the political refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish presence in the Middle East.

What is truly remarkable is that a number of non-Catholic theologians seem to have inherited this *non possumus* theology. It is often argued that particularistic Judaism ceased to exist two thousand years ago, and was superseded by a universal Christian mission, as described in the New Testament. In these theological texts one detects a narrow reading of some of the antagonistic passages in the Gospels, of the Pauline epistles and of some of the chapters in the epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>8</sup> In short, some Christian theologians seem to argue that there is no theological room for a Jewish self-understanding after Christ.<sup>9</sup> In other words, for political reasons, a number of theologians want to delegitimize the Jewish people in order to delegitimize the State of Israel theologically. However, it is easy to side with Gerard S. Sloyan here: not to consider the Jewish people when talking about the people of God is “perilously like playing Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark.”<sup>10</sup>

d. In addition to these contemporary reflections, we also need to remember that a growing number of scholars challenge the assertion that ethnicity played an insignificant role in early Christianity. Historically speaking, the first generations of Christians did not define Christianity in opposition to the category of ethnicity; on the contrary, when using the “people” (Greek *genos*; Latin *genus*) discourse, they understood themselves as a people distinct from other kinds of peoples.<sup>11</sup> The confessions of the martyrs *Christianus sum* and *Christiana sum* are not expressions of their indifference to the *genos/genus* discourse, but of its very centrality and its reinforcement.<sup>12</sup> In short, ethnicity is not the dividing line between an alleged “tribalistic” Judaism and an assumed “universal” Christianity.

By way of conclusion, we have to ask ourselves whether it is actually possible to describe the Church as “the new people of God” and, at the same time, to assert that “the Jews should not be represented as rejected by God or accursed, as if that would follow from Holy Scripture.”<sup>13</sup> The only possibility to maintain that the Church is the new people, without stripping Israel of its covenantal peoplehood, is to say that there are—at least—two peoples of God, which means that the Church cannot be described as *the* people of God, only a people of God.<sup>14</sup> If we, as Gerald O’Collins suggests, choose to refer to non-Christians as “God’s other peoples,” we thereby also state that there is not only one people of God.<sup>15</sup> In short, the Church cannot be both the people of God and the new people of God at the same time.

## 2. The Theological Interplay between the Stories of Fall and Revelation

We have seen that there are several good reasons for seeking an alternative to the *populus Dei* discourse. Before addressing the *corpus Christi* discourse, it might be worthwhile to reflect on the relationship between revelation and fall. Historically speaking, Christianity—as well as Islam—has been considerably more universal in its discourse than has Judaism. This could be ascribed to historical reasons. Whereas Christianity became the most powerful religion in Europe after no more than three centuries, Jews have lived as second-class citizens all over the world for millennia. According to this line of thought, Judaism had to cultivate a theology which corresponded to the historical context. But in addition to this historical explanation, there is also something in the historiography—the interpretations of the past—of the two religions which deserves our attention. How do Jews and Christians relate revelation and fall (i.e. the master story of human fragility) to each other? The word order here—“revelation and fall” as different from “fall and revelation”—is of importance.

The Jewish master story is, undoubtedly, the exodus from slavery to freedom. It is

revived at each year's Seder table with biblical texts, traditional songs, and symbolic food. According to Jewish historiography, the story about the Golden Calf is exceptionally central (see Ex. 32; Deut. 9:6-29), but this event takes place after the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. In other words, revelation precedes the fall. The focus is on the people which accepts the Torah but fails to live up to its demands.

In traditional Christian historiography the course of events is the opposite: whereas the exemplary text on human fallibility is found in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 3), revelation is linked to the proclamation and person of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament. In short, while revelation precedes the fall in Jewish historiography, according to Christian historiography the fall precedes revelation. This fact may, of course, serve as an illustration as to what extent Jews and Christians read the same stories in different ways, but there is more here than immediately meets the eye. It is the universality of Christology that prompts Christians to look for a mirror text in the Hebrew Bible. Paul calls Jesus of Nazareth *ho deuterios anthropos* ("the second man"), thereby constructing an exceedingly influential Genesis-Jesus dichotomy.<sup>16</sup> Not all members of the scholarly community acknowledge this "from-solution-to-plight" paradigm, but a growing number of scholars do.<sup>17</sup> Hence, the third chapter in Genesis is not the starting-point for this line of thought, but a Christological reflection.

Now, what if Christians sought to articulate a theology which allows revelation to precede the fall? I would suggest that there is an excellent parallel in the Gospels' presentation of the disciples, the fallible followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Many readers of the Bible are so used to the depiction of Judas Iscariot as the traitor (see Matt. 10:4, Mark 3:19, and Luke 6:16) that they might forget what is truly astonishing: the traitor belonged to the inner core; he was actually one of the twelve. This is especially obvious in the oldest narrative account: in both Mark

14:10 and Mark 14:43 it is explicitly stated that Judas is "one of the twelve" (Greek: *heis tôn dôdeka*). Two of Jesus' disciples play important roles in the passion narrative: Peter the denier and Judas the traitor. Peter, too, is one of the twelve.

We have here a striking discrepancy between the Gospel narratives and the reception history of the very same Gospels: whereas Judas is remembered as the traitor, Peter was soon to be rehabilitated.<sup>18</sup> One is reminded of the interesting question posed by Edgar Lee Masters: "How did you, Peter ... the fisherman, worthy of blame, arise to this fame?"<sup>19</sup>

Many a Bible reader would answer that Peter is a model, not in his rejection, but in his repentance. It is astonishing that the Gospel of Mark probably was written for the Christians in Rome, the city where Peter, according to the Christian tradition, was the Vicar.

What I suggest in this article is that Christians concentrate less on the third chapter in the book of Genesis and more on the New Testament's astonishingly forthright narratives about the fallible followers of Jesus, hence allowing revelation (Jesus' calling of the disciples) to precede the fall (the defectiveness of the disciples).

### 3. The Theological Potential of the *Corpus Christi* Discourse

It is now appropriate to return to the *corpus Christi* discourse which, I argue, is to be preferred to the description of the Christians as "the people of God," "the new people of God," or "the true people of God." There are several good reasons for this option:

a. First, this discourse is very old. As a matter of fact, we find it in the oldest Christian texts, the Pauline epistles, e.g., in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (a passage which is a prelude to the important 13<sup>th</sup> chapter on faith, hope, and love) and also in Romans 12:3-8.

b. Secondly, this is a discourse which presupposes and focuses on the manifoldness in the Christian community. “If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body” (1 Cor. 12:19ff.). The *corpus Christi* metaphor helps us detect the perils of uniformity. Furthermore, it is an inherently anti-hierarchical metaphor. Only Christ can and should be the head of the *corpus Christi*. It should be added that, although the encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* of Pope Pius XII understands the metaphor differently, it is not difficult to argue that this emphasis on ecclesiastical hierarchy is actually against the grain of the metaphor. When the text refers to “the Vicar of Jesus Christ” as “the Supreme Head” it is not an assertion stemming from the Pauline metaphor, but a line of thought which is imported from other discourses.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the *corpus Christi* metaphor, if anything, sustains ecumenism.

c. Thirdly, the *corpus Christi* discourse emphasizes the importance of incarnation to Christian theology and liturgy. The Christian *kerygma* is that Christ is God’s presence in this world, that the Eucharist is Christ’s presence in the *leitourgia*, and that Christians are to be Christ’s presence in the *diakonia*. The doctrine of the incarnation is often presented as a stumbling-block in Jewish-Christian relations. It is, therefore, worthy of note that Jewish philosopher and theologian Michael Wyschogrod thinks of it as a stepping stone for a better understanding of his own tradition:

*The doctrine of the incarnation thus separates Jews and Christians but, properly understood, also sheds light on incarnational elements in Judaism which are more diffuse than the Christian version but nevertheless very real. If the Christian move was a mistake—and I believe it was—it was a mistake that has helped me better understand a dimension of Judaism—God’s indwelling in the people Israel—that I would probably not have understood as clearly without the Christian mistake.*<sup>21</sup>

d. One of the more important questions to ask in interreligious discussions is how God reveals Godself. A Muslim will point at the Qur’an and a Jew at the Torah scroll—and a Christian will narrate the Christ event. The New Testament is important because of Jesus of Nazareth; it is not the other way around. When asked by Muslims and Jews about my Christian faith, I often state that Jesus Christ is as important to me as the Qur’an and the Torah are to them. This answer indicates that I appreciate the central roles that the Qur’an and the Torah play in the life of Muslims and Jews, and it is also an invitation to them to respect my reverence as much as I respect their faith. What, then, could be better than presenting the Christian community as the visible presence of the invisible Christ? Hence, fourthly and finally, *corpus Christi* is a discourse that does not present Christianity as the *antithesis* or the *replacement* of other faith communities. Jews understand themselves as the Israel of God; why should not Christians think of themselves as the body of Christ? Two faith communities cannot understand themselves both to be *the* people of God, but the members of each group could think of themselves as constituting a *genus electum* (see Ex. 19:6 and 1 Pet. 2:9).

#### 4. “There Is No Longer ... Barbarian, Scythian...” (Col. 3:11)

Of all the New Testament statements that “there is no longer Greek and Jew ...” the one most worthy of note is found in Col. 3:11, as it also refers to “barbarian [and] Scythian.” The Greek word *barbaros* was coined by someone who thought that foreigners’ language simply sounded like “bar-bar,” that their way of expressing themselves was gibberish. The word *skythai* referred to the nomadic groups, considered as being cruel and primitive, that lived north of the Black Sea in modern-day Ukraine. Hence, it is interesting to note that the words “barbarian” and “Scythian” are not each others’ opposites, as are “circumcised” and “uncircumcised.” but two terms which

both refer to outsiders. The theological bottom line seems to be that the Christian *kerygma* must not be expressed in such a way that other people and peoples are described as theological outsiders. Can the *corpus Christi mysticum* discourse help us in this endeavour? I would like to think so.

<sup>1</sup> For a presentation of these three WCC texts from 1948, 1961, and 1967, see, e.g., Franklin Sherman, "The Road to Reconciliation: Protestant Church Statements on Christian-Jewish Relations," in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation*, ed. Mary C. Boys, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 241-251, particularly 242.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., [www.icrelations.net/en/?item=1489](http://www.icrelations.net/en/?item=1489).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., [www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/ecumenical-christian/736-wcc1961](http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/ecumenical-christian/736-wcc1961).

<sup>4</sup> The "Bristol Report" resulted from a meeting of the WCC Faith and Order Commission, held in Bristol, England. Although wide-ranging in its scope it included a section on "The Church and the Jewish People."

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., [www.abrock.com/Birmingham.html](http://www.abrock.com/Birmingham.html).

<sup>6</sup> For the expression "theological space," see Tony Bayfield, "Making Theological Space," in *Dialogue with a Difference: The Manor House Group Experience*, ed. Tony Bayfield and Marcus Braybrooke (London: SCM, 1992), 15-28. See also Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 240: "There is no one theology for all. Every group's theology must recognize and *make room* for the theologies of others" (emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, 32 and 113.

<sup>8</sup> For a study of the role of anti-Jewish theology in the political discussions about the Middle East conflict, see Peter A. Pettit, "The Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," in *Covenantal Conversations: Christians in Dialogue with Jews and Judaism*, ed. Darrell Jodock (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 147-174.

<sup>9</sup> For a study on the interplay of belief and national identity, see Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Gerard S. Sloyan, "Who Are the People of God?" in *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scriptures and in Tradition with Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher*, ed. Asher Finkel and Lawrence Frizzell (New York: Ktav, 1981), 103-114, especially 113.

<sup>11</sup> See Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 8ff. and 164. See also e.g., Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). For an important study of the role of racism in the study of early Christianity, see Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Buell, *Why This New Race*, 54-56.

<sup>13</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, par. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, 241: "Instead of being *the* chosen people, my people begin to see themselves as *a* chosen people. Instead of *the* true church, Christians come to see themselves as *a* true church."

<sup>15</sup> Gerald O'Collins, *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), vii.

<sup>16</sup> See 1 Cor. 15:47.

<sup>17</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 554-556.

<sup>18</sup> This can be seen already in the Matthean redaction of the Markan narrative; see, e.g., Jesper Svartvik, "Matthew and Mark," in *Matthew and His Contemporaries*, ed. David C. Sim and Boris Repschinski (London: Continuum, 2008), 27-49.

<sup>19</sup> Edgar Lee Masters, the poem "Simon Surnamed Peter" quoted in Roland Bartel, "Two Biblical Passages That Have Appealed to Poets," in *Biblical Images in Literature*, ed. Roland Bartel, J. S. Ackerman, and T. S. Warshaw (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1975), 289.

<sup>20</sup> *Mystici Corporis Christi*, par. 69: "the Supreme Head, that is, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth." See also par. 25, 27, and 40. One might add that neither is the mariological emphasis towards the end of the document an indispensable part of the metaphor.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. and introd. R. Kendall Soulen (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), 178.

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## Text, Tribulation and Testimony:

### The Bible in the Context of the Middle East

Dr Clare Amos

*God of mystery,  
Strange opponent of our long night,  
whether we are near or far,  
in difficulty or in danger,  
your face is always turned towards us in  
love and compassion.  
Grant us the grace to look upon you,  
and to trace your likeness  
in the shapes of others,  
both lovely and unloved.  
Struggle with our fear and shame,  
And do not let us go,  
Until the day breaks,  
And you have given us your blessing.  
Amen.*

In the struggle is the blessing. Among the dozen or so books that have most influenced me is a classic volume on prayer, *The Use of Praying*, written by the Methodist minister and writer on spirituality Neville Ward. I can still remember coming across it in my late teens. The concluding paragraph in the book had—and still has—for me a peculiar frisson. Neville Ward wrote: “Sometimes faith confidently and easily interprets experience as from God; sometimes only slowly and after much argument with itself and life. And sometimes it simply has to hold on, like the troubled wrestler by the dark river, trusting that when the light breaks it will appear that the imagined enemy was Love all the time.” Many times in the last 25 years I have used these sentences, with their allusive reference to the story of wrestling Jacob, to introduce ministers in training to the spirituality of the Old Testament. I think I glimpsed that particular allusion to Genesis 32 on the very first occasion that I read Neville Ward’s book, though I have to confess that, Anglican innocent as I was at the time, I did not initially realize that Ward was himself drawing, in good Methodist

fashion, on Charles Wesley’s great hymn, “Come O thou traveller unknown.”

A few years after I first read those words I found myself at a missionary college at Selly Oak preparing for work as a Church Missionary Society (CMS) mission partner at St George’s College, Jerusalem. It was not an altogether happy time—partly because I was not quite sure exactly what I was meant to be doing at Selly Oak. I had just spent two years at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem doing post-graduate biblical studies. This led to my being offered the position at St George’s College and in turn to the link with CMS, which required a few months at their training college in Selly Oak. With my existing background in theology as well as recent experience of the region to which I was returning, I expect I was a difficult and cussed customer for the tutors to have around. However, there can always be unexpected and pleasant surprises in life. Mine at that time was a series of lectures on the Old Testament given by Dr Dan Beeby, himself recently returned to Britain after years as a Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan. It would be false modesty to suggest that Dan taught me many basic facts about the Bible that I did not already know. But what he certainly did was inspire me with a vision of how to teach and interpret the Bible for others. One of Dan’s unforgettable lectures was on that dark contest of Jacob by the brook Jabbok. The lecture was entitled “In the Struggle Is the Blessing” and I suspect that the seeds of much of my later thinking were sown in what I heard that day. Dan pointed out with a clarity that I had not previously seen how important this story was, not simply as a keystone in the saga of Jacob and his brother Esau, but also as a metaphor for the whole history of the people of God. As Gerhard Von Rad puts

it, "Israel has here presented its entire history with God almost prophetically as ... a struggle until the breaking of the day." Such an interpretation is surely justified by the granting of the very name Israel at the climax of the encounter. The blessing which Jacob demands is somehow linked to the entitlement to this name, which Jacob's descendants will bear for generations to come and carry into nationhood. Yet as Dan Beeby also suggested, it is only as long as Israel is prepared to continue to struggle in relationship with God that it can justifiably claim the name or title of "Israel," literally "the one who struggles with God." However, as the author of Genesis makes clear, that is not the whole of the story. For there is a profound link made between this nighttime encounter and the meeting that takes place the next morning between Jacob and his long-estranged brother Esau. In the one encounter Jacob sees God "face to face" and so names the place "Penuel." In the other encounter, which takes place after the long night is ended and dawn has broken, there is at last enough light for Jacob to see Esau face to face and make the amazing statement "truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me" (Gen. 33:4-10). Picking up on this clear hint in the biblical narrative, rabbinic tradition drew a link between Esau and the divine figure with whom Jacob had wrestled the night before. It was, some suggested, the guardian angel of Edom, the future nation of which Esau was the ancestor. Significantly, in rabbinic interpretation the names "Esau" and "Edom" also came to symbolize the foreign nations that were regarded with suspicion or hostility, and this adds yet another dimension to the story.

Perhaps therefore the relationships of Jacob become Israel must be triangular, between Jacob/Israel, the divine wrestler, and Esau/Edom, so that the vocation of Israel is to wrestle both with God and with the world of national and political realities in which God's people have found

themselves. Daringly this would also suggest that the blessing that Jacob is offered at the end of the struggle is contingent upon the goodwill of those such as Esau's descendants. Thus, if Israel turns its back on either a relationship with God or a relationship with the "foreign nations" symbolized by Esau/Edom, it becomes less than Israel.

But who or what is Israel? Invigorated by the wisdom of people like Dan Beeby, I returned to Jerusalem to take up my position at St George's College. I was soon to discover, if I did not already know, that the identity of "Israel" could never be simply an academic question in the Middle East in the second half of the 20th century. In 1975, when I began teaching at St George's College, the Anglican diocese of Jerusalem was undergoing a key transition. After decades of British Archbishops and Vicars General, a new province of the Anglican Communion was being formed, that of Jerusalem and the Middle East, and the intention was that for the first time in history the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem (we Anglicans with a selective display of humility officially hold that our Anglican bishop is "in" rather than "of" Jerusalem!) should be an indigenous member of the Arabic-speaking Anglican community. It was not an easy transition for a variety of reasons: apart from quite a strong expatriate presence whose members did not welcome this development with open arms, there were also clergy and others in the diocese who regarded their primary role as ministering to people of Jewish origin; associated with them there was a small yet symbolic group of Hebrew-speaking Christians. They too looked with some trepidation to what lay ahead.

So it was not a comfortable mix. The tensions were reflected in a variety of ways. One practical example was linked to the drawing up of a lectionary for use in the diocese. The group charged with this responsibility included a Palestinian clergyman working on the West Bank, a British expatriate responsible for the cathedral in Jerusalem, and a Dutch



minister who had been appointed by the previous Archbishop to liaise closely with the Jewish community. I was not privy to the discussions, but I gather they were lively! The Palestinian concern naturally enough centred on those sections of the Old Testament which focused on the conquest of the land at the time of Joshua, which felt in Palestinian eyes only too analogous to the events of the Six Day War which had taken place less than a decade before. There was also antipathy to a number of the New Testament canticles which normally form a regular part of Anglican worship. It is quite difficult to sing the canticle known as the *Benedictus* or Song of Zechariah, with its opening lines, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who has visited and redeemed his people" and its later reference to the Abrahamic covenant, if your perspective is that of a Palestinian whose family has been dispossessed of land and home. Even the much cherished *Nunc Dimittis* or Song of Simeon feels uncomfortable when seen through Palestinian eyes—"a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel" can offer raw resonances to which many people in Britain are completely oblivious. But there were also Jewish sensitivities to consider as well. There the concern centred on those parts of the New Testament, perhaps particularly in the Gospels of Matthew and John, where the hostility expressed to the people called "the Jews," especially at the time of Christ's trial and crucifixion, had been a terrible and diabolic justification for the centuries of Christian anti-Judaism and antisemitism which culminated in the Holocaust. By the time everybody's concerns had been addressed, it was perhaps a miracle that there was much of the Bible left to read at all!

You can of course say that both Palestinians and those who sympathized with Jewish concerns were misunderstanding biblical language and terminology—that of course "Israel" in both the Old and New Testaments does not mean the modern State of Israel, and that the term "the Jews" used with such

hostility in the passion narratives ought not be connected in any way with the modern Judaism which developed out of the rabbinic movement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE.

