



# 58 CURRENT DIALOGUE

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## Editorial

“In Our Time” is a phrase that has had considerable resonance for me over the past few months, in several different directions. It is of course an English translation of the Latin phrase *Nostra Aetate*, the opening words, and thus the name, of the Vatican II declaration on “Other Religions,” first promulgated on 28 October 1965. So during the course of the last year there have been a number of significant events held, both in Rome and elsewhere, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this groundbreaking document. I was privileged to participate in at least two of these, and grateful to be invited to bring greetings from the World Council of Churches. In particular, at the gathering organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), working collaboratively with the Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews (26-28 October 2015), I noted how the influence and importance of *Nostra Aetate* extended well beyond the Catholic Church itself, important and vital though that was. I noted: “Others have or will speak of *Nostra Aetate*’s influence on people of other religions, in particular Judaism. But *Nostra Aetate* profoundly impacted the life of other Christians outside the Catholic Church itself. The willingness of the Catholic Church to speak in such a way and then to act upon what was said somehow gave permission to bodies such as the World Council of Churches to take institutional steps to ensure that serious interreligious engagement was seen as an intrinsic necessity rather than an optional extra for our work. I am sure that the establishment of the World Council of Churches’ office for interreligious dialogue at the end of the 1960s was in some way a result of, and would not have been possible without, the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* on 28 October 1965.” The PCID’s website contains pictures and documentation from that gathering ([www.pcinterreligious.org](http://www.pcinterreligious.org)), as well as a link to an excellent video, *The Leaven of Good*, produced especially for the occasion.

It is partly with *Nostra Aetate* in mind that a focus of this issue of *Current Dialogue* has been to explore a particular question relating to Christian-Jewish dialogue; namely, “Is there a special relationship between Christianity and Judaism?” In July of last year, I threw out that question to a considerable number of Jewish and Christian scholars, and I am gratified to say that at least half of them agreed to offer their particular response to that question. I then had a few anxious months of wondering whether I was going to receive about 10 identical answers to the question from 10 different correspondents – but, I was glad to discover that virtually every writer focuses on different aspects, making up what I think is a rich and interesting mix of responses. These shorter articles are complemented by a longer piece by Professor Lawrence H. Schiffman, which explores Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity and today. I think, taking the collection as a whole, they make a useful contribution to Jewish-Christian relations “In Our Time.”

For those of you who are not already aware of it, it will be important to know about a substantial document issued by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in December last year, “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable” ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20151210\\_ebraismo-nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html)), which reflects on theological questions linked to Catholic-Jewish relationships. There is a lot of meat in that document that deserves to be chewed over and ruminated upon over the coming year or so, even if, as in my own case, I would want to express the Christian-Jewish reality slightly differently. It is also worth noting that a group of significant Orthodox Jewish Rabbis produced a reflection on Christianity – again with the anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in mind – “To Do The Will of Our Father in Heaven: Towards a Partnership between Jews and Christians” ([http://www.jcrelations.net/To\\_Do\\_the\\_Will\\_of\\_Our\\_Father\\_in\\_Heaven\\_Toward\\_a\\_Partnership\\_between\\_Jews\\_and\\_Ch.5223.0.html?L=3](http://www.jcrelations.net/To_Do_the_Will_of_Our_Father_in_Heaven_Toward_a_Partnership_between_Jews_and_Ch.5223.0.html?L=3)).

*Nostra Aetate*, however, was not simply about Christian-Jewish relationships, even though the subject had been the document's initial inspiration – it also spoke to the issue of Christian-Muslim dialogue and relations. One of the World Council of Churches' most enduring and long-standing bilateral interreligious relationships is with the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue in Tehran. The communiqué from the 8<sup>th</sup> round of that dialogue, which took place in Geneva in November 2015, as well as two of the papers offered at that meeting, are also included in this issue of *Current Dialogue*. Tellingly, but perhaps all too pertinently, the theme of the meeting was "Religion and Violence." This theme, increasingly over the last year or so, is one on which the staff of the WCC's interreligious dialogue office have been working. There was a plenary at the recent meeting of the WCC's Central Committee in Trondheim, June 2016, which focused on the issue of Religion and Violence, and we have been working with others to produce a background resource, which explores the concern both in general terms and in relation to particular interreligious relationships. The speeches given at the plenary as well as revised versions of background documents prepared for it will be made available in a forthcoming issue of *Current Dialogue*.

We have also used this issue of *Current Dialogue* to report all too briefly on a series of significant meetings between Christian and Muslim women that took place a few years ago, but which have not to date been reported.

Among new developments, which will be reported in more detail in a future issue of *Current Dialogue*, is the establishment of a dialogue between the World Council of Churches and the Muslim Council of Elders/Al Azhar Al Sharif which has taken place as the result of a visit paid to Geneva at the end of September 2016 by the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, Dr Ahmed Al Tayyeb and his companions.

"In Our Time," 2016, the need for the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* is as relevant as ever as our world is confronted by challenges with an interreligious dimension which perhaps were not fully imagined 50 years ago. My colleague Rev Dr Peniel Rajkumar and myself are working together to hold a working meeting at the end of this October, at the very end of *Nostra Aetate*'s anniversary year that – picking up the words, "With Prudence and Love," which formed part of *Nostra Aetate*'s original text – will be seeking to explore some directions for interreligious dialogue and cooperation for the future.

**Dr Clare Amos**, Programme Executive, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

## **Who Do We Say that We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World**

One piece of news that the Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation team at the World Council of Churches are pleased about is the publication in book format of the report “Who Do We Say that We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World.”

This report went to, and was accepted by, Central Committee in July 2014, and was initially published as part of *The Ecumenical Review* in December 2014. But it is good to have it out in a more accessible form, as a well-designed small book – with a very colourful cover! It is obtainable from Amazon. We have deliberately chosen not to put the complete report in book form, which explores how our multi-religious world offers both challenges and resources to Christian self-understanding and sense of identity, and focuses on seven key Christian themes (Trinity, Creation, Christology, Holy Spirit, Scripture, Church and Eschatology), online or in this issue of *Current Dialogue*.

However, below we have set out the appendix to the report, which describes the process of its development and writing. Most of the papers that were presented at the “religion-specific” consultations have appeared in earlier issues of *Current Dialogue*.

### **Background to the Report**

1. Religious plurality, and its potential for contributing to both peace and hostility in our world, is an issue that has marked out the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Bearing this in mind, the WCC Central Committee, at its meeting in 2002, suggested that there should be a study process on the subject of religious plurality and Christian self-understanding, taking account of the experiences of churches all over the world living in varied contexts of religious plurality.

2. In order to address the different dimensions and aspects of the theme, the networks of the WCC’s departments of Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism, and

Interreligious Dialogue engaged together over a period of two years (2003-04), and at the end of this period scholars linked to these networks produced the document “Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding.” This document was discussed at a hearing session of the Central Committee in 2005, and at the World Mission Conference and at the Standing Commission of Faith and Order, both held in the same year. Though the document was welcomed by many, a number of the comments made confirmed the view that there needed to be further reflection on this theme. The document however served as a background resource at the ninth assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre in 2006, where the importance of the theme and the desirability for further work were confirmed.

3. This led to a number of “religion-specific” consultations during the period 2008-12 that explored Christian self-understanding in the context of one particular religion or religious tradition. These consultations focused respectively on Islam (2008), Buddhism (2009), Judaism (2009), Hinduism (2011), and Indigenous Religions (2012). These consultations were organized by the WCC’s programme for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. The papers and discussions of these consultations have fed into the ongoing process. Additionally, the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct,” published by the WCC, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance in June 2011, has been a resource for the process.

4. This document, “Who Do We Say that We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World,” therefore seeks to draw together the reflections and work of the last decade. It has been drafted as a result of a gathering of scholars held at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, in March 2012, and a further meeting held at the Desmond Tutu

Centre, Nairobi, Kenya, in February 2013. The meetings were held under the auspices of the WCC's programme for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, but intentionally also included individuals linked to the Faith and Order and Mission and Evangelism networks.

5. A draft of the document was then used as a background resource for the ecumenical

conversation "Exploring Christian Self-Identity in a World of Many Faiths," held during the tenth assembly of the WCC in Busan, Korea, October 30 – November 8, 2013. Insights from that conversation fed into its final revision, which took place in March-April 2014. The document was presented to, and accepted by, the Central Committee of the WCC, which met in July 2014.

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### **Called to Dialogue: Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation**

A slender but significant report was published in booklet form in November 2015 with the title *Called to Dialogue: Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation*. It is the fruit of creative collaborative working between the World Council of Churches Interreligious Dialogue team and the networks linked to Faith and Order. It reflects a particular interest and concern of my own, that I brought to the WCC when I began working here in 2011; namely, the confusion (which can lead to tension) between the goals and roles of interreligious dialogue, compared with dialogue between Christians of different churches. Of course, there are also important things the two forms of dialogue can learn positively from each other.

The introduction to the booklet sets out the issue like this:

*The ecumenical movement faces a number of contemporary challenges. One of them is the question of the relationship between intra-Christian dialogue and interreligious dialogue. This issue has come to the fore for a number of reasons. These include the shifts in demography caused by large-scale human migration, the changing nature of relationships within the global Christian family itself, the maturity yet also frustration of developments in institutional inter-church relationships, and overt political and humanitarian pressures that have an explicit*

*interreligious dimension in a number of regions of the world.*

*Both forms of engagement in dialogue – intra-Christian and interreligious – are affected by these developments, both are experiencing a degree of defensiveness, and the new situation has altered the dynamics of the relationship between them. At times it has led to a certain amount of confusion or even hostility. At other points the overlapping of the two areas has offered creative and positive opportunities. The changing contexts for both intra-Christian and interreligious relations, namely the crisis in traditional expressions of ecumenism and the rise of religious extremism and fundamentalism across several religions, impinge on one another but also seem to undercut the efforts of both endeavours.*

*However they also impel us to explore new language and methods to affirm and promote both intra-Christian and interreligious relations, recognising both their commonalities and distinctiveness. Despite their differences, both forms of engagement hold the promise of diffusing tensions, addressing violence, fostering understanding and reconciliation and deepening the religious commitment and spirituality of those involved.*

I was grateful to have the opportunity to explore this significant topic in some detail with a range of experts in the field at two working meetings held at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, and this booklet is the fruit of our work. As its subtitle suggests, it is

intended as “A Practical Guide,” particularly intended to assist practitioners in churches who find themselves having to address this area during the course of their work. We decided the primary means of publication of this booklet would be electronic, via a download at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/called-to-dialogue>.

We are already receiving feedback from people who have heard about the booklet, that they are finding it practically useful. Please help us make it more widely known.

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*Dr Clare Amos is the Programme Executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation at the World Council of Churches.*

## **OBITUARY**

**Ulrich Schoen**

**Prof. Dr Sc. Agr. Dr Theol.**

**(3 October 1926 - 12 August 2016)**

*No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom God. – Luke 9:61*

Ulrich Schoen died on 12 August 2016, in Hanover, GE, at the age of 89. He had chosen Luke 9:61 as the motto for his funeral service. He wanted those gathered to keep the essentials in mind and not to get stuck in mourning and despair. For Ulrich, this verse was more than an image or a parable. As young man working on a farm, he had learned to steer the plough, aiming at a target to keep the direction for every furrow. Go forward and do the necessary: ploughing, sowing, and preparing for the harvest when God will gather all and everything at the end of times. Go into the world – you have enough to do! And let yourself be gathered for God in joyful anticipation of what is about to come!

The dialectics of sending and gathering was an important feature in Ulrich’s thinking. He published, in recent years, a thought-provoking and inspiring history of Christianity in interaction with other religions as a series of volumes under the title *Die Fliehkraft und die Schwerkraft Gottes* – the centrifugal and centripetal (gravity) power of God (LIT Verlag, 2002). Only Ulrich could choose such a title; he earned the right to teach both agronomy as natural science and theology, in which he concentrated on the plurality of religion as a theological challenge much earlier than many others. In the first volume of this series of books he completed – with enormous energy and skill just before he died – he stated:

*Following the centrifugal power of God, Christianity spread more than other religions in an explosive way. In the third millennium – if we get once again away with it – a mission from outside could begin. It is this mission which belongs to the implosive movement in which the gravity of God comes into play. It impacts from outside of the Christian playing field. God shines in and through those who believe differently (Bd1, S.7, original in German).*

Ulrich was employed by the WCC from August 1989 - February 1991 as a consultant in the WCC Sub-Unit on Dialogue to produce the first draft of the “Ecumenical Considerations on Christian-Muslim Relations.” Prior to his time at the WCC, he had spent a number of years, 1977-83, in Beirut, Lebanon, during one of the most difficult times in that country, when he had been a Professor of the faculty of the Near East School of Theology, Beirut. He then worked in France as both a pastor and a professor.

His wife Sabine Udodesku, his family, colleagues and friends will miss Ulrich with his treasures of knowledge that he was always willing to share in meaningful and inspiring conversation and with his fine sense of humour.

**– Martin Robra, World Council of Churches**

# **Cooperation on Interreligious Dialogue and Accompaniment of Churches in Conflict Situations: An Ecumenical Perspective**

**Indunil J. Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage**

*This paper was originally presented as a reflection to the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.*

## **Introduction**

The very *raison d'être* of Christianity is mission. "The Church on earth, is by its very nature missionary" (*Ad Gentes*: 2). The term "mission" presupposes a sender, a person sent, a message and the authority to carry it out. Thus, in every mission, there is a sender and the one sent. Jesus says, "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me" (Matt. 10:40, Mark 9:37, Luke 9:48). Jesus presents the Father as the sender (Luke 2:49). Jesus himself was the sent one and he faithfully fulfills the mission entrusted to him by the Father. The twelve were called with the explicit purpose of being prepared for mission (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11). The mission entrusted to Jesus was to bring about reconciliation. For Christians, the story of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection gives a solid foundation for a spirituality of reconciliation. God's raising up of Jesus to new life tells us that violence and sin will be overcome by the peace of the Risen Lord. The first words of the Risen Lord to his disciples were: "Peace with you," and then he showed them his wounds. He brought peace at the cost of his life, and even though he is raised to new life, his wounds remain. The disciples are overjoyed when they see the Lord and they undergo a conversion. The Risen Lord then sends them on a mission of peace: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you" (cf. John 20:19-22). The Risen Lord thus becomes both the victim and the reconciler.

## **The Context of Reconciling Mission**

The church becomes missionary by attending to every context in which she finds herself. In other words, if Christianity is to be meaningful and relevant, it must address the issues affecting her life (the church) and the lives of the people (all humankind). The church lives in a multi-religious and multicultural society. Thus, if her mission is to be effective, it ought to be intra-Christian and interreligious, especially in view of destructive and dehumanizing forces.

What factors contribute to violence and war in today's world? How do we account for the violent conflicts? It seems that many situations of conflict today have some basis in religion. A paradox of the era of globalization is the alliance between religion and violence or acts of religious terrorism (and also religion and peace). Thus, the modern world is characterized not only by martyrs for peace and nonviolence but also for war and violence. Virtually every major religious tradition – Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist – has served as a source not only for the peacemakers but also, at times, for the violent actors. Religions are capable of providing ideological resources for both violence and nonviolence.

Let me now briefly account for cultural conflicts. "By cultural conflicts we mean those domestic, inter-state or transnational political conflicts in which the actors involved focus on issues relating to religion, language and/or historicity. When defining a conflict as 'cultural' it is not relevant 'why' there is a dispute, but 'what' is in dispute."<sup>1</sup> Some of the views expressed by Samuel P. Huntington in *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* roughly lay down a theoretical framework to account for the prevailing cultural conflicts. He argues that

“People and countries with similar cultures are coming together. Peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart.”<sup>22</sup> He further observes that “Political boundaries increasingly are redrawn to coincide with cultural ones: ethnic, religious, and civilizational.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, the Cold War question: “Which side are you on?” has been replaced by “Who are you?” The answer emanates from one’s cultural identity. Moreover, the dislocation, exclusion and discontent arising from globalization can “stimulate the revitalization of indigenous identities and culture.”<sup>24</sup> This process of affirmation of religious, ethnic, tribal and linguistic identities of one group at the expense of the “other” – a different religious, ethnic, tribal and linguistic group – can give birth to an “us” versus “them” perception. The “us” versus “them” distinction can thus generate conflict when one cultural group tries to take control of another’s territory, wealth and resources by imposing its own values, culture and institutions. Thus, identity-rooted cultural conflicts are a social phenomenon today. Furthermore, those discontented with social systems often channel their resentments into cultural resistance. Full of fear, anxiety and uncertainty, the dejected majority – in absence of a viable political force to resist the ills of globalization – often recourse to religion to reaffirm its identity. The growing influence of religion as a political ideology in recent decades ought to be analyzed vis-à-vis this background. The return of religion to the public domain is owing to the abject failure of a secular liberal state to live up to its own promises of political freedom, economic prosperity and social justice. In the absence of a hegemonic political ideology, religion becomes a candidate to fill the vacuum.

### **Accounting for the Price of Conflict and War**

Pope Francis notes that “War ruins everything, even the bonds between brothers. War is irrational; its only plan is to bring destruction: it seeks to grow by

destroying.”<sup>25</sup> War and conflict bear human, economic, social and political costs. Such costs can include: direct deaths (soldiers, combatants, civilians); indirect deaths (malnutrition, damaged health, lack of educational and transport infrastructure, environmental degradation, poverty); injured, widowed, and orphaned populations; refugees and displacement; the erosion of civil liberties and human rights violations. These are all evils of war and conflict. In post-conflict situations, the wounds of war and conflict often persist because even though the war is won, hearts are lost. Therefore, the realities on the ground call all involved to a spiritual battle within each person, within the church, within religions and within society. Post-conflict contexts manifest many polarizations: ecclesiastical, ethnic, socio-political, regional, religious etc. Violent conflicts inflict wounds on everyone and therefore all are in need of healing. The wounds have collective as well as individual forms: collective, in terms of the traumatization caused by war and injustices, and individual, in terms of unfair arrests and detention without trial, disappearances, torture, killings, physical injuries and above all, bereavement over the death of loved ones. The victims suffer from being treated as lesser human beings. Any kind of traumatic hurt can affect a person profoundly and cause numerous psychosomatic issues. The “Hurter” and the “Hurt” both live with memories that linger for life and disturb their mental, relational, moral and spiritual status. Therefore, both the victim and the perpetrator are in need of healing. Who will liberate them? What is the mission of the church in this context? The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people ... I have heard them crying out ... and I am concerned about their suffering” (cf. Ex. 3:7). “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Is. 6:8).

### **Interreligious and Ecumenical Dialogue as Reconciling Mission**



Robert J. Schreiter presents reconciliation as a new paradigm of mission. The ministry of reconciliation is "... about participating in God's healing societies that have been wounded deeply and broken by oppression, injustice, discrimination, war, and wanton destruction."<sup>6</sup> Vertical reconciliation is the reconciliation of humanity with God. Jesus Christ through his suffering and death brought human beings back into God's communion. Horizontal reconciliation mends the broken relationships and brings individuals or groups back into a harmonious milieu.<sup>7</sup> Though vertical and horizontal reconciliation are distinct, they also overlap with each other. According to the Christian tradition, reconciliation embraces the themes of truth-telling, justice, memory, healing, and forgiveness. The ministry of Christian reconciliation is to break down the dividing walls built within human hearts. "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ ... [b]ut now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... (cf. Eph. 2:12-14).

God's reconciliation is universal and it embraces the wrongdoer as well as the victim, the sinner as well as the innocent. The ministry of reconciliation seeks to elevate the victim and the wrongdoer to a new place: freedom for the victim and repentance for the perpetrator. This healing in the life of the perpetrator as well as the victim brings forth a new creation, a new humanity. The parable of the merciful Father manifests his generosity to all: "because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32). St Paul teaches, "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). All Christians are ambassadors on behalf of Christ with a message of reconciliation to pull down the walls of hostility. Thus, to be a Christian

through baptism is a divine call for a purpose: "to be sent out" (Mark 3:13-15), to engage actively in God's mission, and to become a co-worker with God for the salvation-transformation of the world into God's final design. It will therefore become a new world without sin, sickness, hatred and all alienating forces that affect both human life and the entire cosmos.

### **Rebuilding Broken Hearts and Minds: An Ecumenical Perspective**

As the saying goes: "charity begins at home." Christians ought to demolish the walls they themselves have built in the course of history. One blind person cannot lead another blind person and a divided church cannot speak of peace and reconciliation. The goal of the ecumenical movement is the restoration of the lost unity of the church. Pope Francis points out: "Signs of division between Christians in countries ravaged by violence add further causes of conflict on the part of those who should instead be a haven of peace" (*Evangelii Gaudium*: 246). The aggressive evangelization by some Christian groups sow a seed of division among Christians owing to "sheep stealing" and among other religious followers owing to so-called "unethical conversions." It is scandalous to see how Christians fight among themselves instead of being bridge-builders and mediators. This behaviour can be understood as not only a counter-witness but also indifference to the Christian vocation of reconciliation. "It is all God's work; he reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ" (1 Cor. 5:18-20). Hence, unity among Christians is of paramount importance, prior to speaking of interreligious harmony. On the eve of Jesus' passion, the burden of disunity and division among his disciples pierced and tore his heart" (cf. John 17:21). Moreover, ecumenical cooperation, dialogue and common witness foster interreligious dialogue. As the 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on*

*Ecumenism* highlights: “Christians cannot close their hearts to the crying needs of our contemporary world. The contribution they are able to make to all areas of human life in which the need for salvation is manifested will be more effective when they make it together, and when they are seen to be united in making it” (DE: 162). Through common programmes, initiatives and common prayers, Christians can promote the ministry of reconciliation by restoring the broken relationships of victims and perpetrators through public apologies, acts of forgiveness, public memorials, the healing of a wide array of wounds and overcoming hatred and enmity, and introducing restorative practices by building institutions of social justice. Such repairing of relationships and healing ought to involve the active participation of victims, perpetrators and members of the community. Thus, rebuilding destroyed societies and fostering durable peace involves material reconstruction as well as the rehabilitation of broken human lives.

### **Interreligious Dialogue as an Ecumenical Mandate**

All ecumenical endeavours seek to restore the unity of the body of Christ. Yet, the ecumenical mandate also seeks the unity of the entire human family. Interreligious dialogue is an integral part of the mission of the church. Thus, in religiously plural situations, for peacebuilding to be effective, interreligious dialogue is indispensable. Peace among the nations is not achievable without peace among religions. Furthermore, peace among religions is not attainable without dialogue among the religions. We explored above how, today, religion grabs the public's attention due to its relationship with conflict and violence. Christopher Hitchens, the atheist author of *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, contends that organized religion is violent, irrational, intolerant and is allied to racism, tribalism and bigotry. In the same vein, Richard Dawkins argues that if religion were somehow abolished, there would be a much better chance of achieving a world

without war. Though Christians do not fully endorse these views, it is not an exaggeration to claim that “No religion is innocent in this regard, and the role of one's own religion in promoting or at least condoning violence must be honestly and humbly acknowledged, especially by those engaged in peacebuilding.”<sup>8</sup>

Religion is a part of the solution since religions can play a major role in repairing the emotional, spiritual and psychological wounds ordinary people have suffered in war and conflict. Based on universal values, religions can contribute to uprooting the causes for the conflict, to building bridges of dialogue, to seeking justice and to being a prophetic voice for the victims and a healing voice to both the wrongdoer and the victim.

### **Conclusion**

We are sent on a mission to heal a fractured world. Accompanying churches in situations of conflict must first require us to strive hard to express solidarity among members of the body of Christ by restoring their broken relationships. Secondly, the provision of support and accompaniment ought to include creative methods for engaging followers of other religions to resolve issues of common concern based on shared values through interfaith cooperation. The World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi (1986), the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei Japan (1987), the Inter Religious International Meetings of the Community of Sant'Egidio (1987), and various dialogues with churches and ecclesial communities reveal local and global, fervent efforts by believers to foster peace and harmony. The first verse of Psalm 133 in the Holy Bible says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Therefore, we must together respond to the great challenges of the contemporary world; namely, to restore the unity and fellowship of our broken human family.