But language does not exist hermetically sealed in a vacuum, protected from the political and social realities of the day. Even though it might be extremely convenient to do so, it is, I think, ultimately naive to pretend that there can be absolutely no overlap between biblical and modern "Israel," nor indeed between attitudes toward the Jewish community expressed in the New Testament and Jewish-Christian dynamics today. History has an impact on the present, especially when it is history held with such passion as is the case in the Middle East. And language is creative and intentionally formative—which is why I as a woman care deeply about the use of inclusive language in the life of church and society. I am quite certain, for example, that the use in Israeli official circles during the 1970s of the term "Judaea and Samaria" to describe what is today referred to as "the West Bank" or "Palestine" was an attempt, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, to affect domestic and international perceptions regarding this territory and its ownership. So it is precisely because there are those in both the Jewish and Christian communities who see a clear continuity between biblical and modern Israel, that the issue of what this concept "Israel" means has to be addressed seriously rather than dismissed abruptly by theologians—and it is equally because some people in the Christian world are still prepared to seek support for antisemitic attitudes from gospel texts that it is dangerous to disregard the difficult question of possible anti-Judaism in the New Testament. I will be returning to these issues later.

My primary role at St George's College was to work with people from all over the world, clergy and lay people, who came to study with us for up to three months. For them we offered courses such as "The Palestine of Jesus" or "The Bible and the

Holy Land today.” It was both a privilege and a responsibility to introduce them to the Holy Places of the Old and New Testaments, conscious as one was doing so that it could not or should not be an experience in a vacuum, or one that did not take account of the realities among which they temporarily found themselves. Ultimately these people had come to Jerusalem because of their faith in the incarnation, yet that very incarnational faith demanded that they meet living stones—as well as historical ones—during their stay and that they too wrestle with the possible political dimensions of the gospel, and not least its implications for the land where they were (for the moment) residents. For without this struggle there could be no blessing.

There were two special themes that were prominent in what I sought to share with our students; one was linked to the wilderness of Judaea, the other to the city of Jerusalem.

First, the wilderness. During my years living in the Holy Land I acquired a special love for the wilderness outside Jerusalem and took groups to visit the sites of Byzantine monasteries and Herodian palaces and fortresses located in or near it. This wilderness was of course the traditional site of Jesus’ temptation—and contained the way, at least according to the synoptic gospels, of his final journey after leaving the city of Jericho and climbing up to Jerusalem. And as I walked and talked with our students, it seemed to me that this wilderness contained within it elements that symbolized the different paths that Jesus could have chosen to take in those last weeks of his life on earth. There were in this wilderness the extensive physical remains, strangely including even magnificent palaces, of Herod’s grandiose vision—and his debt to the Roman authorities and way of life. They spoke to me of one possible path for Jesus—that of collaboration with the Roman authorities and their local clients.

But the wilderness also reminded us of another way people might “react to the

Romans.” They could take the path chosen by those hostile to Rome, loosely referred to as Zealots, people such as Theudas and Judas or eventually “the Egyptian” whose revolt is specifically linked to the wilderness in Acts 21:38. Inevitably these people left far fewer physical traces, though further south in the wilderness the citadel of Masada would eventually be their infamous last redoubt. Yet their ghosts were there in the winding tracks that led up through the wilderness where they might have hidden from the authorities in caves and possibly preyed on travellers in order to fund their fight for freedom. Those two contrasting ways of “reacting to the Romans” must have weighed heavily on Jesus as he neared the city, for someone who had gained his apparent notoriety could not avoid the choice between them.

There was yet another alternative, again reflected in the wilderness, which must have seemed very attractive as the drumbeats of decision pressed in upon Jesus. That was quite simply to remain there in the wilderness, for the wilderness is par excellence the place of withdrawal from society. In the Byzantine period the Judaeian wilderness teemed with monasteries; one ancient writer commented how the monks had “made the desert a city,” and even in New Testament times the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest a similar understanding of the role of the wilderness, particularly if the site of Khirbet Qumran near where the scrolls were found was indeed some kind of Jewish monastic settlement. The wilderness, the place of Jesus’ initial temptation, could have provided a seductive temptation of a different sort in Jesus’ last days: stay here, make straight the way of the Lord here in the wilderness, and you will be able to avoid making the difficult and tangled choices that lie ahead once you crest the brow of the Mount of Olives.

Certainly, as Luke, in particular, presents the last journey to Jerusalem, the political dimension of this journey—and its choices—comes to the fore. Jesus has

stopped in Jericho, the city on the edge of the wilderness just before the steep climb up to Jerusalem begins, and has befriended Zacchaeus, a tax collector, symbol of the repressive Roman rule. As Jesus leaves the city, Luke 19:11 tells us that he “went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.” Luke then presents his retelling of the parable of the talents (19:11-27). In his version we hear of a vicious king who travels to a foreign land to have himself appointed king there. We also read of the citizens who did not want him as their king because of his brutality and who sent a counter-delegation after him. These are clear allusions to events that had taken place a generation before the time of Jesus’ ministry. Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, had travelled to Rome after his father’s death to demand the kingship of Judaea. The Pharisees, knowing his savage reputation, had also travelled there to plead with the Roman Emperor Augustus not to appoint him. But Archelaus returned as king in triumph from Rome and took revenge on these opponents (see Luke 19:27). Yet he was not to last long: after less than ten years of suffering his viciousness, the people rose up and finally succeeded in having him exiled. It is quite extraordinary that Jesus apparently recounted this story just as he left Jericho. During the time that I lived in the Holy Land, one of the most interesting archaeological excavations was at the site of Herodian Jericho. A magnificent and luxurious winter palace, probably first built by Herod the Great but then certainly enlarged by his son Archelaus, was unearthed. It was, and is, a visible reminder of the values and oppressiveness of the Herodian dynasty. Even though on the academic level I have questions about the dating and historicity of Luke’s gospel, I find it remarkable that this parable should be presented as being told at this very moment, with the palace of Archelaus apparently clearly visible, just as Jesus begins the route that will take him up to Jerusalem and his own destiny. It is as though Jesus is telling his

disciples, and us, “You think I am a king. But my kingship is not like Archelaus’s kingship, reflected in this palace of his. It is a realm of peace, rather than brutality, that I am seeking to inaugurate.” Of course, as the Lukan parable itself reminds us, the transitoriness of Archelaus’s own vision would also be visible, for those who saw the palatial buildings would know that their erstwhile lord had, by the time of Jesus’ ministry, been living in exile for twenty years or more.

So when Jesus finally crested the Mount of Olives, having renounced the temptation of wilderness withdrawal on his journey from Jericho to Jerusalem, the moment of decision could no longer be delayed. What was this Kingdom that was so different from that of Archelaus/Herod or Rome? What about those alternatives which the wilderness had presented so sharply to Jesus? Did it mean that he should react to the Romans by apparent collaboration or by militant opposition? It has always seemed to me that what led from Palm Sunday directly to Good Friday was precisely Jesus’ refusal either to succumb completely to or to reject entirely each of these two options. He challenged and threatened the political authorities, yet at the same time refused to play the Zealot game. And it was precisely because he refused to take one clear-cut path that he was in effect torn in two by the crucifixion. I do not want simplistically to analogize from the situation of New Testament times to the present day in the Holy Land, but it has always seemed to me that at the very heart of Christian witness in any political context is the necessity of not opting for the one easy obvious solution; rather, Christian witness holds together diverse and even contradictory viewpoints in what may sometimes be a very uncomfortable and possibly dangerous tension. Dietrich Bonhoeffer certainly knew something of this. In the context of the Middle East, the words of the Roman Catholic layman Donald Nicholl, who was Rector of the Ecumenical Institute of Tantur, near

Bethlehem are pertinent: "The job of the Christian is not to be neutral—but to be torn in two." Nicholl also once said, speaking about the atrocities that continue to infest the Middle East, that "if your immediate spontaneous reaction—if the movement of your heart—upon hearing of some tragedy, is an ideological one rather than a human one, then your heart has become corrupted and you should leave straight away and go on pilgrimage until it is cleansed." These are, as I well know, difficult words to live up to, but they are words that not only Palestinians and Israelis, but their respective supporters in other parts of the world, would do well to hear. It is certainly an ongoing struggle, but a necessary one. For without this struggle there will be no blessing.

And now, a reflection on Jerusalem, the city once described by Pope Paul VI as "the earthly point where God came into contact with humankind, and where eternity crossed history." There is an old Jewish proverb, "Ten portions of beauty gave God to humankind, nine to Jerusalem and one to the remainder. Ten portions of sorrow gave God to humankind, nine to Jerusalem and one to the remainder." In the contexts of events in other parts of the world such sentiments can feel exaggerated, yet there is also an important truth about them. The medieval mapmakers knew this when they created their maps which showed Jerusalem at the centre of the world. For the intermingling of the beauty and the sorrow in Jerusalem is a parable or perhaps a sacrament of the human condition. It is a visible symbol of our longing, our highest and best desires, our love of beauty, and our desire to worship God, but it is also a powerful reminder of how this best can go so tragically wrong, precisely because we find it so difficult to love without also seeking to possess. Jerusalem is the place where this conundrum is squeezed into a sort of prism, so that it can be viewed in sharp focus. One could not live for five years in Jerusalem, as I did, without wrestling frequently with such thoughts.

Once again it is Luke's gospel which seems to be most aware of this dimension. It is Luke, for example, who in his account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem appears to pun on the very name Jerusalem, linking it to the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*. In fact it is this gospel alone that refers to "peace" in relation to the events of Palm Sunday, and it does so with almost exquisitely painful irony. The word is first used by the disciples of Jesus as they greet their king with the words "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:29-40). Their words are a paradoxical counterpoint to the song of the angels at Jesus' birth. Yet the angels had sung "Peace on earth," while the disciples chant "Peace in heaven." "Surely we should be on the side of the angels: it is peace on God's earth we need and are called to struggle for! "Peace in heaven" can all too easily become an escapist diversion. Peace-making has to happen on earth, and it is an activity that can be very costly to those who are brave enough to engage in it. Yet the consequences of lack of peace are dreadful indeed. That is made clear in the next reference to peace in the same chapter of the gospel of Luke. In the moving account of how Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, Luke ascribes to him the lament, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your sight" (Luke 19:41-44). Jerusalem, called and named to be a vision of peace, has often and tragically been a theatre of war. In the next few sentences the knife goes deeper still as the apparent prophecy is uttered that the city will be destroyed and her children "dashed" to the ground.

To understand what is being said here one needs to be aware just how well Luke knew his Old Testament, for the words in Jesus' mouth are an allusion to Psalm 137. That psalm the very epitome of the passionate feelings that Jerusalem can inspire in her lovers: "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Jerusalem" concludes with an appalling curse—that the children of Babylon, Jerusalem's oppressor, will be

“dashed” to the ground. The same very rare Greek verb, *edaphizo*, “to dash,” occurs both in Luke 19 and in the Septuagint version of Psalm 137—only of course in Luke it is Jerusalem’s own children who will suffer this fate. Over the years I have come back many times to reflect on this strange congruence. I have come to believe that Jesus’ words in Luke are there as a salutary warning that the kind of love that leads to the degree of hate expressed in Psalm 137 is destructive and dangerous, but ultimately most destructive to the party who is doing the hating. The curses of Psalm 137, Luke seems to be suggesting, fall back on those who are doing the cursing. It is difficult not to be aware what this might mean in the Middle East of today, where this city, holy to three world faiths, has been loved so hatefully. Yet it is perhaps this all too apparent failure of Jerusalem that may provide the seeds of hope. As a Christian I believe that Jerusalem is the place where God is crucified by the desires and aspirations and passionately held beliefs of men and women. Yet I also believe that it is this same cross, painful result of humanity’s peace-less-ness, which can and must become the way to peace and blessing.

After my marriage I left Jerusalem to live for five years in Beirut. There too, many of the theological issues with which I had struggled in Jerusalem remained with me, not least because I had as a lecturer at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut the unique and daunting task of teaching the Old Testament to a number of Palestinians training for ministry in the church. In Beirut in the 1970s and 1980s, the study of the Old Testament and the question of biblical interpretation with the students were not simply an archaeological or intellectual exercise: they were all too relevant to present life and death. Once again, it was a major challenge to make theological sense of a part of the Bible that had been used by some to undermine the legitimacy of my students’ self-understanding. Let me try and explain graphically and from a

personal encounter exactly what was (and sadly still is) the problem. The incident to which I am referring actually happened while I was living in Jerusalem. It happened to a middle-aged, middle class Palestinian woman who was a friend of mine. She is a well-known poet and the wife of a senior Anglican pastor, then living in Ramallah, a town just north of Jerusalem. Her experience exemplifies the kind of attitude that many Christian Palestinians still have to deal with far too often. On the day of the incident I met my friend, who was gasping in disbelief from an encounter she had just had with a Christian tourist from the West. On a visit to Jerusalem, she had had a conversation with this person who, on discovering that she was a Christian living on the West Bank, had informed her quite categorically that “she couldn’t be a real Christian, because if she were a real Christian she would of course have been willing to leave her hometown, since she would know that God had given the land to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” She was incredulous, and I was mortified for her—and angry on her behalf. Ever since, I have held this episode before me as a stark reminder as a teacher of the Old Testament, seeking to explore those abused biblical texts in a way that offers justice to my Palestinian friend and to those, both Christian and Muslim, against whom they have been employed as a weapon.

The problem has been succinctly stated by Canon Naim Ateek, the Palestinian Anglican priest who is the founder of Sabeel, an organization dedicated to exploring liberation theology from a Palestinian perspective. Naim Ateek writes: “In Israel-Palestine today, the Bible is being quoted to give the primary claim over the land to Jews. In the mind of many religious Jews and fundamentalist Christians the solution to the conflict lies in Palestinian recognition that God has given the Jews the land of Palestine forever. Palestinians are asked to accept this as a basic truth... Palestinian Christians must tackle the land from a biblical perspective,

not because I believe that the religious argument over the land is of the *bene esse* of the conflict, but because we are driven to it as a result of the religious-political abuse of biblical interpretation.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the last decade I have found myself caught up in the debate about what is often referred to these days as “replacement theology,” though I still prefer the more technical term of “supersessionism.” The basic question is whether Christianity is, or at least perceives itself to be, a replacement for Judaism—whether, for example, the very physical promises which Genesis 15 and 17 suggests were given to Abraham have been fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in such a way that they no longer apply today in any concrete dimension. As I suggested earlier, it may be illogical, but whether we like it or not, our answer to such a question seems to affect our view of the rights and wrongs of events in modern Palestine/Israel. A rather tendentious 2002 article by Melanie Phillips in *The Spectator* quotes the Rt Rev. Riah El Assal, the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, as saying, “We are the true Israel ... no one can deny me the right to inherit the promises, and after all the promises were first given to Abraham and Abraham is never spoken of in the Bible as a Jew. He is the father of the faithful.”

Undoubtedly the bishop’s views on this subject have been affected by his own identity and situation: he is a Palestinian Christian who ministered in Nazareth for almost 30 years before his election as bishop in Jerusalem, and his theological views are coloured by his experience of struggling for justice for his community, in a political context in which this community was and is constantly discriminated against. However, Melanie Phillips is quite simply wrong when she refers critically to statements such as those of Bishop Riah as an “attempt by Arab Christians to reinterpret Scripture in order to delegitimise the Jews’ claim to the land of Israel.” Bishop Riah’s views are not a “reinterpretation.” They express the mainstream attitude of traditional

Christianity throughout most of its history over the past 2000 years.

My own challenge to Bishop Riah—as it would also be to those who think very differently from him in the replacement theology/supersessionist debate—would be to argue that there is in fact not a single biblical position on this question. There is rather a range of views expressed within the New Testament canon on the question of whether Christianity has superseded Judaism. Matthew probably holds to what we could call a supersessionist viewpoint, although whether he found space in his scheme of things for Gentile Christians who were not prepared to adopt the accoutrements of Judaism I am far from sure. In other words, for Matthew traditional Judaism may not be superseded by Christianity, but by messianic Judaism. John’s gospel clearly expresses hostility to Jewish institutions and customs at least in their official form, though the word I would choose to use to describe his attitude is “invalidate” rather than “supersede.” Taking Luke-Acts as a whole, I think that there are supersessionist views expressed in this corpus of writings. However, Paul’s writings are not consistently supersessionist. They may be illogical and inconsistent at times—for Paul’s heart often ruled his head—but any reasonable interpretation of Romans 9-11 would suggest that there is an ongoing role within Paul’s theological schema for those whom he describes as “Israelites.” Similarly, a good case can be made that Paul’s sudden benediction of the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:17 refers to non-Christian Jews. So even leaving on one side New Testament writings such as James and Hebrews, we can say that, although supersessionist views may be dominant within the New Testament corpus, they are certainly not the only canonical response to the question of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism—a question which has bedeviled (the word is used deliberately) Christian history for the last 2000 years.

To acknowledge this range of views or diversity within scripture is a threatening stance for many. This seems to be particularly true for Christians (and others) who find themselves emotionally and sometimes physically engaged in the maelstrom of the Middle East. Diversity is not an easy option. It is something that has to be wrestled with. Yet in this struggle is the blessing. It is also, ultimately, a profoundly biblical option, for if the name of God is revealed as YHWH, “The I am who I am,” then an unpinnable-downness, a refusal to be fitted into neat and tidy boxes, lies at the very heart of scripture.

Of course the views of Bishop Riah quoted above have inevitably been crystallized in a particular context—and in response to another strongly expressed viewpoint, already hinted at in my story of my Palestinian woman friend, namely that texts such as Genesis 15 and 17 sanction a particular political programme in Palestine/Israel today and that the Israeli settler presence in areas such as Hebron and Nablus/Shechem is legitimated by an appeal to the Abrahamic promises. This is a view held both by representatives of a certain strand within Judaism and, perhaps equally strongly, by a number of Christian Zionists. It is interesting how influential Christian Zionism has been in this controversy. A case can certainly be made that many Jewish settlers on the West Bank have actually been influenced in the religious motivation for their actions by fundamentalist Christians. Sometimes this influence is unconscious, at least on the part of the recipients; yet perhaps for that very reason, it is even more powerful. This process has been going on for more than a generation, for the story of my Palestinian Christian friend’s experience took place in 1977.

If, unlike some who explore this topic, I cannot and do not want to take refuge in an easy Christian supersessionism—I respect the Jewish faith and insights too much for that—then I owe it to Palestinian friends to wrestle with key biblical texts within the Old Testament and to

encourage them to be read in a way that challenges a facile Christian or Jewish religious Zionism. When I wrote a commentary on Genesis<sup>2</sup> I began to see that Genesis, apparently the crux of the problem, actually provides a possible solution, which can be found at the very heart of the narratives about Abraham, whose covenant is too often quoted in justification for a particular political agenda.

The story of Abraham begins with a command: “Go from your country, and your kindred and your father’s house” (Gen. 12:1). It climaxes with the instruction “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to a mountain” (Gen. 22:2). In both cases the unusual Hebrew expression *lech l’ha* (translated as “go”) is used. This repeated expression and the two narratives thus introduced seem to be intended as a structural frame for the saga of Abraham. In the one episode Abraham is being asked to sacrifice his past, and in the other his future. Taking these two incidents as a starting-point, a number of commentators have suggested that chapters 12 to 22 of the book of Genesis are organized in a chiasmic structure in which pairs of stories parallel each other, working in progressively to the very centre of this section. Normally in such a pattern the story in the middle is a focal point around which the rest of the narrative revolves. What is this centre? It is chapter 16, the account of the pregnancy of Hagar, the Egyptian surrogate wife of Abraham, leading into the birth of her son Ishmael. Perhaps this is an unexpected centre which at first glance appears to be a diversion, a sort of false trail, which irritatingly delays the arrival of Isaac, the favoured heir. Elsa Tamez, writing from Latin America, has described Hagar ironically but approvingly as “the woman who complicated the history of salvation.” Looking more closely at the narrative, it becomes clear that this is no dead end but a pathway to a vision of God whose justice refuses to be confined by national or tribal boundaries.

The first clue comes in the very name of Hagar. In the Book of Genesis, names and their meanings matter, and too little attention has been paid to Hagar's name. Hagar seems deliberately to remind us of *ha-ger*, a Hebrew word that is difficult to translate but means something like "sojourner," "stranger," or "resident alien." In the law codes of the Old Testament, just treatment for such people is a touchstone for people's relationship with God. "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt," says Exodus 22:21. Significantly, the first time the noun *ger* occurs in the Hebrew Bible is in the chapter before the story of Hagar, Genesis 15. There, during the numinous episode which results in the establishment of a covenant between YHWH and Abraham, threatening words are spoken: "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years" (Gen. 15:13). It is interesting that this reference to the Egyptian experience of Abraham's descendants should come so shortly before Hagar herself is introduced to us, particularly as she is immediately referred to as an Egyptian. Connections are being woven. The links are reinforced by the verb *'anah*, which in its intensive form means "to oppress" or "to afflict." This word too makes its first appearance in Genesis in these chapters, first describing the "oppression" of Abraham's descendants in Egypt (Gen. 15:13), but next used to express the ill-treatment that Hagar receives at the hand of Sarah. The ties are strengthened by the fact that the same verbal stem appears twice more in Genesis 16: as a reflexive verb in 16:9 when Hagar is instructed by an angel to return to Sarah and "submit" to her, and as a noun in 16:11 as Hagar is promised that YHWH has heard her "affliction." The hint is surely being offered that the very reason for the later slavery of Abraham's descendants in Egypt is the mistreatment that was once meted out to a woman of Egypt at the hands of Israel's founding father and mother. Somehow a demand

for justice and compassion for all resident aliens—for whom Hagar is being presented as an archetype—is being written into the very fabric of the covenant; the implication seems to be made that the healthy continuance of this covenant relationship depends at least in part on the willingness of Abraham and his family to offer justice to others.