To conclude, I quote from the document “Together towards Life: Mission and

Evangelism in Changing Landscapes”: “We commit ourselves together in humility and hope to the mission of God, who recreates all and reconciles all. And we pray, ‘God of Life, lead us into justice and peace.’”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aurel Croissant and Christoph Trinn, “Culture, Identity and Conflict in Asia and South Asia”, *Asien* 110, (January 2009), 13.

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>5</sup> Military Memorial of Redipuglia, Saturday, 13 September 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, “Reconciliation as a New Paradigm of Mission”, Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Athens, Greece, 9-16 May 2005, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. idem, “A Practical Theology of Healing, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation” in Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby and Gerard F. Powers (eds.), *Peacebuilding, Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 368-9.

<sup>8</sup> Peter C. Phan, “Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, Interreligious Dialogue and Catholic Spirituality” in Robert J. Schreiter, *Peacebuilding, Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, 332.

<sup>9</sup> “Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes” (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), n.122.

## Is there a Special Relationship between Christianity and Judaism?

The following series of articles are responses to the question “Is there a special relationship between Christianity and Judaism?” which I addressed to a wide circle of contacts during the middle of 2015, when the celebration of the golden jubilee of

*Nostra Aetate* was in progress. Tackling the topic from an interesting variety of angles, they offer between them a fairly detailed discussion of the topic, with perhaps less unanimity than would have been expressed a generation ago. — Clare Amos

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### A Special Relationship?

#### Alon Goshen-Gottstein

To consider Jewish-Christian relations to be in “special” relationship is either a descriptive move, describing some fact of history or the present, or one of conviction and faith, describing a certain worldview. While the factual data may be commonly recognized by Jews and Christians, the decision to proclaim the relationship special in some way is a choice, and never grows strictly from the data that it marshals as evidence for it. The choice is normally motivated by theological considerations, certainly so for Christians. It can also be motivated by other historical and ideological concerns, as is more often the case among Jews. Therefore, in thinking of a special relationship we must consider the double question of who is making the affirmation and upon what grounds it is being affirmed, or rejected.

To put the matter at its most extreme: Jews have never considered there to be a special relationship with Christianity, while Christians have in some way or another affirmed it, even if such an affirmation found expression in the denial of the continuing relevance of Judaism. The claims of a special relationship therefore reflect how the person making the claim is situated, in terms of their faith community, moment in history and broader worldview.

Let us examine the issue from the perspective of Christians and Jews

respectively. The recent publication of *The Gifts and the Promises Are Irrevocable*, by the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews provides us with a clear formulation of a Christian view. Section 2 of *The Gifts* explores the theological status of the Jewish-Catholic dialogue and in so doing goes to the heart of some of the theological issues. The core argument is that dialogue with Judaism is different from dialogue with other religions, because of the church’s continuity with Israel. Jews are “elder brothers” or “fathers in faith”; Jesus was a Jew and the entire faith of early Christianity must be understood as taking place within the broader Jewish matrix. Judaism’s scriptures, the Old Testament, is part of the Christian Bible, and all this places Judaism in a unique theological relationship with Christianity, unlike any religion.

The description of a special relationship based on these premises should not be taken as an inevitable fact, based on the evidence alone, but as a choice. Christianity springing out of Judaism is not the only case in world religious history where one religion grows out of another. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, in their respective ways, all grow out of Hinduism. When one religion grows out of another, this means that, in some way, the growing religion maintains its grammar, its constitutive conceptual framework. Thus, while offering other

solutions and sourcing from other foci, saints, scriptures and more, each of these traditions shares the basic grammar of the value of action (*karma*), reincarnation, the quest for spiritual redemption and more. Yet, despite such sharing, the “offshoot” religions as such do not consider themselves to be part of Hinduism or to necessarily have a special theological relationship with it. Especially if they have in some way rebelled or taken another course, or crossed some fundamental divide (caste system, scriptures, ritual etc.), they are happy to understand themselves as distinct religious entities that do not maintain some special theological or mystical relationship with the founding religion.

There is, however, one factor that makes the Jewish-Christian situation unique in relation to other possible parallels. The continuation of Judaism’s scriptures into the Christian Bible creates a kind of continuity, or even potential identity, between the faiths unlike any other two faiths in the world. But such incorporation requires interpretation and Christians have interpreted Jewish scriptures in relation to the church as Israel through some construct or another and typically, until recently, through a theology of supersession. Thus, while the continuity of scripture does provide a unique historical fact, this historical fact is only meaningful because of Christian self-understanding as having a unique relationship with Israel or Judaism. Only when Christians affirm the uniqueness of this relationship, in light of scriptural continuity, do we emerge with a statement of a special relationship. To be clear: for most of history, Christians have not affirmed a special relationship with Jews — a relationship of privilege of the kind that the new Vatican document affirms, and that is at the root of the present discussion. It required a changed perception of Christianity’s view of Judaism to make the fact of scriptural continuity the foundation for a declaration of a special relationship.

The role of choice in affirming a special relationship becomes clear when we consider how Jews respond to the same

data. The understanding of a special relationship is based on a series of facts — relating to Jesus and the formation of the Christianity canon — that are in and of themselves meaningless to Judaism. For most Jews throughout history, nothing good has come to them as a consequence of the facts marshalled as proof for a special relationship. If anything, the contrary is true. Greater efforts were made to convert the Jews to Christianity because of such a “special relationship” or the circumstances related to Christianity’s growth from Judaism and Judaism’s presence within the Christian story and canon. It was, if anything, a negative special relationship.

Jews did not, and on the whole still do not, view Christianity as a relationship that is to be appreciated apart from their view of other religions. All precedents of a Jewish view of other religions formulated in the Middle Ages and the early modern period consider Christianity and Islam in the same breath. While Christianity has integrated Judaism’s scriptures, both are considered as offshoots of Judaism, and both are seen as, in some way, continuing its message, even if in an imperfect or corrupted form. To take one of the best-known examples, Maimonides, in uncensored versions of *The Laws of Kings*, speaks of divine providence’s mysterious ways in preparing the way for the ultimate recognition of truth by means of the spread of Christianity and Islam. Through them, God’s name is known, preparing the way for the full knowledge of God, when the Messiah comes. It is worth noting that differences between Islam and Christianity are not germane to this view. While Maimonides considers Christianity to be idolatrous and Islam non-idolatrous, this distinction is irrelevant to an appreciation of their historical role. The point here is that Christianity and Islam are considered in the same breath, when considering their historical significance. The same is true for almost all rabbinic authorities (Franz Rosenzweig provides an interesting exception to the rule). Positive references to

other religions include both Christianity and Islam.

“Special relationship” denotes a validation and recognition of positive value in another religion. Various obstacles must be overcome for Jews to be able to affirm a special relationship with Christianity. Historically, until Christians transformed their theology of Judaism, there was no room for such special status. Theologically, it is hard to conceive of a “special relationship” if Christianity is considered idolatrous by Jews. If anything, non-idolatrous Islam would be a better candidate for special relationship. Only after such obstacles are overcome can we consider the argument from scripture as a criterion one might apply in affirming a special relationship with Christianity. (The shared scriptural heritage may be appreciated and validated, nevertheless, without endowing a special relationship. Maimonides himself appeals to it by permitting the teaching of Torah to Christians, because they share our scriptures). But the scriptural criterion is only one of several possible criteria for viewing another religion. On the whole, Jewish attitudes privileged affirmation of pure monotheistic faith over shared scripture, thereby making the case for a special relationship with reference to Christianity much harder. Christianity has therefore historically been appreciated only within the broad strokes that accommodate it alongside Islam, and not as holding a special relationship.

Once we recognize that special relationship is something that has to be constructed, rather than a given, and an obvious outcome of certain historical data, we may revisit the question and ask: What conditions or circumstances might provide the will for affirming a special relationship with Christianity? The answer will be different, of course, for Jews and Christians. Christians, as indicated by the Vatican’s recent document, already have that will. With the change in attitude towards Judaism comes a novel, positive appreciation of the relationship, leading to the affirmation of a

special relationship. If the affirmation of a special relationship requires will, most Jews lack it. The reasons vary. Either due to the burden of history, or on account of theological differences or simply out of inertia, disinterest or lack of knowledge of advances in Jewish-Christian relations, most Jews lack the will needed to construct an argument for a special relationship. If anything, the medieval pattern of relating to Christianity and Islam in the same breath finds new justification with increasing references to Abrahamic religions, as though that category has greater coherence than “Judaeo-Christian heritage.” What “Abrahamic” does signal – beyond questions we may cast on the category itself – is the need to address three religions under one rubric, a need that readily undermines efforts to declare a special relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

And yet, there are those who are willing to make the effort and make the case for a special relationship. In a conscious effort to reciprocate the goodwill and breakthrough shown in *Nostra Aetate*, a statement on Christianity produced at the end of 2015 by a group of Orthodox rabbis (“To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Towards a Partnership between Jews and Christians”), assumes, without stating explicitly, the existence of such a special relationship. The statement speaks of partnering in a covenantal mission of healing the world and serving society. The very fact that it addresses Christianity already establishes some kind of special relationship, which is further affirmed by the use of covenantal language as a way of speaking of both communities. It is theoretically possible that a statement such as this may be expanded, tomorrow, to include Islam or other religions. But it is being issued today, at a particular point in time and under a particular set of historical and social circumstances. These suggest a special relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

Affirmation of a special relationship need not be based on theological data only. While the continuity of scripture and recognition of the same God are primary candidates, there are other ways in which such a relationship may be singled out. I surmise that, to a certain extent, such criteria also played into the recent statement by Orthodox rabbis. Jews and Christians are culturally closer to each other, at least in the Western world, than to other groups. Part of the cultural closeness is the very readiness to advance in mutual recognition and in improving inter-group relations. Other aspects include a sense of global mission and social service, the capacity to be self-critical about tradition and one's own faith and the willingness to make theological advances, which itself requires a measure of openness and self-confidence. These factors are no less legitimate as data for making the case for a special relationship than theological criteria. One could argue that they do not establish a special relationship between Judaism and Christianity, but only between Christians and Jews, but that is certainly also something that is worth affirming and for which a case must be made.

The contingency of any case for special relationship raises the question not only of when the argument can be made but also when it becomes unravelled. The growing prominence of Islam in the interreligious conversation in the West is one reason for developing alternative models. Political circumstances in Israel might be another. Some Protestant groups may be seen as downplaying their relationship with Judaism as a consequence of political realities. Given that special relationship is a case to be argued for, rather than a given, this would make sense at face value. If a case can be made, it can equally be argued against, on some ground or another. There is room to query, however, what are the criteria upon which the argument for or against a special relationship among religions should be made. Personally, I would consider the criteria to relate to a combination of a view

of God, God's will, and how this will is reflected in action, pointing to notions of historical mission and purpose, service and self-understanding of the religion. Historical and phenomenological data such as scriptural or ritual continuity would also contribute to a theoretical argument. These criteria relate to the fundamental structures of the religion and its self-understanding, and transcend the particulars of a historical reality in a specific point in time. Therefore, I do not believe such time-specific considerations should play a major role in evaluating special relationship. In short, having come as far as we have in Jewish-Christian relations, it seems to me wrong to allow the case to be influenced by political considerations.

In viewing the recent arguments put forth by the Vatican and by Orthodox rabbis, it seems that fundamental criteria are upheld. Affirmation of the same God leads to common action in the world, thereby affirming, establishing and reinforcing a special relationship. Even if historically this special relationship did not exist, it is constructed by means of the argument and can be reinforced through common action, leading to further expression through education and other means of deepening its hold. The criteria seem to me valid, their application appropriate and their promise deserves the choice to refer to the relationship as a special relationship. In some way, we must remember, all relationships are special and, other than natural family relations, they all have to be constructed. With that awareness we are called not only to recognize or affirm the special relationship now emerging between Jews and Christians – possibly even between Judaism and Christianity – but to contribute to its formation, strength and to the fruits it has to bring to the world.

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## Judaism as *Sui Generis* for Christians and Part of the Wider Dialogue

Patrick Morrow

For anybody looking to *Nostra Aetate* and its outworkings by the Catholic magisterium for authoritative guidance, the question is not whether, but *how* the Jewish-Christian relationship is special. As is obvious, different readings are possible. It makes sense to think of the teaching as developing historically. This writer would say the trajectory is clear: Judaism is, for Catholics, *sui generis*. It is neither a form of Christianity, nor one of the set of “non-Christian” religions. Nevertheless, the dialogue with Judaism still has things to say to and within wider interfaith relations.

Historically, *Nostra Aetate* itself started out as *De Judaeis* (1961). In the cut and thrust of the Council's work, it became an overview of diverse religions (in its intentionality, all religions). Judaism is thus integrated into the interreligious scene. But it is still clearly the text's climax, and indeed Section 4 (the section that relates to Judaism) is almost 40% of the Latin text. Of the people of Israel it is said that they have to do with “revelation,” such that Jews and Christians share a common “spiritual patrimony,” and the document cites Romans 9:4-5: to Israel belongs (present tense: Latin *est*), among other things, the “covenants” (*testamentum*). The document does not deny that other faiths may have revelation or covenantal standing; it is silent on such matters. So it may still be argued that Judaism is first among equals, having that privilege because it has been, since earliest days, the archetypal “other” for Christianity, as such one of many “others.” Later developments make the *sui generis* classification necessary.

Perhaps too much should not be made of the fact that the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews comes under the Council for Promoting Christian Unity rather than that for Interreligious

Dialogue. That said, it is a unique distinction, which many do see as logical, holding that the parting of the ways is the “first schism” or “primal rift” in Church history.<sup>1</sup> The *Guidelines*<sup>2</sup> of 1974 and *Notes*<sup>3</sup> of 1985 both addressed the need for Church repentance and reform in education, preaching and liturgy; it becomes clear that a right relationship with the Jewish People affects Christian self-understanding, a point carried forward to *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (1998). Thus entirely within this trajectory was Saint John Paul II's statement in the Rome synagogue (1986):

*The Jewish religion is not something “extrinsic” to us but in a certain way is “intrinsic” to our own religion. With Judaism we therefore have a relationship we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and in a certain way it could be said, our elder brothers.*<sup>4</sup>

This explicitly unique, fraternal understanding has been unreservedly repeated by Benedict XVI and Francis.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission arguably went further, stating: “The Jewish reading of the Bible is a *possible* one, in *continuity* with the Jewish scriptures of the Second Temple period, a reading *analogous* to the Christian reading, which developed in *parallel* fashion.”<sup>5</sup> These are striking statements, given the Catholic Church's deep-seated reluctance to speak of any human grouping as “parallel” to the Church. This has to be a theological rather than a phenomenological judgement (as historical fact it is banally self-evident). And by “Jewish reading” must be meant rabbinic approaches. In the *Guidelines* (and thereafter) the magisterium has emphasized that “Christians must ... strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.” Thus this is the Judaism of Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash.



On his 2015 visit to the USA, Francis blessed a statue which made this point visually dramatic; namely, *Ecclesia and Synagoga in Our Time* at St Joseph's University, Philadelphia.<sup>6</sup> As a moving corrective to the medieval images, it shows the two characters as equal, and equally free, crowned women, engaging in mutual Scriptural study.

Alongside this, mention must be made of the liturgy, and the Good Friday Prayer of the Ordinary Rite, where the affirming prayer for the Jewish people comes tellingly between that for the unity of Christians and that for those who do not believe in Christ (and a distinct prayer is also part of the Extraordinary Rite, whatever its other merits/demerits). Eugene Fisher insists it is significant that there is in formal Catholicism no prayer – and no organization – dedicated to the conversion of the Jews.<sup>7</sup>

The theological underpinning of such unique, abiding and authoritative affirmation of Jews and Jewish faith has perhaps been under-discussed, forcing us into areas of speculation.<sup>8</sup> It clearly involves the claim that the Hebrew covenant(s) cannot be “revoked,”<sup>9</sup> but it goes beyond that. Logically, one can believe that another community stands in a covenant with God, and, being disobedient, is thus under God's judgement. This is one interpretation of Paul on the non-Christian Jews of his day. Roy Eckardt notes in his exegesis of Romans 9-11: “It is faulty reasoning to maintain that since God has not rejected his people (and hence has not destined them to final exclusion from salvation), the church has therefore not taken over Israel's role.”<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, it involves an understanding that Jews are connected to revelation, treasuring as they do what Christians call the “Old Testament” (and the “traditional” terminology is defended, it being understood that it carries no connotation of “out of date” or “out-worn”).<sup>11</sup> But, again, it exceeds this point. For honouring the Hebrew Bible, or parts of it, as revelation is not unique to Jews and Christians: it is

shared with Samaritans, Mormons and, at least, some Rastafarians. These are not recipients of the magisterium's validation.

My contention is that the rationale for this unique affirmation neither comes from biblical exegesis, nor efforts at doctrinal coherence alone. Rather, it is the place to which the dialogue has inductively led the Church. The historical and existential realities of the dialogue have compelled the Church to make a positive judgement about living Judaism, rabbinic religion, a post-biblical or extra-biblical faith, as an inspiring spiritual teacher, which does not present as ecclesial or church-like. While the magisterium nowhere puts it this way, the trajectory of the development makes it plausible to say that the Church recognizes in the rabbinic way a “charism.”

There is of course a counter-argument. *Nostra Aetate* remains “the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” without qualification. Pope Francis has at least once, albeit in an informal meditation, spoken of Abraham as “the father of the faith shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike” – a rather different model.<sup>12</sup> And Cardinal Kasper has powerfully spoken of Judaism as “the sacrament of every otherness.”<sup>13</sup> The last statement requires some comment. One may put the emphasis on “otherness” such that Judaism is exemplary, or on “sacrament,” such that it may remain unique. On the latter reading, just as Judaism is the only religious phenomenon outside the Church which is known to guard and celebrate scriptural revelation authentically, so in its life in the world it can function uniquely sacramentally, being the effective sign for “otherness” wherever it occurs. This otherness, for all it is graced, is not itself sacramental.

Much discussion of Catholic approaches to faiths other than Judaism has centred on the question: Are they constitutive of salvation, or merely the circumstance into which God's saving grace comes?<sup>14</sup> The Council was clear that God is active in all lives,

seeking to shape consciences to salvific effect: “the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the [saving] paschal mystery.”<sup>15</sup> But what follows for the religions themselves?

Karl Rahner, in many ways the originator of this Catholic “inclusivism,”<sup>16</sup> can be said to give the most positive reading of the function of the religions:

*If revelation properly so-called is not possible without faith ... and must be offered always and everywhere ... then such revelation and such faith ... occur concretely and on the whole only by the mediation of those categorical, institutional, and verbal realities which we know as the non-Christian religions.*<sup>17</sup>

Gavin D’Costa counters that the “non-Christian” faiths do not as such play any salvific role:

*When we ask how a person lives the good life, various Conciliar documents give a uniform answer: through conscience and the natural law ... written within the hearts of all ...*<sup>18</sup>

A middle way may be possible. This would insist that revelation consists of the story of salvation as celebrated in the Bible in the two Testaments (a story which is indeed partially shared with Jews, whose charism enables them authentically to interpret their Bible), and also in its concrete outworking in later history (a point D’Costa emphasizes).<sup>19</sup> As such, revelation, although open-ended, can have no parallel in the world. This is a circular argument, but properly so; it is a foundational position.

On the other hand, it is important that the grace at work in the hearts of all persons is not reified, as if some spiritual medicine. For “grace” surely stands for all that takes place when God Holy Trinity graciously communicates with creatures. Further, God communicates with persons as the social animals they are, and thus (albeit mysteriously) through human language and social structures, in which, even in our century, religion typically plays a vast part. While this loving divine communication

cannot strictly be called “revelation,” it must bear some of the traits of that definitive communication, if the communicating God is one. Might not *Nostra Aetate* lead the way here too? It insisted (in Section 2) that other religions “often reflect a ray of that Truth which illumines all.” Divine communication through non-Christian forms of life can truly be called “illumination.”<sup>20</sup>

To the extent that this is correct, the following can be said: that which the Church can and does say with *confidence* regarding post-biblical Judaism, it might come to say with real *hope* and generosity of *imagination* regarding religions properly called “non-Christian,” if and when the concrete realities of the dialogues compel this. It would be a different application of the method used to make the affirmation of rabbinic Judaism, namely allowing the *datum*, indeed the *novum* of the dialogue itself to inform, as much as biblical and in-house doctrinal considerations.

With this – highly contestable<sup>21</sup> – reading of the contemporary Catholic position I am in sympathy. For some, this might make me a disloyal Anglican. After all, the 1988 Lambeth Conference paper *The Way of Dialogue*<sup>22</sup> itself moved from concerning Judaism to including Islam, and many Anglicans are in sympathy with the idea of a triologue of the three “Abrahamic” faiths. The later Anglican Communion document *Generous Love*<sup>23</sup> did not in any depth consider the idea that Judaism is *sui generis*. Nor was this promoted by the Church of England’s own discussion of Christian-Jewish relations, *Sharing One Hope*?<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Michael Ipgrave has argued that Anglican theology “has on the whole shifted from ... ‘exceptional distinctiveness’ to ‘paradigmatic distinctiveness,’ using a different reading of Kasper’s phrase, ‘the sacrament of every otherness.’”<sup>25</sup>

It might be countered that at least the Church of England’s own *Common Worship* liturgy is in line with the Roman Catholic approach, for it too has on Good Friday a distinct and uniquely affirmative prayer for

“God’s ancient people, the Jews, the first to hear his word,” along with Christians “the children of your covenant.”<sup>26</sup> But, differently, one might boldly hint at something almost Anglican in the Catholic position as outlined above. It is knowingly untidy, as Anglican approaches often are. Rahner’s ecclesiocentric inclusivism is herein complicated by what I have called Judaism’s *de facto* charism. The point is the Church can neither own, nor necessarily in any detail discern, its contours (for by what criteria would the Church judge between an authentic and an inauthentic manifestation in Judaism?). The very inductive approach, which enables the affirmation of post-biblical Judaism, going beyond the biblically and logically necessary, is a valued Anglican way, as *Generous Love* notes:

*As Jesus’ ministry initiated an indefinite series of particular encounters, now limitless in reach in the light of his resurrection, so the Anglican Church has sought in making decisions to attend to the particular contexts of its work.*<sup>27</sup>

The practical outworking of this position is manifold. The message of *Guidelines and Notes*, on a careful reading of the Passion, and of the Pharisees, forms part of the bare minimum, even if on the ground there is a long distance yet to travel. Marginalization of the Old Testament (if it is right still to name it thus) must also be avoided, which requires some hard work on thinking how Christians can and cannot appropriate it. What must not happen is that it is replaced by others’ scriptures as “more culturally relevant” in some contexts. Neither is it permitted to deracinate the scriptures, as when the Church of New Zealand/Aotearoa and Polynesia removed some references to Israel and Zion from its 1989 *Psalms for Worship*.<sup>28</sup> Knowledge of and attention to Judaism (in Old Testament, Second Temple and rabbinic modes) is obligatory for serious Christian formation, regardless of how many Jews with whom a particular church has contact.

That Judaism is *sui generis*, neither Christian nor non-Christian, is not necessary

comfortable for – or welcomed by – Jews. It can be actively resisted, most obviously when Jacob Neusner insists that the two faiths are “[d]ifferent people talking about different things to different people.”<sup>29</sup> And no part of the argument here is that Jewish thinking must in some way “return the favour,” seeing Christianity as unique. Nevertheless, I suggest it is the way to which the Church is historically committed. Simply put, one cannot be a Bible-reading, liturgy-praying Christian without having to do with Israel and her faith, in ways without parallel. But some of the method of the Church’s unique dialogue with unique Judaism can be replicated in the wider world of faiths.

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Kurt Koch, “Building on *Nostra Aetate* – 50 Years of Christian-Jewish Dialogue.” *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations Website*. CCJR. 16 May 2012. Accessed 29 October 15.

<sup>2</sup> Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate* (n. 4) (1974).

<sup>3</sup> Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985).

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Koch, “Building on *Nostra Aetate*,” *op. cit.* However, that the fate of elder brothers is less happy than that of younger brothers in biblical accounts of sibling rivalry is not lost on many Jewish hearers.