There are a number of indications in other parts of the Pentateuch that support the interpretation I am offering. For example, it is probably significant that the only other episode in which Hagar appears (Gen. 21:1-21) is inserted between two narratives in which the meaning of Abraham's own status as *ger* is explored (Gen. 20:1 and 21:23,34). The laws about the "alien" at various points in the Book of the Covenant may also be alluding to, or punning upon, the story of Hagar.

I want to argue therefore that from within the pages of the Bible itself comes liberation from interpretations of scripture which foster privilege and particularity and which have so dominated our thinking throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century that they have affected the history of the entire Middle East region.

I need not point the possible implications of such a reading for today, nor indeed who might be the equivalent of the "resident alien" in today's Israel/Palestine. It is of course deeply embedded within Islamic tradition that Hagar, as mother of Ishmael, is the ancestor of the Arabs, which sharpens the analogy still further.

Indeed, Ishmael's own role in the story of Genesis provides another strand to reinforce the view that in this biblical book, particularity is never allowed totally to displace universality, and that the eventual destiny of Isaac's descendants will be affected by how Ishmael and his mother are treated. In spite of the priority that is clearly given to Isaac and his descendants, Ishmael is not totally excluded from the ongoing story; he stands alongside Isaac in Genesis 25:9 for the burial of their common father in



Hebron—the two brothers standing alongside each other in a way that would be unthinkable to many of their present-day spiritual descendants—and there are remarkable parallels between the fates that both Ishmael and Isaac nearly suffer. The trials, almost unto death, of the two brothers, Ishmael in Genesis 21 and Isaac in Genesis 22, are told in such a way as to emphasize their parallels; both men, for example, are ultimately rescued from danger by the voice of an angel speaking from heaven. The author of Genesis thus suggests that the destinies of Isaac and Ishmael are closely intertwined, that the descendants of both still need each other. Back in Genesis 16:12, a mysterious birth-oracle is uttered over Ishmael. Most modern biblical translations read it as suggesting that Ishmael would live at odds, in hostility, with his kin. Yet the Hebrew here is ambiguous: another possible translation is that one day Ishmael would live “alongside his brother.” Is it too fanciful to suggest that the destiny of the Holy Land somehow lies held between these two possibilities? There is an exquisite poem written by the Israeli poet Shin Shalom which is used during the New Year festival in Reform synagogues of the United Kingdom. It is presented as an utterance of Isaac, speaking to Ishmael his brother about a future that will—and must—include them both.

Here is part of the poem translated from the original Hebrew:

*Ishmael, my brother,  
How long shall we fight each other?  
My brother from times bygone,  
My brother, Hagar's son,  
My brother, the wandering one.  
One angel was sent to us both,  
One angel watched over our growth—  
There in the wilderness, death threatening  
through thirst,  
I a sacrifice on the altar, Sarah's first.  
Ishmael, my brother, hear my plea:  
It was the angel who tied thee to me...  
Time is running out, put hatred to sleep.  
Shoulder to shoulder, let's water our  
sheep.*

I referred above to the importance of appreciating the diversity of scripture. Perhaps a related feature is scripture's celebration of duality, a motif that is written into the heart of the creation stories and is then explored in the rest of Genesis, as again and again brothers strive together to discover the essence of brotherhood. There is a midrashic tradition that Genesis deliberately begins with the word *Bereshit* because it starts with the letter *beth*, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which can also be used to represent the number two. The Jewish tradition suggests that *beth* was chosen for this honour precisely because duality permeates our universe.

I suspect that this is an insight with which the Christian tradition needs to wrestle more seriously. It may be wisdom that we need to learn from the Hebrew scriptures or from Jewish scholars such as Emmanuel Levinas, who has written so profoundly about the importance of the other. It is interesting to observe how in Galatians 4:24 Hagar, ironically in Paul's eyes representing Judaism, is dismissed out of hand. This sharply contrasts with the apparent affirmation of Hagar in Genesis. Sadly, Christianity has never found it easy to cope with a possible duality of truth.

For me the biblical tale which wrestles most profoundly with the divine dispensation of duality is the strange tale of Jacob and Esau with which I began this presentation. If the reading that I suggested earlier is valid, as I believe it is, then I am positing that the very theological existence of those who claim the name of Israel depends on a continuing willingness to struggle to see God in the face of Esau and in the face of those like the foreigner whom Esau represents and symbolizes to this day.

The story seems to be suggesting that any who claim the title of God's people are required to live in a triangular relationship, with God and with their brothers and sisters. It is only those who are prepared to continue their struggle with God who can see their “brothers” in their true light,

as God sees them. Conversely, it is when people wrestle for a more authentic relationship with their brothers and sisters that they discover they are given God's blessing. Our relationship with God and that with our brothers and sisters belong together; woe betide us if we try to separate them. If we do, our faith has ceased to be biblical.

So let my final words read like a commentary on the story of those two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Appropriately, they are spoken by Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Galilean priest who claims Jesus as his fellow countryman and the first disciples as his ancestors. Writing about the icon of the transfiguration, Father Chacour comments:

"The true icon is your neighbour, the human being who has been created in the image and with the likeness of God. How beautiful it is when our eyes are transfigured and we see that our neighbour is the icon of God, and that you, and you, and I – we are all the icons of God. How serious it is when we hate the image of God, whoever that may be, whether a Jew or a Palestinian. How serious it is when we cannot go and say, 'I am sorry about the icon of God who was hurt by my behaviour.' We all need to be transfigured so we can recognize the glory of God in one another."<sup>3</sup>

In this struggle is our blessing.

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<sup>1</sup> Naim S. Ateek, "Biblical perspectives on the Land," in *Faith and the Intifada*, ed. Naim Ateek, Marc H. Ellis, and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 108.

<sup>2</sup> Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis* (Peterborough, UK: Epworth Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Elias Chacour with Mary E. Jensen, *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 46-47.

## Sharing the Inheritance: An Orthodox Christian View of the Church as New Israel in the Context of the Contemporary Jewish-Christian Dialogue

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In examining the Orthodox Christian self-understanding of the church as the New Israel (or for that matter as Israel itself)<sup>1</sup> it is useful to begin by referencing a document that has, more often than not, been considered problematic in the area of Jewish-Christian relations. In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, the Jew Trypho asks the Christian apologist Justin Martyr, "What, then? Are you Israel?"<sup>2</sup> Both the question posed by Trypho and the answer offered by Justin Martyr are of central importance to my examination of this subject. Justin's particular response to Trypho's question and his general view of the Church as New Israel are certainly couched in language that the contemporary ear would recognize as supersessionist. There exists, however, a thread in Justin's response that can be useful in contextualizing the Orthodox Christian self-understanding as the New Israel in light of the contemporary Jewish-Christian conversation.

In Justin's response to the query, "Are you Israel?" the second century apologist appeals to various figures of the Jewish Bible to support his position. "As therefore from the one man Jacob, who was surnamed Israel, all your nation has been called Jacob and Israel; so we from Christ, who begat us unto God, like Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Joseph, and David, are called and are the true sons of God, and keep the commandments of Christ." It is precisely this appeal to figures "like Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Joseph, and David" that will be the focus of my investigation into the Orthodox Christian self-understanding as New Israel in light of the present Jewish-Christian dialogue.

One could easily write an entire book on the Orthodox Christian view of the church

as Israel. References to the church as the true Israel permeate the writings of the fathers and the prayers and hymnody of the liturgical services of the church. These references are part of the intrinsic self-understanding of the church as the fulfillment of both the covenant with Abraham and the prophetic witness; it influences how the church looks backward at creation and forward toward the eschaton. The focus of this paper, however, is to contextualize the Orthodox Christian self-understanding as the New Israel in such a way that we can "expand the space in which Jews and Christians can provide mutual theological affirmation to each other."<sup>3</sup> It is my feeling that an examination of how the Orthodox Church appeals to the personages of the Jewish Bible as part of its self-understanding as New Israel can help provide for such an expansion of the theological space in the present Jewish-Christian dialogue.

In the patristic consciousness, it was the holiness and virtue of such historic figures of the Jewish Bible that marked them as true citizens of Israel. Whether it be Gregory of Nyssa's famous treatise on *The Life of Moses*, Ambrose of Milan's treatises on the patriarchs, or John Chrysostom's frequent appeal to figures such as Abraham, the early Christian fathers never hesitated to identify the virtue, faith, and righteousness of such important personages as worthy of emulation and, indeed, foundational to the identity of Christians as children of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Setting aside the inherent historic and theological differences between Judaism and Christianity (especially in terms of their differing eschatological visions), the holiness and virtue of the men and women described within the pages of the Jewish Bible presents us with a point of

commonality in which Orthodox Christians have a valuable role to play in working together with Jews as part of a mutual endeavour of *tikkun olam*, the “repair of the world.”

### Replacement Theology and the Orthodox Church

Orthodox Christians are placed in a unique position when addressing the concerns of supersessionism or replacement theology in the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue. In the present conversation the discussion is often centred on ways to interpret New Testament supersessionist language (e.g., Acts 15:14, 1 Pet. 2:10) in a more sympathetic light. The more refined replacement theology of the apostolic and postapostolic church is seen to originate solely from those early church apologetics and polemics contained in Scripture, and thus the present discussion often assumes that, if the scriptural language can be explained away, the later patristic language is itself automatically dealt with as well. Although various Orthodox theologians come down on either side of these interpretative debates regarding the language of the New Testament, it must be remembered that, for Orthodox Christian thought, the patristic tradition is as formative and normative as is the apostolic and scriptural tradition. As a result, the Orthodox Christian theologian cannot so easily dismiss supersessionist language in the writings of authors like Justin Martyr and Melito of Sardis as simply polemics born out of historical differences that have since lost their relevance.

This patristic witness that regards the church as Israel also manifests itself within the sacramental life of the church in general and the eucharistic rite of the Divine Liturgy in particular, where the priest leads the people in worship “to the heavenly Jerusalem.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there is scarcely a sacramental act that does not take place without some form of invocation of the church as Israel within both the prayers and the hymnody of the

services. If the patristic witness is foundational to Orthodox Christian theological norms, the importance of liturgical usage is even more profound because it exists within the consciousness of the faithful as much as it does within that of theologians. At baptisms a blessing is given to the newly baptized, that they may behold the good things of Jerusalem all the days of their lives. At weddings God is asked to bless the bride and groom as he blessed Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and all the Prophets, Joseph and Asenath, and Moses and Zipporah and to protect them as he did Noah in the Ark, Jonah in the belly of the whale, and the three youths in the fire. In the funeral rite, the names of the “holy and glorious forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” are invoked in the dismissal. Indeed, one need look no further than the ninth ode of the paschal canon in which we hear, “Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem, for now on you is dawning glory from the risen Lord; dance now for joy, and be glad, O Zion” to see how profoundly the image of the church as Israel is made manifest in the liturgical life of Orthodox Christianity.

As mentioned at the onset of this discussion, the patristic and thus Orthodox view of the church is not so much of a *New Israel* as it is of *Israel* herself. While certainly such language is problematic for many, it also presents us with an opportunity to expand upon the patristic witness in such a way that the moral and ethical qualities of Israel that endeared the fathers of the church become the focus of our dialogue and the departure point for our conversation between Jews and Christians. That the early (and later) church fathers embraced the mantle of Israel and did not reject it should not be viewed as inevitable, nor should its significance be underrated. The tendencies of a Marcion were certainly not isolated and indeed persist in certain corners of Christianity to this day. The church fathers viewed figures like Abraham, Moses, Joseph, and the prophets as models of virtue, worthy of

emulation, and representative of the Christian ethos—indeed, as proto-Christians, as is made abundantly clear in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. The patristic tradition repeatedly makes reference to the Israelite “saints” who endured temptation, persevered in their faith, and led their people back to God. Such is the devotion to these Israelite exemplars that the Orthodox Church has venerated and continues to venerate them as saints with prescribed feast days.

While the idea of such an explicitly Christian veneration of Jewish figures may sound a jarring note to the Jewish ear (indeed, outright disdain would not be a surprising reaction), admiration and extolling of such figures in Judaism is not without precedent, albeit in a much modified form. As Robert Cohn notes, “Biblical personalities have always occupied a special place in the Jewish imagination. Although no single one of them could properly be regarded as a saint for ancient Israel, together they display a range of imitable and inimitable qualities typical of saints... Thus Abraham is a model of faith, Jacob of cunning, Joseph of wisdom, Moses of humility, David of repentance, and Jeremiah of compassion.”<sup>6</sup> These personalities of scripture, therefore, become a shared treasure and a point of commonality from which we can view the early Christian (and thus Orthodox) self-understanding of the Church as Israel in a new light. Thus, Jews and Christians can together present these figures to “all the nations” as both *tzadikim* and *hagioi*—moral and virtuous people who, in their time, led their people back to God and, in our time, inform our understanding of how to do the same as part of our own, joint effort to repair the world.

It is my hope that the approach described here will help enhance the theological space necessitated by the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue while at the same time taking into account the particular needs associated with the Orthodox Christian participation in this

conversation. I will examine some of the pertinent theological touch points, using the patristic regard for the holiness and virtue of Israel and its great leaders as a lens for defining the Orthodox Christian self-understanding of the church as Israel. It is my hope that the regard the early church fathers held both for Israel as a holy nation and for its luminary figures as models of virtue will provide us with a way to accommodate the Orthodox Christian self-understanding of the church as Israel within the context of the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue.

### Holiness

In Jewish thought, the Noahide covenant with its seven commandments (*mitzvot*) forms the moral code by which the nations (i.e. Gentiles) are judged and required to live their lives. For Jews, Israel is a people and a unique nation and is therefore held to a higher standard than all others. Whereas the nations are judged by the adherence to the seven Noahide *mitzvot*, Israel is held to a more rigorous code of 613 laws derived from the covenant given to Moses at Sinai. It is significant, though, that in Jewish thought, Gentiles can live virtuous and exemplary lives by adhering to the Noahide covenant and can themselves become models worthy of emulation.<sup>7</sup> It was also not uncommon for some Gentiles of antiquity to be enamored with the God of Israel. Gentiles who professed such an admiration for the God of Israel were known as θεοσεβείς (*theosebeis*), σεβόμενοι τὸν Θεόν (*sebomenoi ton theon*), and φοβούμενοι τὸν Θεόν (*phoboumenoi ton theon*, “God-fearers”) to the Jews of the Hellenistic period.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, despite the acknowledgment of holiness in others, in the early centuries of the Christian Era Israel was seen by Jews as a nation set apart and marked by its more rigorous adherence to the commandments of God.

This adherence to the Mosaic covenant and the associated separateness from the nations ascribed to Israel a measure of holiness in the world. As Hannah Harrington observes, “ethical goodness is

an essential component of the rabbinic definition of holiness, exhibited most perfectly in the Holy One, blessed be he.”<sup>9</sup> Israel’s holiness, however, was derived not only from her observance of the *mitzvot*—indeed, the Jewish Bible is replete with stories detailing Israel’s repeated straying from God’s commandments—but because of her close association with God, who chose Israel to receive the *mitzvot* and the high calling to holiness contained in the covenant. As Harrington aptly concludes, Israel was commanded not simply to be a people set apart but to be holy as God is holy, and thus to be close to God (Lev. 19:2).<sup>10</sup> It is this holiness, both in ethical observance and in intrinsic relationship to God, that characterizes Israel as the people chosen by God, and it is this holiness that the great personages of Israel exemplified.

Conversely, the traditional patristic view is to look toward the Abrahamic covenant as the source for Christian claims to be Israel. It is the promise to Abraham that he will be “a father to many nations” (Gen. 17:4-6) that informs the understanding of the fathers concerning what constitutes Israel. For the fathers, the coming of Christ fulfills the promise to Abraham and is the culmination not only of the Abrahamic covenant but also the Mosaic covenant of Sinai. The Abrahamic covenant was given to one man, was renewed at Sinai, and was then extended to one people (Israel). The New Covenant, similarly, is seen as renewing and extending the Sinai covenant to all people affording them the opportunity to become “children of God”—*Τεκνα Θεου*, *tekna theou*— (John 1:12) and thus recapitulates and fulfills the Abrahamic promise. Basil the Great affirms this fulfillment, describing Christ in his eucharistic prayers as the “King of Israel” who “acquired us for Himself, as His chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.”<sup>11</sup> Once again, chosenness is associated with holiness.

In both Jewish and Christian understanding, holiness is accompanied

by the abiding presence of God (*shekhinah*). At Sinai the moveable Tabernacle assured this presence and later the Temple in Jerusalem assumed this function. In a similar fashion the early Christian community saw the presence of God fulfilled in the eucharistic elements.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the offertory prayer of Basil found in the liturgy that bears his name, the worship of the New Covenant is placed in direct association with that which preceded it when the celebrant asks God to “accept it as You accepted the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the burnt offerings of Abraham, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, and the peace offerings of Samuel.”<sup>13</sup> The Christian eucharistic offering, as the sacrifice of New Israel, and the church within which this bloodless sacrifice took place, were seen to be directly in line with the sacrifice offered in the Jerusalem Temple. So profound was this association that Eusebius declared that the churches of the fourth century were intentionally modeled after the Jerusalem Temple. In his oration to the Bishop of Tyre, Eusebius refers to the Christian church as *νέον ἁγίου νεὺ θεοῦ* (*neon hagiou neo theou*), “God’s new Holy Temple.”<sup>14</sup> While clearly holiness was associated with physical places, both Jews and Christians saw their moral and ethical conduct as a marker of their own personal holiness. In the period of the early church fathers the church participated in the holiness of the Israelite “saints” through their veneration and prayer for these saints. Symeon of Thessaloniki described such prayer for the saints as a way in which the church petitions God to increase their glory and holiness.<sup>15</sup>

The *Halakhah* was intended to preserve such holiness by building a fence around the Torah to guard against accidental violation of its precepts. From the prophetic tradition to the Maccabean martyrs to the variegated sects of first century Judaism, there was a consistent call within Judaism for renewal and heightened holiness. Christ acknowledges this desire in the Pharisees in the Sermon

on the Mount when he called on his listeners to be even more righteous than the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). There is considerable debate concerning the exact meaning of the term “Pharisee.” The most common understanding, however, is that “Pharisee” referred to people who were separate or set apart (*perushim*). Such separateness described those who were “holy” in that they were set apart from impurity and known for their piety. The mark of holiness that marked the Pharisees as a separate and holy group had its own particular manifestation in first century Christianity and later on in the patristic era. The *Didache*, for example, begins with the bold proclamation that there are two ways, the “way of life and the way of death”<sup>16</sup> and clearly identifies the early Christian community with the former. The members of this group were called “holy” and the spiritual descendants of the “holy vine of David.”<sup>17</sup> While Christianity maintained a more universalist interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant—one which envisioned the incorporation of all the nations into a New Covenant—the early Christian view of the Church as a “holy nation” nonetheless upheld in the Christian concept of Israel a particularity and separateness similar to its Jewish counterpart.

In the decades following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, both Christianity and Judaism struggled with articulating and defining how the adherents of their respective faiths would work toward achieving a sense of holiness. This articulation found its eventual form in the New Testament for Christians and the Mishnah and oral Torah for Jews—the former with roots in the New Covenant of Christ and the latter in the covenant of Sinai. The messianic and eschatological claims of the early Christian church along with the open incorporation of Gentiles into church communities were beliefs and practices too divergent to allow Christians to remain under the large umbrella of Judaism—even by the rather broad standards of the variegated, sectarian Judaism in the first century CE. This

exclusion, however, mattered little for the early church fathers. For them, it was the sanctity and holiness of the Christian community that marked it as the true Israel. While the early Christian approach to sanctity was profoundly different from the one prevailing in contemporaneous Jewish traditions, the centrality of the holiness of Israel remained entirely intact.