<sup>5</sup> The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2001) § 22, emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations, “The Medieval Motif of Synagoga and Ecclesia.” *Saint Joseph’s University Website*. Saint Joseph’s University. Web. Accessed 29 October 15.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene J. Fisher, “God’s Plan for the Jews.” *The Tablet* (5 April 2008), 12-13. (Benedict XVI’s new Prayer within the Extraordinary Rite was published before this, on 6 February 2008.)

<sup>8</sup> Though for a good overview, see Philip A. Cunningham et al. (eds.), *Christ Jesus and the Jewish*

*People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. John Paul II, 17 November 1980, cited in Koch, "Building," *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Roy Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians* (New York: Schocken, 1967), 55f. Such supersessionism is emphatically not Eckardt's own position.

<sup>11</sup> *Notes* (1985), footnote.

<sup>12</sup> "The Call of Abraham" (Meditation, 25 June 2013), at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20130625\\_abraham.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20130625_abraham.html). Accessed 29 October 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Cardinal Kasper, "Address on the 37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*," 2002, at [www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Kasper\\_NA37.htm](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Kasper_NA37.htm). Accessed 29 October 2015. The address is very short and does not permit an interpretation of the phrase based on context.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions and the Trinity* (New York: Orbis, 2000), 99-142.

<sup>15</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, (1965) §12.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations* Volume 5 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966) 115-134.

<sup>17</sup> Idem, "On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," in *Theological Investigations*, Volume 18 (London: DLT, 1984) 293.

<sup>18</sup> D'Costa, *op. cit.*, 104.

<sup>19</sup> D'Costa, *op. cit.*, 127ff.

<sup>20</sup> To the argument that all that is envisaged of the religions is a "reflection" it can be counter argued that a reflection of an illumination itself illumines.

<sup>21</sup> The principal alternative reading is to insist that the rabbinic reading of the Hebrew scriptures is

"possible" only because it is a mix of true revelation and natural law/human wisdom. There is no special charism from God in addition to ordinarily graced nature. This is plausible. But, *structurally*, this argument would also apply to (say) Mormonism, as and when Mormons use their best conscience and natural law to interpret both Christian Testaments in the light of their own post-biblical traditions. I do not believe the magisterium has so affirmed or will so affirm Mormonism. Nor does it see Mormons as spiritual siblings or teachers.

<sup>22</sup> Lambeth Conference, *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* (1988), at [http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/media/129614/lam88\\_ap6.pdf](http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/media/129614/lam88_ap6.pdf). Accessed 29 October 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Anglican Communion 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).

<sup>24</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Sharing One Hope? The Church of England and Christian-Jewish Relations – A Contribution to a Continuing Debate* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Michael Ipgrave, "Remembering the Covenant: Judaism in an Anglican Theology of Interfaith Relations", *Anglican Theological Review*, 96.1 (Winter 2014), 42.

<sup>26</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Times and Seasons* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), 317.

<sup>27</sup> *Generous Love*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> See Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns, *Land of Promise?* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2012), 28.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 1.

# A Phenomenology of Monotheism in Relationship: Jews, Christians and Muslims

Reuven Firestone

Some involved with interreligious dialogue have argued that Judaism and Christianity have a special “sibling-relationship” that derives from their roles as inheritors of Biblical Monotheism – to the exclusion of Islam which arrived on the scene centuries later and out of a largely different context. Others have argued that Judaism and Islam have a special theological relationship that derives from their particular understandings (or articulations) of divine unity as a theological core, which explicitly and purposely denies any kind of Trinitarian nature to God. I will take a somewhat different tack by observing a phenomenology of interreligious relationship that I consider to be based on the serendipity of history. Because of the limited space allowed for this inquiry, my observations will necessarily be somewhat general.

It has long been established that Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity emerged out of the ashes of Second Temple Judaism and that early expressions of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity seem to be in many ways indistinguishable.<sup>1</sup> The famous (or infamous!) “parting of the ways” resulted eventually in the formation of two separate and contending monotheist communities, each claiming that it represents the authentic continuation of Biblical Monotheism.<sup>2</sup> This is a “zero-sum” relationship. One expression is correct. All others are incorrect. One represents the Truth. All others are wrong.

This insistence on the absolute and precise nature of Truth – and the claim of unqualified possession of that Truth – is referred to by Jan Assmann as the “Mosaic Distinction:” “... the distinction between truth and falsehood in religion, between the true god and false gods, true doctrine and

false doctrine, knowledge and ignorance, belief and unbelief.”<sup>3</sup> For centuries before the emergence of Christianity, that distinction reigned between a single expression of monotheism and its view of all other religious expressions, all of which were one or another form of polytheism. That monotheism certainly evolved during the First and Second Temple Periods. It produced various competing sub-communities and sectarian groups within it, but all varieties remained essentially united through faith in a singular God within a single *ethnos*, while virtually (or perhaps literally) all other *ethne* were polytheists of one variety or another. Assmann argues that polytheisms are inherently tolerant. “By disarticulating the sphere of the numinous into distinct roles and functions, [polytheism] converts the divine world of a particular group into a format that makes is compatible with the divine worlds of other groups and cultures.”<sup>4</sup>

Polytheists who observed Biblical and Second Temple Monotheism were sometimes perplexed by the rigidity of monotheist practice and perspective, but with some notable exceptions, they generally tried to accommodate the strange or distinctive nature of monotheist claims and ideas.<sup>5</sup> Despite the internalization of the “Mosaic Distinction” among Biblical Monotheists, they, too, could live with the existence of polytheists as long as they had a “safe haven” in which to practice their religion without interference or temptation to revert to earlier (Israelite) polytheist practice through religious and even social interaction with polytheist peoples. The temptation of polytheism, from within the community as well as without, remained a threat to Biblical Monotheists for centuries.<sup>6</sup>

Monotheists polemicized against polytheism throughout the Hebrew Bible, but the purpose was hardly to convince polytheists to come over to monotheism. The major purpose was rather to convince Israelites to remain or become more thorough monotheists. Likewise, while some polytheists polemicized against Israel and their notions and ways, there is no evidence of any creedal polytheist anti-Judaism.<sup>7</sup>

That *modus vivendi* would change with the “parting of the ways” because that parting represents the first time in which two separate, independent, self-identifying monotheist communities vied with one another over their particular notions of Truth, divine disclosure in the form of canonized scripture, destiny and salvation. To use Assmann’s terminology, it was the first time that the Mosaic Distinction applied between two competing expressions of monotheism; hence the zero-sum nature of Jewish-Christian argument.

Despite so much in common between Jews and Christians, I suggest that small differences were made into big differences because of the zero-sum mentality of the Mosaic Distinction between two competing monotheisms. Prior arguments between factions within the Second Temple Judean community were not seen as win-or-lose at the same level. After the initial zero-sum crisis between Jews and Christians, however, even internal argument became more problematic, perhaps not so significantly among Jews who belonged to a single ethnos (even if by this time it was entirely, as opposed to partially, constructed<sup>8</sup>), but certainly among Christians who struggled so mightily with the problem of sectarianism and heresy.

I argue that the intensity of the Mosaic Distinction remained high as long as the distinction was obtained between only two separate self-identifying parties. Christians claimed to have superseded the position of the Jews as God’s one and only chosen (Matt. 22:14, 24:1-22; Mark 13:20-32; Luke 1:30-33, 9:28-35; John 15:5-6, 15-16;

Romans 9:7-8; Gal. 4:21-31; Heb. 8:6-13; 1 Peter 2:7-10, etc.). During the period that Christians became increasingly influential, Jews became increasingly powerless. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century they were unable to make bold claims like their Christian competitors (they were often forced to articulate their position in code in Rabbinic Literature so as not to endanger themselves), but their view of themselves in relation to their Christian competitors was no less elitist than that of Christians.<sup>9</sup> Each distinct monotheist community competed against the other through a binary perspective; each claimed an independent identity and each claimed ownership of the whole truth.

That binary relationship could not easily change because of the centuries during which it became codified in the most sacred literatures of both parties. But when a third party emerged, the nature of monotheist relationship changed profoundly. No longer could the relationship be defined as zero-sum. It could no longer be either-or. As just mentioned, Jews and Christians continued to process the world, including the emergence of a new and independent form of monotheism in Islam, under the inertia of the formative centuries of polemic between their binary worldviews. But that is not the perspective of the Qur’an, and I would argue that the emergence of a third option along with its non-binary perspective regarding earlier monotheisms even came to affect the views of some Christians and Jews, such as the Christian Nikolas Cusanus (d. 1464) and the Jew Menachem Me’iri (d. 1310).<sup>10</sup> As the Muslim community began to recognize itself as a distinct religious community,<sup>11</sup> it observed not one or even two contending communities, but a number of different expressions of monotheism. Some were Jewish, some Christian, and some may have been neither.<sup>12</sup> The very existence of harsh internal polemic between rival Christian communities and, less so, between rival Jewish communities, rendered all of their claims relative.

The rhetoric of the Qur’an, then, tends not express an either-or, zero-sum perspective

on truth in relation to Judaism and Christianity.<sup>13</sup> It recognizes that both Judaism and Christianity derive from God and that both contain truth. But their particular expressions of originally pristine monotheism had become corrupted or distorted over the centuries.<sup>14</sup> Through error or forgetfulness (Q. 2:59, 5:13-14) or purposefully (Q. 2:75, 146, 3:78, 187), Jews and Christians altered the original forms of their scriptures so that contemporary believers may not even be aware that their religious practice and belief is not entirely accurate. In God's great wisdom and compassion, therefore, the Qur'an was given as a clear revelation of divine disclosure confirming and correcting what came before.<sup>15</sup> It sometimes corrects the theology and practice in earlier scripture – the altered versions of a divine template that was retained intact in the Qur'an<sup>16</sup> – but it does not claim to supersede it.<sup>17</sup> The old covenants are not declared invalid.<sup>18</sup>

The Qur'an returns monotheism to its original, accurate, pristine form, but it is not supersessive. Some verses such as 3:110 may be read as elitist, but the notion of "best community" is understood by some as a conditional statement.<sup>19</sup> And perhaps the most supersessive verse, "Whoever desires a religion other than *al-islām*, it will not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers" (3:85) is likely to refer contextually to a generic submission to God rather than to a distinct religion.<sup>20</sup> Even its critique of prior religions is ambivalent. While submission to the divine will as articulated in the Qur'an is best, the Qur'an itself can still instruct believers, including Muhammad, to ask the People of the Book if they are uncertain (Q. 10:94; 16:43).

The Qur'an argues repeatedly that difference between human communities is intentional, that God created humanity to disagree.<sup>21</sup> It also argues against certain practices or beliefs of established monotheisms, but it does not argue against their intrinsic value. I suggest that the rigidity that crept into Islamic thinking in its relations with other

forms of monotheism was largely a reaction to the absolute rejection that it experienced from earlier monotheists. Not all earlier monotheists rejected Islam, of course. In fact, most Christians and many Jews in the Middle East and North Africa became Muslims themselves, but the powerful institution of the church rejected Islam and its scripture out of hand as either a ridiculous error or worse, the work of the devil.<sup>22</sup> Partly in response to this rejection out of hand, and partly in response to its own internal processes associated with political and ethnic and religious rivalries (which cannot really be separated) for power and control with the emergence of the Caliphate, Islamic institutional thinking became increasingly rigid itself, and that includes its rejection of Christianity and Judaism. It became not merely an issue of rejecting the errant particulars of Christianity and Judaism practiced by Christians and Jews, but a more absolute rejection of all things Christian and Jewish.

The result has been a vector of absolutism in Islam that roughly parallels the vectors of absolutism in Christianity and Judaism.<sup>23</sup> The phenomenology of identity formation is roughly alike. As Muslims came to identify themselves increasingly as a community independent from those of Christians and Jews, they saw their movement in increasingly absolutist terms, just as the movements that eventuated in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity became increasingly self-isolating and self-absorbed as their ways parted. Ironically, a "third way" that was initiated in the Qur'an could not be sustained among most post-Qur'anic Muslims, perhaps another loss to the unavoidability of religious realpolitik.

I end with the observation that today, in a pluralistic environment in which the prizes of politics are much more readily available through means other than religion than in previous eras, we have an opportunity to transcend the absolutist tendencies that Assmann believes are inherent in the "Mosaic Distinction." There are traditional models in each of our traditions that can be

plumbed for considering how to retain the particularism of our commitments while simultaneously opening ourselves to the likelihood that the truth of the Ultimate cannot be contained entirely in a single community.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A number of different names have been employed to identify the kinds of monotheism practiced by the people who populated the Land of Israel prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE: Israelite monotheism, Biblical monotheism, Second Temple Judaism, etc. These refer to a variety of changing practice and theology that predate Rabbinic Judaism, the expression of monotheism among Jews that became dominant by the end of the Talmudic period and which corresponds roughly with the emergence of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: James Dunn (ed.), *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Julie Galambush, *The Reluctant Parting* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005); George Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Marcel Simon, *Vetus Israel* (London: Littman Library, 1996); and Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 2. Assmann has written extensively on this and has stimulated much discussion, especially in Europe. Perhaps his most concise and recent book treating this issue is the monograph listed here.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> See John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University, 1983); Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1997). The anti-Jewish violence in Elephantine and Alexandria in Egypt (Gager, 43-54; Schäfer, 121-69) is explained by Assmann as a violent reaction-formation in response to a far earlier expression of the “Mosaic Distinction” initiated during the Amarna period by Akhenaten (*The Price of Monotheism*, 32-67; *From Akhenaten to Moses* (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2014)).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Ex. 15:11; 2 Kings 21:1-9; Ps. 95:3, etc. See also Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001); Ziony

Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel* (London: Continuum, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> The term, “Israel,” is the standard Jewish term for the people that are referred to in Jewish sources variously as “Hebrews,” “Israelites,” “Judeans,” and “Jews.”

<sup>8</sup> I follow Benedict Anderson’s work, which is also relevant to an earlier age (Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983)). See also Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2003); Lee Patterson, *Kinship Myth in Ancient Greece* (Austin: University of Texas, 2010); Exodus 12:37-38, the Book of Ruth, etc.

<sup>9</sup> See the work of Daniel J. Lasker, such as *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Ktav, 1977, 2007), and Sarah Stroumsa, “Jewish Polemics Against Islam and Christianity In the Light of Judaeo-Arabic Texts,” in N. Golb (ed.), *Judaeo-Arabic Studies: Proceedings of the Founding Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies, Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations 3* (Amsterdam, 1997), 241-50.

<sup>10</sup> Inigo Bocken, “Nicholas of Cusa and the Plurality of Religions,” in Barbara Roggema, Marcel Poorthuis and Pim Valkenberg (eds.), *The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the Historical Dialogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Leuven: Peters, 2005), 163-80; Moshe Halbertal, “‘Ones Possessed of Religion’: Religious Tolerance in the Teachings of the Me’iri,” *The Edah Journal* (2005), 1-24; idem, *Between Torah and Wisdom: Rabbi Menachem Ha-Meiri and the Maimonidean Halakists in Provence* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Fred Donner and others argue, to my mind successfully, that the movement that eventuated in the community of Muslims did not emerge as a distinct religious confession but became that only with time (Fred Donner, “From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Muslim Community,” *al-Abhath* 50-51 (2002-2003), 9-53; *ibid.*, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2010)).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (eds.), *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> It is not in the nature of scripture to avoid what we today would identify as inconsistency, but as will be observed below, the Qur’an often refers positively to the religions of Jews and Christians even if not to what it identifies as their practices and beliefs. This is not the case regarding what it defines as *shirk* or polytheism, which has no redeeming value.

<sup>14</sup> Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “*Tahrīf*” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 111-12; Gabriel Said Reynolds, “On the Qur’anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*tahrīf*) and



Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130.2 (2010), 189-202.

<sup>15</sup> Q. 2:2-5; 4:47; 5:48; 12:1-2; 15:9; 16:64.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Q. 50:38 argues that God had no need to rest on the day after creation, 5:72 argues that Jesus is not God, 4:157 argues that the Crucifixion did not occur, and 4:160-61 argues that the strict dietary restrictions among Jews was either self-imposed (3:93) or punishment for wrongdoing (4:160-61).

<sup>17</sup> The Qur’an does claim abrogation of revelation (Q. 2:106). Some Muslim scholars understand this to refer to prior revelation, though it became the basis for the theory of internal abrogation within the Qur’an (*naskh* or *al-nāsikh wal-mansūkh*). But in either case, it is corrective rather than supersessive.

<sup>18</sup> Reuven Firestone, “Is there a Notion of ‘Divine Election’ in the Qur’an?” in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur’an. The Qur’an in Its Historical Context 2* (NY: Routledge, 2011), 393-410.

<sup>19</sup> “You are the best community brought forth for humankind, commanding right and forbidding wrong, and believing in God. If the People of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Some of them are believers, but most of them are wicked.” The conditional nature can be understood as *whether* the community indeed commands the right and forbids the wrong.

<sup>20</sup> See also Q. 3:19; 5:3; L. Gardet, “*Islām*” in EI (2), Vol. 4, 171; A. J. Droge, *The Qur’an: A New Annotated Translation* (Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2013), 32, note 26. For a history of the Islamic interpretive tradition on the Qur’anic term, see Jane Smith, *An*

*Historical and Semantic Study of the Term ‘Islām’ as Seen in a Sequence of Qur’ān Commentaries* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Q. 5:48; 6:106-07; 10:99; 11:118-19; 42:15; 49:13.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1960); John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University, 2002); Minou Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe: A Thousand Years of Western Myth-Making* (New York: New York University, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Judaism, however, while certainly equally elitist in its sense of monotheism, is relieved of the problematic of the salvation/damnation binary. That is, non-believers are not automatically destined for damnation because Judaism presumed entry to the World-to-Come for all non-Jews who follow the Noahide Laws (Tosefta, Avodah Zarah 9:4; Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 56a). The seven Noahide laws are listed in later Rabbinic texts as the prohibition of idolatry (worship of idols but not necessarily owning images), murder, theft, sexual immorality, blasphemy, eating flesh taken from a living animal; the last is not a prohibition but rather a requirement to maintain courts to provide legal recourse.

<sup>24</sup> I mentioned Nikolas Cusanus and Menachem Me’iri above. See also the work of Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), idem (ed.), *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

# **The Return of the Wandering Jew: The State of Israel as a Theological Challenge for Jewish-Christian Relations**

**Peter Colwell**

“The Wandering Jew” is a myth from the Middle-Ages and concerns a Jewish shoemaker who taunted Christ as he carried the cross to Calvary, and as a result was said to have been cursed and banished from the land of Judea, destined to wander the world until the Second Coming of Christ. It belongs to a corpus of anti-Jewish polemic that would perpetuate a narrative of Jewish rejection of Christ, their subsequent killing of him, and their theological invalidation and replacement. For centuries, the “wandering Jew” came to epitomize just how much European Jews were regarded as politically, morally and religiously suspect. It also symbolized the extent to which the power Christianity had over Judaism was total and permanent.

The polemics that one religion uses against another are important indicators of some of the complexities that exist in the way the religions relate together and how power is exercised. This particular piece of anti-Jewish polemic helps reveal two important aspects of Christianity’s complicated relationship with Judaism, particularly at the present time. First of all, it reminds us of the long history of antisemitism, which although is most severe in the European context, is one that is borne out of the ancient separation of Church and Synagogue in the Eastern as well as the Western Church. The anti-Jewish language from figures as diverse as John Chrysostom and Martin Luther is illustrative of this, but also the way in which scripture has been interpreted. The way in which the language of “the Jews” in John’s gospel and the way in which Jesus’ disputations with the Pharisees are read, interpreted and understood in respect of Jews and Judaism suggest that this difficult aspect of the Jewish-Christian relationship is not one that is easily, or quickly, addressed.

The second aspect of the Jewish-Christian complexity relates to the Holy Land itself. Prior to the end of World War II, the “Land” was not a significant issue for Jewish-Christian relations, although there has been a continuous Jewish presence in and around Jerusalem throughout the centuries. However, it was growth in that population towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and then the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, that meant that the issue of the Land and Jewish relationship to it once more became a critical issue in Jewish-Christian relations. To pick up the polemic issue again, it was as though the Wandering Jew had returned home in complete defiance of centuries of Christian antisemitism. In the words of Rabbi David Hartman, the “rebirth of the State of Israel has shattered the Christian theological claim of God’s rejection of the Jewish people as witnessed by their endless suffering and wandering.”<sup>1</sup>

We can therefore identify a twofold challenge to Christian theology presented by a continuing and flourishing Judaism. On the one hand are the Jews, Christ’s own people, who in the main reject him, yet with whom, according to St Paul, the covenant is still active, and so how does one relate to that theological crucible? This is a matter that has been the main concern of Jewish-Christian dialogue since the Holocaust, in an attempt to recover the historic closeness of the two religions. On the other hand, a different sort of theological challenge is presented by the creation of the State of Israel, and this has received less attention in the dialogue between Jews and Christians.

The reason for its relative neglect is because of the way it relates to the former issue – Israel has become crucial to Jewish self-understanding in the post-Holocaust

context and demands that Christianity relates to Jews in ways other than as victims of Christian hegemony. Yet it sometimes seems as if Christians ought to accept uncritically the State of Israel, regardless of its actions towards the Palestinians. Thus, a number of denominations in Europe and North America have felt torn between two inescapable issues of justice – addressing deep-rooted Christian antisemitism and advocating for justice for the Palestinians. An emphasis on the former can lead to the accusation of ignoring the cries of Palestinians, and a commitment to the latter invites the charge of disproportionately holding Israel to moral standards to which its Arab neighbours are not held (with a suspicion that age-old antisemitism might be one of the motivating factors).

Part of the reason why Jewish-Christian dialogue finds itself caught within this dilemma is the lack of any adequate Christian theological appraisal of the implications of Israel as a contemporary political reality as well as a hermeneutical and theological concept. The hermeneutical issues are acute, given that the name chosen for the new homeland for the Jews was Israel. It immediately connects contemporary Jewish political self-determination with the Jews of the Bible, implying biblical warrant for a modern nation state, and as such makes it almost impossible to divorce the language of the Bible wherever Israel is mentioned, with the present reality of Israel and its conflict with Palestinians.

For Palestinian Christians, this is a hermeneutical crisis in a way that it is not for their Muslim neighbours. Writers such as Mitri Raheb and Naim Ateek have highlighted the way in which Palestinians have become victims of a theo-political displacement that makes Biblical interpretation (especially in respect of the Old Testament) particularly difficult. Pastor Mitri Raheb has suggested that whilst Western Christians have sought to reject replacement theology, whereby the church replaced Israel, it had nonetheless allowed a

new form of replacement theology, whereby the Palestinians are replaced by the modern State of Israel.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah has warned against the tendency amongst Palestinians to fall into a form of neo-Marcionism (Marcionism being the heresy that denied the validity of the Old Testament), and Munther Isaac believes that this has become hermeneutical practice among many Palestinian Christians.<sup>3</sup> It is as though the Bible itself had displaced Palestinians from their land, or as Bishop Kenneth Cragg puts it: “the painful ambiguity of blessing the Lord God of Israel.”<sup>4</sup>

For Christian theology, names such as “Israel,” “Jerusalem” and “Zion” have, over the centuries, a spiritual and atemporal association within Western Christian theology and only become subject to re-examination with the emergence of the State of Israel as a political and temporal reality that also compels Christian theology to re-examine its relationship to the Land and Judaism. When there were territorial claims on Jerusalem (particularly during the Crusades), Jews were never seen as having any legitimacy there.

The “atemporal” nature of a Christian theology of Zion is most apparent in devotional texts, hymnody and Christian Psalm adaptations. Numerous examples can serve, including “Jerusalem the Golden,” “Blessed city, heavenly Salem,” and “Glorious things of thee are spoken.” What is evident from these illustrations is how the atemporal importance of Jerusalem (and by implication, the Holy Land) has been a dominant and overarching theme of Christian theology and devotion, especially in post-Reformation Europe. Any sense of Jerusalem’s temporal nature is seen to end with biblical times and the church looks beyond history to the eschatological images that are described in Revelation 21. John T. Pawlikowski, the Roman Catholic theologian of the Jewish-Christian encounter, notes how this was driven by the need to replace Jewish exclusiveness with

regard to the land with an eschatological Zion, and that to some extent, the Christian language of “Holy Land” is part of the same tendency.<sup>5</sup>

Zionism, and particularly the creation of the State of Israel, raises a significant challenge to Western Christian theology. Having viewed Judaism as a faith tradition that had been superseded by Christianity, the temporal importance of Jerusalem had all but evaporated, and reduced to eschatological hope. Yet Zionism sees part of its task as reversing the eradication of Jews from history, and so the Jews “returning to history” (in the words of Gershom Scholem) suggests an ontological crisis for Christian self-understanding, that a faith that it believed had been superseded had returned to history, self-defined in biblical and Davidic terms (albeit with a strong secular underpinning). These challenges are both hermeneutical and ecclesial. Hermeneutical, insofar as the methodology of scriptural interpretation is critical here, and ecclesial, because so much ecclesiology is predicated upon the church (the Body of Christ) as “the New Israel.” Thus we can see that the existence of the State of Israel is a significant hermeneutical and ecclesiological challenge to Christian theology more generally, but a theology of the Land, more specifically, and how it relates to Palestinians.

The context of Jewish-Christian relations is evolving and changing, away from the issues of European history and towards those that relate directly to Israel as a reality of Jewish self-determination. If Christians are honest then they will recognize that, for them, post-Holocaust guilt, and therefore relating to Jews as “victims” of Christendom, has been the primary impulse for dialogue with Jews. Yet the existence of Israel as a modern democratic state throws down a challenge to this older paradigm, asks of Christians to

engage with Jews as a people and of a religion who regard themselves as masters of their own destiny and not dependent upon Christian benevolence and repentance. And thus another honest question to reflect upon would be whether, given centuries of antisemitism that believed the Jews to be banished from the land, destined to wander and always a subject of Christian hegemony, is a Jewish return to history a deeply problematic reality for Christianity that requires an honest re-evaluation? Furthermore, there is an urgent task to address theologically the challenge of the existence of the modern nation-state called “Israel,” with all the biblical associations that come with that, both in terms of our engagement with contemporary Judaism and also in taking much more seriously the perspective of Palestinian Christianity, which represents an unbroken line in the land of Palestine from the day of Pentecost to our present time.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hartman, *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2012), 280.

<sup>2</sup> Mitri Raheb, “Shaping Communities in Times of Crises: Narratives of Land, People and Identities.” *Mitri Raheb website*. Mitri Raheb. Web. Accessed 24 May 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, From Eden to the Renewed Earth* (Langham Monographs, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian* (London: Mowbray, 1992), 237.

<sup>5</sup> John T. Pawlikowski, “Ethics in a Globalized World: Implications for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” in *PEACE & CHANGE*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (October 2011), 541-56.

## A Living Question Mark? Jews, Christians and *Nostra Aetate* 50 Years On

Clare Amos

October 2015 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, one of the shortest but conceivably among the most influential of the major documents to come out of the Second Vatican Council. Its promulgation was controversial, and its appearance was therefore delayed. When it was finally published, its scope had been enlarged. It was no longer a document focused solely on Judaism and Jewish-Catholic relations; it also included brief reflection on other non-Christian faiths, especially Islam.

Looking back with the advantage of 50 years hindsight on what *Nostra Aetate* said about Judaism, our first reaction might be surprise at what it says and doesn't say, and at its tone. It states that the Jews of today cannot be held responsible for the passion of Christ, but this comes across as a rather grudging declaration, prefaced as it is with the remark, "True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ..." An explicit reference to expunging the charge of deicide (killing of God) had been present in an earlier draft but was eventually omitted as a result of pressure from representatives of Middle Eastern Catholics. It was noted that the Church "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of antisemitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone," but there was no overt admission that the church and its adherents had been guilty of precisely such actions many times over many centuries.

A careful reading of the paragraphs in the document relating to Judaism make it apparent that the theological position adopted could be described as a soft supersessionism (the belief that Christianity has superseded Judaism and made it obsolete). Liberal Catholic critics noticed

that though *Nostra Aetate* described other religions such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in terms that followers of those faiths would regard as authentic, the same courtesy was not applied to Judaism, which was clearly viewed through Christian spectacles, albeit with a gaze that was seeking to be as benevolent as possible.

In spite of such limitations, *Nostra Aetate* was a watershed in the field of Christian-Jewish relations, not simply for what it said, but because of the radically new direction it encouraged – and not merely among Catholics. Other Christians, including many of the mainline Protestant churches that are members of the World Council of Churches, found themselves wanting to rethink their engagement with Judaism and their theological understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship. Indeed it is arguable that it was *Nostra Aetate* and the change of Catholic institutional direction which resulted from it that prompted the World Council of Churches to open its own interreligious dialogue office in 1971.

Although the initial Jewish reaction to *Nostra Aetate* was mixed, by 1970 a representative group of Jews, largely American but coming from across the Jewish religious spectrum, had formed the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), initially to be a bilateral dialogue partner with the Catholic Church. (Later IJCIC also entered into bilateral dialogues with other Christian bodies, including the World Council of Churches.)

In 1974 the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ) was established. The very existence and name of this body witnesses to the ambiguities of the relationship with Judaism in Catholic eyes. First, a deliberate decision

was made not to include Judaism among the “other religions” for which the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue was responsible, but to locate the relationship with Judaism within this commission, which is attached to but autonomous within the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. This marked out Judaism as somehow enjoying a special relationship with Christianity, at least in Catholic eyes.

Second it was significant that the title of the Vatican body was “*Religious Relations*.” This was deliberate, and was intended to steer conversations away from dangerous political topics such as the question of Israel and its role in Jewish self-understanding. Since 1974 interventions of all three popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis) have emphasized the close fraternal relationship between Catholics and Jews.

Pope Francis’s appreciation of Judaism, linked in part to his close personal friendship with Rabbi Avraham Skorka, is reflected in his recent encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*. The section on relations with Judaism, distinct from both the section on ecumenism (relationships with other Christian bodies) and the section on relations with other religions, is especially warm in tone and notably remarks, “we hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for ‘the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.’” This belief in one shared irrevocable covenant, common to both Christians and Jews, language that was particularly emphasized by Cardinal Walter Kasper during his tenure as head of the CRRJ, reflects a massive change even from the language of *Nostra Aetate*, yet at the same time we can see in that earlier document the seed of these later developments.

So *Nostra Aetate* deserves to be celebrated 50 years on. Among the gatherings to mark the occasion was a meeting in June 2015 in Rome of the International Council of Christians and Jews, the global body which acts as an umbrella for national Christian-

Jewish organizations. I was privileged to be present.

I was surprised at how the meeting brought out my “inner Protestant.” I’m an Anglican (Episcopalian) with a considerable amount of ecumenical experience, which has included close friendships with (Roman) Catholic Christians. However I found the heavy focus at the meeting on Catholic-Jewish relations quite disconcerting and jarring. It was telling how often a speaker would begin by using the phrase “Christian-Jewish relations” but then slide into “Catholic-Jewish relations” by the second sentence.

To some extent of course this was due to the location and theme of our gathering, and the fact that the highlight was an audience with Pope Francis. But it also represents a wider reality that perhaps I was not sufficiently aware of. I think there is a particular appreciation among the Jewish community of the importance of relations with the Catholic Church. It is partly demography: there are a lot more Catholic Christians in the world than there are liberal Protestants. It is also the fact that at least in theory the Catholic Church can speak with one theological voice, which is impossible for the rest of Christendom. And the theological voice of the Catholic Church has over the past twenty to thirty years been used to explore and witness to a theological closeness with Judaism.

A considerable majority of what is called the Christian Scholars Group (largely based in the United States), which works to “develop more adequate Christian theologies of the church’s relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people” are Catholics. Within the mainstream Protestant world, although most churches (certainly in the United States) now have statements and policies distancing themselves from the deliberate targeting of Jews for conversion to Christianity, there has not been the same institutional desire to push forward toward finding ways to express closer theological convergence between Judaism and Christianity. (The

Lutherans, especially in Germany, may be something of an exception here, and – bearing in mind Martin Luther’s ambiguous attitudes to Judaism – interesting work being done in preparation for 2017 and the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation.)

It is very difficult for the non-Catholic Christian world to own with one voice a theology that gives an unambiguously salvific role to the Jewish religion in itself. It was telling how efforts at theological dialogue between Jews and Christians fostered by the World Council of Churches effectively came to a halt in the late 1980s. WCC members were divided on the whether they could say that Judaism was a totally valid way to God or that Jews should not be the subject of Christian mission. The WCC’s increasingly strong support for Palestinians also flavoured the discussion.

Of course, in the Catholic world, no less than the Protestant one, there may be questions as to how far any new thinking filters down into the religious experience of ordinary believers. Probably quite a lot of sermons still get preached with an implicit element of supersessionism. A factor here is surely the lectionary, and in the case of the Revised Common Lectionary, the way the Old Testament lesson is often set over against the gospel in a typological fashion.

Protestant churches, rather more than the Catholic Church, often tend to find themselves caught between two opposing tendencies, both of which militate against a unique theological affirmation of Judaism. On the one hand is the conservative viewpoint that still wants firmly to assert that salvation is only to be found in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). On the other hand is the considerable number of Protestant Christians, at least in the Western world, who hold a “pluralist” religious viewpoint and are willing to accept the possibility that salvation may be experienced through many different religious traditions, not merely Christianity and Judaism. From that perspective, to worry about how to

express the possible salvific role of Judaism becomes less relevant.

Another reflection from my recent ICCJ experience was that there may be a difference between Europe and the United States in the comparative importance given to key practical and social questions. In Europe – I speak as a citizen of the United Kingdom but resident in France and working in Switzerland – the last few years have seen a resurgence in what I call “traditional” antisemitism. Some of it is obviously influenced by the political situation in the Middle East and the convoluted interplay between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in Western Europe today, but there are also definite examples of hostility to Jews that deliberately play into historic accusations.

You don’t have to venture too far into the darker corners of the Internet to find material that seeks to blame the financial crisis in Greece on Jewish bankers or even more nauseatingly tries to claim a link between some of those being investigated in the child sexual abuse enquiry in the United Kingdom and the infamous blood libel (that is, that Jews kill Christian children to use their blood in religious rituals).

I was surprised how little attention was focused at the ICCJ meeting in Rome on such concerns: maybe it was because the agenda for our meeting was substantially driven by the recently elected president, Phil Cunningham, an American who primarily sees the organization as a theological advance guard. From where I am standing in Europe, that ambition, however laudable, needs to be reinforced by a still watchful eye on other concerns. The ancient enemy of antisemitism can all too easily rear its ugly head.

I sometimes talk about the lopsidedness of Jewish-Christian relationships, both in the “guilt” linked to antisemitism which many Western Christians carry and in the way that on the whole there is more interest among Christians in exploring the relation with

Judaism, both theologically and practically, than the other way round. This is one reason that the statement *Dabru Emet*, a Jewish reflection on relations with Christians, published in 2000 by a range of American Jewish religious leaders, is significant. Although primarily intended to facilitate an intra-Jewish conversation, *Dabru Emet* was clearly undertaken with the awareness that Christians would be listening in.

This need to correct the lopsidedness in the relationship becomes more important because of the shift in Christian demography. I arrived at the ICCJ meeting just having come from teaching at a theological summer school for young Asian Christians held in Cambodia, so the monochrome hue of the participants – other than Israelis, there was possibly no one there present from either Asia or Africa – made an impact on me. While in Cambodia I had begun a session teaching on antisemitism by asking how many of the participants in the group had met a Jewish person. Out of the group of 24, only four people raised their hands.

I am increasingly convinced that both Christians and Jews need to take account of the way that the shift of Christianity toward the global South, both in terms of numbers and of influence, is bound to affect the nature of international Jewish-Christian relationships. If you are an East Asian Christian who is unlikely ever to meet a Jewish person in the flesh, and if the convoluted European story of centuries of Christian antagonism to Jews is essentially alien to you (but linked somehow to your own colonial experience), and if you are a Christian minority in a society that is majority Buddhist, or Hindu or Muslim and need to wrestle with the relationship between Christianity and these faiths – then you are going to be looking at relations with Judaism in a way very different from the way European and American Christians do. In particular you may find yourself asking (and some significant Asian Christians are doing just that) whether Christians should

continue to think in terms of a “special relationship” with Judaism.

The situation is slightly different in Africa, where theological and biblical conservatism plays into the picture. There is what I call a naïve supersessionism – often combined with a strongly political pro-Israel stance. Somehow the history of the last 2,000 years is collapsed and the Jews of the New Testament (and Old Testament) are implicitly conflated with Judaism today. Judaism is somehow critiqued and cherished in the same breath. The hostility to Islam felt by Christians in some African countries also encourages a form of Christian Zionism, although not necessarily including the detailed dispensationalist schemas prevalent among some Western evangelicals.

This leads us toward the elephant trundling around the room and largely unspoken in this article as it also was unspoken during much of the meeting in Rome – though ultimately named. However hard one might try, the question of Israel/Palestine cannot ultimately be ignored in the Jewish-Christian conversation today. It clearly has the possibility of poisoning it. But as I hinted about *Nostra Aetate* above, the question refused to be silenced even in this key document of Vatican II.

The past 50 years (in particular during the past 25) have seen something of a sea change in the stance of mainline American Protestants on this issue. The change is symbolized for me by the writings of the well-known Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. In 1977 Brueggemann published an influential book called *The Land*, in the series *Overtures in Biblical Theology*. It looked at the theme of land as a key motif in the Old Testament. It did not address at all the significance of this topic for land questions in contemporary Israel/Palestine, though most readers probably assumed that Brueggemann took a broadly, though qualified, pro-Israel stance. I remember meeting Brueggemann on occasion during the 1980s, and he commented to me that academic and church



life in the United States made expression of any other stance very difficult.

When a second edition of *The Land* appeared in 2002, however, it had an additional preface which made it clear that Brueggemann was now aware that (as he put it) “the land as a theological theme is never to be taken as innocent,” and which made explicit reference to potential implications of the ideology of land entitlement for the situation in Israel and Palestine. Clearly Brueggemann’s earlier stance was beginning to shift. His latest work – a small book published only a few weeks ago with the title *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* – clearly tackles head on difficult themes related to what feels an increasingly intransigent conflict. Brueggemann’s perspective is now very different from the 1970s, and witnesses to a shift not only in his own views, but also to the willingness of mainline American Protestant churches to be overtly critical of Israel in a way that was unthinkable a generation or so ago.

Along with this shift in one direction among the more liberal American churches, a shift has occurred in the other direction among conservative evangelical Christians influenced by forms of Christian Zionism. I sometimes tell the story of an experience I had when I lived in Jerusalem for five years in the 1970s. I was friendly with one of the wives of the Palestinian Anglican clergy. Her husband was then the senior Anglican pastor of Ramallah, a town just north of Jerusalem. She, apart from being a loyal clergy wife, was a well-known Palestinian poet.

I happened to encounter her one day in the courtyard of St George’s Anglican Cathedral when she was gasping, almost hyperventilating, with disbelief. She had just come from lunch at one of the Christian guesthouses in Jerusalem where she had had a conversation with a Christian woman pilgrim from the West, visiting the Holy Land for a couple of weeks. This visitor, on discovering that my friend was a Palestinian

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.”

In those more innocent days of the 1970s both my Palestinian friend and I regarded such views as extraordinary and extreme. So I am perturbed that 40 years on what seemed then to be extraordinary has, with the rise of Christian Zionism in the United States and the Jewish religious right in Israel itself, become far more acceptable to think.

However changing views on this topic are not just the prerogative of Christians. There have also been changes in Jewish circles in the United States, particularly among the younger generation. There’s still a general commitment among the vast majority to the importance of the continuing existence of the State of Israel, but they are now much more willing to be openly critical of current Israeli stances and actions. I had a memorable conversation in the summer of 2015 with a young Jewish woman from New York. She commented that she, and many young Jews like herself, committed as they were to humane and humanitarian values, felt “betrayed” (her word) by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in particular because of Israeli actions in Gaza in the summer of 2014.

One thing is sure: from the Christian perspective (and probably from the Jewish perspective as well) when it comes to Christian-Jewish relations and the issue of Israel/Palestine, there are more questions than answers. I have been struck by how many publications on this subject carry a question mark in their title. *Sharing One Hope?* is a Church of England 2001 report on Jewish-Christian relations. *Land of Promise?* is a 2012 Anglican Communion report on the land and Christian Zionism. And now Brueggemann’s *Chosen?*

Such titles witness to the essential ambiguity and mystery of the relationship between Jews and Christians at many levels, theological, historical, and political. My husband, Alan Amos, speaks of Judaism being for Christians, “a living question mark.” That phrase catches my own vision. It is true to the apophatic tradition which I cherish and which Christians ultimately derive from the elusiveness of the name of God as it is portrayed in Exodus 3, a fundamental biblical text for both Christians and Jews.

Perhaps part of the reason for my hesitation about the “theological advance guard” approach is my perception that Christians don’t actually need and should not seek total clarity and coherence in our thinking about Judaism. It is its very difference from – yet also closeness to – Christianity for which we can esteem this religion and its people.

Thirteen years ago, on the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Cardinal Walter Kasper described Judaism in a wonderfully evocative phrase as “the sacrament of every

otherness.” Kasper’s words offer us an inexhaustible richness for reflection. Through deepening their relationship with Jews, Christians can come to a deeper understanding of our need to value the other, the one not like us, if we are going to live healthily in God’s world.

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# Bridge over Troubled Water: Towards a Journey of Friendship

Eeuwout van der Linden

## Mixed feelings

What are your associations when you hear the word “Israel”? I sometimes ask this in my work in Jewish-Christian relations. A variety of answers are given: mixed feelings, fatigue, a raw nerve, conflict between Jews and Palestinians, people of God, the relationship between land, state and people, covenant, source of joy. Mixed feelings predominate, no doubt because of politics.

Not so long ago, many Christians in my country were strongly in favour of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Israel was the land of the Bible and the foundation of the state was seen as a miracle. Such sympathizing was strengthened by a great sense of guilt after World War II. This attitude changed after two Intifadas, the Lebanon War and the Gaza War. The State of Israel came more and more under judgement in the courtroom of international opinion. People got embarrassed. How could it be that the Holy Land seems so unholy? Church members became divided and they still do. They had to choose – or so it was felt – between support for Palestinians or support for Jews.

I myself have experienced this shift over the years. I have lost my naiveté and become more critical. At the same time, I try to make a distinction between politics and theology, realizing how mingled they can become. The relationship between Jews and Christians, between the Jewish and Christian traditions, is something different from the conflict in the Middle East. What journey do we travel?

## A Journey of Friendship

In June 2015, I was in Rome. A major conference was held by the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ). The conference was dedicated to 50 years of

commemoration of *Nostra Aetate*. This important declaration by the Second Vatican Council brought a revolution in Jewish-Christian relations. Then began, in the words of Pope Francis, “our journey of friendship,” that not only for the Roman Catholic but also for other churches has proved essential. Of course, there was a lot which preceded *Nostra Aetate*, such as the conference on antisemitism in the Swiss town of Seelisberg in 1947, where immediately after the Shoah Jews and Christians came together to offer new perspectives and produced the so-called *Ten Points for Jewish-Christian Relations* (revised in 2009 in the *Twelve Points of Berlin*). It would lead to the creation of the ICCJ.

That we, both Jews and Christians, travel a journey of friendship may be a little bit too early to say. I would very much support it, but when I look at the relations between Jews and Christians, for example, in the Netherlands, there is a lot yet to be done. We are at times cooperating, we try to know each other, and some of us become friends, but most of the time we are busy with our own business of troubles, sorrows and joys. Still, much work has already been done to prepare for friendship.

## From Mission to Dialogue in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

The Dutch Reformed Church had already sought new relations years before the Second Vatican Council and had developed new visions. Such visions include: an understanding that the Old Testament has its own place and cannot solely be read from the perspective of the New Testament; Israel is not something just from the past, there is still a vibrant and living Judaism today; and mission to the Jews should be abandoned, for how can you evangelize people who gave to the world the notion of a God, whose name is: I am, I will be with

you? Instead there is an urge for dialogue. In 1949, the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church proposed a special Israel Sunday. At that time, the State of Israel had just been established, but the main reason for initiating such a Sunday was reflection on the relationship of the Church with Israel. Since 1950, Israel Sunday falls on every first Sunday in October, because it is in this period the major feasts in Judaism are being held. Due to mixed emotions and varying theo-political insights, not everyone nowadays greets Israel Sunday with warm feelings. Of which Israel are we speaking: the Jewish people, the State of Israel, or the Jewish religious tradition?

In the Church Order of the united Protestant Church in the Netherlands (since 2004, the Dutch Reformed, Reformed and Lutheran churches are united), the phrase “unrelinquishable bond with Israel” was incorporated. “The Church is called to give shape to the unrelinquishable bond with the Jewish people.” The term “unrelinquishable” was originally used in direct relation to the negligent attitude of the Church with respect to the Holocaust and antisemitism. The word “unrelinquishable” reminds the Church of this fateful history and calls for a fundamentally different attitude. In addition, it reminds the Church of the theological, spiritual and mystical link between both traditions. In part, we share the same scriptures. We worship the same God. Jesus was a Jew, as were all the key persons in the New Testament. Judaism and Christianity are two strands that have grown from the heritage of biblical Israel. We belong to the same family.

The Protestant Church has various vocations: besides the vocation to shape the unrelinquishable bond with the people of Israel and to dialogue, there is also the ecumenical vocation to seek the unity and communion between Christians worldwide (among them Palestinian Christians) and the diaconal vocation to stand up for justice and righteousness (in the Middle East as well). Even though there might be tension

between all these vocations, the Church cannot abandon any of them.

All vocations apply to the whole church. The vocation in connection with the Jewish people is first mentioned in the Church Order. This indicates the importance the Protestant Church attaches to dialogue with the people of Israel. It expresses its awareness that the roots of Christianity are Jewish.

### **Bridge over Troubled Water**

Jewish-Christian relations have long been strained. The Jewish people were collectively held responsible for the death of Christ. It was common for Christians to believe that Jews had always lived in darkness, that Jews should repent, that the church had taken the place of Judaism. At some cathedrals, statues of a blindfolded woman, representing the synagogue, are to be found as a painful sign of hopefully former times. As if to illustrate the history of strained relations between Jews and Christians, during the ICCJ meeting in Rome, the power frequently went out in the conference room. During one of these occurrences, Rabbi David Rosen played “Imagine” by John Lennon.

The idea that new visions can only come about with much strenuous and energy-consuming effort was made clear by a performance of Symphony n.2 F Major “The Council” by Federico Corrubolo, played by a youth orchestra during the course of the ICCJ event. The music passages were interspersed with excerpts from “My Journal of the Council” by Yves Congar. Towards the end of the Second Vatican Council, there was a moment of great despair by Congar, which reminded me of the efforts to keep Greece in the Eurozone, or with the struggle of how best to deal with the refugees in Europe: “I am tired of the assemblies at Saint Peter’s ... Each person speaks based on their own training, synthesis, fixed ideas ... The work tends to grow larger, with the risk of depleting itself or crumbling under its

weight ... Undoubtedly, the Pope makes great symbolic gestures, but behind them there is neither the theology nor the concrete meaning that those gestures would require ...” The piece ended *allegro con brio*.

With small steps, there has been a change. A bridge between the two traditions is being built in the last decades. There is the realization that Christianity has Jewish roots. Jesus and Paul were Jews and the New Testament is, for the most part, Jewish. As Edward Kessler said: “Jesus was born a Jew, he lived as a Jew and he died as a Jew. He had a Jewish mother and his fierce criticism of some Pharisees comes from a close relationship with them.” Gabriele Boccaccini said much the same about Paul. “Paul was a Jew born of Jewish parents, he was circumcised and nothing in his work suggests the idea that he became apostate. Paul was not a Christian.”

At the conference, I heard many lively conversations. Jews and Christians drink from the same source. We worship the same God of Israel, who is the God of the whole world. “We are twins,” Gabriele Boccaccini said, while he was wobbling his feet on his chair as if to emphasize that this thought sets things into motion. “We come from the same womb, we have the same mother.” I found this a marvelous picture. We have gone our own ways, but there is no question about our constant crossing of each other’s path. As twins, we have too much in common. From the heart of the Torah, Prophets and the gospel, key questions are being posed to all humankind. Where are you, Adam, Eve? Are you a guardian of your fellow human beings? How do you live?