### Virtue

The Fathers of the Church repeatedly looked to the holy men and women of Israel as their spiritual ancestors and viewed their Christian community as the natural inheritor of that tradition. For the church fathers, the practice of virtue made them the spiritual descendants of the great figures of the Jewish Bible. John Chrysostom makes such an argument concerning the sons of Samuel, Joel and Abijah, who did not “walk in [their father’s] ways,” (1 Sam. 8:2-3) when he asks, “what were the sons of Samuel advantaged, tell me, by their father’s nobleness, when they were not heirs of their father’s virtue?”<sup>18</sup> The church fathers used the Greek philosophical category of “virtue” (ἀρετή, *arete*) as a defining characteristic for the great figures of Israel. Chrysostom and other fathers (echoing the apostle Paul) saw the virtue of these individuals as the spiritual blood that flowed through their veins. To be a citizen of Israel is to emulate the greatest of God’s chosen people, an act which also places the burden of responsibility upon those who desire to claim the mantle. “Do you have a glorious ancestor?” asks Chrysostom, “If you emulate him, you have profited; but if you do not emulate him, your noble ancestor becomes your accuser, because you are a bitter fruit from a righteous stock.”<sup>19</sup>

The great figures of the Jewish Bible were transformative for early church hierarchs like Gregory of Nyssa. In writing on the life of Moses, Gregory demanded that his flock study the life of Moses so that they “might benefit for the virtuous life from the things mentioned.”<sup>20</sup> Although it is Gregory who writes, he instructs the reader that in

reality it is “Moses [who] teaches us by his own example to take our stand with virtue as *with a kinsman* and to kill virtue’s adversaries.”<sup>21</sup> Like John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa saw Moses and other figures of the Jewish Bible as kinsmen, fellow members of Israel, after which the members of the New Covenant should pattern their lives.

The emulation of virtuous figures is most certainly a staple of the Greek philosophical thought that was so profoundly influential on the early church fathers. These same fathers, however, also looked to Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher of the first century, in applying this type of philosophical language to the historic figures of Israel. In the mode of the great Greek philosophers that preceded him, Philo sought to present an eternal truth that was of value to both Jew and Gentile. Toward this end, Philo made use of the genre of the βίος (*bios*) or “life,” in which a politician, literary figure, or philosopher is put forth as a model worthy of emulation. In writing his βίοι (*bioi*, “lives”), Philo took the Platonic notion of God as abstract perfection and the Stoic concept of an earthly ruler who emulated this perfection and translated them to a figure such as Moses, presenting him as an example of earthly perfection, as a model of virtue. Indeed, there is a reflexive quality to virtue and perfection in Philo: for him, to live a life of virtue is to seek perfection.<sup>22</sup>

While Philo’s use of Greek philosophical categories such as virtue is certainly representative of the fact that he was writing from a Hellenistic background and for a Hellenistic audience, his language also reflects that of later Jewish scriptural writings of the Hellenistic period such as 2–4 Maccabees and the Wisdom of Solomon, texts which are generally recognized as being originally written in Greek. At the same time, it should be noted that the Jewish translators of the Torah avoided the word ἀρετή (*arête*, “virtue”) altogether. The concept of “virtue” is charged with a variety of meanings such as goodness and excellence and

connotes actions such as glorious deeds, wonders, and miracles. Plato and Aristotle would define the four cardinal virtues as wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice.<sup>23</sup> The Stoics, building on Aristotle’s work, saw virtue as a life lived according to reason, a task meant for all but most especially for those who desired to be leaders. Like holiness, the philosophical categories of virtue were markers for describing the personal characteristics of the great patriarchal and prophetic figures of ancient Israel who embodied the individual categories of virtue. Thus, for Ambrose, Abraham is a model of justice, Isaac a model of wisdom, and Joseph a model of temperance and strength in resisting temptation.<sup>24</sup> Such images resonated with Ambrose’s flock and helped contextualize and communicate the scriptural text to his contemporary audience. As we have seen, associating different attributes with different scriptural figures is not altogether foreign to the Jewish exegetical mindset.

The first century Roman Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus described virtue as being something that was “not simply theoretical knowledge, but ... practical application as well.” He noted that when a king lives a life of virtue he becomes “preeminently godlike and worthy of reverence.” Thus, being virtuous, for the Stoics, made someone a good Roman and it was the virtue of the great patriarchs and prophets of Israel, for the church fathers, that made them good Israelites. In surveying the personages of the Hebrew Scriptures and desiring to present these figures as models to be emulated, it was only natural for Philo and for later Christians to associate the idea of virtue with many of the prominent figures of their respective faiths. Indeed, within the Wisdom of Solomon, the Hellenic influence on the author is readily apparent in the famous verse speaking of virtue, saying, “Or if one loves justice, the fruits of her works are virtues; For she teaches moderation and temperance, justice and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful for men than these” (Wis. 8:7). The prominent figures of



the Jewish Bible were a point of intersection for both the Jewish philosopher Philo and the early church fathers who read his works. If these scriptural figures provided such a common point of reference that early Christian theologians felt free to appropriate from Philo, even though he fell outside of the Christological boundaries of their work, it would seem reasonable to consider that a similar intersection could occur in our contemporary endeavour to create a space for mutual theological affirmation.

### Relevance to the Contemporary Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Sharing the Inheritance

In reflecting on how the common Jewish and Christian appeal to the holy men and women of the Jewish Bible can help create theological space in which a contemporary dialogue can take place, I am reminded of Jeffrey Siker's work on Abraham in early Christian controversy entitled *Disinheriting the Jews*.<sup>25</sup> While Siker accurately describes the apologetical arguments of early church fathers like Justin Martyr, such a focus limits the theological space necessary for the contemporary dialogue—most especially for the Orthodox Christian for whom, as has already been demonstrated, the early Christian views regarding the church as Israel play a significant role in the theological and liturgical life of the church. One possible way to widen the theological space of our dialogue would be to *share the inheritance* using the foundational figures of scripture which both Judaism and Christianity have in common.

In sharing this inheritance, what is needed is a contextualization of these foundational figures in an effort to develop a common understanding of the holiness and virtue of Israel and in turn present this common understanding to the world as part of a joint endeavour of *tikkun olam*. Indeed, I have afforded some space in this discussion to the person of Philo because this was essentially the task he was engaged in—contextualizing major figures

of the Jewish Bible such as Abraham and Moses for a Hellenistic Jewish and Gentile audience. The appropriation of Philo by early Christians is evidence of the success of his method. In a more contemporary setting, we have another example to which we can refer.

Rabbi Joseph B. [Dov] Soloveitchik, steeped in Greek philosophical thought, appealed to Western authors such as Kant and Kierkegaard in his presentation of Judaism for a contemporary audience. The reaction from the Jewish community to Soloveitchik's work was mixed and may be a cause for reservation when considering the proposed model. Some, like David Singer, believed that Soloveitchik was putting "old Jewish wine in new westernized wine bottles." Others thought that Soloveitchik was simply making an apology for Judaism in a Western, modern context. David Hartman, however, believes that Soloveitchik was not so much making an apology for Judaism as he was constructing a phenomenology of *halakhah*.

Irrespective of Soloveitchik's intent, it is clear that this scholar of Judaism—known as HaRav or The Rav (the rabbi)—felt very comfortable using the language of non-Jewish sources in articulating his message of Judaism to the contemporary world. A significant part of that message was Soloveitchik's thought on the spiritual life of Jews living in the modern age, represented in a collection of works, including *Abraham's Journey*, *Halakhic Man*, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, and *Worship of the Heart*. In these works, Soloveitchik uses western, philosophical language, in order to construct an overarching anthropology of the individual he describes as the "halakhic man" or the "lonely man of faith" living in the modern world. In his writings, Soloveitchik touches upon a variety of points that sound very familiar to the Orthodox Christian ear.

Indeed, the entire language of Soloveitchik's God-human encounter shows a remarkable similarity to Eastern Christian norms, examples of which are

the finite creature meeting the infinite creator, light and energy, ascent and descent, communion, and the unity of body and soul. In reading the works of Soloveitchik and those of the Eastern Christian spiritual masters—from Gregory of Nyssa to Gregory Palamas—it is evident that they share a common lexicon of spirituality. A good deal of this commonality can be attributed to the Greek philosophical language upon which both drew heavily. It is, indeed, striking to note that they not only draw from a common well, but even share a common reaction to it. Soloveitchik and the Greek Christian fathers both freely appropriated Greek philosophical language, but both were equally free in their disparagement of the philosophical discourse from which that language was drawn.<sup>26</sup> Like Soloveitchik, the Christian fathers were articulating an anthropology that was in opposition to the contemporaneous world view and needed to speak in the language of that world in order to communicate their message.

Like the church fathers, Soloveitchik often employed figures such as Abraham, Noah, Moses, and others to help support his position. If one were to strip away the Christological language of the Church Fathers in their treatises or introduce it into the work of Soloveitchik, there are many instances in which the differences in theological discourse would be difficult to notice. When Soloveitchik describes his halakhic “worship of the heart” as an “intense *stretching forth* [which] is fully rewarded by the clarity of vision and apprehension,”<sup>27</sup> it is not altogether difficult to hear in these words Gregory of Nyssa’s description of Moses’ encounter with God on Sinai in which the very same language of *epektasis* or “stretching forth” is used to describe the God-human encounter. Similarly, when Soloveitchik refers to Noah’s encounter with “the supranatural light emanated by the Creator,”<sup>28</sup> it is not hard to imagine a Palamite reference to the “uncreated light” of God.

More than anything else, examples such as these demonstrate that a theological space can be created in the Jewish-Christian dialogue even when the voices in dialogue speak to differing eschatological ends. Certainly, in the contemporary context, Gregory of Nyssa would be considered a supersessionist, yet the conversation between his theology and that of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik still has profound relevance for the contemporary audience. In this dialogue, Moses and Noah do not represent the end of the discussion but rather the departure point from which we can explore deeper theological questions.

The theological precepts that Rabbi Soloveitchik sought to convey came from the fertile soil of the inherited Jewish tradition originating in the ancient Near East. Orthodox Christians have a valuable role to play in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, if for no other reason than that the fact the roots of this historic Christian religion come from the same soil that gave birth to rabbinic Judaism. Indeed, the veneration, respect, and theological importance of the patriarchal and prophetic figures of the Jewish Bible spoken of in this paper and preserved in the liturgical and theological life of Orthodox Christianity bear witness to this common soil. While all Christians can claim this through the scriptures of the New Covenant, Orthodox Christians make an even stronger claim since the faithful of this church have maintained a contiguous presence in the Holy Land since the age of the apostles. As Nicholas de Lange correctly observes, “The historical and sentimental history of Orthodoxy and of Judaism overlap, and are wedded to each other to a far higher degree than we are normally aware.”<sup>29</sup> The historical and cultural factors that influenced Judaism in this region also influenced Orthodox Christianity, from the Bar Kokhba revolt to the rise of Islam and even the Crusades.

## Conclusion

The language of the church as Israel and/or New Israel is embedded in the

theological and liturgical consciousness of the church in such a profound way that removing this language is impossible. The embeddedness of such language in Orthodox Christianity, however, is, in many ways, a result of its close historical and cultural proximity to Judaism. If a theological conversation involving Jews and Orthodox Christians is to take place, it must occur in full acknowledgment of this reality, or else the dialogue runs the risk of degenerating into private speculation and would lack any real coherence or practical application.<sup>30</sup> While some may argue that a dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Jews cannot be fruitful in light of the Orthodox Church's self-understanding of the church as the New Israel, I am not so pessimistic. It is my belief that the dependence of the Orthodox Church on the patristic tradition and adherence to liturgical norms simply necessitates a unique approach to the dialogue.<sup>31</sup>

There is great potential in using the exemplary figures of the Jewish Bible as a departure point for our theological discussion, since these figures were the lens through which the early Christians viewed the Jewish Bible and were their reference point for what Israel was in the first place. In the patristic and midrashic commentary on the principal figures of the Jewish Bible there is much grist for the mill to be found in building such a theological discussion. In many ways, the use of these figures constitutes a common vocabulary through which Orthodox Christianity and Judaism can speak to one another. David Hartman described the goal of this type of dialogue as one that seeks "to build shared meaning, shared frameworks of understanding, and shared experiences of solidarity with all of humanity."<sup>32</sup> Through these common figures we can begin to build such a shared framework of understanding, and can thus explore issues of mutual theological importance including, but not limited to, spirituality, biblical exegesis, social ethics, and liturgical worship.

It must be emphasized that the use of this methodology is a departure point, not an

end in itself. The use of figures like Abraham and Moses to communicate theological norms was an approach taken by Jewish luminaries such as Philo and Joseph Soloveitchik to convey Judaism to a non-Jewish audience and their choice to do so should, in some way, inform how Christians and Jews can begin to carve out theological space based on this common ground. As we have seen, these figures were also profoundly important to the early church fathers (and thus the Orthodox Church) in conveying a host of theological precepts to the faithful. Indeed, it is not so much the figures themselves that lie at the centre of this theological space but the holiness and virtue which they represent. If we could return to Soloveitchik one last time, it might prove beneficial to consider his belief that "When a man creates himself, ceases to be a mere species man, and becomes a man of God, then he has fulfilled that commandment which is implicit in the principle of providence."<sup>33</sup> What Orthodox Christianity and Judaism share is an understanding that the patriarchs, prophets, holy men, and holy women of the Jewish Bible were preeminent models of the "dynamic not static" nature of holiness and virtue, forever moving and never ceasing until they arrived at "the pinnacle of the revelation of the Divine Presence."<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps, in the end, the words of someone like Justin Martyr, with whom we began this discussion, can prove useful in expanding the theological space of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. Justin's answer to Trypho was to claim kinship with Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Joseph, and David as a "true son of God." If Trypho had been more than just a literary foil for Justin, he most certainly would have been surprised and taken aback by such a response since Justin was claiming those individuals whom Trypho and his fellow Jews claimed for themselves. Both Justin and Trypho claimed the same inheritance and each thought of their people as the true children of God—the true inheritors of the holiness and virtue of the great

exemplars of the Jewish Bible. Perhaps the task of repairing the world that is thus central to both faiths involves recognizing that the inheritance of holiness and virtue to which both Justin and Trypho laid claim is a responsibility to be fulfilled, not a privilege to be possessed. Thus, as we engage in the hard work of repairing the world, as joint claimants, we can share both the burdens and the blessings of this common inheritance.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I shall use the terms "Israel" and "New Israel" interchangeably since the early Church Fathers more readily identified themselves with the former rather than the latter. We see this, for example, in the Thanksgiving Prayer of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which declares, "But Israel, Thy Church on earth, taken out of the Gentiles, emulating the heavenly powers night and day, with a full heart and a willing soul sings, 'The chariot of God is ten thousandfold thousands of them that rejoice: the Lord is among them in Sinai, in the holy place.'" *Apostolic Constitutions*, in *A Select Library of Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 38 vols., ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), vol. 7, 473.

<sup>2</sup> *Dial.* 123.7.

<sup>3</sup> Shanta Premawardhana, "Concept Paper for Consultation on Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Judaism" (2010), 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Chrysostom, for example, openly recognizes how often he refers to Abraham (and indeed other figures of the Jewish Bible) as models to emulate. In a homily on 1 Corinthians he defends such repeated references, saying, "let none accuse me of tautology if I often make mention of him [Abraham], and on all occasions: this being that which most of all shows him wonderful, and deprives them that refuse to imitate him of all excuse." *NPNF II*, vol. 12, 213.

<sup>5</sup> "Εἰς τὴν ἄνω Ἱερουσαλὴμ" (*eis ten ano Ierousalem*). Saint Germanus I, *On the Divine Liturgy*, trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 90-91. The Anaphora of the Antiochene rite offers a description of salvation history through a litany detailing the blessings bestowed on the posterity of Judaism beginning with the sacrifice of Abel to the suffering of Job to the victory of Joshua over the seven nations of Canaan. Paul Gavriluk has indicated that the

sequence of the listing of these prominent scriptural figures is possibly from an external Jewish liturgical tradition. See Paul Gavriluk, "Melito's Influence Upon the Anaphora of Apostolic Constitutions 8. 12," *Vigiliae Christianae* 59, no. 4 (2005): 370.

<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Cohn, "Sainthood on the Periphery: The Case of Judaism," in *Sainthood*, ed. Richard Kieckhefer and George Doherty Bond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 93.

<sup>7</sup> A prominent scriptural example is that of the Egyptian midwives Shifrah and Puah, who spared the life of the infant Moses and thus became exemplars par excellence of righteous among the nations; *chasidei umot ha-olam* (Ex. 1:17).

<sup>8</sup> For more on this subject see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 171ff.

<sup>9</sup> Hannah K. Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 12.

<sup>10</sup> In the Orthodox Christian context, the concept of *theosis* or deification would seem to be a natural cognate to Harrington's echoing of Lev. 19:2 in this context.

<sup>11</sup> Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, *L'eucologio Barberini Gr. 336*, vol. 2d ed, Bibliotheca "Ephemerides Liturgicae" (Rome: Edizioni liturgiche, 2000), 62, 66.

<sup>12</sup> Ignatius, in his letter to the church in Philadelphia, says, "Take care, therefore, to participate in one Eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup which leads to unity through his blood; there is one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do in accordance with God" (*Philadelphians* 4:1). In both the life and the letters of Ignatius, who was ordained bishop of Antioch in 70 CE, we see the primitive church's liturgical formulation of priesthood, centered around a bishop, presiding over a eucharistic celebration which was held over an altar.

<sup>13</sup> Parenti and Velkovska, *L'eucologio Barberini Gr. 336*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> *NPNF II*, vol. 1, 370.

<sup>15</sup> Casimir Kucharek, *Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* (Allendale, NJ: Alleluia Press, 1971), 628.

<sup>16</sup> Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 345.

<sup>17</sup> “τῆς ἁγίας ἀμπέλου Δαυεὶδ” (*tes hagian ampelou Daveid*). Ibid., 357.

<sup>18</sup> *NPNF* II, vol. 10, 59.

<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 112.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory Nyssa, ed. *The Life of Moses*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 51. Gregory Nazianzus and Dionysius the Areopagite also make reference to Moses as a model of virtue.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>22</sup> See A. C. Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis*, Studia Philonica Monographs (Providence RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), 31-36.

<sup>23</sup> Plato, Republic IV, ἡ σοφία (*sophia*) (428.b.1), ἡ σωφροσύνη (*sophrosune*) (430.d.1), ἡ ἀνδρεία (*andreia*) (431.e.10), ἡ δικαιοσύνη (*dikaiousune*) (427.e.1).

<sup>24</sup> Marcia L. Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> John Meyendorff, Jaroslav Pelikan, and others have noted that the early spiritual fathers of the Christian East also recognized the inherent incompatibility of Greek philosophical thought with Christianity but nevertheless appropriated its language in order to translate their message to their contemporary world.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, ed. Shalom Carmy, Meotzar Horav Series (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, *Abraham's Journey: Reflections on the Life of the Founding Patriarch* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2008), 94.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas R. M. De Lange, "The Orthodox Churches in Dialogue with Judaism," in

*Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 53.

<sup>30</sup> In discussing the challenges associated with a Jewish-Christian dialogue, Rabbi Soloveitchik was clear about his belief that such a conversation could only take place with the understanding there would be no doctrinal compromise. A discussion on "matters of faith" runs the risk that "one of the confronters will be impelled to avail himself of the language of his opponent. This in itself would mean surrender of individuality and distinctiveness." The Orthodox Christian theologian would agree with such an assessment. However, as David Hartman and others suggest, Soloveitchik's assessment does not preclude any dialogue but rather places more rigorous constraints when seeking to expand the theological space for discussion. See Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6, no. 2 (1964): 24.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholas de Lange makes another valuable point when he notes that, "Tradition is one of the fundamental pillars of Orthodoxy, and I believe that Jews, particularly Orthodox Jews, must be sensitive to the problems that this raises." De Lange, "The Orthodox Churches in Dialogue with Judaism," 55.

<sup>32</sup> David Hartman, *Love and Terror in the God Encounter: The Theological Legacy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 164.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 128.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 129.

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## What Does the Church Gain in Affirming the Jewish People as People of the Covenant?

Dr. Bernd Schröder

### 1. Context and Starting Points

This paper reflects the point of view of a Protestant theologian who joins the process of revisiting and renewing Christian theological thought on Judaism which is going on in Germany and many other countries, mainly in Europe and North America. In Germany, this process began with reflection on the Shoah as the low mark of a history of anti-Judaism that lasted for centuries. Without any doubt, Nazi Germany was guilty of the Shoah. But reconsidering this history has shown that there was also a remarkable amount of Christian anti-Judaism, relying in part on certain passages of the New Testament.

Horrified by this dark side of the history of Christianity,<sup>1</sup> the new or rediscovered understanding of Judaism, gradually established since the 1960s, stresses God's "uncancelled covenant" with the Jewish people as well as the unique, integral relationship between Christianity and Judaism. It focuses on dialogue as the recommended way to look at what we have in common theologically without denying our differences.<sup>2</sup> To put it in a nutshell, in light of a new reading of the New Testament, a dialogical, affirmative relationship to Judaism has become an integral part of Christian self-understanding.

The willingness of Jews to meet Christians despite the history of Christian anti-Judaism has become an important catalyst of this renewed understanding of Christian-Jewish relations. Our knowledge of Judaism and our understanding of the living faith of modern Jews primarily derive from encounters with Jews living *in the diaspora*: Germany, other European countries, and North America. Nevertheless, multi-faceted living Judaism

in the modern State of Israel has also contributed and contributes considerably to our perception of Judaism.

At least two remarks must be added: (1) While Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany have reached a remarkable consensus on the issue of Jewish-Christian relations,<sup>3</sup> the renewed understanding of Judaism has never been unopposed. Theologies of supersession, stereotypes of Jews, and even anti-Jewish resentments are still to be found within our churches as well as in German society; they are still challenging the Churches' commitment. (2) While the churches and individual Christians have succeeded in establishing a network of vital Christian-Jewish relations, the churches also have numerous close contacts with Palestinian Christian communities. Many of these contacts emerged from European missionary efforts during the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Palestinian Christian communities, such as those of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), have been connected with their former mother churches ever since.<sup>4</sup> Churches and Christians in Germany are mostly aware of their various links to the "Holy Land," to Palestinian Christians as well as Jews. Therefore, they are by no means insensitive to the political impact of renewed Christian-Jewish relations on Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This is, in short, the background against which I identify the question to be answered.

### 2. Identifying the Question and Presuppositions

What does the church gain in affirming the Jewish people as people of the covenant

in the wake of God's own affirming of the Jewish people as people of the covenant?

I am taking for granted St Paul's vision of the relationship between Jews and Christians and three presuppositions I am about to name. According to St Paul's epistle to the Romans, the Gentile Christian church has "been grafted in among [the olive branches], and ha[s] come to share the same root and sap as the olive." Therefore it must not "make [it]self superior to the branches" (Rom. 11:17ff.). As a consequence of this biblical testimony, the Christian church:

- a. must not assume an attitude of disinheritance, substituting, or superseding the Jewish people as the chosen people;
- b. has to avoid any anti-Jewish thinking and proclaiming of the Gospel; and
- c. has to renounce any missionary approach to Judaism.<sup>5</sup>

The New Testament—for the most part—wants us to *establish an affirmative relationship between Christians and the Jewish people*. The word of God as heard in the words of St Paul and the gospels confirms the Lord's covenant with his first-chosen people—and so should Christians!<sup>6</sup>

In search of a hermeneutical metaphor which can express the relationship intended between the Christian Church(es) and Judaism, I would like to propose the following one: Christians and Jews are to be seen as *companions on their way through history*. They are both rooted in the promises of the Old Testament; both guided by the one God; different from one another, but having a remarkable range of theological issues in common: the Scripture called the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament respectively; the belief in the one God, creator of heaven and earth; and the belief in God's presence in history, either guiding "Israel" or incarnated in Jesus the Jew. They have a set of common moral values focused on justice and love, essential forms of liturgy

and prayer, and a shared hope for the coming kingdom of God.

Therefore, the vocation of the Church should not be turned against the Jewish people, just as God's keeping faith with the Jewish people does not turn against the church. On the contrary, *God's loyalty to the Jewish people is to the benefit of not only present-day Jewish people but also the Christian church*.

By asking for attention to what the church gains from this close relationship to the Jewish people, I would like to stress that Jewish-Christian dialogue should not only deal with the clarification of biblical and historical interaction between Jews and Christians and with an analysis of their relationship in the field of systematic theology, although these clarifications remain necessary at least for *Christian* theology and *Christian* churches. Beyond that, Christian-Jewish dialogue is a useful and suitable tool for the purpose of understanding today's tasks of Christian churches in a world which has succumbed to a large extent to a secularization of the mind and to a far-reaching commodification of everyday behaviour and thought.

In terms of methodology, this shift in subject and focus is to be understood as a demand to complement the theology of Jewish-Christian dialogue with questions of practical and ethical theology.

### **3. What Does the Church Gain in Affirming the Jewish People as People of the Covenant? A Florilegium of Answers**

#### **3.1 Making sure of the Lord's unflappable loyalty: the poimenic dimension**

According to the Scriptures the Lord has "cut" (established) several covenants:

- the covenant with Noah and all humankind (Gen. 6:18 and 9:1-17);
- the covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 15:7-21 and 17:1-22);

- the covenant with the people of Israel (Ex. 24:1-11 and 34:10ff.);
- the covenant with David, king of the ancient state of Israel (2 Sam. 23:5).

The biblical line of thought describing all these covenants stresses that God keeps faith with all of them, even if God's human partners are going to break the promises and obligations connected with their entering the covenant. Those covenants have been renewed in the past (2 Kings 23:1ff.; Neh. 8) and they might be renewed again in the future (Jer. 31), but they will never be broken by the Lord.

God's reliability is to be seen as the pledge for future hopes not only for the Jewish people, but also for humankind and the Christian church. It is precisely God's reliability regarding these former covenants which may reassure *us* in times of trouble. It is precisely God's unflappable loyalty which may console *us* regarding our own untrustworthiness. It is God's trustworthiness in regard to the Jewish people which can confirm *our* faith—if we see ourselves grafted onto the olive tree of God's covenants through Jesus Christ, the born Jew, our Lord.

### 3.2 Participating in the mission of biblical Israel and the Jewish people: the missionary dimension

The Leuenberg Church fellowship of Reformation churches stated in 2001 in "Church and Israel": "Both statements are true: God chose the people of Israel, and God chose the Church from Jews and the nations and thus made it his own possession" (2.5.3). "The Church confesses that [it] is created by God's work of election and that it is thus 'the people of God'—[together] with Israel" (2.5.10). "Of itself the Church cannot claim to be 'the people of God'" (2.5.9).<sup>7</sup>

Joining the covenant *sola gratia* (by grace alone), the church does not have any mission to Israel, but the church participates in the mission of Israel. This mission consists of bearing witness

- to the one God, creator of heaven and earth;
- to the coming redemption and reconciliation of humankind and to the kingdom of God;
- to the Holy Spirit who is going to renew human beings on behalf of the Father.

God wants us to live according to this mission which the Jewish people and the Christian church have in common. This mission should be followed in words as well as in deeds.

Therefore, Christians and Jews should not work against each other. Instead, they should engage, wherever possible, side by side, in favour of their fellow human beings!

This is my understanding of the biblical idea of "election": Neither the election of Israel nor the vocation of the church is to be understood as an exclusive priority treatment by the Lord, but as *a calling to stewardship* (see Ex.19:5ff.).

### 3.3 Differentiating between God and idols: the (self-) critical dimension

One of the main issues the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint deal with is the distinction between the Lord, the one and only God, and any idols, worshipped either by parts of the people of Israel (see Ex. 32) or by other peoples like Canaanites or Babylonians, either idolized by ritual cults or betrayed by a violation of the laws of the Lord or a violation of ethical behaviour.

It is very important to see that the biblical tradition does not differentiate between worship and idolatry by simply differentiating between Israelites and Gentiles. On the contrary, there are Israelites worshipping idols and Gentiles praying to the Lord.

In other words, theological distinctions of the so-called Old Testament do not only contain a critical discrimination between Israel on the one hand and all the other peoples on the other hand, but also a self-



critical attitude within and against the people of Israel. In this remarkable self-criticism you will find critics of the temple cult, critics of social injustice, critics of tyranny and usurpation, especially in the books of the prophets and also in the traditions dealing with Jesus the Jew, our Lord.

This tradition of theological self-criticism is still alive in modern Judaism. One can refer to the secularized Jewish thought of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud as well as to modern Jewish theologians like Jeshajahu Leibovitz or Emil Fackenheim. One can refer to Rabbis for Human Rights<sup>8</sup> as well as to sharp arguments between different Jewish movements like the Reform movement and modern orthodox Judaism.

Christianity has inherited from biblical Israel the ability to differentiate between service and idolatry. The Christian churches should become aware anew of their obligation to make good use of this discrimination in dealing with economics and social injustice, with religions and world-views, and with their own traditions and practices.

### **3.4 Learning from the two-fold history of God's first testament: the educational dimension**

Both Judaism and Christianity have been part of the history of God with his chosen people. More than that, they are still part of this history.

In being coupled by the divine act of election, Jews and Christians, first of all, have to learn *about* each other's historical and theological narrative of God's presence in history; second, they have to learn *from* the other's narrative. Jews and Christians form a learning community (*Lerngemeinschaft*), a community that should spare no effort to understand the word of God, the two communities' common mission and each other's faith traditions. For example, Christians have to perceive and recognize those aspects of Jewish history and theology in which

the Jewish people succeeded in cultivating the biblical heritage. Some of these aspects are:

- the living culture of dialogical learning (*Talmud Torah*),
- the tradition of narrative theology (*Haggadah*),
- the shaping of every-day-life according to the "Torah" (*Halakhah*),
- the communitarian way of celebrating worship ("a kingdom of priests" according to Ex. 19:6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9).

### **3.5 Yearning for the kingdom of God: the dimension of hope**

Judaism perceives the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ neither as the prelude of the kingdom of God nor as a fulfilment of God's promises. All the more reason why Judaism had been yearning for the future kingdom of God from ancient times, through the Middle Ages to the present day.

One can see this by looking at Jewish history: the celebrating of Shabbat, the daily prayer for redemption, messianic movements, and the struggle for human rights and "emancipation." These may serve as examples even if modern Judaism has developed a wide range of different positions regarding redemption, a future kingdom of God, return to Zion, and other important issues of traditional Judaism. To put it differently, learning from Judaism means learning to preserve a living hope.

In the light of this biblically-rooted tradition of a living hope, Christians are required to do two things. First, they are required to enter a protest against any *theologia triumphans* (which assumes that redemption has already been fully accomplished in Jesus Christ). Second, they are required to revitalize their hope and commitment to the kingdom of God by acting in favour of the justice, love, and reconciliation which are to be brought about by God's will and deed.

### 3.6 The priority of action over theological reflection: the ethical and ascetic dimension

Some of the most famous rabbinic stories tell about the priority of action and everyday behaviour over theological reflection. This priority is one of the common threads in rabbinic literature, but by making this point I do not want to reinforce the traditional misunderstanding of Judaism as a legalistic religion. On the contrary, it is the preceding grace of the Lord, his faithfulness and wisdom, which enable the Jewish people to behave according to God's Torah.

Looking at the history and plurality of Christian faith traditions, one cannot claim that mainstream Christian faith neglects ethics and asceticism. There have, however, been many movements and times in which ethics and the ascetic dimension of Christianity have been neglected in comparison with the effort and interest given to detailed theological distinctions offered by dogmatic theology. Think of the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages or Lutheran theology in the era of National Socialist Germany. Of course, the exception proves the rule.

Compared with this, Judaism has *continuously* stressed halakhic action and behaviour, i.e. asceticism, ethics, and rituals.

There are probably further aspects of Jewish tradition that could enrich Christian self-understanding, Christian theology, and Christian commitment. There may also be aspects of the manifold Christian faith traditions that might make an impression on Jews and Jewish thought. But the latter do not belong to today's subject.

## 4. Principal Reservations

My first caution concerns definitions: When talking about "Israel" and "the Jewish people," I do not want to refer foremost, let alone exclusively, to the modern State of Israel. "Israel" rather

means the ancient people (and nation) of Israel referred to in the Hebrew Bible; beyond that, it is a collective term for the Jewish people in the past *and the present*. The term "Jewish people" refers to the entire Jewish people past and present, including those Jews living in the modern State of Israel.

A second remark: Appreciating theological figures, practices, and ideals of the Jewish people does not mean seeing them more or less realized in every single Jew, in the modern State of Israel, or in the Jewish people as a whole. Perceiving the plurality of Jewish self-understandings, ways of living, and modes of behaving in view of the vocation of "Israel," and taking into account the fallibility of human beings, there is, of course, a natural hiatus between theological ideals and the real life of the Jewish people, challenging and threatening the credibility of human believers and their theological ideas. I do not want this remark to be understood as a reproach to any Jewish individual or community, but rather as a description—a description that applies to individual Christians and Christian churches to the same extent, if not even more. In this respect, St Paul's words might be fitting to characterize the struggle of Jews and Christians to fulfil their vocation: "At present we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but one day we shall see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

It is understandable that Palestinian Christians might not be able to verify my reflections on the mission of the Jewish people in the lights of the politics of the present government of the modern State of Israel or of violations of their human rights by Israeli Jews. But they should bear in mind the maxim of ancient Roman law: *abusus non tollit usum, sed confirmat substantiam* ("Abuse does not destroy the essence but confirms it.").

## 5. What Does the Church Have to Do as a Result of Its Affirmative Relationship to the Jewish People?

**5.1 The Church has to answer in the affirmative to the biblical narrative of being grafted in the olive tree (Rom. 11: 17-24) of God's promises to biblical Israel.**

According to this biblical metaphor, the Church has to become humble. It has to recognize that Israel was the first to be called by God to live according to his Torah. The Church has to adopt a position that might be characterized as epistemological humility: the Church does not only depend on God's revelation—"by your light we are enlightened" (Ps. 36:9)—but also on moving into God's history with his people of the covenant—"Remember that Christ became a servant of the Jewish people to maintain the faithfulness of God by making good his promises to the patriarchs and by giving the Gentiles cause to glorify God for his mercy..." (Rom. 15: 8ff.).<sup>9</sup>

**5.2 The Church has to build up and to cultivate both, a culture of memorizing the Jewish roots of Christian faith and its contemporary companionship to the Jewish people.**

From the first century onward the Church became a "Gentile Christian" church. Since then, the Church has often forgotten its Jewish roots and its partnership with the Jewish people.

Therefore, one of the most important tasks of the Church today is the establishment of a certain culture of memory. Every visitor to a Christian church community should get the opportunity to perceive the commitment of the Christian church to the Jewish people. We should learn to speak and act in a way which shows the affirmative ties between the Christian church and the Jewish people—in the field of liturgy and homiletics, in the field of religious education, in the field of ethical commitment.

**5.3 The Church has to arouse its members' curiosity about the rich plurality of Jewish life-styles, Jewish self-understandings, Jewish theologies**

If Christianity is to be seen as grafted onto the olive tree of God's presence in history as a younger branch, Christians should be interested in the experiences, the practices and theological thoughts of the older branches, i.e. Judaism. Learning about and from Jewish faith traditions belongs to the first obligations of a Christian's way of life.

**5.4 The Church has to appreciate the Jewish "no" to Jesus as the Messiah.**

When St Paul struggled with the fact that the majority of his Jewish contemporaries did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, he declared it a divine secret: "this partial hardening has come on Israel only until the Gentiles have been admitted in full strength; once that has happened, the whole of Israel will be saved..." (Rom. 11:25). Shortly after, Paul added: "they are God's enemies *for your sake*" (Rom. 11:28). Given the truth of this statement, we Christians must not negatively accuse Jews of remaining faithful to the Torah; rather Christians should appreciate this as expression of an eschatological reservation and an incentive to realize the legacy of Jesus Christ in our way of life, our theological thinking and, last but not least, in shaping the relationship with the Jewish people.<sup>10</sup>

**5.5 The Church has to fight against anti-Judaism in words and deeds; theological thinking must renounce the idea of disinheritance.**

If Christianity is allowed to see itself as a companion to Judaism, called later by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it is obliged to fight against anti-Judaism and to resist anti-Jewish theological thinking of disinheritance. The spirit of charity, the spirit of Christianity, forbids disregard for our Jewish companions; it forbids any disinheritance of the Jewish people.

**5.6 The Church has to see its relationship to the Jewish people as a unique one, but this means neither that it should disregard other religions and peoples nor does it mean it should**

**close the eyes in front of the manifold ethical challenges in the world.**

In the light of Holy Scripture, there is no other religion than Judaism which can be seen as the root of Christianity. This is a historical finding as well as a theological correlation. There is no other religion which could or should be seen as such a close companion, in the historical, theological, and prospective sense of the word. Therefore we can and should speak of a unique relationship, a unique companionship of Christians and Jews. This by no means allows us to disregard other religions and peoples. Nor does this allow us to ignore challenges of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.<sup>11</sup>

Let us take a look at a serious and controversial example of this close relationship and its implications. Whoever confirms the right of existence of the State of Israel as a place of refuge for Jews—and Christians, especially those from Germany) in my opinion are obliged to do so – has to confirm in the same breath the right of existence of the Palestinians, their right of political self-determination, and their claim to found a state of their own.<sup>12</sup> Christians who confess the “uncancelled covenant” between God and the Jewish people and their right to live in the land which was promised to their biblical ancestors—an idea which, by the way, does not include a claim to certain territory or borders and other political details—have to be sensitive and supportive to the fate of the Palestinians, especially to Palestinian *Christian* communities.<sup>13</sup> We have to foster their spirituality, their commitment to non-violence and justice, their educational efforts and social work, and their political struggle for self-determination.

In sum, in the light of the biblical testimony and of history, the relationship between Jews and Christians is to be seen as a unique one, but this does not mean disregarding either other religions or other interfaith dialogues: the companions might be accompanied by others. Or to put in

other words: “*Brother and sister do not disregard friends.*”

The biblical tradition calls us to see the ongoing existence and spiritual richness of the Jewish people as signs of God’s ongoing allegiance to the Jewish people. God remains loyal to the Jewish people and we should do so as well. God’s blessing of Israel will not be effective without the struggle of the Jewish people to fulfill its mission; but there will also be no blessing of the Christian churches without our cultivating of an affirmative relationship to the Jewish people as our companion, our elder brother or sister. “Remember that you do not sustain the root: the root sustains you” (Rom. 11:18).

<sup>1</sup> In this sense the Shoah has been the *reason* for reconsidering Christian theology, but not the (main) *subject* of that renewed theology. Therefore, naming this new understanding of Judaism and the renewed relationship to Judaism “Holocaust theology” is unsuitable and polemical.

<sup>2</sup> A concise description and summary of this process has been given by Hans Hermann Henrix: *Judentum und Christentum: Gemeinschaft wider Willen* (Regensburg: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 2004) and Christina Kayales and Astrid Fiehland-van der Vegt, eds., *Was jeder vom Judentum wissen muss* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> See the broad collection of official documents concerning Jewish-Christian relations published by churches and Jewish bodies all over the world, in Rolf Rendtorff and Hans Hermann Henrix, eds., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, vol. 1, *Dokumente von 1945-1985* (Paderborn: Bonifatius Verlag and Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1988), 231-320 and 527-622, as well as Hans Hermann Henrix and Wolfgang Kraus, eds., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, vol. 2, *Dokumente von 1986-2000* (Paderborn: Bonifatius Verlag and Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 340-428 and 533-942.

<sup>4</sup> Mitri Raheb, *Das reformatorische Erbe unter den Palästinensern* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1990) reminds us the history of this relationship; see also [www.elcjl.org](http://www.elcjl.org).

<sup>5</sup> The term “missionary approach” means any organized effort intending to convince Jews to become baptized. But the rejection of mission

to the Jews does not mean imposing a ban on answering questions concerning one's Christian faith or on bearing witness to each other in the framework of meetings, which in my opinion is to be seen as a vital part of any serious dialogue.

<sup>6</sup> The WCC and its "consultation on the church and the Jewish people" adopted this conclusion and most of the new findings mentioned above in its affirmations "Toward a new understanding" (1988); see [www.jcrelations.com/stmnts/wcc\\_sigtuna.htm](http://www.jcrelations.com/stmnts/wcc_sigtuna.htm) and Henrix and Kraus, *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, 442-447.

<sup>7</sup> Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft, *Kirche und Israel: Ein Beitrag der reformatorischen Kirchen Europas* [...], Leuenberger Texte 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Otto Lembeck Verlag, 2001). (Leuenberg Church Fellowship, *Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, Leuenberg Documents 6.)