### Meeting with the Pope

A highlight of the ICCJ conference was the meeting with the Pope. A special moment

occurred when the Argentine Rabbi Abraham Skorka and Pope Francis embraced each other. When he was still a Cardinal, Jorge Bergoglio had written a book together with Skorka. In one picture, it showed to me the new relationship between the two traditions: a meeting instead of a call to repentance, a hug instead of hate. The Pope stated that Christian confessions find their unity in Christ, Judaism in the Torah. Both faith traditions find their foundation in the one God. When I myself shook the Pope’s hand, I brought him greetings from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Again, this is typical of other relationships nowadays. A Protestant minister who shakes hands with the Pope, and can come home with it...

### The Spirit Blows

At the end of the conference I visited St Peter’s Basilica. High in the chorus, rising above the majestic altar, I saw a stained glass window of the Holy Spirit, which reminded me of the logo of the Protestant Church. We need the Spirit of God, I thought. The Spirit can create friendships and can playfully blow through barriers. The Spirit calls us to the imitation of the one God. We can cross the bridge over our troubled waters when we let the Spirit hover over it. In the end, we might become friends.

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# Confessions of a Jewish Ecumenist

## Deborah Weissman

I often joke that I have probably attended more World Council of Churches functions than any other Jew in the world. I feel that I owe the WCC a great debt of gratitude. In June of 1988, through the WCC, I underwent a life-transforming experience. They invited about sixty women from all over the world, representing nine different religions, to a week-long conference in Toronto, on religion, politics and feminism. The nine religions represented at the Toronto conference were Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Sikh and Baha'i faiths, Native American Indian spiritual traditions, and the Wiccan religion. This week was, to me, life-changing. It set me on a path that led to my further involvement in interreligious work, including much with the WCC. I have been to many conferences since. But I don't think I've ever attended a conference quite like this one. Usually, the most important part is the informal contact over coffee and meals. In Toronto, every morning I awoke eager to attend the sessions themselves.

In what way did this experience transform me? Growing up in the USA, I had always had Christian friends. But I had made a conscious decision in 1972 to move to Israel and work in the field of Jewish education. Thus, for the first 16 years of living in Jerusalem, I knew relatively few non-Jews. Through my work in Diaspora Jewish education, I met people from throughout the world—but they were all Jews. The women's conference in Toronto put me on a trajectory that led to my devoting years to interreligious dialogue in general and Jewish-Christian dialogue in particular. From 2002 until 2009, I was part of a WCC international interreligious framework called "Thinking Together," with Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims. We served as a kind of think tank and issued several publications. I am convinced that

dialogue and positive interaction among people of different religious and spiritual traditions is one of the important ways through which we can build peace and understanding in our world.

One of the amazing discoveries for me has been what Jews share in common with Hindus – for example, a similar attachment to our respective homelands. Neither religion is on a world campaign of proselytizing. One of my dialogue partners insists that Hinduism at its heart is monotheistic, and that the many deities are manifestations of the central Godhead, an idea that echoes some strands of Jewish mysticism, or Kabbalah. Any similarities between the Hindu and Jewish traditions are not likely to be the product of historical interaction, so that makes them even more interesting to me.

When I began this journey, I was of the opinion that Jews and Muslims had a great deal in common, more than either had with Christians. Historically, Jewish commentators have had fewer theological problems with Islam than with Christianity. Muslims seem to be even more radical in their monotheism and rejection of images than we are. Both traditions are based on a complex legal system – Sharia and Halakha, respectively – which include some of the same prescriptions (such as male circumcision) and prohibitions (such as pork). Both are de-centralized and generally non-hierarchical.

Still, since 2006, I have focused primarily on the bilateral dialogue between Jews and Christians, which, I believe, reflects a unique relationship. I served for two terms as President of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Under my leadership, the ICCJ revived a framework called the International Abrahamic Forum for trilateral dialogue among Jews, Christians and

Muslims. I believe that that conversation is increasingly important, especially as more and more Muslims immigrate to Western countries. Some Jews, frightened by the rise of violent forms of fundamentalist Islam, have begun to view Jewish-Christian dialogue as a waste of time, in which there is very little left to discuss. For them, dialogue with Muslims is a political and existential need, of great urgency. There are even some who would like to change the ICCJ into the “ICCJM.” I support trilateral dialogue as well as bilateral Jewish-Muslim or Christian-Muslim dialogue ... but not at the expense of Jewish-Christian dialogue. When a third group is involved, there is a different dynamic.

In order to explain why, I would like to borrow a phrase from Psalms 34:14, “turn from evil, and do good.” Under the category of “turn from evil,” there are two aspects of the bilateral Jewish-Christian relationship:

- 1) There is still a great deal of unfinished business between us. One need only glance at Sections 1 through 8 of the ICCJ Berlin Document from 2009<sup>1</sup> to see that we have much work to do on both sides. Many non-Western Christians, including in the Middle East, adhere to beliefs in supersessionism and even traditional Christian anti-Judaism. Christianity is growing fastest in places where there are very few, if any, Jews. Jews, for our part, must respond more significantly to the profound changes that have taken place within the churches in the last 50 years.
- 2) Unfortunately, even when a problem appears to have been “solved,” we cannot always assume that it won’t crop up again. There needs to be constant vigilance on the part of all sides to the dialogue to make sure that its positive outcomes remain intact. We have witnessed in the last few years an alarming resurgence of antisemitism, particularly in Europe.

These points do not necessarily mean that our dialogue hasn’t succeeded so far. As Hebrew University Bible scholar, the late and sorely missed Moshe Greenberg, once suggested, on another topic: “Even the choicest vine needs seasonal pruning to ensure more fruitful growth.”<sup>2</sup>

But once we have “turned away from evil,” it still remains for us to “do good.” Here again, I would point out two aspects:

- 1) Even if “the problems” had all been solved, Jews and Christians have a great deal of common ground, chiefly because of historical ties and shared scripture. I do not know of two other distinct faith communities who have such a close tie. Study of our shared texts and also of each other’s texts and their interpretations is particularly rewarding and spiritually enriching. Because we share common scripture, we also share some common liturgy; for example, the Psalms. Here in Jerusalem, I belong to a Jewish-Christian study group called The Rainbow. One year, we chose as our theme for that year “The Psalms.” One month, a Christian would give his or her interpretation of a particular Psalm and a Jew would respond; the next month, vice versa. Clearly, such a dialogue, meaningful and important to Christians and Jews, is irrelevant to Muslims and any others who do not have the Psalms as a sacred text.
- 2) For Christians, the study of Judaism is the study of the Jewish roots of their own faith. For Jews, the study of Christianity is, at the very least, an exploration of “the road not taken.” It can also shed much light on Jewish culture in the early centuries of the Common Era. Much of Rabbinic Judaism developed in response to the challenge of Christianity. Learning about the other helps us learn more and understand more about ourselves.

On June 30, 2015, the ICCJ was privileged to be hosted by Pope Francis in the Vatican.

Speaking to the 260 participants in our annual international conference, he said, referring to *Nostra Aetate*, “This document represents a definitive ‘yes’ to the Jewish roots of Christianity and an irrevocable ‘no’ to antisemitism.”

I hope that his optimism is justified and that Jews and Christians continue our special dialogue, while continuing, as well, to interact on other levels with other “Abrahamic” worshippers and the rest of our fellow human beings.

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<sup>1</sup> “A Time for Recommitment: The Twelve Points of Berlin.” *ICCJ Website*. ICCJ. 27 January 2011. Accessed 24 May 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Moshe Greenberg, as quoted in Seymour Fox, Israel Scheffler, and Daniel Marom (eds.), *Visions of Jewish Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 145.



# **Not the Same, Not the Other in the Same Way as Any Other: Praying the Psalms and the Jewish-Christian Relationship**

**Jeremy Worthen**

The book of Psalms has provided texts for Christian praise and prayer, public worship and personal meditation, throughout the history of the church.<sup>1</sup> The way it has been used has varied over the centuries. In particular, the extent to which a commitment to praying through the psalter in its entirety has been a cardinal feature of spirituality for Christians has not remained altogether constant. Contemporary scholarship suggests it was the fourth-century monks who introduced it,<sup>2</sup> and arguably it was then in some churches of the Protestant Reformation, not least the Church of England, that this originally monastic model came closest to forming the faith of all believers.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the psalter has been eclipsed in the experience of many Protestant and Anglican Christians, for reasons that would include the rather different spiritual focus of revivalist forms of Protestantism and the unease generated by modern biblical studies around the kind of appropriation of scriptural texts required for this spiritual practice. At the same time, attempts inspired by the Liturgical Movement in Roman Catholic and other contexts to reinvigorate the daily office, with its extensive diet of psalmody, for the whole people of God have not been wholly successful. Nonetheless, psalms retain a regular place in the public, liturgical life of many Christian traditions, being prayerfully recited day by day by communities and by individual Christians and featuring prominently in acts of worship on Sundays and festivals. They are constantly quoted and paraphrased in hymns and songs from all periods, including the present day. Individual Christians turn to the Book of Psalms to find words with which to speak to

God in their deepest distress and their highest joy.

Where Christians are aware of Judaism as a living form of faith, they are bound to become conscious that Jews, like them, address God through these same texts.<sup>4</sup> Judaism also gives a central place to the psalms in its liturgical traditions. Judaism also fosters the praying of the psalms by believers in their particular personal circumstances. The use of the psalms to speak to God is a deep-seated aspect of both faiths, so deep-seated that neither could relinquish it entirely without cutting itself off from the normative sources for its current identity and self-understanding. Of course, the shared spiritual practice of praying the psalms is bound up with the overlapping but not identical scriptural canon of Christianity and Judaism. Yet as Athanasius argued in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, part of the uniqueness of the Book of Psalms within the Bible is that these are not just words from God to us, words to be listened to and heeded, but words from God to us for us to speak back to God.<sup>5</sup> Christians and Jews therefore have a shared stock of texts on which they draw when they seek to respond to the divine. Moreover, those texts provide them with a common vocabulary of prayer and praise.

That is one reason why there may be something that jars for Christians when Judaism is spoken of as one among many “other” religions. There is simply no parallel for this level of shared spiritual practice, extending to the use of the same texts for the same central purpose, with another religion. How can Judaism be just one among many others when there is this common ground at the heart of what we do and who we are?

At the same time, Christians who become aware of Judaism as a living faith community that shares in the use of the psalms to express its praises and prayers are also likely to realize that neither is it simply the “same.” If the psalms have a central place within the historic liturgical traditions of both religions, that place remains located alongside other texts – and those other texts are, for the most part, not shared, and in many cases not capable of being shared, because they are bound up with the differences between the two religions. Yet at the same time, neither can Judaism be easily categorized with the “other” forms of religion that Christianity encounters at the far side of its own borders, because Judaism appears both inside them and beyond them: <sup>6</sup> speaking the same prayers and the same praises, even while asserting different and at times contradictory things.

Now, it is of course entirely proper at this point to observe that shared words are not the same as shared meanings, and it is clear enough that Christians and Jews have some different horizons for meaning in reading and praying the psalms. Given, however, that the most fundamental dimension of meaning here is that of address to God, then the only way to deny any common horizon of meaning at all when Christians and Jews pray the psalms is to deny that they are both addressing the same God. Because of the commitment of both Christianity and Judaism to belief in one God, such a denial can only be expressed by claiming that while one of these faiths in speaking the psalms is addressing the true God, the other is merely casting words at an idol, a demon or a fiction. Such assertions are not without precedent over two millennia of polemical exchanges.<sup>7</sup> All major Western Christian churches, however, have made formal statements since the Second World War and the Holocaust that flatly contradict any assertion of this kind.<sup>8</sup> Christian doctrine, therefore, is that Jews and Christians alike in saying these words worship the one God of Israel and make intercession to the one God of Israel.

Therefore they cannot each be doing something completely unrelated to the other in this shared practice of psalm reading, which is so central for them both.

Furthermore, the practice depends on the belief that the words we are saying speak truth about who we are before God, as well as speaking truth about who God is for us. That is, by using the psalms in this way we are saying something about the relationship between the persons praying them and the one to whom the prayers are directed. Most obviously, we are claiming a continuity between the first person pronouns of the psalms and ourselves, a continuity sufficiently strong that we can inhabit the “I” and “we” of the texts: we are affirming there is a theological identity here that permits an act of hermeneutical identification. Moreover, that act of identification then implies a commitment to finding ways to relate the world of the text to our own world. Israel, Jacob, Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh – we, too, own these names as our names. Jerusalem, Zion, the temple, the law, the reign of God, the deliverance of the poor – we, too, make these the subjects of our speech, the objects of our longing.

For Christian theology, such identification can only proceed from prior identification with Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> We are in him, our life is found in union with him, and we recognize him as the Word in all the words of Scripture; therefore we can inhabit the text of the psalms and the world that they open up for us. The act of hermeneutical identification in praying and praising with the psalms in Judaism clearly does not proceed from the same basis but has quite different roots. This does not imply, however, that Christians are bound to regard it as mistaken and to deny any distinctive relationship between the Jewish community speaking the psalms and the realities named in the text. Some forms of Christian belief have done this: supersessionism (to use the standard shorthand here) in both its “conservative” and “liberal” forms, where “conservative”

describes a position where those realities now refer exclusively to the church and “liberal” one where they now only have a universal meaning that in principle extends beyond any particular religious tradition. Yet all such forms of belief are contradicted by Romans 9:4: “For they are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.”

Christians, therefore, should be able to recognize the “worship” that is God’s gracious gift in the Jewish practice of speaking praise and prayer to God in the psalms, even as they acknowledge that the meanings given to the words in the context of this shared practice will be in many cases divergent, because the conscious orientation to the mystery of Christ that shapes the dynamics of Christian spirituality is inevitably absent. That is, they will recognize Jews as a religious community other than themselves, yet using the same God-given words to address the same God who gave them to us; inhabiting with Christians the fullness of the meaning of those words, and yet contesting their account of how that fullness should be described. Not the same, therefore, and not other in the same way as any other. That is the uniqueness of the relationship to Judaism for Christianity. One could start from other places, with other practices and other themes, to sketch it out, but the shared practice of praying the psalms shows up the decisive parameters here well enough.

None of this implies anything directly about the relationship of Judaism to Christianity. The relationship between the two religions is not straightforwardly symmetrical (human relationships rarely, if ever, are), and there is no reason to think that the phenomenon of shared practice with regard to the psalter should be interpreted in a symmetrical way. Nonetheless, for Judaism, too, the uniqueness of this sharing could perhaps also prompt reflection about the particularity of its relation to Christianity,

and how it might most truthfully be described.

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<sup>1</sup> For overviews of this subject, see for instance William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, with Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> So Paul F. Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (London: SPCK), 117-31.

<sup>3</sup> George Guiver, *Company of Voices: Daily Prayer and the People of God* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1988), 115-25.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Gillingham, in *Psalms through the Centuries*, Vol. 1, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), weaves together the history of the psalms in Judaism and Christianity.

<sup>5</sup> Athanasius, *Letter to Marcellinus* 11, in *The Life of Anthony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980), 109-11.

<sup>6</sup> I attempted to articulate this way of understanding Christianity’s relationship with Judaism, which might be traced back to Franz Rosenzweig, in *The Internal Foe: Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Shaping of Christian Theology* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 317-63; David Ellenson, “A Jewish View of the Christian God: Some Cautionary and Hopeful Remarks,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, (eds.) Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Samuel and Michael A. Signer (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press), 69-76.

<sup>8</sup> See the documents assembled Franklin Sherman, (ed.), *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, Vol. 1, *The Road to Reconciliation (1945-1985)* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Worthen, “Praying the Psalms in the Name of Christ: Christian-Jewish Relations since Vatican II and a Pre-Modern Spiritual Tradition,” in *Interpreting the ‘Spirit of Assisi’: Challenges to Interfaith Dialogue in a Pluralistic World* (eds.) Maria Diemling and Thomas J. Herbst (Canterbury: FISC, 2013), 235-51.

# Feminism as Meeting Point

Helene Egnell

Feminism has indeed been a meeting point for Jewish and Christian women, even though their sisterhood has been as ambiguous as any sisterly relationship. From the beginnings of modern religious feminism, it has been a common project for Jews and Christians – but Christian feminist theology still has not always managed to avoid the pitfalls of classical Christian anti-Judaism. However, the joint efforts of Christian and Jewish feminists can revitalize and offer new perspectives to Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Judith Plaskow attests to the cooperation between Jewish and Christian feminists:

*We formulated a critique of patriarchal religion together; we argued about the depths of patriarchy in Judaism and Christianity; we discussed together what it means to recover and make visible women's history; and we struggled together with integrating women's experience into our respective traditions.*<sup>1</sup>

An example of how feminist approaches can yield new insights is a discussion on the concept of covenant by Annette Daum and Deborah McCauley from 1983.<sup>2</sup> They want to rethink the idea of covenant in terms of our experiences of human relations. The traditional understandings of covenant are tainted with the idea of religious triumphalism, and is detrimental both for the relation between men and women, and between Christians and Jews: "Implicit in the symbolism of covenant is that men are more chosen/elect than women, Jews are more elect than Christians, Christians are more elect than Jews."<sup>3</sup> A feminist understanding of covenant should avoid ideas of election and exclusiveness, and instead focus on "responsibility and inclusiveness," where responsibility is spelled "response-ability," the ability to respond.

The theology of the cross is another area where Jewish and feminist critique can inform and strengthen each other. Mary C. Boys brings in the feminist and womanist critique of how some theologies of the cross sanction violence against women into her critique of the "toxic effect" which the Christian "sacred story" has had for Jews. Again, the feminist response has been to rethink redemption in terms of right relationships rather than redemptive violence.<sup>4</sup>

However, this is not only a story of harmonious collaboration. The discussion on anti-Judaism in feminist theology was started in 1980 by Judith Plaskow and Annette Daum, with two articles, "Blaming Jews for the Birth of Patriarchy" and "Blaming the Jews for the Death of the Goddess," respectively, in *Lilith* No 7. In 1986, *Christian Jewish Relations* devoted an issue to this topic. A comprehensive study on the subject is Katharina von Kellenbach's *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings*, Oxford: OUP, 1994.

The charge of anti-Judaism in feminist writings can be summarized in three points: (1) making Judaism the anti-thesis of (especially early, woman-friendly) Christianity; (2) subsuming Jewish (feminist) interests under Christian ones; and (3) scapegoating Judaism for the death of the Goddess and the rise of patriarchy.

In the early days of feminist theology, the catchword "Jesus was a feminist," coined by Leonard Swidler in 1971 in a very influential article, tended to set Jesus over and against a thoroughly patriarchal Jewish community. In order to safeguard Jesus' uniqueness, his affirmation of women was set against a foil of negative sayings about women in contemporary Jewish writings, while neglecting those which show an attitude similar to Jesus'. Often the Jewish sources

quoted are written centuries after the gospels, and should rightly be compared with the church fathers. Jesus is especially constructed as un-Jewish in contrast to the Jewishness of Paul.

While it has largely disappeared from scholarly works, thanks to the critique by Judith Plaskow, Susannah Heschel, Katharina von Kellenbach and others, this antithetical rhetoric is still very common in sermons and popular feminist writing. Some kind of “trickle-down effect” seems to be in place, where once groundbreaking feminist insights are now part and parcel of mainstream liberal theology – but unfortunately, the anti-Jewish tendencies remain intact.

When Christian feminists assume that what is liberating for Christian feminists is liberating for everyone else, they subsume Jewish interests under Christian ones. One example is the favourite Christian feminist Bible verse in Gal. 3:28, which, while it asserts that “there is neither male nor female,” from a Jewish point of view it appears to deny Judaism the right to exist as an independent religion (“neither Jew nor Greek”). Another example is when Christian feminists, in order to avoid the patriarchal “Lord” instead use the unspeakable Name of God. *The Psalter in Inclusive Language* is an example of this approach. With these examples, sensitivity to Christian feminist concerns is achieved at the expense of sensitivity to Jewish concerns.

As Jews in the Christian tradition were charged with decide for having killed Jesus, and through history have been scapegoated for disasters like pestilence, in feminist theology, the charge is for killing the Goddess and introducing patriarchy. Feminist scholars researching early matriarchy have read the Hebrew scriptures as evidence of how matriarchal, peaceful, Goddess-worshipping societies of the Near East were transformed into patriarchal, violent war-faring nations through the imposed worship of a single male god. Though this view is primarily embraced by

post-Christian feminists, it has also influenced Christian feminist interpretations of the Hebrew scriptures.

To these three feminist guises of classical anti-Judaism, we can add the Christian misuse of internal feminist critique of Jewish theology and practice in anti-Jewish discourse. Jewish feminists have found it problematic that the sign of the covenant, circumcision (*B’rit mila*), is exclusively male. In a recent discussion about circumcision in Swedish media, two (female) priests used this feminist critique as an argument to legislate against circumcision. Unfortunately, this misuse of an internal discussion can contribute to a backlash for Jewish feminism, and its alliance with Christian feminists, as it is always sensitive for members of a minority to voice critique publicly.

However, Jewish and Christian feminists have shared agendas, not only in the general sense of making women’s voices heard within patriarchal traditions, but also in the insight that there are parallels between misogyny and anti-Judaism. Women and Jews have been the inferior “Other,” upon whom undesirable qualities are projected. Judaism is both described, and slighted, in feminine terms.

Feminist scholarship has detected a parallelism between the persecution of Jews, culminating in the Holocaust, and the medieval witch-hunts. The same scapegoating mechanisms were behind them, as both groups could be constructed as symbols of evil. As women must forever atone for the fall of Eve, Jews must forever atone for the death of Jesus. There is a negative correlation between pogroms and witch-hunts: for instance, it was only when German cities were “Judenrein” in the 15<sup>th</sup> century that witch-hunts started there. When one scapegoat had disappeared, another had to be found. The witches’ pointed hat (now made famous by the Harry Potter movies) is reminiscent of the hat that Jews were forced to wear – it was also put on the heads of “witches” on their way to

the stake. The similarities between the persecution of Jews and of witches cannot be explained by any sociological similarities between the actual groups. It was their status as “heretics” and symbols of evil, which were threatening to the church authorities and made them targets for scapegoating.

Exposing the similar structures of anti-Judaism and misogyny helps us to analyze and understand both phenomena. It can also help us to realize the need for intersectional approaches and to appreciate diversity in general. Again, there can be clashes when Jewish feminists encounter not only white Christian feminists, but those from other ethnicities and oppressed groups.

Point three in ICCJ’s “Berlin document” *A Time for Recommitment*<sup>5</sup> from 2009, urges its readers to ensure “that emerging theological movements from Asia, Africa and Latin America, and feminist, liberationist or other approaches integrate an accurate understanding of Judaism and Christian-Jewish relations into their theological formulations.” Many Christian feminists from the global South with postcolonial sensitivities might detect an imperialist agenda and a patronizing attitude in the words “an accurate understanding” – accurate according to whom?

The problems are illustrated in a roundtable discussion on “Anti-Judaism and Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation” in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Spring 2004. Jewish feminist Amy-Jill Levine challenges Christian feminist theologians from the global South about the anti-Judaism she claims has “infected” their biblical interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

Levine expresses her disappointment that “feminists conscienciated by colonialism” do not recognize the mechanisms of “othering” of Jews in the New Testament and Christian interpretative tradition.<sup>7</sup>

She gives a plethora of examples of how feminist theologians from the developing world reiterate all the anti-Jewish stereotypes in feminist theology described above. Further, she argues, “postcolonial” theologians mistakenly identify practices of their indigenous cultures concerning taboos, purity etc. with corresponding ideas in the Hebrew scriptures, without comprehending that their meanings differ.

Two different issues are at stake in the discussion: is antisemitism a “special case,” or just one of the evils that plague humanity, on a par with the atrocities colonialism has wrought on the colonized countries, and the rights Christians have to read the Hebrew scriptures through the lens of their own cultures. On the issue of antisemitism there was a clear divide between the white Western women respondents and the women from the global South who saw it as one of many evils, and one for which they refused to take responsibility.

Kenyan theologian Musimbi Kanyoro, in her response, gives a new “twist” to the question of the ownership of the Hebrew scriptures. She claims that African people identify with the Jewish people through their closeness to the “Old Testament,” though admitting that this identification can be a problem, because “[t]his appropriation of another people’s culture can implicitly be dangerous if it gives a license to provide critique, which the owners of that culture understand in a different way.”<sup>8</sup>

Kanyoro nonetheless defends African theologians’ right to claim the “Old Testament” as their own scripture, to use it to condone or to condemn African indigenous culture. When the Bible is criticized, it is seen as a Western, not a Jewish product, she states.