<sup>8</sup> Rabbis for Human Rights, founded in 1988, seeks to prevent human rights violations in Israel and the Palestinian territories on the basis of the humanistic Jewish tradition and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; their website is at <http://rhr.org.il/eng/>. The organization has a North American affiliate, Rabbis for Human Rights-North America, founded in 2002: <http://www.rhr-na.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> See Dietrich Ritschl, *Die Logik der Theologie: Kurze Darstellung der Zusammenhänge theologischer Grundgedanken* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1984), 161-167. Eng. ed. *The Logic of Theology: A Brief Account of the Relationship between Basic Concepts in Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt: "Feinde um unserer willen": Das jüdische Nein und die christliche Theologie, in *Verwegenheiten: Theologische Stücke aus Berlin* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1981), 311-336, 326ff.; Eng. trans. "'Enemies for Our Sake': The Jewish No and Christian Theology" (1977) in *Theological*

*Audacities: Selected Essays*, ed. Andreas Pangritz and Paul S. Chung, Princeton Theological Monographs Series 137 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 3-30.

<sup>11</sup> You might want to learn about keeping aware of these challenges in the teachings of Martin Stöhr, e.g. *Dreireden* (Wuppertal: Foedus, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> These suggestions are both to be seen as theologically founded political consequences, but they are founded in two different kinds of theological approach: the first is a biblical-systematic one, exclusively concerning "Israel" and the Jewish people; the other is a biblical-ethical one, reflecting the commitment of Christians to the welfare of every human being.

<sup>13</sup> Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, *Den rheinischen Synodalbeschluss zum Verhältnis von Christen und Juden weiterdenken – den Gottesdienst erneuern. Eine Arbeitshilfe* (Düsseldorf: 2008), 44ff.

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## Denominational Perspectives

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### Lutheran Insights for Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Judaism

**Dr Peter A. Pettit**

I cannot speak for all Lutherans, nor for Lutheranism; this is the statement of a Lutheran who is in good fellowship with his Church and who thinks regularly about these matters from within a Lutheran theological framework.

*“What is your starting point for Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism?”*

#### 1. Justification by Grace through Faith

*Justification by grace through faith* has to be the starting point, the “article on which the Church stands and falls,” as classical Lutheran theology puts it.

This means that God alone calls us into being, confers on us our identity, and gives us the gift of life, extending that gift to us even after our sinfulness has forfeited any basis for it—what Paul Tillich called accepting our acceptance though we know ourselves to be unacceptable.

Where would the Church get such an idea? *Paul finds it in his Jewish heritage* and brings it into the Gentile realm to take root. Taken together canonically with later New Testament writings, Paul finds God’s grace in the redemption from any other power that would be god—any power to which one is enslaved. For the Gentiles these were elemental powers or spirits, summarized as “sin, death, and the power of evil.” For the Jews this power was Pharaoh/Egypt. Paul finds the paradigm of faith, of course, in Abraham: Abraham’s trust in God, when God called or elected him, marks him as righteous.

Thus the Church begins its relationship with Judaism by recognizing that the *model and precedent* for the church’s own election and redemption lies in God’s gracious election of Israel and redemption from slavery. Further, the Church lives in this reality through faith that is modeled by Abraham. The pattern of God’s saving ways is true for the church because it is true for Israel. The election and promise of the Church are eternal because the election and promise of Israel, the Jewish people, are eternal.

#### 2. Incarnation and Sacrament

A second starting point is the *incarnational and sacramental* character of God’s revelation and relationship to humanity.

The power of God to free us from sin, death, and the power of evil is present in the human being Jesus Christ. It comes to its saving effect in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection and it is received *in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist and in the preached word* of the gospel.

The truth that the Church knows is not propositional, but relational, as the Church encounters the *living word of God* under forms of created existence in every age. Thus the experience of Israel in each of its ages—biblical, early rabbinic, medieval, modern, and contemporary—holds something of interest and value for the church, but the church will seek its self-understanding in relationship to Judaism especially through *the lived encounter with Jews today*.

#### 3. Covenant

Just as the Church’s covenanted life with God is eternal, grounded in God’s own gracious promises, so too is the Jews’ covenanted life with God eternal. These *two peoples* (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9) have both been *called into being as covenant*

partners by one God, working in two distinct sets of historical experiences.

*"What methodological insights does your region or confessional tradition bring to the table?"*

### 1. *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda*

A key methodological insight of Lutheran theology is the realization that *the Church is always in the process of reforming* (*ecclesia semper reformanda est*).

One of the greatest dangers to the church is the reification and idolization of theological propositions and formulations, as though they were the essence of God or of the God-human relationship. Salvation does not lie in proper theology, but in the gracious election and redemption of God, which are new every day. It is not theology that leads to salvation, but a living relationship with the saving God that gives life to the church and leads it to *self-understanding in transitory, inadequate, ever-reforming theology*. (Thus the classical Lutheran forms of Bible translation, catechism, and confessions—all timely, contextualized articulations of the good news of God's gracious saving acts.)

*Dialectical encounter* is an essential aspect of a theology always in reform, as every formulation faces the challenge of adequacy in encountering circumstances other than those for which it was formulated. The Church works most creatively when it is living in the tension between its own heritage and a contemporary reality which that heritage does not comprehend well. Such encounter fosters a constructive humility that welcomes growth and correction in the church's self-understanding.

### 2. Encountering God in the Concrete Experience of the Other

The specific encounters with others who raise these dialectics for the Church can also be understood as acts of God. Thus the Swedish church reflects well the value of diversity in the human experience of

God by titling its document on relations with the Jewish people "God's Ways" (*Guds Vågar*). By *encountering God in others' experience* the church grows in its self-understanding; by encountering the church through the presence of religious others God leads us toward a fuller understanding of ourselves and of Godself (Cardinal Walter Kasper has spoken of Judaism as "the sacrament of every otherness.")

The *Jewish community* is not an abstraction or a theologoumenon, but, like the church, a *concrete reality wherein the Church recognizes God at work*. Its experience of God is the experience of the Church's God at work in a different context and idiom, even as our experience of God is the experience of Israel's God at work in a different context and idiom. In our dialectical encounter God leads us both to grow into new self-understanding.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Humility and Partnership

Lutherans, heirs of both Martin Luther and the German church of the Nazi era, have particular reasons to realize the dangers of relegating Jews and Judaism to a disembodied, mythic place in our theological terrain. A posture of *self-critical humility* will always mark our theological claims, with such self-criticism perhaps fostered best by *the critical presence and partnership* of those who are implicated in our claims.

The Church understands itself in relation to the Jewish people, then, as *two peoples partnered by God in difference*, for the sake of mutual growth and for the sake of that which transcends both Christian and Jewish identity: the world's redemption.

<sup>1</sup> See George W. Forell, "How to Speak about God in a Pluralistic World" in *Martin Luther, Theologian of the Church; Collected Essays of George W. Forell*, ed. William R. Russell, Word and World Supplement Series, vol. 2 (1994)) and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, "'Enemies for Our Sake': The Jewish No and Christian Theology" (1977) in *Theological Audacities: Selected Essays*, ed. Andreas Pangritz and Paul S. Chung, Princeton

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Theological Monographs Series 137 (Eugene,  
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## **Starting Points: An Anglican Perspective**

**Dr Clare Amos**

*“What is your starting point for Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism?”*

I am seeking to answer this first question both personally, as a biblical scholar, and in my institutional capacity, representing the Anglican Communion.

An appropriate starting point would be to affirm that the Old Testament has always been authoritative and valued as part of Scripture by Anglicans. At the Reformation, this was firmly stated in Article Seven of the Thirty-Nine Articles. (The Thirty-Nine Articles are regarded as a key statement of Anglican doctrine—though they most often tend to be used to prove a point against something!) Article Seven reads:

### *VII. Of the Old Testament*

*The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no*

*Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.*

Until fairly recently it is probably true that Anglicans read the Old Testament liturgically to a greater extent than most other Christian communions, since both morning and evening prayer (the staple diet of Anglican worship until the 1960s) prescribed the use of an Old Testament as well as a New Testament reading. Additionally there was, and is, substantial use of the Psalter.

Yet the honouring of the Old Testament did not necessarily lead to a parallel honouring of contemporary Judaism. The Old Testament was very much viewed as “our” (Christian) book, properly understood only in the context of the New. We Anglicans do not much like calling it the Hebrew Bible (which I as a good Anglican think is actually a misnomer when used by Christians). It is significant that until very recently the professors of Hebrew and Old Testament studies at Oxford and Cambridge universities were required to be Anglican clergymen. There was a flattening of historical perspective: the beautiful but soporific chanting of the psalms in Anglican cathedrals did not necessarily lead to a real understanding of their original historical or liturgical context. (As a teacher of Old Testament producing a drama that sought to set some psalms in their original form-critical context of a harvest festival journey to Jerusalem, I was greeted by students who said “We never thought of the psalms like this before.”) The Old Testament for many Anglicans was “now and England.”



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I can also remember seeing a book written in the 1960s by an Anglican clergyman who was an Old Testament scholar (I believe it was Eric Heaton) about the Babylonian and Persian periods and which referred to these eras as "Late Judaism." The implication presumably was that a couple of centuries later, in the New Testament period, "Late Judaism" transformed itself appropriately into the New Testament of which it was the ancestor and could therefore gently die off, its task complete. The fact that Judaism was (and is) still around felt rather like an aged aunt who inconveniently refuses to quit this life and insists on disrupting family parties! We are quite fond of her, but doesn't she realize it is now time to pass on? She is inhibiting our style.

The 1958 Lambeth Conference tried to be forward-looking in its discussion of Scripture but in doing so unwittingly presented problems for Christian-Jewish relations. Resolution 2 of the Conference states:

*The Conference affirms that our Lord Jesus Christ is God's final Word to man, and that in his light all Holy Scripture must be seen and interpreted, the Old Testament in terms of promise and the New Testament in terms of fulfilment.*

This is a resolution that has come to increasing prominence in recent years in relation to the internal Anglican debate about the use of scripture in relation to issues of sexuality, but whether consciously or not, it actually marginalizes Judaism.

I suspect that in 2010 Anglicanism is a bit more subtle. Though Archbishop Rowan Williams gave a brilliant talk in 2004 in Cambridge which reflected on the "covenant" issue, one or two, shared or separate,<sup>1</sup> I do not think that on the whole Anglican theology is deeply caught up in the covenant discussion. Many of us have questions about too much of a focus on covenants.<sup>2</sup> It may be that I am looking at

the views of others to reinforce my own perceptions, but John Barton (Anglican clergyman, international Old Testament scholar, Oxford professor) seems to me to express a view that I also hold, namely that Anglicans cherish a certain "unpinnable-down quality" in faith, and that we owe this in part to the Old Testament understanding of God as the elusive "I am who I am." So the concept of the Name that is no name, clearly important in modern Judaism, presents an intriguing starting point for Christian engagement with Jewish faith.

A recent book, *The Internal Foe: Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Shaping of Christian Theology*, by Anglican priest and theological educator Jeremy Worthen,<sup>3</sup> perhaps takes this argument one stage further. Worthen suggests that Judaism forces Christianity to engage with the tragic dimension that it often seeks to suppress, that it is an "internal foe," or to use a mathematical metaphor, it can be described as a surd!<sup>4</sup> Alan Amos, my husband and an Anglican priest with considerable experience of the Middle East, has referred to contemporary Judaism in the context of modern Israel as "a living question mark." In a variety of ways, great and small, Judaism still insists on posing challenges for any too simplistic Christian theodicy.

*"What methodological insights does my confessional tradition bring to the table?"*

The recent Anglican report on interfaith relations, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue*,<sup>5</sup> draws attention to Anglican theological method. It points out (here I am paraphrasing) that it is distinctly Anglican to give considerable weight to a reasoned reflection upon our human experience in history which is informed by the study of Scripture, prayer (worship), and shared discourse. I believe that these are all resources that we Anglicans bring to the present-day table in our discussion with Judaism. In spite of my critique of certain Anglican views in the previous section, I also want to honour the Anglican scholarly tradition in relation to

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Judaism: the first English translation of the Mishnah was made by a scholarly Anglican priest, Herbert Danby, long-term resident at St. George's Cathedral, Jerusalem.

Worship clearly is important in any understanding of Anglican self-identity. Archbishop Rowan Williams once said that we "inhabit our doctrine" (in worship); and singing those psalms (soporifically or not) is something that we share in common with Judaism as part of our joint commitment to ortho-doxy (literally "right worship").

Like Judaism, the Anglican tradition believes that theology is shaped by history and context. Place is and has been important in much Anglican theology, linked originally to its sense of rootedness in England—as it clearly is in contemporary Judaism, where the question of rootedness in *Eretz Israel* is a significant focus. The ongoing dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has, over the past three years, in one way or another, focused on our understanding of "place." Connected implicitly with the importance of "place" is the Anglican sense of "establishment." This is reflected not only in the "established" Church of England but also in the traditional links that many Anglican Churches in former British colonies have with government. Perhaps Anglicans share something of modern Judaism's dilemma of the relation between religion and politics. In Israel itself the links are very clear, yet Diaspora Judaism also understands the sense of embarrassment that many contemporary Anglicans hold about being linked too closely with "the powers that be." With respect to this matter of place, it is worth concluding by referring to two very different episodes in the history of Anglican relations with Judaism.

Regarding the first, many contemporary Anglicans would be horrified to be reminded of the fact that there is a link between early 19<sup>th</sup> century Evangelical Anglicanism and early Christian Zionism.

But the connections are very close and were fostered by influential figures in the British establishment of the day such as Lord Shaftesbury. Indeed the appointment of the first Anglican bishop of Jerusalem (a joint appointment with the Lutherans) was clearly influenced by Christian Zionist aspirations, linked both to hopes for the Jewish "return" to the Holy Land and to the Jews' eventual conversion to Christianity. The first bishop, Michael Solomon Alexander, was largely chosen because he himself was a converted Jew. He was sent out to Jaffa on a British warship. He was originally going to be transported on a ship named "Infernal." However, the name was deemed unsuitable for a vessel transporting a bishop, so his travel was at the last minute switched to a ship that was called "Devastation," as this was considered more appropriate.

The second and very different example is the work of the Anglican clergyman James Parkes. Parkes was deeply Anglican, particularly in his social and incarnational vision. His life story shows how his theological engagement with Judaism was influenced by his social concern for Jews in the rising tide of antisemitism in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s—and vice versa. I would argue that this interplay between the practical and the theological is characteristic of the Anglican tradition at its very best. Parkes was the driving force in the formation in 1942 of the London-based Council of Christians and Jews, one of the key originating groups of the Councils of Christians and Jews (CCJ) movement around the world. In his scholarly passion, his social commitment, his organizational vision – yet also a certain quirkiness and sense of being a lone voice within an established church secure enough to tolerate the unusual – Parkes's life and work represents some key characteristics of the Anglican tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> See

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1040?q=judaism>

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<sup>2</sup> The establishment of a possible 'Anglican Covenant' as a means of helping to resolve internal tensions in the Anglican Communion is a development which has been greeted with ambiguity and concern in some quarters. At the time of writing (November 2012) the eventual success of such a Covenant is uncertain. .

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Worthen, *The Internal Foe: Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Shaping of Christian Theology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> In mathematics a surd is defined as follows: "A surd is a radical that is not evaluated, or cannot be precisely evaluated".

<sup>5</sup> Anglican Network for Inter Faith Concerns, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue; An Anglican Theology of Inter Faith Relations* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2008). Available online at

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[http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/resources/documents/generous\\_love\\_A4\\_with\\_foreward.pdf](http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/resources/documents/generous_love_A4_with_foreward.pdf).

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## Orthodox Perspectives

### H. E. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France

It is with great honour that I am addressing this Consultation of the World Council of Churches that is taking place here in Istanbul, a crossroad of cultures and civilizations for over two millennia. His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has kindly asked me to convey to all of you his greetings and to welcome you all to the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The topic of this consultation, Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism, gives us the opportunity to express our views as Orthodox Church regarding our starting point in the dialogue with Judaism.

I would like first of all to recall that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and various Jewish organizations enjoy more than thirty years of fruitful collaboration in the field of inter-religious dialogue. (We also must not underestimate the longer history

of prior relations between Jews and Orthodox Christians.) Under the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its Orthodox Centre in Chambésy, Geneva, a series of seven academic consultations has been jointly organized with the International Jewish Committee on Inter-religious Consultations (IJCIC).

The starting point of the seven Jewish-Orthodox academic meetings<sup>1</sup> was a lecture given by His Eminence Metropolitan Damaskinos in 1976 before the Swiss Society for Christian-Jewish cooperation in Zurich on the theme "The Claim for Absolutism of both Christianity and Judaism and the necessity for Dialogue between Them," The first of the seven meetings took place in Lucerne, Switzerland in 1977 on the theme "The Notion of Law in Judaism and Christianity."<sup>2</sup> A second was held in Bucharest, Romania in 1979 on "Tradition and Community in Judaism and the Orthodox Church" and a third in Athens, Greece in 1993 on "Continuity and Renewal."<sup>3</sup> The fourth meeting took place at Ma'aleh HaChamisha near Jerusalem,

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Israel, in 1998 on "The Encounter of Christian Orthodoxy and Judaism with Modernity,"<sup>4</sup> the fifth occurred at Thessaloniki, Greece in May 2003 on the theme "Faithfulness to Our Sources: Our Common Commitment to Peace and Justice," and the sixth in Jerusalem in March 2007 on "Religious Liberty and the Relationship between Freedom and Religion." The seventh meeting was held in Athens in November 2009 on the topic "The World in Crisis: Ethical Challenges and Religious Perspectives."

The variety of topics addressed during these academic meetings aimed at promoting the sincere mutual desire among Jews and Orthodox Christians to get to know each other better and by doing so, to provide the faithful with the opportunity to understand that cooperation and peaceful coexistence can only be achieved by an open and sincere dialogue. No one can deny that we share a common spiritual origin, and in the words of His All Holiness in his address to the third academic meeting in 1993, "This common spiritual origin of Christians and Jews seems today, more than ever, to offer a fruitful ground toward the rejection of the consequences of mutual prevailing hostility during the past, and the establishment of a new relationship between them, genuine and authentic, rooted in the willingness to work toward mutual understanding and improved knowledge of each other."

We have to keep in mind that dialogue is not taking place to convince either of the parties to convert to the religion of the other, but to strengthen the calm and peaceful cooperation between people, so that consciences on both sides may freely select the faith that draws them through their personal responsibility. My predecessor, Metropolitan Damaskinos, stressed that the full and unconditional constitutional and legislative guarantee of full freedom of religious conscience and other religious freedoms for the citizens of all states is indispensable if we want to live in a peaceful world. Whatever the origin of the majority of the faithful in any

given nation may be, respect toward the religion of the minorities is necessary. In the constantly expanding pluralist composition of society in virtually all modern states, the legislative protection of equality before the law and of all the internationally recognized social rights of religious "others" constitutes a factor for stability and social coherence.

The seven academic meetings have adopted common principles in order to encourage the faithful to better understand one another. Some of these principles are the following:

- Judaism and Christianity, while hearkening to common sources, inviolably maintain their internal individuality and particularity.
- The purpose of our dialogue is to remove prejudice and to promote a spirit of mutual understanding and constructive cooperation in order to confront common problems.
- Specific proposals will be developed to educate the faithful of both religions to promote healthy relationships based on mutual respect and understanding in order to confront bigotry and fanaticism.
- The principle of religious freedom is a fundamental right that flows from our mutual biblical affirmation that all human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Freedom is a divine gift and religious value, and as such must be respected and protected.
- The preeminent value of the human person obliges us to respect all forms of religious and secular expression, as long as they do not infringe upon or threaten the security and religious freedom of individuals, communities, and societies. Conversely, where militant secularism and religious extremism pose such a threat, they must be repudiated and combated.

In this framework we can confirm that the Orthodox Church, well aware of the great problems affecting the whole of

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humankind, already expressed in its first Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference of Chambésy in 1976 its willingness to collaborate with the faithful of other religions in order to erase any kind of fanaticism and to ensure the realization of all the ideals of freedom, reconciliation among peoples, and peace in the world for all humankind, without distinction of race and religion. It is obvious that this concern is not unique to the Orthodox Church. The subject of peace is important for all Christians and, perhaps with different emphases, for all of humanity, because it is crucial for the future of the planet.

In conclusion, the following seven points summarize the positive significance of our academic consultations toward mutual understanding and the wider framework for relations between Judaism and the Orthodox Church.

*First*, our religions are not willing to disturb the divine heavenly peace in order to serve the deplorable military hysteria of the Earth's leaders.

*Second*, our religions are not willing to overlook their teaching about the unity of the human race in order to serve recent ideologies of fragmentation and social conflicts.

*Third*, our religions are not willing to replace the call put forward in their teachings for peace and justice in the world with the demand of more recent ideologies for "a war of all against all."

*Fourth*, our religions are willing, through interfaith dialogue, to heal the wounds of the historic past in order jointly to serve the weak and suffering people of our time in a more consistent and responsible way.