In this roundtable, there is a simultaneous intellectual willingness to understand and grapple with the issue of antisemitism in “post-colonial Biblical interpretation,” and an emotional resistance against it. This emotional resistance has partly to do with

the fact that women from the developing world do not feel the same complicity in anti-Judaism that Western women do, partly because of their experience of being marginalized by Western discourse. In the context of race discourse, they also perceive Jewish women as being white.<sup>9</sup>

If handled constructively, Third World feminist theologians' participation in Jewish-Christian dialogue could be seen in terms of a "third space,"<sup>10</sup> which could free the dialogue from the constraints of guilt and defensiveness that so often hamper the European context. Postcolonial theory can expose the intersection of colonialist discourse, Christian triumphalism and anti-Judaism.

It has been a while since the dialogues I have revisited in this article took place. I do not see too much activity in Jewish-Christian feminist dialogue at present. As antisemitism appears to grow all over the world, it is important that the insights of the early Jewish critique of Christian feminism do not get lost, and that the fruits of the constructive project are not wasted. It is urgent to bring feminists from the global South into the dialogue as an important voice, and not only to admonish them to adopt an "accurate understanding" of Jewish-Christian relations.

It is time to rediscover Jewish-Christian sisterhood in all its complexities, for the sake of feminism, for both our religious tradition, and for Jewish-Christian relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Plaskow, "Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 8, No 2 (1991), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Anette Daum and Deborah MacCauley, "Jewish-Christian Feminist Dialogue: A Wholistic Vision" in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol XXXVIII, No. 2 (1983).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Boys, *Redeeming Our Sacred Story* (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 19-23.

<sup>5</sup> ICCJ, "A Time for Recommitment: Building New Relationship between Jews and Christians." ICCJ (2009) *ICCJ Website*. Web. Accessed 24 May 2016.

<sup>6</sup> See roundtable discussion on "Anti-Judaism and Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, No. 1 (2004), 91-132.

<sup>7</sup> Amy Levine, "Roundtable Discussion: Anti-Judaism and Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2004) 92.

<sup>8</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, "Roundtable Discussion Response" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2004) 108.

<sup>9</sup> During the Apartheid era in South Africa, Jews were classified as whites.

<sup>10</sup> The concept "third space" is attributed to Homi K. Bhabha and refers to the space "in-between" cultures, or in between positions of duality.

# Christianity's Original Sin?

Tatha Wiley

Can the church itself be guilty of sin? In 1994, Pope John Paul II addressed that question.<sup>1</sup> He distinguished between the sins of individuals and that of the church. The church as such does not sin, according to John Paul. Individuals do, and repentance is essential for forgiveness.

But then, what about Christian antisemitism?<sup>2</sup> Christianity's entire identity has been shaped by appropriating Jewish symbols and declaring itself the replacement of Judaism in God's covenant. According to Christians, Jews did not accept Jesus as the hoped-for Messiah, and God has been punishing them ever since. They are a "stiff-necked" people. Their blindness condemns them. Such are the outlines of a supersessionist theology which took hold in the scriptures themselves, was developed by patristic theologians, was assumed by medieval theologians, and was not rejected until the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* at the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

The relationship between Christianity and Judaism is special and will remain so because Jesus was a Jew. Both Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity were developments that took place within Judaism – from the Pharisees and the Jesus Movement until after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Yet, for centuries, that relationship has been systematically distorted by Christian antisemitism.

We know today that Christian antisemitism is an ideology of superiority, like racism or sexism. It is worse, though, because it presents its judgments as God's judgments. It presents a caricature of Judaism. Its misunderstandings of Judaism are legion. At the heart of the distortions is the claim that Judaism is legalistic, a religion of "works-righteousness," of thinking one could earn one's salvation by fulfilling the commands of the Torah. Christians demeaned Jewish

spirituality and called Judaism an invalid expression of religious faith.

Christian antisemitism is the false fact in which the truth of the gospel has taken form. It is the "root sin," the original sin, of Christianity. As individual Christians, we are, so to speak, born into it. We contribute to it insofar as we continue to promote the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. It is generated not only by individuals but by Christian institutions, their traditions and practices, and it pervades the identity of the church around the world. Supersessionism is a distortion of Judaism that permeates everything in Christianity – its scripture, its liturgy, and its theology. Several brief examples will illustrate how it continues to saturate Christian thought and language in these three areas.

## Scripture

Christian scripture itself is tainted by the gospel writers' anti-Judaic polemic engrained in these authoritative narratives. Witness this passage from the gospel of Matthew, in which blame for the suffering and death of Jesus is shifted from the Romans to the "the Jews":

*Now Jesus stood before the governor and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner to the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time, they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the*



*judgment seat, his wife sent word to him. "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." Now the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want for me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood! See to it yourselves." Then the people as a whole answered, "Let his blood be on us and our children!" (Matt. 27:11-25, NRSV)*

This classic text is pure theatre. Only an omniscient narrator would know Pilate's private thoughts and conversation, such as his exchange with his wife. Pilate is a powerful, brutal man. That he would negotiate with a crowd – "What should I do?" – is difficult to imagine. That he would feel any concern for Jesus' fate or ask, "What evil has he done?" is more difficult to imagine. That he "saw that he could do nothing" is impossible to believe. The hand washing effectively shifts the blame for Jesus' death from the Romans to the Jews. By their desire for Jesus' crucifixion and their cry, "Let his blood be on us and our children!" blame was placed on the Jews for the death of Jesus for all eternity. The writer reinforces that they are doing this to the Messiah.

Likewise, many New Testament texts present the Pharisees and scribes negatively. They are polemical texts, intended to turn the reader against these groups, which were perhaps rivals of the Jesus movement in the early generations.<sup>3</sup> Yet, this context is rarely noted in preaching, and lectionary selections in some ways highlight the most polemical passages of the gospels.

The gospel writers have created a distance between Jesus and "the Jews" and "your traditions," as if Jesus was not one of them.

Pharisees and scribes are portrayed as hypocrites, as evil, as waiting to catch Jesus in some wrongdoing, and as giving alms but neglecting justice. The bitterness reflects an intra-Jewish conflict still alive at the time the gospels were composed.

## Liturgy

Christian liturgies, Protestant and Catholic, are sprinkled with references to Judaism, but unfortunately most references are negative. The worst assertion is that Jews are guilty of deicide (killing God).<sup>4</sup> It is a product of reading something like the passage quoted above historically, that is, as if it were an unimpeachable historical account.

As the Jesus movement became more and more Gentile in composition, Christians were so busy blaming Jews for Jesus' death that they forgot about the Romans. Yet it was the Romans who had the authority to crucify and used that power frequently as a means of punishing and terrorizing subject peoples. Christians were naturally cautious about referring to them. One also finds in various liturgical forms, such as the liturgy of the hours and propers for the eucharist, the implication that Jesus rejected the law or that he rejected the Temple, both of which, in light of contemporary scholarship, are known to be untrue. But perhaps the most common declaration is the replacement maxim: the church has replaced the synagogue, Jesus has replaced the Torah, Christians have replaced the Jews. Because they refused to believe in Jesus, God took away their place in the covenant and gave it to those who did.

References to the Jews have not usually been subtle. This prayer was part of the Roman Catholic Good Friday Service until its removal by Pope John XXIII in 1959,<sup>5</sup> before the Second Vatican Council and *Nostra Aetate* but well after the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust:

*Let us pray also for the unfaithful Jews, that our God and Lord may remove the veil from their hearts; that they also may acknowledge our Lord*

*Jesus Christ. Almighty and everlasting God, Who drivest not even the faithless Jews away from Thy mercy, bear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people, that, acknowledging the light of thy truth, which is Christ, they may be rescued from their darkness.*

As the prayer suggests, Jews were expected to convert to Christianity, and there is no suggestion of the ongoing validity of their covenant with God.

## Theology

We know that the Christologies of the patristic writers were deeply shaped by the classic themes of antisemitism. In one way or another, two themes are dominant: Jewish unbelief and God's choice of the Gentiles to replace the Jews in the covenant.

Melito of Sardis (d.c. 170) was the first to make explicit the accusation of deicide:

*He who hung the earth in place is hanged. He who fixed the heavens in place is fixed in place. He who made all things fast is made fast on the tree. The Master is insulted. God is murdered. The King of Israel is murdered by an Israelite.<sup>6</sup>*

Three centuries after Melito, John Chrysostom (c. 349-407) also spoke harshly about the Jews. But oddly enough, his goal was to keep Christians out of the synagogue and from adopting Jewish ways: "They killed the son of your Lord, and you dare to gather with them in the same place?" John's complaint offers a clue as to how attractive the synagogue and "works of the law"<sup>7</sup> continued to be to Christians, even in the fifth century.

After the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, with the power of the empire behind them, decrees of church councils over the next few centuries moved beyond the merely polemical. They banned Jews from public office, outlawed them from appearing in public on Easter Sunday, stopped marriages between Christians and Jews, and prohibited them from even eating together. All this was prelude to a sad and

sorry story of Medieval prohibitions, persecutions, expulsions, and pogroms.

We are saddened but perhaps not surprised by the routinely antisemitic character of early church writers. Scholars of Jewish-Christian relations have recognized the antisemitic nature of their writings for some time.<sup>8</sup> What is more surprising is how present-day theologians, who are so sensitive to oppression in their own context, can shelter such a blindspot for Christian mistreatment of Jews.

The first example is from the father of liberation theology, whose life work has been concerned with injustice and who teaches us how to analyze oppression, exploitation, and the view from the underside of history. Yet Gustavo Gutiérrez repeats a familiar antisemitic theme – the replacement of the Old Covenant with the New Covenant – in his seminal text *A Theology of Liberation* (1973):

*The infidelities of the Jewish people made the Old Covenant invalid, the Promise was incarnated both in the proclamation of a New Covenant, which was awaited and sustained by the "remnant" as well as in the promises which prepared and accompanied its advent.<sup>9</sup>*

A second example, also from a liberation theology, shows possible depth of such a blindspot. Leonardo Boff writes in *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World* (1987) that, for him, Christian discipleship shaped by the crucifixion of Jesus means "taking up a solidarity with the crucified of the world – with those who suffer violence, who are impoverished, who are dehumanized, who are offended in their rights."<sup>10</sup> But he writes about Rabbinic Judaism and observation of the law:

*Observance of the Mosaic law had become the very essence of postexilic Judaism. Sophistical interpretations and absurd traditions had caused the law to degenerate into a terrible slavery, discriminating between those whom God loved and those whom God did not love, between the pure and the impure, between my neighbor whom I should love*

*and my neighbor whom I may hate ... the law had become a prison with golden bars. Instead of being an aid to human beings in the encounter with their fellows and with God, the law shut them off from both. The Pharisees had a morbid conception of God. Their God no longer spoke to human beings. Their God had left them a Law.*<sup>11</sup>

This absurd characterization of Jewish faith exemplifies the contemporary survival of a kind of scotosis deeply and systemically engrained in foundational concepts of Christian theology. It continues not only to poison relations with the Jewish people but also to skew Christians' own reflections on their roots and identity.

### Repentance and Exclusivism

To deny that Judaism is an authentic spirituality or to label it "legalistic," implying that a "religion of law" is somehow inferior to a "religion of grace," while maintaining at the same time that Christianity offers the only way to God, is an untenable assertion. We do not have to solve the classic dilemma of "how can Christ be unique if there are other ways of being saved" before we drop exclusivism. Exclusivism leads inevitably to violence. We live in a religiously pluralistic world, and the denial of Judaism as a way to God is also a denial of other ways.

Christian antisemitism is a collective sin that demands collective repentance. We have to live knowing that Christianity has committed a massive fault that has caused incalculable suffering. How can we find forgiveness for our arrogant claim over the centuries that we offer the only means of salvation? How can we address the last vestiges of supersessionism in our church's life and thought and practices? To surrender this claim of exclusivity is, at the very least, both the way of repentance and an affirmation, with the apostle Paul, that the Jews remain God's beloved people. (Rom. 11:28).

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<sup>1</sup> See the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II, in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000: *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Nov. 10, 1994, available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_10111994\\_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_10111994_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html).

<sup>2</sup> The original "Semites" were the Palestinians; but I use the word *antisemitic* to mean "anti-Jewish," in the traditional and routine way it has been used by Christians.

<sup>3</sup> See the recent discussion in Terrence Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in the New Testament: Decision Points and Divergent Interpretations* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, and London: SPCK, 2010), esp. ch. 2 on Matthew.

<sup>4</sup> It was not eliminated until the twentieth century.

<sup>5</sup> Pope John XXIII announced the Council in 1959. A meeting between the Jewish historian, Jules Isaac and Pope John XXIII may have been the direct cause of the church's relationship with Judaism being put on the upcoming Council's agenda. Isaac referred to the church's teaching about Judaism over the centuries as a "teaching of contempt." Mary C. Boys, SNJM, "What *Nostra Aetate* Inaugurated," in David G. Schultenouer, ed., *50 Years On: Probing the Riches of Vatican II* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2015), 235-272; 243.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2000); see also more recently, idem, *Redeeming Our Sacred Story: The Death of Jesus and Relations between Jews and Christians* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> "Works of the law" simply means "living as a Jew." Cited in Boys, *One Blessing*, 56. See full text of John Chrysostom's "Against the Jews: Homily 1," in ET at: [www.tertullian.org](http://www.tertullian.org).

<sup>8</sup> The classic exposé of Christian antisemitism is Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Antisemitism* (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, tr. Sr. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973), 161. Cited in John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M., "The Christ Event and the Jewish People," in Tatha Wiley, ed., *Thinking of Christ: Proclamation, Explanation, Meaning* (N.Y.: Continuum, 2003), 105.

<sup>10</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011 [1987]), 130.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

# Reorienting Jewish-Christian Relations and Dialogue

**S. Wesley Ariarajah**

It is very appropriate that we have been celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* – the “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” promulgated towards the end of the Second Vatican Council. By any measure, this was a landmark declaration that officially put the Roman Catholic relations to people of other religious traditions on a firm new footing. The openings provided by that Declaration have helped many Roman Catholic theologians to venture boldly into creative explorations on interfaith dialogue and in rethinking the Christian Theology of Religions. Much can be said on the developments in these two areas and in a critical analysis of the Declaration on how it needs to be revised and re-envisioned after 50 years.

The purpose of this article, however, is limited by the specific interest of this issue of *Current Dialogue*, which is dedicated to re-visiting the question of Jewish-Christian relations today. This relationship was one of the major pre-occupations of *Nostra Aetate*. In fact, the Declaration, while dealing with all the major world religious traditions, gives a prominent place to Jewish-Christian relations by dealing comprehensively with many aspects of this relationship in its 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph.

In order to have clarity in discussing Jewish-Christian relations and dialogue today, one needs to separate out three interrelated but distinct aspects of this relationship:

The *first* is on Jewish-Christian dialogue and the contribution it has made to this relationship.

The *second* relates to the fact that the Jesus Movement that eventually grew into Christianity emerged from within Judaism, that Jesus and his immediate disciples were Jews and that the church inherited and

modified a number of its theological doctrines and teachings from Judaism. What significance does it have for our understanding of the Christian faith, Christian theology and to Jewish-Christian relations today?

The *third* is the thorny question of the modern State of Israel and what approach Christians should have to it.

Although they are interrelated in some ways, conflating these three issues uncritically, without sufficiently distinguishing them from one another, has contributed to some of the dissatisfaction and anxiety about this relationship among sections of the Christian community. The crux of the question has to do with the issue of “special relationship” and what it implies.

## Building a New Relationship

There is no need to recount to the readers of *Current Dialogue* the troubled history of Jewish-Christian relations from the very beginning. From the time Christianity became part of Empire, the Jewish community had continuously suffered discrimination and persecution through the centuries. The shock of how historic animosity toward Judaism and the Jews was eventually one of the contributing factors for the Holocaust shook the Christian conscience. In the post-World War II period, much has been done to challenge anti-Judaism, antisemitism, supersessionist readings of the scriptures and prejudice against the Jewish community in the reading and interpretation of the Christian scriptures.

Much theological reparation and radical rethinking of Christian relations with Jewish people had to be undertaken. This was not an easy task in the context of deep and justified grievances on the Jewish side. One must salute the patience, courage and

wisdom of those Christians and Jews who embarked on Jewish-Christian dialogue and brought us to where we are today. I have reservations, as an Asian Christian, to privileging this dialogue over dialogue with other religions and mainly about the “no-go” areas within this dialogue. Some have rightly claimed that new vitality would come to this dialogue only when we are ready to discuss and enter into dialogue on the difficult issue of peace and justice in the Middle-East. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this dialogue must be continued, nurtured and further developed for the benefit of both communities.

### The Question of Theological Affinity

It is, in fact, very easy to argue that there is a “special relationship” between Christians and Jews. Some of it is obvious in that Jesus remained a Jew to the end and appeared to have shown no interest in creating an alternate religious tradition among his people. Christians strengthened this relationship by the adoption of the Hebrew scriptures as part of the Christian scriptures. The main traits of the Christian understanding of God – its commitment to social justice issues, its prophetic tradition and many of its ethical and moral values – are also drawn from Jewish heritage.

As Jewish-Christian relations improved over the years, a number of Jewish and Christian scholars have begun to argue that this theological affinity and proximity between Judaism and Christianity is a strong basis for a “special relationship” between Christians and Jews. There are a number of streams to this argument but three of them stand out.

The first is the appeal to Abraham as the common ancestor of the two faiths (of three, when Islam is included).

The second stream argues that a deeper exploration of Christian scripture and Christian theological developments, despite the Hellenization of Christian theology in the Greco-Roman world, would reveal the basic Hebrew basis of Christian theology.

For instance, Marvin R. Wilson, in his *Our Father Abraham – Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*,<sup>1</sup> does a thoroughly scholarly analysis of both the Christian scriptures and the early Christian theological developments to show how Jewish thinking and beliefs lie at the root of Christian theology. While admitting that this theology underwent significant changes in the Greco-Roman culture, he argues that Christianity, to its great benefit, should recover and re-own its Jewish roots and heritage. One of the books I have read with much interest is Tikva Frymer-Kensky’s *Christianity in Jewish Terms*,<sup>2</sup> in which several outstanding Jewish scholars reflect on the basic beliefs of the Christian faith from a Jewish perspective with responses from other Jewish and Christian scholars.

The third stream relates to the bulk of literature that has emerged in recent years, both from Jewish and Christian scholars, offering new interpretations of Jesus and his ministry, basically lifting up the “Jewishness of Jesus” and his teachings with a call for a revised Christology. Despite the doubts cast by the Jesus Seminar on the reliability of the gospel narratives on Jesus’ life and teachings, there have been considerable new studies of the gospel narratives, extra-biblical resources related to them, and the Pauline corpus to give new interpretations of Jesus particularly in the context of the socio-political and religio-cultural background of 1<sup>st</sup>-century Palestine. So much so that New Testament scholars, James Charlesworth and Walter Weaver, for instance, in their volume *Images of Jesus Today*, speak of Jesus research as marked with “chaotic creativity.”<sup>3</sup> There is disagreement as to whether Jesus was an itinerant cynic, Israelite prophet, a radical reformer or the anticipated Messiah. From the Jewish side, the rabbinic writer Harvey Falk wrote, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus*,<sup>4</sup> which places Jesus firmly within the Jewish Tradition. Bruce Chilton goes even further, in his *Rabbi Jesus – An Intimate Biography*,<sup>5</sup> and maintains through very detailed research and arguments that Jesus

can only be understood as a Jewish Rabbi. All these studies have thrown much new light on the immediate background of Jesus' ministry and the socio-political and religious milieu in which he ministered.

### **The Problems Related to the Claim to "Special Relationship"**

Much of the claim to special relationship is based on the close affinity between Judaism and Christianity in the early stages of its evolution into a new religion, borrowing and incorporating ideas from Judaism and interpreting the significance of Jesus and his life in Jewish categories of thought. This comes as no surprise because most of the early members of the Jesus Movement were Jews. However, if one takes an honest look at Christian beliefs today, including interpretations of who Jesus is, there is very little Judaism and Christianity hold in common. With the evolution of the doctrine of the Trinity, which also heavily revises early understandings of Christology, Christianity moved miles away from the Jewish theological tradition. In fact, none of the basic theological affirmations Christians make about Jesus and his significance would be acceptable within contemporary Judaism. The Jesus Christians "believe" in (and even "worship") has little or nothing to do with the Jewish rabbi he was during his ministry.

There are many Christians, including myself in *Your God My God, Our God: Rethinking Christian Theology for Religious Plurality*,<sup>6</sup> who argue for the recovery of Jesus as teacher, and view his challenge to discipleship to the Reign of God as an important corrective to the classical theological interpretations of his significance. But it is precisely those teachings, and the consequences he drew from them for social relationships, that the Jewish teachers and leaders of his day found difficult to accept. A number of dimensions of Jesus' teachings did not sit well with Jewish self-understanding at the time: Jesus' claim to a special relationship with God, and the nature of his mission in the world. I think Jacob Neusner's *Christianity and Judaism*

– *Two Faiths Talking about Different Things*<sup>7</sup> is more to the point.

This does not mean we must stop talking to each other or refrain from building a good, robust and dialogical relationship. Nor does it mean we might not be enriched in our understanding of Jesus, his teachings and his mission by the new interest in the historical Jesus and the painstaking research that is underway. But this needs to happen within the recognition that we are two distinct religious traditions, and what might have contributed theologically to a "special relationship" instead came to an end during a certain period of history.

For me, when Christianity became a predominantly Gentile religion and therefore moved away from the Torah and the ritual of circumcision (the marks of belonging to the covenant community), and refrained from observing the Sabbath, the "special relationship" was broken for good. The two had become two distinctly different traditions. Some would still argue, despite this reality, that the very Jewishness of Jesus and the Christian borrowing of Jewish theological concepts together call for a special relationship. My own sense is that any continued claims to special relationship after which Christianity had become a different religion have been at the heart of some of the major problems plaguing Jewish-Christian relations in the past and the future.

When Christians adopted the Jewish scriptures as their own, which in hindsight was quite unwarranted, they had to resort to a supersessionist reading of the Hebrew scriptures. The gospel according to Matthew is witness to the almost preposterous use of the Hebrew scriptures, as it takes them completely out of their original context to prove that almost every action of Jesus and everything done to him were, "so that the scriptures may be fulfilled." Any reasonably informed Sunday school teacher would know the gymnastics that one had to do to take the stories, history and events in the Hebrew Bible – which hold enormous

meaning to Jewish people, but have little to do with Christianity – and make them relate to the Christian story. Because of the attempt to interpret Jesus' death in terms of the Jewish sacrificial system, we are now stuck with the theory of substitutionary atonement, which makes little sense to many in our day. Stories and interpretations that make perfect sense within one religious tradition do not necessarily make sense within another. Our unwillingness as Christians to accept that, even though Jesus was a Jew, the implications of his teachings had crossed the boundaries of Judaism and that today Christianity has too little in common with Judaism is at the heart of many of the problems we have had in Jewish-Christian history.

### **An Example from the Asian Context**

But does not the fact that Christianity rose from within Judaism argue naturally for a special relationship? Let me illustrate my answer to this question from a similar situation from Asia. The Lord Buddha was a Hindu who, out of his dissatisfaction with the religion and how it was practiced began a new movement that ended up as Buddhism. Even though he himself did not want to consciously break away from his Hindu heritage, his teachings invariably resulted in a distinct move away from Hinduism. His denial of an Ultimate Reality and a human soul, which were at the heart of the Hindu tradition, his refusal to accept the authority of the Vedic scriptures, which Hindus considered authoritative and revealed, and his refusal to organize society on the basis of the Caste System, which was central to Hinduism of his day, meant that he had gone too far from Hinduism to have any "special relationship" with it. Although Hinduism attempted to incorporate Buddha as one of the *avatars* (incarnations) of Vishnu, and made Buddhism one of its systems of Philosophy, the horse had already bolted the stable. Buddhism has grown in its own way, as did Christianity, and has become a parallel religious tradition.

Although any research on the Buddha and origins of Buddhism needs to have a full understanding of the Hindu environment in which it was born, no one today argues that we cannot understand Buddhism without Hinduism or that Hindu-Buddhist relations are privileged over other interfaith relationships. Although initially Buddhists suffered persecution by the Hindus, eventually they settled down and became two mature, parallel religions that can relate to one another.

By continuing to claim special relationship between Judaism and Christianity we continually fall into the trap of having to explain one religion in terms of the other. We should leave Judaism alone and relate to it as we would with any other mature religious tradition. A Jewish Rabbi once said, "Two thousand years of Christian love is enough to make anyone nervous." Acknowledging that Christianity and Judaism are two distinct religions in theology, practice and ethos will respect the integrity of Judaism and provide a stronger common platform for our dialogue.

### **What of the Christian Approach to the State of Israel?**

Due to the limitations of space, it is not possible to develop this third section on Christian attitudes toward the State of Israel as much as it should be, and it is difficult to discuss this question without being misunderstood. On the Christian side, the problem has to do with a skewed reading and interpretation of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures by a considerable section of the conservative Christians in the USA and in some other parts of the world (with the support of some sections of the Orthodox Jewish community) that results in uncritical support for the modern State of Israel. At the same time, there is also a considerable section of Christians who hold that after nearly seven decades of its founding, Israel should be treated like any other modern state. They hold that while one needs to give heed to Israel's legitimate concerns and security needs, one should

also hold it accountable to international laws and conventions and the way it deals with the Palestinian question. Both the USA as a state and parts of Christianity as a religious tradition are paying a very high price in the eyes of the world for their blind spots in this area because of the assumed “special relationship” – both political and theological. What both the United States and Christianity have lost through this is the possibility to be a *trusted* partner in the search for justice and peace in the Middle East. All relationships need to be built on mutual respect, justice and mutual accountability, so that the integrity of all parties involved are respected. Keeping this thorny question out of Jewish-Christian dialogue does a disservice to the basic concept, purpose and practice of dialogue.

### **New Wine and Old Wineskins**

When I think of Jewish-Christian dialogue, I am reminded of a saying attributed to Jesus found in all three synoptic gospels, and which comes from the Jewish wisdom tradition: “no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins” (Mark 2:22). This should not lead anyone to approach Judaism as “old” and Christianity as “new” in a prejudicial sense. The saying instead has to do with *what is the appropriate thing to do*. As with so

many of Jesus’ sayings, this too provides enormous scope for deep reflection as we look at Jewish-Christian relations today.

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, et al. (eds.), *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver, *Images of Jesus Today* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Your God My God, Our God: Rethinking Christian Theology for Religious Plurality* (Geneva: WCC, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Christianity and Judaism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984).



## Remembering the Covenant: Judaism in an Anglican Theology of Interfaith Relations

Michael Ipgrave

The question I begin with is this: “Does Anglican theology treat Christian-Jewish relations as a special case within interfaith relations?” There is an obvious answer to that question, which is: “Yes. Every relationship between Christians and people of another given faith is special, reflecting the particular themes which arise in encounter with that faith.” So my question is really about “special specialness.” Perhaps it should be refined to ask: “Is there for Anglicans some qualitative difference between Christian-Jewish relations and other interfaith relations?” And, if so, in what does that distinctiveness consist? Note that I am here following the language of the document *Generous Love* presented to the 2008 Lambeth Conference, in that *Generous Love* described itself as “an Anglican theology of interfaith relations,” and not as “an Anglican theology of other faiths.”<sup>1</sup> A view of Christian-Jewish relations as qualitatively distinctive from other interfaith relations might indeed rest on a view of Judaism as qualitatively distinctive from other faiths, but it does not seem to me that that is a necessary implication.

Two very different kinds of “distinctiveness” for Christian-Jewish relations are immediately apparent within wider Christian theologies of interfaith relations. One reads from the Bible a teaching that the Jewish people have been given a wholly exceptional status before God, and concludes from that that Christian-Jewish relations are also wholly exceptional as compared to other interfaith relations. Christians and Jews each have a distinctive place within the dispensations of God’s plan for the world, and it is the asymmetry of those dispensations which mandate how Christian-Jewish relations should be conducted in practice. This view of a distinctive relationship does in fact rest

on a view of Judaism as a distinctive religion, literally *sui generis*: whereas all other non-Christian religions are human constructs, more or less false in their assumptions and misguided in their aims, the religion of Israel is – or was – built on true revelation from God, as testified by the Bible. Amongst Christians who share this approach, there is then a divergence over the relationship between contemporary Judaism and this authentic religion of Israel, and correspondingly different views of Christian-Jewish relations: for some, Judaism and Jews continue to have a uniquely favoured position in the divine purpose; for others, they have lost that place since the coming of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The premise of “exceptional distinctiveness” can therefore lead to radically different views of Christian-Jewish relations: to use common slogans which require further interrogation, it can support both “supersessionism” and “dispensationalism.”

A different account of distinctiveness can be found in the contemporary teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, from Vatican II onwards. Here too, Christian-Jewish relations are qualitatively distinctive, but they are not thereby wholly divorced from relations with all other faiths. Thus, on the one hand the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews is organizationally part of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, not of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, and the 1965 declaration *Nostra Aetate* addresses Christian-Jewish relations through “sounding the depths of the mystery which is the Church.”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, *Nostra Aetate* itself moved from an initial draft focused entirely on the topic *De Iudaeis* to become a statement speaking also about relations with Muslims, and more

widely with Hindus, Buddhists and other religions. The political factors underlying this expansion of the text are well-known, but underpinning it is a theology which sees the distinctiveness of Christian-Jewish relations as being in some sense paradigmatic for all other interfaith relations; the Church's primary relation to the Jewish other is to shape its relation to all religious others in a multi-faith world.<sup>3</sup> This has been eloquently expressed by Cardinal Walter Kasper as follows: "Judaism is as a sacrament of otherness that as such the Church must learn to discern, recognise and celebrate." I wish to return later to that evocative phrase "sacrament of otherness."<sup>4</sup>

How would an Anglican theology of interfaith relations position itself on the question of the distinctiveness of Christian-Jewish relations, bearing in mind these two types of distinctiveness? My view is that, insofar as an authoritative shape of Anglican theological teaching can be recognized and articulated, it has on the whole shifted from the first type to the second, from "exceptional distinctiveness" to "paradigmatic distinctiveness." The "insofar" is an important qualification, for discerning the theological position of Anglicanism on this, as on many other issues, is not a matter of simply locating and expounding a definitive piece of teaching. Rather, it is a question of gathering and interpreting elements scattered among church reports, conference resolutions, liturgical prayers, and the writings of individual theologians whose views command respect; together these can be taken to provide evidence of the thinking of Anglicanism as a whole. In fact, they generally provide evidence of several different strands of thinking; there is then a further task of assessing the relative weight of each strand. This clearly involves a major exercise of discernment; in this short paper I will necessarily be very selective in the evidence I can consider.

In a passage quoted by *Generous Love*, the 1988 Lambeth Conference document *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue*

asserted that: "A right understanding of the relationship with Judaism is fundamental to Christianity's own self-understanding,"<sup>5</sup> and added that we must "reject any view of Judaism which sees it as a living fossil, simply superseded by Christianity."<sup>6</sup> The Swedish theologian Jesper Svartvik has described such a position as "deutero-Augustinian,"<sup>7</sup> meaning thereby that like St Augustine it sees theological significance in the continued existence of the Jewish people in the world after Christ (for Augustine, more immediately their continued toleration in an Empire which had become legally Christian).<sup>8</sup> Unlike pagans or heretics, Augustine argued that the Roman authorities should safeguard the continued life of the Jewish people; he himself described them as *librarii nostri* ("our scribes")<sup>9</sup> and *custodes librorum nostrorum* ("our librarians").<sup>10</sup>

That Christians should in this way see theological significance in Jewish people *post Christum* does not in itself imply a "right understanding of the relationship with Judaism," as the contested and poisonous history of Christian-Jewish interaction shows. Augustine's own view was that contemporary Jewish misery was an encouraging proof to Christians of the truth of the gospel since it was a divine punishment for their rejection of the Messiah; similarly, six hundreds later St Bernard of Clairvaux argued that Jews should not be killed "for they are living tokens to us, constantly recalling our Lord's passion."<sup>11</sup> This *adversus Judaeos* tradition, while in one way it preserved a Jewish presence in Christian Europe, also shaped the "teaching of contempt" (*enseignement du mépris*), which was identified by the French historian Jules Isaac as feeding the European antisemitism which culminated in the Holocaust – albeit the latter was itself a negation of the principle of preservation implied by the older Christian anti-Judaism. Together with other churches, and following the lead given by Vatican II, Anglicans have rejected this poisonous tradition of teaching, as *The Way of Dialogue* and *Generous Love* both

show. But if this negative account of Israel is rejected, how do we now reach Augustine's goal of seeing theological significance in Judaism *post Christum*? Svartvik suggests a move from seeing Jews as *librarii nostri*, keepers of a deposit of truth which they misunderstand, to recognizing them as *sacramentum nostrum*, a God-given means of grace in their life alongside us.<sup>12</sup> This of course echoes Cardinal Kasper's description of Judaism as a "sacrament of otherness." How convincing an approach is this, what might it mean in practice, how does it relate to Anglicanism, and what are its implications for wider interfaith encounter?

An obvious starting point for reflecting on the continuing significance of Israel for Christians is to be found in St Paul's intense, and intensely personal, writing in Romans 9-11. Here, he brings together a number of passionately held convictions which on the face of it are extremely difficult to harmonize: the newness, gratuity and reality of the life offered to believers in the Christ event (10:4) together with the continuing vitality of Jewish life in quest of God (10:2); the universality of the gospel offered to all (10:12) together with the particularity of the covenant made with the Jews (9:4); the failure of all human beings, Jews or Gentiles, before God (11:32) together with Paul's deepest and most recurrent theme, the unchanging faithfulness of God in his self-revelation (9:6; 9:11; 9:14; 11:1; 11:30). A huge amount of interpretative energy has over the years been expended in the effort to clarify exactly what Paul's theology of Israel is in Romans 9-11, yet there are still major disagreements among scholars. The apostle's writing in these chapters is intricately dialectical, expressive of a personal anguish which in some passages gives it an almost tortured feel, and which issues in statements of intense paradox: "Just as you [Gentiles] were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy through their disobedience, so they [Jews] have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too

may receive mercy" (11:30-31). It seems to me that the complexity and strangeness of a verse like that simply cannot be ironed out, harmonized with other verses to produce a systematic account of Paul's theology. He is wrestling at every level, from personal biography through the life of the nascent Christian community, up to the divine purpose for Israel, with the challenge of reconciling his own identity before God with a recognition of the other (or, rather, of that which has become other to him), and doing so in a situation where knowledge of God comes through that other. He is looking for a way of speaking of the other which avoids total separation yet does not fall into easy assimilation.

If relationship with this other is of key importance for Christians in God's purposes, it is perhaps in this sense that we can interpret Kasper's description of Judaism as a "sacrament of otherness" at the outset of the Church's life. A sacrament is, for the Christian community, an outward sign that reliably conveys to believers the grace and life of God. To speak of the Jewish people in the language of "sacrament" is thus at the very least to say that encounter with them can be for Christians a source of blessing, a way of being called back to holiness. The suggestion that Judaism is a sacrament for Christians, though, is saying more than simply that grace can be mediated through this encounter, for a sacrament has about it the character of reliability based on God's pledge. It is an assured sign of grace set within a relationship of promise on God's part and of response on ours – it is theologically located within the covenant God has made with his people. *Generous Love* stresses the generosity of God's grace, which by the work of the Spirit can engage Christians through encounters with people of any faith and in quite unexpected places;<sup>13</sup> but to speak of a "sacrament of otherness" is to claim something more than this. It is to claim that, under some conditions at least, encounter with Jewish people can be relied on to be a means of God's grace through

their otherness. Is this a plausible theological claim to make?

How we answer this question depends of course on where we place Judaism in relation to the new covenant which God has established in Jesus Christ. There is considerable diversity, and some dispute, of view amongst Christians on this question, and that diversity and dispute are evident among Anglicans. I wish to illustrate this from a report produced in 2001 by the Church of England's Inter Faith Consultative Group with the title '*Sharing One Hope*'?<sup>14</sup> Subtitled "a contribution to a continuing debate," the report sought to map out various issues in the area of Christian-Jewish relations on which English Anglicans were agreed, and various issues on which they were not agreed – or, as the report put it more hopefully, "areas of continuing debate." In his "preface," the then Bishop of Southwark remarked, with some understatement: "Given the strength and diversity of feeling aroused by the issues with which it deals, this document has not been easy to write."<sup>15</sup> Among those issues was precisely the question addressed by this paper, that of the nature of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. '*Sharing One Hope*'? outlined four Anglican positions on this, the first of which it rejected.

In the first place, it explained that there was agreement on the unacceptability of "replacement theology." This is a contested term, variously defined, and sometimes also referred to as 'supersessionism'. '*Sharing One Hope*'? defined it as "the theory that the Christian Church has simply superseded or replaced the Jewish people, who no longer have any special place in God's calling."<sup>16</sup> This might imply the view that Christian-Jewish relations have no distinctiveness at all; but it would also include the "negative exceptionalism" of the *adversus Judaeos* tradition exemplified by Augustine and Bernard.<sup>17</sup> The report argues that this must be rejected because of the disastrous consequences to which it has led historically through the *enseignement du mépris*, because it does not recognize the contemporary vitality

of Judaism, because it fails to do justice exegetically to the complexity of St Paul's witness in Romans 9-11, and because its theology denies the fundamental principle of the unchanging faithfulness of God: the first covenant cannot be regarded as having been simply annulled.

The next two views identified in '*Sharing One Hope*'? take the idea of covenant as central, differing among themselves as to how many covenants there are.<sup>18</sup> The second position is a "one covenant" model, which draws on Paul's language of the "grafting in" of a wild olive tree into the root of a cultivated olive tree (Rom 11:17-24) to insist that a single covenant has been established with the people of God, in which Christians are enabled to share through the work of Christ. A "one covenant" approach is adopted by many theologians;<sup>19</sup> it is within this view that the idea of Judaism as a "sacrament of otherness" perhaps has most coherence.

A different view – the third identified in '*Sharing One Hope*'? – speaks of Judaism and Christianity, not as sharing in one covenant, but rather as engaged in two separate, parallel, in some sense complementary, covenants. This idea was promoted, for example, by James Parkes, one of the pioneers of Anglican involvement with Judaism, and developed by John Pawlikowski. Parkes saw in the two religions two equally valid expressions of the mercy and faithfulness of God: the covenant at Sinai, communally oriented, with a focus on the life of the people as a whole, and the covenant given by Christ, with a personal focus, inviting individuals into a relationship which would transcend the boundaries of time and space. *Generous Love* at one point explains that the work of the Spirit is understood in Anglican theology as being about both "inwardness" and also the flourishing of social life. Following Parkes' theory, then, encounter with Jewish life could have a particular function in calling Christians back to the fullness of their faith expressed in community; in this sense it might perhaps be called sacramental.

The fourth and final view of Christian-Jewish relations described in *'Sharing One Hope'* eschews the language of covenant, on the grounds either that this is not a centrally important motif in one or both religions, or that its meaning is different between the two. Rather, it chooses to stress the difference and incommensurability of Judaism and Christianity. This is, for example, the position adopted with some trenchancy with Jacob Neusner, who describes them as "completely different religions, not different versions of one religion ... different people talking about different things to different people."<sup>20</sup> From a perspective like this, there is no scope for speaking of Judaism as in any sense sacramental for Christians; Neusner's stress on radical difference leaves no shared theological framework in which a perception of sacramentality could be set. Judaism and Christianity are in principle left with no more in common than any other two faiths. This is in one sense clearly a loss, but it may also include a salutary element of correction to a tendency to assimilate the otherness of Judaism too easily into a Christian understanding. The language of the sacramental, after all, is Christian language; while it is entirely right for Christians to use it when they reflect on the effect of encounter with Jewish people on their own discipleship, they must not abuse it by evacuating the human reality of those people, instrumentalizing them into signs for themselves alone. What is of significance theologically is the indomitable persistence of the Jewish people after the Christian revelation, their defiance of pressure to reduce them to Christian categories.

This is perhaps the paradox which is incorporated into Kasper's memorable phrase "sacrament of otherness." This people by the very continuity of their existence defy all attempts to reduce them into mere bearers of Christian meaning, to accommodate them too comfortably in a Christian universe of discourse; and it is precisely through this irreducibility that they are a blessing to the Church. Michael

Barnes, drawing on the "heterology" of Michel de Certeau, expresses the point thus: "The Jewish other is always returning, always present, 'haunting' the space carved out by the dominant Christian 'same'."<sup>21</sup> There is then a wider application in interfaith relations of the "return of the Jewish other," but first we must look at the socio-political forms in which that return is concretely embodied, the Jewish people and the land of Israel. How have Anglicans related historically, how do they relate today, to these realities?

The continuing "return" of Judaism to the contemporary Church, with all its theological significance, is in fact embodied in several different socio-political contexts. One is the presence of vibrant Jewish communities alongside Christians in several Western countries and beyond, providing opportunities for interaction of a type which *Generous Love* describes in relation to other faiths also. Another, for which Barnes and de Certeau's language of "haunting" is more especially apposite, is the absence in many places of once flourishing Jewish communities, particularly as a result of the Holocaust, but also through Jewish migration to Israel. Ruth Ellen Gruber, in her fine study *Virtually Jewish*, has spoken of the "Jewish space" in many European countries created by this absence, and of the ways in which this is being filled, often by Gentiles with a more or less informed enthusiasm for Jewish culture, life and spirituality.<sup>22</sup> The intensity of the vacuum left, for example, by the Holocaust in the city of Cracow is captured by the émigré Polish writer Rafael Scharf in these words: "There is a multitude of them – nowhere" says Jerzy Ficowski. That crowded, eternal absence is far more tangible here than anywhere else in the world."<sup>23</sup> For me personally, visiting the spaces left by vanished Jewish communities has been a profoundly moving experience, not only in terms of human story, but at the level of the Spirit also: even in those places where Jewish life has gone, the traces it leaves are sometimes so powerful that they can

mediate the reality of that otherness through which we encounter the Holy One of Israel.

However, the most challenging manifestations of Jewish life for Christians today are neither in the presence of the diaspora communities nor in their absence, but in the current political reality of Israel as a Jewish state. It is here that theologically significant reality achieves political actuality, and in so doing poses real challenges for Christians of all kinds, not least for Anglicans – perhaps particularly for Anglicans, given the complexity of the history which implicates them in this issue. As with many dimensions of Anglican life, that history can only be understood by recognizing that it involves a number of different strands. Three in particular can be identified, roughly in the order in which they successively came to prominence, as the Messianic, the Jewish solidarity, and the Palestinian solidarity strands.

Although the readmission of the Jews to England in 1656 owed something to Messianic speculation, it was in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that Christian Zionism really became prominent in Britain, in the belief that the coming of the Messiah was linked to the conversion of the Jews and their restoration to the promised land of Israel. The London Jews Society, founded in 1809 as an interdenominational society but by 1815 reconstituted in purely Anglican terms, was from the beginning committed to the twin goals of proselytizing and of restoration, and in 1841 a joint scheme for a Protestant Bishopric in Jerusalem was realized with the Prussian political and ecclesiastical authorities. The first bishop, Michael Solomon Alexander, was a converted rabbi, and his charge was primarily to conduct mission among the small Jewish community in the city, at the same time encouraging the return of diaspora Jews there. Contemporary evangelicals enthusiastically hailed this as the “restoration” of the apostolic Hebrew Christian Church in Jerusalem, suppressed since the first Christian century, and looked eagerly to the

beginning of the Messianic age. Bishop Alexander died in 1845, and under his successor there was a marked change in the direction of Jerusalem Anglicanism overall; the London Jews Society, however, continued at Christ Church, Jerusalem, subsequently becoming the Church’s Mission to the Jews, now Church’s Ministry among Jewish People. This Messianic strand still plays some part in the Church of England, though generally in an attenuated form stressing the importance for Anglican Christians of valuing the witness of Jewish believers in Jesus.

A second strand increasingly marking the Church of England during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century emphasizes a sense of solidarity with Jewish people, irrespective of any commitment from them to belief in Christ, and largely unconnected with any eschatological expectation associated with their dispersal or restoration. This was given profound, sometimes extreme, articulation by the scholar James Parkes, who combined a rather eccentric reputation with a close friendship with Archbishop William Temple and other mid-century Anglican leaders. It found its first organizational expression in the formation of the Council of Christians and Jews in 1942 as a joint venture of the Archbishop and the Chief Rabbi. Following the effective endorsement of the teaching of *Nostra Aetate* by the 1988 Lambeth Conference, this strand stresses the importance of positive Christian-Jewish relations, for example in the Joint Declaration made by Archbishop Rowan Williams and the two Chief Rabbis of Israel in September 2006, which affirmed that: “A relationship between our communities, nationally and internationally, has grown from the steady work of encounter, discussion, reflection and reconciliation.”<sup>24</sup>

A third strand affecting the Church of England’s relations with Judaism has been the sense of solidarity with Palestinian people. This has become an increasingly significant influence in recent years, both with a heightened awareness in British society of the sufferings of the Palestinian

people, and with the growing involvement of the Church of England with Muslim communities, who will often raise the question of Israel/Palestine as an issue in interfaith dialogue. However, its most persuasive force is exercised through links with Anglican Christians in the Holy Land, who are overwhelmingly of Palestinian Arab background and generally strongly pro-Palestinian in their political orientation. In 1887 the Jerusalem see was reconstituted as a purely Anglican bishopric, and the new bishop George Blyth was entrusted with an ambassadorial role to build good relations with Orthodox Christian Arabs. This inevitably led to tension between the increasingly high church, Arab-oriented diocese and the low church, Jewish-oriented Christ Church, leading eventually to the construction of a new Cathedral, St George's. The polarity has continued to the present day, providing a crucially important instance of the Anglican vocation to hold together difference in tension.

It is the interplay and occasional confrontation of these three strands – Zionist, Jewish solidarity and Palestinian solidarity – which shape Anglican attitudes to Israel today, and these political realities cannot be wholly divorced from theological principles. “Palestinian solidarity,” for example, can at times turn to a kind of replacement theology to deny any Jewish claim on the land; Zionist Christians may either adopt a dispensationalist version of the “two covenants” theory or may stress the Christian dependence on Israel by being grafted into the one covenant; the “Jewish solidarity” strand draws support from both one and two covenant models, and from the “different religions” approach. This intermingling of theology and politics is found in other inter faith relations also; yet Christian-Jewish relations have significance beyond their immediate field.

Christian-Jewish relations will always have a profile disproportionate to the actual size of the Jewish community, and this reflects their recurrent and unavoidable centrality for any Christian engagement with other religions. It

is no accident that *Nostra Aetate* began as a text addressing the Church's relation with Judaism only, and subsequently grew to engage with Islam and with other religious traditions also; rather, this reflects a deep theological orientation, which in encounter with the other will always find an evocation of the first experience of otherness in the Church's life, that between Gentile and Jew – both within the Christian fellowship and in relation to those Jews who do not accept Jesus as Messiah. As Paul's writings most notably show, a passionate wrestling with this division is inscribed in the New Testament, and through that is encoded in Christian ways of thinking, to emerge with a shaping role in any encounter with the religious other.

Most of all, as Judaism throughout the Church's history has refused to go away, its continuing vitality has posed a challenge to Christians who want a tidy solution to the problem of religious plurality – to quote Michael Barnes again:

*If there is a “first moment” in a Christian theology of religions, it arises from the strictly anarchic otherness to which the living tradition of Judaism witnesses; in faithfulness to that trace of the Infinite, Judaism continues to “haunt” the process of Christian self-identification.*<sup>25</sup>

So it is precisely because of the formative nature of this primal division within the people of God, this first Christian encounter with an “other,” that the significance of Christian encounter with Israel is not limited to one part of interfaith relations. To the contrary, any serious engagement with a religious other will drive us theologically to revisit the first covenant in which the Jewish other shapes our Christian identity in relation to God for, as Kasper rightly said, Judaism is a sacrament of every otherness which the Church repeatedly needs to encounter.