*Fifth*, our religions are willing to contribute jointly to publicizing the principles of mutual respect and sincere understanding in our educational curricula and textbooks, so that the unhealthy phenomena of blind fanaticism and religious intolerance may gradually be eliminated.

*Sixth*, our religions are willing to cooperate through modern ecumenical dialogue to defend peace, social justice, and human rights in relations between individuals and peoples, irrespective of any religious, national, racial, social, or other differences.

*Seventh*, our religions are willing to support their people's governments and international organizations in order to achieve fuller awareness of these fundamental principles and peaceful co-existence between the peoples of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> For a historical survey and analysis of the interreligious dialogue between Orthodoxy and Judaism, see "Le dialogue de l'Eglise orthodoxe avec la Tradition juive," *Contacts* 216 (Oct.-Dec. 2006): 516-527.

<sup>2</sup> For proceedings, see *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 24, no. 4, (1979): 265-327.

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of the Third Academic Meeting between Orthodoxy and Judaism, 21-24 March 1993 (Athens, Greece). "Continuity and Renewal," *Immanuel*, vol. 26-27, 1994. The volume includes a History and Bibliography of Dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Jews, 197-249.

<sup>4</sup> The proceedings are unpublished.

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**His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel of France is the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Europe.**

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## Regional Perspectives

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### Thoughts for Opening the Conversation from a North American Perspective

**Rev. Dr Robert O. Smith**

1. *"What is your starting point for Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism?"*
2. *"What methodological insights does your region or confessional tradition bring to the table?"*

My own starting-points for Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism is shaped by history and theology. I seek to be responsive to the suffering inflicted on Jews by Christian communities through the centuries. Our Christian traditions are implicated in this history of unjust suffering, even if our communities did not directly commit sins of either omission or commission. Theologically and ethically speaking, my first starting-point is affirmation that we share the same God (though differently conceived) and much of the same revelatory tradition.

My second starting-point is that we also share the same flawed human desire for self-verification that tempts each of us to impose ourselves on those who cannot agree with us doctrinally or conform to us culturally. Human beings too often seem incapable of allowing differences to exist in tension, too eager to claim that the independent existence of an other impinges on the existence of our selves. It is the reality of Christian political power that has made these unethical temptations into a history of tragedy for Jewish-Christian encounter.

More broadly speaking, Jewish-Christian engagement occurs at all levels of North American society, especially in those areas with a high Jewish population: local rabbis have good relationships with many pastors and church leaders; synagogues

and churches participate in each other's holidays. There are many important national expressions of Jewish-Christian dialogue at a national level. The "scriptural reasoning" movement<sup>1</sup> has been an especially noteworthy development in relationships between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The important insights developed through Christian engagement with Jewish theological reflection and dialogical encounter have been adopted by national church bodies and promoted at the congregational level.

Nevertheless, the awareness most North American Christians have about Jews is linked to the Holocaust, the perception of some bond between Jews and Christians expressed in common defense of the "Judeo-Christian" tradition, and the State of Israel. This complex of associations, especially when tied with constructions of Jews through biblical images, produces a flattened image incompatible with contemporary Jews in all their complexities and diversities. While many Christian perceptions of Jews drawn from the Bible are positive, others could benefit from nuanced pastoral contextualization, especially of those negative images of Jews contained in first-century Christian narratives.

Simplistic comprehensions of biblical narratives also affect North American Christian views of Muslims and Christians in Muslim contexts. The positive political construct of the "Judeo-Christian" tradition, originally developed to define Western values against totalitarianism, has been used (despite objections from many Jews and Christians) to build a defensive wall against Muslims around Christians and Jews. With the "Judeo-Christian tradition"'s mobilization in Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis,<sup>2</sup> Arab and Muslim civilization in all of its complexity, including its significant Christian populations, has been consigned to outer darkness.

In North America, attitudes toward the State of Israel are a common feature of Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism, whether or not Israel is explicitly mentioned in dialogical encounters. North American political, economic, and military power is central to the continued ability of the State of Israel to project its own power in its neighbourhood. State and imperial power thus become essential sites of theological reflections. Mainline churches, while theologically compatible with Jewish interests, have not translated those theological shifts into political support for Israel's political proclivities. Debates over church-related efforts to put economic pressure on the State of Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian territory are a current feature of engagement between Christians and Jews. On the other hand, politically mobilized Christian Zionism—already known to provide favorable political perspectives toward the State of Israel—has recently promoted theological understandings more compatible with the interests of some Jewish leaders. It remains to be seen whether this politically-charged atmosphere of Jewish-Christian engagement can continue to produce breakthroughs in understanding between Christians and Jews, or whether it can even be sustained.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scriptural Reasoning Movement is described as follows: Scriptural Reasoning is a practice of inter-faith reading. Small groups of Jews, Christians and Muslims, and sometimes people of other faiths, gather to read short passages from their scriptures. The participants don't have to agree. They may not accept one another's texts as scripture, nor agree with each other's reading of them. Scriptural Reasoning is a process that works even when the participants differ strongly, and when those differences really matter to them. It is not about seeking agreement, but about understanding one another's differences. See: <http://www.scripturalreasoning.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Huntington first presented his thesis about "civilizations" (including a theory of religio-cultural identity) as a basis for conflict in the post-Cold War world in 1992 and developed it further into Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49. Huntington expanded the article into a book published three years later.

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## **A Palestinian Christian understanding of the Christian relationship to Judaism and the Jewish People**

**Dr Salim Munayer**

Jewish-Christian relations, and in particular Palestinian Christian relations with Judaism and the Jewish people, are confused and highly complicated. They have to negotiate not simply the current political climate, but also paths through the history of antisemitism which has been

inherited from the European church, in order for constructive dialogue and mutual acceptance between the two sides to be affirmed. Palestinian Christians are, however, ideally situated at the intersection between the Western church and Eastern culture and thus can help to facilitate this dialogue.

The political environment means that the encounter between Palestinian Christians and Jews takes place in the context of the conflict in the Holy Land. My own family, for example, were made refugees in their own town of Lod, having witnessed traumatic acts of violence. Such a context

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makes it incredibly difficult for Palestinians to relate to Israeli Jews and the Jewish Diaspora with sympathy for the Jews' persecuted history in Europe; it colours all encounters between the two sides.

As a child, I grew up in the Orthodox Church, in which the theologically substantiated hatred of the Jewish people, long prevalent in Western Christianity, was completely alien to my Greek Orthodox upbringing. It was only as I began studying in a Jewish high school that I was suddenly exposed to the whole history of the relationship between Western Christians and Jews, which is now dominated by the events of the Shoah. That history was projected onto me and began to cloud my relationship with my Jewish classmates and teachers. It was here that I began to bear the weight of the history of Western Christianity, which has become the normative history of Christianity around which Jewish-Christian dialogue is now framed and formulated.

Western Christianity has now attempted to articulate a new framework for constructing Jewish-Christian dialogue in order to enter a process of reconciliation. The second Vatican Council, for example, gave a positive theological space to the Jewish people, yet one which was couched in post-Shoah guilt and went, arguably, beyond the boundaries of strict Christian orthodoxy. Theological notions such as two-covenant theology have been adopted as a way of moving beyond the antisemitism which operated under the guise of Christian supersessionism in the West, yet they sharply diverge from orthodox Christian beliefs. Indeed antisemitism or "anti-Semitism" as a nominal term cannot correctly be applied equally to the Arab and to the European, for in the Palestinian context, both groups of people are Semites.

Not only are these foreign ideas and this normative history forced upon Palestinian Christians when they enter into the context of Jewish-Christian relations, but any protesting or dissenting voices which

come from within the Palestinian community are repressed for fear that they will harm the reconciliation which is currently occurring between Jews and Western Christians.

The Palestinian Christian encounter with Judaism and the Jewish people is heavily influenced by the Israel-Palestine conflict. What began originally as largely an ethnic and political struggle between Arab nationalism and Jewish Zionism over territory has increasingly taken on religious dimensions which colour the meeting of Palestinian Christians and Jews. Islamism has become much more important, as well as Jewishness, leaving Palestinian Christian identity on the sidelines of this encounter. This neglect is also prominent in the writings of Western Christians regarding the conflict, which often fail to acknowledge the existence of an indigenous Christian community in the region.

There is a tendency in the West to adopt a bi-polar view of the world. This bi-polar worldview contrasts the East with the West, the uncivilized with the civilized, and Jews and Christians with Muslims. Again, this reductionist perspective fails to articulate a coherent and necessary space for the Palestinian Christians who claim an identity with both the Christian West and their Muslim Arab brothers and sisters. This view has also served to propagate the logic and language of Islamophobia, in which Muslims from the uncivilized East are considered backward and violent; on the other side, it has also served to propagate antisemitism beyond the Western world. Western antisemitic literature has been translated into Arabic and this new religious language now is injected into a national conflict.

School textbooks in each community neglect the narrative of the other side and as a result, there is a large knowledge gap, on both sides, regarding the religion of the other. There is no comprehensive school textbook written for Palestinian Christians which presents the full history of the Jewish people, their customs, and



their religion. This ignorance only serves to fuel more stereotypes and prejudices among Palestinian Christians and the wider Palestinian community. At the same time, there is an increasing output of violent literature and writings by a number of rabbis against Muslim and Christian Arabs. Rabbi Yaacov Perrin, for example, in a eulogy for Baruch Goldstein, commented that "One million Arabs are not worth a single Jewish fingernail." Such language merely serves to widen the gap of knowledge and heighten hostilities between Arabs and Jews.

For the first time since the early church there is a Christian minority living amongst a Jewish majority; this is in stark contrast to the usual Western demography in which a persecuted Jewish minority is forced to navigate a Christian majority situation. Palestinian Christians are not a threat to the national state: the Arab Christian community is characterized by its high levels of education and positive contribution to Israeli society. In spite of this, its members are often persecuted and treated as second-class citizens.

In 2008 the Jerusalem Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations (JCJCR)<sup>1</sup> undertook research to investigate attitudes of adult Israeli Jews toward Christians and a Christian presence in Israel. The results of the research showed that over half of those asked had no Christian friends, over 40 percent believed that Christianity was an idolatrous religion, and 46 percent did not believe that Jerusalem should be a central city for the Christian world, but claimed a monopoly on Jerusalem for the Jewish people. The research also detailed specific examples of anti-Christian incidents such as arson attacks on churches, increased desecration of churches and Christian gravesites, and the particularly shocking incident in May 2008 in which hundreds of copies of the New Testament were publicly burned by Orthodox Jewish students from a yeshiva in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Such occurrences serve to illustrate the widening gap and inequality between

Jews and Christians in Israel and the impact such estrangement has on both sides. Daniel Rossing, former Director of the Jerusalem Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations, comments on the way that recognition of Jesus' Jewishness has become a mantra for those wishing to enter the sphere of Jewish-Christian relations. However he believes that what is of utmost importance in the Holy Land is recognition that Jesus is not just a Jew, but the Word Incarnate, which requires from adherents to the Jewish religion the use of more reverential language appropriate to such a fundamental Christian tenet.

In spite of such a negative portrayal of Jewish-Christian relations in the Holy Land, there are also notable positive encounters. Judaism, from its contact with Western culture, has been heavily influenced by the Enlightenment project, secular politics, and other forms of Western thinking. Arab Christians have also been greatly influenced by Western culture and historical ideas, which can now serve as a basis for dialogue between Arab Christians and Jews. It is also important to consider the role shared sacred texts can play as a way of facilitating fruitful dialogue between the two groups. There is still a long way to go however, before relations are entirely affable.

As a result of much of the conflict and prejudices that operate within the sphere of the relations between Palestinian Christians and Jews, it has become very difficult for many Palestinian Christians to understand how it is that their own Scriptures have been used by many Jewish people to legitimize their claims to the land. The same Scriptures which Palestinian Christians have used to interpret their religious identity, their calling, their sense of mission and historical and religious heritage, are now used by their enemies in order to oppress them. Some Palestinian Christians have chosen to repress or completely reject their spiritual and religious identity as Christians, believing it to be in conflict with

their ethnic and nationalistic identities, and have embraced the secular Palestinian nationalist movement's political struggle for freedom. Other Palestinian Christians downplay the significance of the Old Testament in the canon and tend to read selectively, leaving out passages which are more nationalistic and instead focusing on the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus and Paul in the New Testament.

The challenge for Palestinian Christians therefore, is to develop a theology of the Jewish people from their own context as they relate to the state of Israel, but one which is not wholly coloured by the conflict and recognizes that their spiritual heritage comes from the Jewish people. Out of the painful relationship between Jews and

Arabs, Palestinian Christians attempt to navigate their way through the mistakes of Western Christianity and increasing religious conflict between Western Christians and Muslims. They are also uniquely placed in the gap between the

East and the West to develop their own theological framework for constructing fruitful dialogue between Jews and Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> "Research on Israeli Jews' Attitudes towards Christians":  
[http://www.jcjr.org/activity\\_view.php?aid=626](http://www.jcjr.org/activity_view.php?aid=626).

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## **A Palestinian Christian Reading of the Old Testament**

**Fr Jamal Khader**

"Why should we read the Old Testament anyway? Don't we have the New Testament? Isn't it enough?" We sometimes hear such questions from Christian Palestinians. In our liturgical texts, we used to avoid the word "Israel," replacing it with "the people" or "Jacob." In the Paschal Vigil, a few communities decided to skip the reading of the Exodus. Those are some of the difficulties in reading the Old Testament.

Every reading of the Bible is a contextual reading. For 2000 years, Christians and Jews have read the Holy Scriptures in different contexts and the Word of God has nourished their lives and continues to do so.

We may interpret this fact in two ways:

1. In different situations, believers read the Word of God to find what supports their choices and their ideologies. Here the Bible may say different things in different situations, or opponents may read the Bible and find opposite conclusions. Whites in South Africa based their apartheid system on the Bible and blacks found in the Bible reasons to oppose apartheid. That is using the Bible; that is an ideological reading of the Word of God.

2. The second way is to read the Bible to find answers and to see the message of God to us, now, in this situation. Here we learn from the Word of God, and let this Word penetrate in our lives and choices. We learn from the Bible, and we try to translate it in our lives.

How to ensure the difference between "making the Word of God say what we want" and "letting the Word of God teach

us”? One of the criteria is to accept the whole Bible, and not to have a “Scripture within the Scripture,” not to have a selection of texts; if we look for a support for our ideologies, most probably, we will find it. We need to accept the whole Bible, including the difficult texts, and then keep the tension between those texts.

### The Palestinian Christian Context

The Palestinian context is characterized by the following (though this is not a complete vision of that context):

\* **Our history:** Two thousand years of Christianity with all the changing regimes, from the Roman and then Byzantine empires to the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian semi-autonomy. The Christian presence suffered because of all this change, going from a large majority to a very small two percent. All those changes are not “history,” the past; they are the layers of our collective conscience. We still have nostalgia for the Byzantine era, when all you could see in Jerusalem was churches... and we still suffer from the Crusades until this present day.

\* **Small in numbers:** We are two percent of the inhabitants of the Holy Land (Palestine/Israel); it is still hard for us to realize and accept this fact. In every new government or new elections of any kind, we still search the names to see how many Christians are there and whether we are well represented! On the other hand, the Christian presence is much larger than the Christian percentage; the work of Christian institutions and organizations, the Churches, and the active role of individual Christians in politics, literature, social life, and the economy make this presence an important one. We can say that Palestinian society, Palestinian culture, is a Christian-Muslim one.

\* **Political conflict:** since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we have lived in a political conflict where, as a Palestinian people, our national rights are denied. The conflict was always seen as a political-national one until the 1980s, when we began to

hear religious arguments and justifications for the political situation. Those claims came from the settlers’ movement and then expanded beyond it, from the Muslim Brotherhood, with its Palestinian version, the Hamas movement, and from Christian Zionists of both sorts: the American and the European versions of Christian Zionism should not be conflated or confused; they come from two different contexts with different premises. Christian Zionist ideas have infiltrated mainstream churches and theologies. The context and the background of such theologies are neither my context nor my background. When I hear some theologians or churches speaking of a “Christian” theology, I do not recognize myself in that theology. To put it differently, antisemitism and the Holocaust, as terrible as they are, are not part of my background. I agree fully that we all need to fight antisemitism, no question about it. The question remains: what are the implications of post-Holocaust theologies or Christian Zionist theologies for the future of peace and justice in the Holy Land?

\* **Relations with the Jews and Judaism:** The relationship between Christians and Jews in the Holy Land is different from that in Europe. Christians in Israel are part of the Arab minority and, in the Palestinian Territories, live under occupation. Our story is one of displacement and dispossession. The contact between Christians and Jews is made in the context of political, national, or even social tensions. It is hard to talk about dialogue, except for a few fortunate groups, usually inside Israel, and without real impact on general Christian-Jewish relations. As for theological reflection, it is relatively recent and it focuses more on the religious aspects of the conflict.

### The Christian Reading of the Bible in the Kairos Palestine Document

Into this context comes the Kairos Palestine document. (The official title of the document is “A Moment of Truth.”<sup>165</sup>) The document has many aspects; I will focus mainly on the section entitled

"Faith," where we talk about the reading and interpretation of the Bible.

1. In the context of denying the authority of the Old Testament, we repeat our belief in the whole Bible, Old and New Testament. No new Marcionism is tolerated.

2. We renew our faith in the basic message of the Bible, in God as a just God, creator of all human beings in his image, giving them dignity.

*We believe in a good and just God, who loves each one of his creatures. We believe that every human being is created in God's image and likeness and that every one's dignity is derived from the dignity of the Almighty One. We believe that this dignity is one and the same in each and all of us. (Kairos 2.1).*

The translation of this faith in God is *"that we might come and know and love one another, and together build up the land in love and mutual respect"* (Kairos 2.1).

3. How do we understand the word of God? We believe that *"Jesus Christ came in order to fulfill the Law and the Prophets."* He interprets Scripture as he did with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. *"He came with 'a new teaching' (Mk 1:27), casting a new light on the Old Testament, on the themes that relate to our Christian faith and our daily lives, themes such as the promises, the election, the people of God and the land."* (Kairos 2.2.2)

4. The Christological reading of the Old Testament is well known, beginning with the New Testament itself (see for example the Letter to the Hebrews). We Christians can never read the Old Testament as if the New did not exist; the two Testaments are linked not only from a historical point of view but from a theological point of view. We have two readings of the Old Testament, the Jewish reading and the Christian reading, including the texts related to the Promised Land. Here the Kairos document does not suggest any

specific reading; it defends the legitimacy of a Christian Christological reading.

5. Theology can hurt. It is not, and has never been, simply an intellectual exercise. The Word of God is a word of life, Good News. That is why it is *"unacceptable to transform the Word of God into letters of stone that pervert the love of God and His providence in the life of both peoples and individuals. This is precisely the error in fundamentalist Biblical interpretation that brings us death and destruction when the word of God is petrified and transmitted from generation to generation as a dead letter"* (Kairos 2.2.2). The document states: *"Certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights."* Thus, their interpretations have *"become a menace to our very existence. The 'good news' in the Gospel itself has become 'a harbinger of death' for us. We call on these theologians to deepen their reflection on the Word of God and to rectify their interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples."* (Kairos 2.3.3)

6. *"In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation."* (Kairos 2.3) *"It is God's land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land: 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it' (Ps. 24:1)."* (Kairos 2.3.1)

7. *"Our task is to safeguard the Word of God as a source of life and not of death, so that 'the good news' remains what it is, 'good news for us and for all. In face of those who use the Bible to threaten our existence as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, we renew our faith in God because we know that the word of God*

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cannot be the source of our destruction.” (Kairos 2.3.4).

8. The conclusion is that *“any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, transform religion into human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth. We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.”* (Kairos 2.4 – 2.5)

In the Kairos document we quote many times from both the Old and the New Testaments. We have tried to offer a contextual reading; and we have tried not to ignore difficult texts, including the commandment to love our enemies.

The Kairos Palestine document is an example of a reading that I can describe as ecumenical, contextual, and bearing a message of hope, where thousands of Palestinians can recognize their faith and a meaning for their struggle.

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Father Jamal Khader is the Chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies and the Dean of Arts at Bethlehem University. He has a Doctorate in Dogmatic Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome where he completed his thesis on the official dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. He is a member of the Theological Reflection Committee of the Latin Patriarchate and of the Committee of Dialogue with Jews. Fr Jamal teaches at the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala, Bethlehem University, the Emmaus Center in Beit Sahour, and Mar Elias College in Ibillin. He also teaches Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Strategies for the master's in International Cooperation and Development (MICAD) programme.

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<sup>165</sup> The document can be found online at <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf> in English. It is available in several other languages at <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/?q=content/document>.

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## Latin American Perspectives -

### Bishop Emeritus Aldo M. Etchegoyen

#### Religious Dialogue in the Context of the Global Empire

*What is your starting point for Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism?*

Let me begin with a personal experience. Several days ago, I received an invitation to take part in a roundtable about religious questions and answers at a Catholic secondary school near Buenos Aires. In the dialogue an issue about the Virgin Mary arose. As a Methodist bishop, I preferred to remain silent, but somebody asked me directly, "I want to know: what is your opinion about the Virgin Mary?"

My answer was short:

1. The Virgin Mary was not Catholic.
2. Of course, she was not Protestant.
3. She was a humble Jewish woman with a deep faith in God.

The people in the auditorium remained in silence; after a moment, somebody commented, "I think you are right, bishop."

Then the dialogue began to recall that Jesus was a Jew, as were his disciples, and that all the writers of the Bible were members of the family of Israel, except Saint Luke.

My starting point for this meeting is this issue; it is directly related to our identity as the Christian-Jewish community.

Christian people, churches, and theological institutions constantly use Jewish elements in their community life. The Psalms are a very important part of our piety and liturgy.

In Latin America, we sing several psalms set to folk music. Some examples are

"Miren qué bueno" (Psalm 133, "Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity") and "Te exaltaré mi Dios mi Rey y bendeciré tu nombre eternamente" (Psalm 145, "I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever").

The Jews are people in covenant with God, and Christians, through Jesus Christ, are the family of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Every Sunday this family goes to the Communion Table in the worship service to remember the words of Jesus, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also Jesus took the cup after supper, saying "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11:25-26).

Let me offer my interpretation of Jesus' words "I am the way, the truth, and the life" in relation to Christian identity: Jesus is our way to know the truth and the life of the God of Israel.

I know it is not necessary to say this in a meeting like this, but we must think about this issue in Christian communities—in local churches and congregations. When I gave that answer about Mary the mother of Jesus in a Roman Catholic secondary school, it was something new for many people. It was a new understanding of the identity of the Virgin Mary and a new self-understanding for the audience as Christian people who were not only Catholics, but Methodists and members of other denominations. I think this is the cornerstone of Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism. Surely you can lay the other stones.

- 1) *What methodological insights do you bring to the table?*

Our theological reflection must take place in relation to our congregations. It must speak to and with people in numerous communities around the world, in

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churches as well in synagogues. We have to think of the places where the people are and, with respect to this issue of Christian self-understanding in relation to Judaism, they are especially in churches and synagogues. Today Jews and Christians interact with one another in sports, cultural life, political parties, business, music, and other settings and activities. Why do they not attend each other's religious celebrations more frequently?

I suppose the perspective is better at a theological level. In Argentina, more than thirty years ago, we began to share theological studies at the Rabbinic Seminary and the Union Theological Seminary (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires. This program continues today and we have excellent academic relations among Jewish and Christian theological professors, but we still have to break down barriers between churches and synagogues.

Around the world we have important interreligious relations; Jews and Christians are in dialogue and working together; but we still have to cross those frontiers between congregations.

I know this is not easy; it is a challenge. Not everybody thinks in the same way. We need authentic Jewish and Christian people not only engaging in dialogue but also working together, seeking justice and peace.

From our experience in Latin America, I have seen that it is possible to work together for example in defense of human rights and in a variety of social programs. I assume it is the same in many other continents and countries.

A final comment: I see our reflection here as linked to the major objective of dialogue between Jews and Christians, which is to offer a united service to lead to a world without unnecessary suffering—a world with strong pillars of truth, justice, peace, and love.

**Bishop Emeritus Aldo M. Etchegoyen is Bishop in the Methodist Church of Argentina.**

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## European Perspectives

**Rev. Katja Kriener**

***I want to dedicate this paper to Prof. Klaus Wengst on the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.***

*What is your starting point for Christian self-understanding in the context of Judaism?*

### **1. Jewish Christian Dialogue: Not Only a "Context" but the "Basic Text"**

Jewish-Christian dialogue is unlike the dialogue with any other religion.

For Christians it is not only a possibility, but necessity! As Christians we cannot

understand ourselves without understanding God's history with Israel and from there with the Gentiles. This is the main difference from the dialogues with other religions: Jewish-Christian dialogue is at the heart of Christian self-understanding.

### **2. The Jewishness of the Christian Faith**

As Christians we believe in the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel.

Jesus was a Jew in a Jewish context that he never left, neither in his deeds nor in his preaching. He opens the door for the Gentiles to participate in God's history with Israel and the Gentiles.

Our hope and our waiting for the Messiah is a Jewish hope.

Our prayers and psalms in the liturgy are from the Jewish prayer book.

Our basic ethical teaching in Sunday schools—the Ten Commandments—is from the Torah, the core of the Jewish Bible.

Thus, our hopes, our prayers, and our teachings are part of God's revelation to and history with Israel. We are involved in this. We share in them.

Furthermore, as a Protestant Christian it is a very important point for me to remember that my constitutional charter, the Bible in both parts, has been transmitted by Jews.

The Bible is a Jewish document—in the first part and in the second part, the New Testament. Thus we have to get to know the Jewish faith, Jewish history, Jewish self-understandings, if we want to know who we are as Christians.

How did we reach this conclusion?

### **3. The European Hermeneutics: Jewish-Christian History**

The memory of the Shoah in Europe, and in Germany in particular, has sharpened this insight.

From its inception, the Gentile church was prejudiced against the Jewish people and the Jewish faith and raised many accusations against them. In numerous sermons and theological writings we find that to be a Christian first of all meant to be not-Jewish. Jews were ill spoken of and cursed. In the course of the centuries this recurred again and again. This development reached a gruesome climax in Europe, with the attempt of the National Socialist terror regime in Germany (1933-1945) to murder the entire Jewish people. First individual Christians and later the churches realised that this genocide had its roots in hostility within Christian preaching and teaching. Even if nothing is said against Jews or the Jewish belief

explicitly, this fundamental hostility against Jews within Christian doctrine exists. Due to this, most Christians and their churches did not raise their voices when the Nazis marginalized, terrorized, and murdered the Jewish population across Europe. In retrospect, many churches in Europe were deeply appalled at their own actions. Why did we keep silent? Why were we blind? We were blind because we did not see the hostility against Jews and Judaism which was fused with Christian theology. We kept silent because we had stigmatized Judaism as hostile and opposed to Christian belief. We did not acknowledge God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people. Rosemary Ruether once poignantly characterized anti-Judaism as the left hand of Christology. (In her view, they are two sides of the same coin.)

### **4. Crippling Inheritance: Anti-Judaism**

Whoever inherits the house cannot do this without accepting the mortgage. Christian self-understanding has defined itself from the outset at the expense of Judaism.

An important factor in this was the doctrine of substitution, which views the church as taking the place of Israel with respect to its being chosen by God.

Accepting the inheritance means accepting guilt. Thus the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland worked hard to find a new basis for and understanding of its relationship to Jews and Judaism. The result was a declaration of the Synod of this church in 1980. The Synod declared: "We confess with dismay the co-responsibility and guilt of German Christendom for the Holocaust."

This is not, however, a theology of guilt; it is the awareness that there is a direct path

- from religious defamation
- via social discrimination
- to physical violence, the murder of the Jews (which took on an extreme form in Germany).



Anti-Judaism and antisemitism did not end in 1945 and can be found in different forms all over the world.

## 5. Renewal

As Christians with Gentile roots we are involved in God's history with the Jewish people from our inception. This means

- we have to involve ourselves with Jews and Judaism.
- We have to study Jewish thought and learn about and from Jewish faith.

The Gentiles of the world will flock to Zion, thus prophesies Micah. Or as Zechariah 8:23 puts it:

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts:*

*In those days it shall come to pass,*

*that ten men shall take hold out of all  
languages of the nations,*

*even shall take hold of the skirt of him  
that is a Jew, saying:*

*We will go with you: for we have heard  
that God is with you.<sup>1</sup>*

With this vision in mind, the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland supplemented its Charter in 1996, professing "the faithfulness of God, who stands by the election of his people Israel. Together with Israel it hopes for a new heaven and a new earth."

## 6. A New Paradigm of Theology

Traditional theology sees Jesus Christ as the hermeneutical framework in which to understand the church and its relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people.

Renewed theology turns this on its head. It sees God's history with Israel as the hermeneutical framework for understanding Jesus Christ and the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> King James Version.

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**Rev. Katja Kriener, born in 1958, studied theology in Wuppertal, Bonn, Jerusalem and Tübingen. She has been involved in Jewish-Christian relations for more than 25 years. From 1993 to 2010 she held the position as Pastor for Jewish – Christian dialogue in the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, coordinating and organizing seminars and conferences, as well as editing books. From 1995 – 2009 she served as chairwoman of the program Studies in Israel, which enables students of theology to study a year at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and delve deeply into Judaism and to explore the multi-faceted reality in Israel and Palestine. Since 2010 Katja Kriener works as a pastor at the Melanchthon-Academy in Cologne.**

## In Memoriam: The Rev. Johan Snoek (1920 – 2012)

The Rev. Johannes Martinus Snoek died on 31 August 2012. He served the World Council of Churches as Secretary of the Committee on the Church and the Jewish People (CCJP) 1970 - 1975.

Johan was eminently qualified for this role. During World War II he took an active part in the resistance movement against the German occupation of the Netherlands. Along with others, he helped to hide a number of Jewish people and was arrested as a result. After the war he studied theology and became involved in the freighted discussions about Jewish and Christian relations, challenging conversations because of the long history of oppression of the Jews in Europe, challenging also because of the extermination of Jews (and others) by the Nazis. One of the key questions in these discussions became "What is the meaning of theology after Auschwitz?"

Johan had also worked as a chaplain at the hospital of the Church of Scotland Mission in Tiberias, on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee, Israel, 1957-1969. In 1958, the Mission became a hospice named the Church of Scotland Centre. In addition, Johan was involved in the foundation of *Nes Ammim*, a Christian community in the northern district of Israel. Its purpose was dialogue with Jews. Subsequently, the dialogue also included Muslims. Johan spoke fluent Hebrew and gave many lectures in Israel, including in several kibbutzim.

### Johan at the WCC

In his role as Secretary of the Committee on the Church and the Jewish People at the WCC, Johan helped to organize the first joint conference of the WCC and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) in December 1972. After consultation with Dr Riegner of IJCIC, Mr Gabriel Habib, later to be General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, was also invited. More conferences followed.

After the truce which followed the Yom Kippur war (1973), Johan was one of two WCC representatives who visited the Middle East. He and his colleague succeeded in visiting two captive Israeli pilots in Syria. In the autumn 2011 one of the pilots expressed his gratitude to Johan during a visit to him in Rotterdam. This emotional meeting was televised in Israel. A hoped for "trialogue" between Muslims, Jews, and Christians did not materialize. However, there was a conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka with participants representing Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Johan's work meant that his wife Corrie Dijkstra had to look after their five children by herself for months at a time.

### The Grey Book

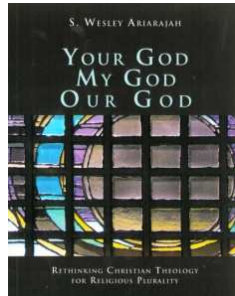
The question has often been raised: "Did the churches keep silent about the persecution of the Jews?" "There was a complete and terrible silence from the side of the church," the chair of the Israeli parliament declared in 1963. But Johan remembered a church service in his local Dutch village congregation on Sunday, 23 March 1941. On that occasion, a countrywide pulpit message by the synod of his church was read. It contained a strong protest against the racist Nazi policies against the Jews. Other churches in the Netherlands also spoke out. The conspiracy of silence was broken! Johan undertook a five year study about church protests by non-Roman Catholic churches in Europe and the United States of America against antisemitism and the persecution of the Jews between 1933 and 1945. The title of his book, *The Grey Book*, indicates that not all was black, but that there was light in darkness. The book is still available, now in electronic form, at [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14764](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14764).

### **The Dissipation of Darkness**

Through his work in Geneva and his many contacts with Christians from other continents, Johan became more and more conscious of the injustice suffered by the Palestinians and of the extent of Israeli responsibility for the flight of some 700,000 Palestinians in 1948 at the time of the foundation of the State of Israel. Johan spoke and wrote about this in several articles and also in a book written in Dutch, the title of which, translated into English, reads: *Jewish and Palestinian Tears*, with the subtitle *Church Resistance against Auschwitz; The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Vught, 2010). For years Johan stayed in contact with Mordechai Vanunu, a former Israeli nuclear physicist who was opposed to weapons of mass destruction and who revealed details of Israeli's nuclear weapons programme.

Johan combined his unbroken love for the Jews and defence of the non-relinquishable bond with Israel (which he believed was not necessarily the same as the State of Israel) with his love for the Palestinians. He concluded his last book by saying: "When Jews and Palestinians recognize each other as human beings, then darkness will be gone."

*New from WCC Publications*



**S. Wesley Ariarajah**  
***Your God, My God, Our God***

*A constructive proposal  
for a Christian theology of religions—*

*"In this tightly argued and lucidly written little book, Wesley Ariarajah offers a staunch response to those academics who recently have been calling for a 'moratorium on the theology of religions.' He makes clear that the urgency of engaging followers of other religious traditions provides the opportunity to review, reform, and re-appropriate one's own. In both college classrooms and parish discussion groups, this is a book that will engage and inspire."*

**Paul F. Knitter**

*Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions, and Culture  
Union Theological Seminary, New York*

*"No one has been better situated by experience and vocation to understand the change in the relation of Christianity and the religions than Wesley Ariarajah. And no one exceeds his generosity of spirit in interpreting the controversies that change arouses. Radical in its scope and humble in its spirit, this book distils the theological counsel of a pioneering thinker.... Whether provoked to agreement or to argument, all of us who care for these questions will be the better for hearing the case he makes with the same open heart with which he offers it."*

**S. Mark Heim**

*Samuel Abbot Professor of Christian Theology  
Andover Newton Theological School*

*"Challenging, provocative, and thoughtful, Your God, My God, Our God is not afraid to confront a vitally important question for today – how our increased awareness of religious plurality affects Christian theology itself. Readers may not agree with all of Ariarajah's answers, but they will discover in this exploration a draught of heady new wine which refreshes the spirit and encourages them to carry on with their own theological wrestling."*

**Clare Amos**

*Programme Executive, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation  
World Council of Churches*



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of Churches**  
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## An invitation to participate

*The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) will take place from 30 October to 8 November 2013 in Busan, Republic of Korea.*

*The assembly will be a unique space in which churches in our time may reflect, speak, pray and work together; challenge and support each other; and share and debate with one another. Representatives of member churches, ecumenical partners and others from all over the world will celebrate our common faith and chart a common future.*

*I invite you to support the 10th Assembly through a financial contribution. The energy and vision of all the member churches will be needed to shape the future work of the WCC so that it will have a real and sustained impact on the world in the years to come. Your donation will make possible the participation of member church delegates, ensuring the full representation of the fellowship of churches.*

**Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit**  
*WCC general secretary*

## Get involved in preparing the Assembly

- **Learn:** Visit the assembly website at [www.wcc2013.info](http://www.wcc2013.info) for resources and reflections on the assembly theme from around the world.
- **Engage:** Study and discuss ecumenical Christianity worldwide using the resource *Pilgrimage to Busan*, available on the assembly website.
- **Pray:** Please pray for the assembly using the prayer on the assembly bookmark.
- **Promote:** Make others aware of the assembly by hanging the assembly poster in your church or meeting hall.
- **Worship:** Follow the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle found on the WCC website ([www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org)) and in the volume *In God's Hands: Common Prayer for the World* in your weekly worship, offering prayers for the churches and peoples around the world.
- **Donate:** Please visit the WCC website at [www.oikoumene.org/make-a-donation](http://www.oikoumene.org/make-a-donation) or use the assembly pledge card to make a special financial contribution in support of the assembly.

**Go to <http://wcc2013.info>**



The poster is designed to look like a collage on a textured, light-brown background. At the top center is the Paideia logo, which consists of a stylized 'P' followed by the word 'PAIDEIA' in a serif font, and below it, 'The European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden'. To the left of the logo is a hand-drawn blue arrow pointing right. To the right is a white, torn-edge paper cutout of a menorah. Below the logo is the title 'Paideia One-Year Jewish Studies Fellowship' in a bold, dark red serif font. On the left side, there is a white rectangular box with a torn edge containing a description of the institute. In the center-left, there is a list of features under the heading 'Features:'. To the right of this, there is a white rectangular box with a torn edge containing a list of qualities for candidates. Below this box is a hand-drawn blue arrow pointing down. At the bottom right, there is a paragraph of text about tuition and stipend. At the very bottom, there is a dark red rounded rectangle containing the website address. The background also features faint, scattered text in Hebrew and German, and a small white paper cutout of a menorah on the right side.

**PAIDEIA**  
The European Institute  
for Jewish Studies in Sweden

**Paideia One-Year Jewish Studies Fellowship**

Paideia is a non-denominational institute of higher Jewish learning with an academic focus on textual sources. Dedicated to the renewal of European Jewish culture, Paideia is also an applied institute connecting academic studies to action.

**Paideia offers you a unique international Jewish studies opportunity in Stockholm**

**Features:**

- Academic studies of Jewish text and culture
- World-renowned faculty from Israeli and European universities
- Interactive text studies using the traditional Hevruta method of studying in pairs
- Applied project work
- Networking in an open, international and pluralistic European environment
- Hebrew Ulpan – 5 hrs / week
- Follow-up programs and conferences

**Candidates should have the following qualities:**

- Commitment to the renewal of European Jewish culture
- Intellectual curiosity and documented academic experience
- Interpersonal and leadership skills

Qualified candidates receive tuition free studies as well as a stipend meant to free them from work while attending the program. Prior study experience in Jewish text or Hebrew is not required. **All classes taught in English**

*For more information visit us on the web at [www.paideia-eu.org](http://www.paideia-eu.org)*

### **Woolf Institute Visiting Fellowship 2014**

**The Woolf Institute, which specialises in the study of relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims from a multidisciplinary perspective, invites applications for its annual visiting fellowship.**

**The Fellowship, tenable for a two to three month period that overlaps one of the Cambridge terms 2014:**

**Lent term: 14 January–14 March 2014**

**Easter term: 22 April–13 June 2014**

**The successful candidate will be expected to be involved in a project of academic research, public education or of the arts in an area relevant to the Institute's work. The Fellow will be asked to present their work at a symposium on the subject of their project proposal.**

**There is no stipend attached to the Fellowships, but Fellows will be entitled to free accommodation in Cambridge and round-trip travel from their country to Cambridge. They will also have access to the Woolf Institute and Cambridge University libraries.**

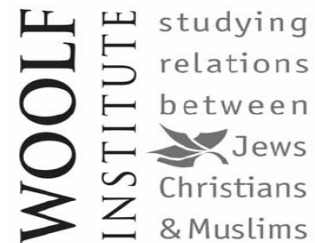
**The Fellowship is available for a postdoctoral scholar of any academic rank, a policymaker or analyst in a relevant area of work, or an artist (writer, painter, photographer, etc.) and will most likely be asked to participate in some of the Institute's teaching or practice-based activities. Further information about the Institute can be found at: <http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk>.**

**A letter of application, CV, the names of two referees who may be approached, a project proposal (1,500 words max.), and a sample of work should be sent to:**

**Electors of the Visiting Fellowship, Woolf Institute, Wesley House, Jesus Lane, Cambridge, CB5 8BJ, UK or e-mailed to Tina Steiner at [bs411@cam.ac.uk](mailto:bs411@cam.ac.uk).**

**Questions may be addressed informally to the Deputy Director, Dr Shana Cohen at [sc736@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sc736@cam.ac.uk).**

**Deadline for the submission of applications is 18 January 2013.**





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## **Building an Interfaith Community**

The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, a programme of the World Council of Churches, will be offering the seminar, *Building an Interfaith Community*, which is taking place July 1-26, 2013. The three week long residential seminar will gather 30 participants ages 18-35 from the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith communities. While fully respecting and affirming each particular faith identity, the overall question to be explored is: What can we, as people of faith, do to respond to and overcome the pressing challenges of our time, and build together mutually accountable societies based on respect and cooperation?

The experience of living under the same roof, eating and worshiping together, will be enriched by lectures offered by specialists from Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities as well as through participation in the religious activities in Geneva. The seminar is being organized by Dr. Marina Ngursangzeli Behera, Professor of Ecumenical Missiology at Bossey. Registration for the seminar will be available in January 2013. For more information or to be placed on the list to receive materials, contact Kelly Brownlee, Co-ordinator for continuing education programs [kelly.brownlee@wcc-coe.org](mailto:kelly.brownlee@wcc-coe.org).

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The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the WCC.