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<sup>1</sup> Anglican Communion 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).

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*” (1965), §4.

<sup>3</sup> Alberto Melloni, “*Nostra Aetate* and the Discovery of the Sacrament of Otherness”, 150-1, in Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hofman SDB and Joseph Sievers (eds.), *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Walter Cardinal Kasper, “Address on the 37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*” (28 October 2002), <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kasper/650-wk02oct28>.

<sup>5</sup> “Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue”, Appendix 6, §13 – p. 302 in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988 – Reports, Resolutions and Pastoral Letters from the Bishops* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, §16.

<sup>7</sup> Jesper Svartvik, “Christological and Soteriological Reflections in the Wake of Half a Century of Intense and Improved Jewish-Christian Relations”, *Current Dialogue*, 44 (December 2004), on <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd44-12.html>.

<sup>8</sup> On the Augustinian tradition, see, e.g.: Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 56.9, CCSL 39: 700.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 5.5, CCSL 41:56.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard, *Epistle* 363. On Bernard’s ambiguous attitude toward the Jews, see David Berger, “The Attitude of St Bernard of Clairvaux toward the Jews”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 40 (1972), 89-108.

<sup>12</sup> Svartvik, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Generous Love*, *op. cit.*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Inter Faith Consultative Group, ‘*Sharing One Hope?*’ *The Church of England and Christian-Jewish Relations: A Contribution to a Continuing Debate* (London: Church House, 2001).

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

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> On the ambiguities and limitations of “supersessionism” as applied to traditional Christian anti-Judaic teaching, see Jeremy Worthen, *The Internal Foe: Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Shaping of Christian Theology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 4ff and *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, citing John Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Archbishop Rowan’s paper for the Fifth International Sabeel Conference, “Holy Land and Holy People” (14 April 2004), includes a characteristically nuanced one-covenant approach.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London: SCM, 1991), cited in *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Barnes SJ, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 62, referring de Michel de Certeau SJ, *The Writing of History* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Rafael F. Scharf, “Cracow of Blessed Memory”, 73, in *Poland, What Have I to Do with Thee ... Essays without Prejudice* (Kraków: Fundacja Judaica, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> “Archbishop and Chief Rabbis Sign Historic Agreement.” *Archbishop of Canterbury Website*. 5 September 2006. Web. Accessed 25 May 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Barnes, *op. cit.*, 128.



# What Jewish-Christian Relations in Antiquity Can Teach Us Today

Lawrence H. Schiffman

The purpose of this presentation is to examine the early history of Christianity and its rootedness in its Jewish background, as well as the commonalities between ancient Judaism and emerging Christianity, in order to serve as a model for harmonious and mutually respectful Jewish-Christian relations in modern times. Contrary to what some might expect, this will not be an attempt to create an overly harmonious imagined vision of the past in order to serve as a model for our present. Rather, it will attempt to treat this subject in a fair and honest manner, recognizing both positive and negative aspects of ancient relations and relationships, and reflecting on the significance of what we hope will be an objective approach in our modern quest for intergroup relations. Our presentation will cover the following subtopics: (1) history of the question; (2) the background of Christianity and its relationship to Jewish sectarianism; (3) accounts of the relationship between Jesus and the Jews; (4) Jews and Christians in the Hellenistic diaspora; (5) Paul and the New Perspective; and (6) rabbis and church fathers. At the conclusion of each section, I will make some brief observations regarding contemporary issues of Jewish-Christian relations, in order to point the way to the more substantial discussion at the end of the presentation.

## History of the Question

It is worth beginning by tracing briefly the history of the interrelated study of Judaism and Christianity. For Jews, serious interest in Christian texts as a source for the history of Judaism began in the Renaissance, particularly in the work of Azariah de Rossi (1513 or 1514-1578).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, he essentially began mining Second Temple period sources, available to him in the Apocrypha, Philo and Josephus for understanding the history of the Jews and

Judaism. His work is, of course, to be seen as part of the Renaissance return to classical sources, a trend that for Jews opened the lost literature of the Second Temple period although these particular sources had long been open to Christian scholars.

Conversely, as a result of the Reformation, Protestants returned to Hebrew sources, starting, of course, with the Hebrew text of what they termed the Old Testament. This quest for the *Hebraica Veritas* soon began to include a search in what we today term rabbinic literature, the classical rabbinic texts of the Mishnah, Talmuds, and Midrash, in order to illuminate the Jewish background of the New Testament. This effort, personified in the work of John Lightfoot (1602-1675, English churchman, rabbinical scholar and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge), often depended on later texts such as the code of Maimonides, since these were substantially clearer and easier to understand.<sup>2</sup> This trend in New Testament scholarship culminated in the extremely influential and important work of Strack and Billerbeck<sup>3</sup> in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is easy to criticize the Reformation scholars for their dependency on later sources. Even the more refined work of 20<sup>th</sup> century colleagues can sometimes be anachronistic by relying on later materials for understanding of 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jewish practice. But actually, this work constituted a major step forward both in understanding the New Testament itself and in beginning to reshape Jewish and Christian views of the others' religious traditions.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the corpus of Second Temple literature was substantially expanded through the discovery and publication of the Pseudepigrapha,<sup>4</sup> and then of the Zadokite Fragments (otherwise known as the Damascus Document),<sup>5</sup> a

copy of a Dead Sea Scrolls text discovered first in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Cairo Genizah. These discoveries should already have led to much greater scholarly investigation of the Jewish background of Christianity. But for reasons that are hard to understand, a major reshaping of our understanding had to await the awakening of the world to the Holocaust, soon followed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These two events, a horrendous tragedy and a phenomenal discovery, worked hand-in-hand to bring about a major change in the way post-Hebrew Bible Judaism and early Christianity were seen, and, in particular, how their relationship was understood. Much of what is today normative in the study of Second Temple Judaism resulted from the discovery and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The re-evaluation of ancient Judaism and its relationship to early Christianity that has taken place in the field of New Testament studies was greatly encouraged by the realization of the role of Christian anti-Judaism in setting the stage for the Holocaust. The study of the scrolls went hand-in-hand with Vatican II in engendering a new openness and sense of collegiality that brought together Jewish and Christian scholars.<sup>6</sup>

While I could reflect at length about some of the silly theories put forward regarding the connection of the Dead Sea Scrolls to early Christianity, suffice it to say that, despite many of these exaggerated views, scholars have come to understand that the scrolls are but a part of a rich library of Second Temple literature.<sup>7</sup> Now enhanced with the contributions of archaeology, we can better envision the world in which Jesus and Christianity came to the fore. The presence in Second Temple literature of parallels or source material for certain New Testament ideas has also contributed to a re-evaluation of the scholarly questions involved.<sup>8</sup>

Both Jewish and Christian scholars in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century began to argue that rabbinic literature was totally irrelevant to

the study of Late Antiquity since at best it reflected the later development of an earlier Pharisaic tradition. Furthermore, it was now assumed that Christianity developed based on so-called sectarian Judaism so that these later materials would have no value. We regard this as a total overstatement, and we find ourselves today in a period in which a rebalancing is taking place in terms of the use of rabbinic literature for the study of the New Testament and early Christianity.

Today we are blessed with an expanded Second Temple library and new methodologies to test the value of sources and to avoid anachronism. Much of this work has proceeded in the spirit of commonality and positive intergroup relations. It is for this reason that many accomplishments have been attained by a large and diverse group of scholars, Christian and Jewish, religious and not religious, from many different countries, who have effectively created a new consensus on the principal issues.

From the point of view of Jewish-Christian relations, it is apparent that the tendency to understand the original closeness of Judaism and Christianity in their common roots has moved forward considerably in modern times. Unfortunately, to some extent, much of this progress is an indirect result of the Holocaust. There can be no question that interpreters of the New Testament have rethought the issues we are talking about today in light of the extermination of 6 million Jews in Christian Europe.

### **Jewish Sectarianism as the Background of Christianity**

Essential to the new perspective that places nascent Christianity, often termed the “Jesus Movement,” into its Jewish context is the assumption that Christianity in its earliest phase was a Jewish sect similar in many ways to the Dead Sea Scrolls sect or other less well-known apocalyptic sects that existed in the Land of Israel in Second Temple times. An exaggerated form of this generally correct view often speaks of

Second Temple Judea and the Galilee as “swarming” with teachers like Jesus or groups such as the early Christians. This picture is a great exaggeration, even if the later statement of the Jerusalem Talmud (Sanhedrin 29c) that there were twenty-four such groups, may turn out to be a somewhat accurate estimate. The reality is that we know a considerable amount about the following groups: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and/or the Dead Sea sect – depending on when whether one sees them as one or two groups – and the early followers of Jesus. Beyond this, we can reconstruct some sense of groups behind some of the apocalyptic texts and we can speak of small groups such as the morning bathers (Hemerobaptists). Still under debate is whether the Hasidim (“pious ones”) were actually an organized group or rather an agglomeration of pietists scattered in the larger population. A number of independent leaders, such as Theudas and the Egyptian, both executed by the Romans, the Teacher of Righteousness and John the Baptist can be profitably compared with Jesus, although only Jesus was eventually understood by his followers to be a messiah or to be divine. On the messianic side, one should also compare the military revolutionary messiah Bar Kokhba as well as some of the revolutionary leaders of the Great Revolt against Rome who may have made messianic claims.

The placement of the Jesus Movement within this context has much to recommend it, although careful comparisons reveal both similarities and contrasts. For example, the Teacher of Righteousness of the Dead Sea sectarians, like Jesus, gathered a group of followers around him with specific views on Jewish law and messianism. Further, both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Jesus Movement, like the Essenes described by Philo and Josephus as well, had subordinate leadership figures who assisted their main leaders. Both of these groups had distinctive interpretations of Judaism that motivated their particular practices, and both were in conflict with the Romans. Nonetheless,

differences between these movements abound: The Dead Sea sect sought to physically remove itself from Jerusalem to the desert, while Christianity remained within the main population centres, moving toward rather than away from Jerusalem. Dead Sea sectarians and Essenes sought to separate themselves completely from outsiders, seeing them as terrible sinners. Jesus and his followers sought to interact with outsiders and sinners in order to bring them close to their emerging way of life. Views attributed to Jesus in the gospels seem to fit into the modes of Jewish legal argumentation of the late Second Temple period, yet they seem to be substantially more lenient than those of the Pharisees. The Dead Sea Scrolls sectarians and those behind works such as the book of Jubilees seem to be much stricter, following the Sadducean priestly approach to Jewish law. The descriptions of the kingdom attributed to Jesus seem to fit mostly into the restorative, naturalistic and peaceful form of Jewish messianism while the apocalyptic views of the Dead Sea sectarians and of other apocalyptic groups known from Second Temple literature expected a cataclysmic destruction on a grand scale. In some of these issues, the views attributed to Jesus seem more like those of the Pharisees than those of the apocalyptic Jewish sects.

In essence, then, it is correct to place nascent Christianity into the context of Jewish sectarianism in Second Temple times. However, one has to avoid overly simplified claims that Christianity descended directly from this or that group. So, for example, the unsubstantiated identification of John the Baptist as an Essene/Dead Sea sectarian cannot then be used to support the claim that early Christianity was influenced by the teachings of the Essenes/Dead Sea sect. This assumption is without proof, and it flies in the face of the data that we have available. The Dead Sea Scrolls sect and the Essenes were highly organized communal entities, which must be contrasted with the highly individualistic character of the role played by John the Baptist. Rather, we must

adopt a much more complex model of Second Temple Judaism. Various ideas were “mixed and matched” in different ways by groups that may also have resembled each other to some extent in social organization. We should in no way be surprised to see earliest Christianity, before and after the death of Jesus, resembling in some ways one or another group while disagreeing with that same group in other ways.

Looking at this question briefly from the point of view of Jewish-Christian relations, we can see that the placement of Christianity within the Second Temple sectarian context has not only enabled us to understand many developments in Christianity but has tremendously heightened the extent to which the New Testament is seen as close to its Jewish roots. Ironically, even when such closeness was over-exaggerated or when some specific sectarian group was singled out to solve the problem of Christian origins, these theories too contributed in many ways to improved Jewish-Christian relations.

### **Accounts of the Relationship of Jesus to the Jews**

Even a casual reader of the New Testament will note that the gospels portray Jesus in a variety of relationships with Jews. In some cases, his followers and/or other Jews in either the Galilee or Judea are pictured as listening appreciatively to his messages, seeking healing or the banishment of demons through him. Some Jews, perhaps including John the Baptist, identify Jesus as the long-awaited Redeemer, but these passages may result from later developments within the church and may not be historical. On the other hand, other Jews receive him quite negatively, as is the case, for example, in his own hometown synagogue where his teachings are rejected (Matt. 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30). At the same time, it becomes extremely clear as the gospel narratives proceed that the high priestly, Sadducean, aristocracy and their colleagues who serve the Romans as local rulers, most

notably Herod Antipas, see Jesus as a political threat eventually to be silenced.

Scholars have concluded that if one traces the various accounts of the gospels over time, one can see a shift from opposition to the Pharisees and the priestly leaders, the latter being essentially stooges of the Romans, to a wider antagonism toward the Jewish people as a whole. It is clear that this process is one of the essential ingredients of later Christian anti-Judaism. We should also note that the distinctiveness of Christianity as a separate religious group can be traced through the same period. The gospels were completed, one by one, between ca. 65 and 100 CE, and simultaneously notions that Jesus was indeed the messiah who had died to save those who believe in him and that he was a divine figure were being solidified as fundamental Christian tenets. Concomitantly, the rabbis were promulgating legal rulings and teachings that emphasized that Christianity was indeed a separate religion from Judaism.<sup>9</sup> Christianity evolved from a Jewish sect into a new religion – especially in the aftermath of the decision or process by which Christians began to seek converts from the general Greco-Roman population. This shift to Gentile Christianity along with official rabbinic distancing from Christianity completed the schism that was essentially complete, even if somewhat fuzzy at the edges, by the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-5 CE. By this time, early Christians understood Jesus’ contact with Jews during his lifetime in a new light, emphasizing the separation and mutual antagonism that existed in the latter half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Furthermore, the early Christians read the gospel accounts in light of the Crucifixion, which they now understood to have been brought about not by some Jews, but by the Jewish people as a whole.

It is easy to conclude this section by saying that Christian understandings of the gospels tended to encourage antagonism to Judaism and, therefore, the study of these questions provides a model not for good Jewish-Christian relations but rather for cool

relations at best. However, this result need not be the case. We can look into the gospels for more positive models of debate and disagreement and for a historical understanding of the process that led to the antagonisms of the past. Such an understanding can in turn serve as a basis for better relations in the future.

### **Jews and Christians in the Hellenistic Diaspora**

We will turn in the next section to the tremendously significant questions regarding Paul and his view of the Jews and Judaism. First let us see how the Jewish communities of the Greco-Roman world related to Paul and early Christian missionaries as well as to the newly emerging groups of Christians. Paul and his associates effectively followed the location of Jewish communities and synagogues throughout the Greco-Roman world in order to spread their new religion. A major change took place in the mid-first century when Christianity turned from being a Jewish sect within the confines of Judaism to being seen, and seeing itself, as a separate religious group. Among other things, this process entailed the acceptance of Gentile converts.<sup>10</sup> From reading Acts and the Epistles, and from the fact that most Christian communities were located close to Jewish communities and interacted with them, it is likely that some of the initial converts in the Greco-Roman world were indeed Jews.

This question, in turn, relates to a wider question: the disappearance of Hellenistic Jewish communities, those Jews who prayed in Greek and referenced Greek Bibles.<sup>11</sup> During the Byzantine period there was a marked decline in communities of Hellenistic Jews. There are two likely causes: conversion of some to Christianity and transition of others to conformity with the growing Hebrew-praying rabbinic tradition. Despite some reports that we have of rejection of Christian missionaries in Hellenistic synagogues of the Greco-Roman Diaspora, some number of Jews that may have been quite substantial must have

converted to the new faith. From the excavation of sites like Aphrodisias and Sardis, we can see that Jews and Christians continued to live in close proximity and to interact with one another.

In the early years of Christianity, Judaism was considered a legitimate religion of the Roman Empire while Christianity was initially considered to be illegal. No doubt, early Christians, if of Jewish descent, might have taken cover in the Jewish community. Such a situation may provide the background for the report of the expulsion from ancient Rome by Claudius (41-54 CE) of a group of Jews said to be instigated by Chrestus (the designation for Jesus was Greek *Christos*). These Christians were totally assimilated into the Jewish community so that the historian Suetonius (Claudius 35.4) could describe them as Jews. This account is also further evidence of the close connection of Jews and Christians, especially in areas where there were previous Jewish communities with synagogues. The existence of a benediction to expel Jewish Christians from synagogues in the Land of Israel, as well as the report of Christians being removed from synagogues intimated in the gospel according to John, would seem to bear out this intimacy.<sup>12</sup> It continued until a combination of rabbinic rulings and realignment of the Christian movement led to further separation.<sup>13</sup>

The situation that we have described here has led some scholars to what I think is a mistaken conclusion – that the so-called parting of the ways took place only in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. This assumption is often based on analysis of what one might term the fuzziness of the boundaries between the groups. From my point of view, there are never group boundaries without overlaps and inconsistencies. I think that these scholars mistook the ambiguous cases as well as the fact that Jews and Christians were so often in close proximity and association, and drew the incorrect conclusion that they could not be differentiated from one another. We would simply argue that they were indeed

differentiated but were in much closer proximity and interaction than one might have expected from some later texts and traditions.

From the point of view of models for modern Jewish-Christian relations, I would argue that some of these communities in the early period of the diffusion of Christianity evidenced the ability of Jews and Christians to relate to one another in a friendly and civil manner. A more negative situation developed only with the Christianization of the Empire in 325 CE and the onset of Byzantine rule over most of the Jewish community. At that point, many discriminatory laws that were promulgated aimed at subjugating the Jews.

### **Paul and the New Perspective**

One of the most sensitive issues in Jewish-Christian relations has always been the debate over the significance of Paul's attitudes to Jews and Judaism. Taking as evidence the Pauline Epistles, recent scholarship has taken a completely different approach, now termed the "New Perspective," that is accepted by virtually all significant New Testament scholars. What we might term the "Old Perspective" viewed Paul as believing that the observance of the law by Jews placed them in a position of constant transgression since it was impossible to fully observe all the commandments. Thus, Paul's view was understood to mean that the Torah's commandments were not a valid path to a connection with God and, hence, that Christianity had effectively superseded Judaism, even for Jews. The New Perspective understands Paul very differently. It accepts the notion that Paul extended his concept of Israel so as to encompass Gentiles who accepted Jesus and had faith in him along with the old Israel that may continue its relationship with God through the commandments. Thus, effectively, the New Perspective removes from Paul the condemnation of the Jewish practice of the commandments and concomitantly makes room for a

Christianity that does not believe in supersessionism. There can be no question that Paul did not practice the so-called ceremonial laws consistently and felt that this approach would be instrumental in spreading the Christian message. Yet his attitudes towards the practice of Judaism by Jews seem ambiguous.

In discussing this approach, one must admit that contemporary issues in the post-Holocaust period and the evaluation of the ancient documents are intertwined. The New Perspective and the improvement of Jewish-Christian relations have gone hand-in-hand, generating, in turn, the dual covenant theory. This intersection of scholarship and the pursuit of positive Jewish-Christian relations is of course not without merit. Nevertheless, objective scholarship dictates that researchers evaluate their work without recourse to their own beliefs and traditions.

### **Rabbis and Church Fathers**

Christianity moved from being a group of Jews with non-normative beliefs to a group of non-Jews who would come to believe that Jesus was the messiah and indeed in some way divine. The rabbis reacted to this trend. They turned from seeing the Christians as *minim*, Jews with beliefs that the rabbis thought were illegitimate, and began to term them *notserim*, "Christians" in our sense of the word. Already at the earlier stage, the rabbis, as mentioned earlier, instituted a supplement to a benediction in order to remove believers in Jesus from synagogues. Further, they outlawed accepting such people as reliable regarding kosher foods and instituted various steps to indicate the unacceptability of their beliefs and to separate Jews from them.<sup>14</sup> Of course, not all Jews, even in the Land of Israel, followed these instructions strictly. However, from the point of view of the rabbinic authorities, by the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-5), Christianity was seen as a separate religion outside the Jewish community.

In the Hellenistic world, especially in Asia Minor where Christianity had made considerable headway, we certainly cannot assume that rabbinic teachings were the norm among Jews. Yet evidence seems to show that identities had solidified by this time. The Roman Empire under Nero (ruled 37-68) outlawed and persecuted Christianity while continuing to regard Judaism as a legal religion. Therefore, Jews and Christians were widely considered by the Romans to be members of different groups, though they might have been confused by outsiders at times. It is apparent from the evolution of the gospels that Christians began to see Jews as “the other” by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. This trend within both religious communities, in the writings of the rabbis and church fathers, evidenced the continued separation and even antagonism of the two groups.

To be sure, discriminatory laws such as those found in the codices of Justinian and Theodosius were widely imposed on Jews who found themselves second-class citizens in the Christian Byzantine Empire.<sup>15</sup> In the land of Israel this process led to the dismantling of the Patriarchate, the institution of Jewish self-government, in 425 CE. The very same time seems to have been one of increased “on the ground” strife between Jews and Christians.

We should note, however, the asymmetry of the antagonism. Most Jews, living in the land of Israel in the Hellenistic world, found themselves under the rule of the Byzantine Roman Empire, so that anti-Jewish measures undertaken by the government and supported by the church fathers were strongly felt by the Jewish community. The various negative views found in rabbinic literature, for the most part censored in printed editions of rabbinic texts, display the reciprocal antagonism of the persecuted minority, frustrated by steps taken against it by the majority.<sup>16</sup>

It is fair to say that in Late Antiquity – the period just before the Islamic conquest of most of the Near East – antisemitism

became institutionalized in the church through the teachings of the church Fathers. While it is possible to point to some evidence for the engagement of Jews and Christians in intellectual discussions of various religious ideas as well as cooperating in various ways, this is the period in which the schism was finally sealed, leading to the terrible abuses of the Middle Ages. As we reflect on the relevance of ancient Judaism and Christianity for our modern-day relationship, this period will be seen as one of decline and sets up a model very different from the one we will want to follow today.

### **Modern Reflections**

In considering modern-day relations between Jews and Christians in light of the precedents from Antiquity, we can construct three models from the past: one that indicates the potential for close relations based on positive precedents; one that would recognize the potential for close relations based on new understandings of older traditions; and the last provides essentially a model of precisely what we wish to avoid, namely a relationship of antagonism. Any “use of the past” that seeks to model itself upon a totally antagonistic view of the past – or, the complete opposite: a reading of ancient sources that ignores the realities of conflict – will not be successful. For this reason, I reject approaches that seek to recast the history of the separation of Christianity from Judaism as devoid of inherent conflict. I also wish to reject the argument that essentially there never was a real separation. This position constitutes a kind of anachronistic ecumenism which seeks to understand the past as if Jews and Christians met one another with the identical motivations and attitudes of today.

I would argue against both extremes, claims of irenic relations on the one hand, or of total, continuous antagonism on the other. One can be cured of the Pollyanna-ish approach by looking at the manner in which ancient peoples inveighed against each other throughout the Greco-Roman world. Yet

the row of stores shared by Jews, Christians and pagans in late antique Sardis clearly shows that Jews and Christians (and pagans) lived and worked together in harmony and good will.

We will now look at the three-part model that I have suggested. I would argue that one of its prime advantages is its ability not only to base modern positive relationships on positive ancient models, but its ability to turn ancient antagonism and the discussion of it into a basis for new relationships of respect and cooperation. It is ironic that the discussion of the Dead Sea Scrolls community and their texts – certainly documents infused with hatred for opponents and conflict with others – has served in modern times to help bring Jews and Christians together because of what we learn from these texts about our common roots.

### **Positive models**

While the gospels generally present an impression that large numbers of Jews opposed Jesus and his early followers, historians generally take the view that the extent of this opposition is magnified in the gospel traditions over time. It is a reflection of the reaction of late 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christians to Jewish opposition that became very strong after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. In the aftermath of the destruction, Jews found it necessary to rally around the Pharisaic-rabbinic consensus. If this is true, then we should be able to reconstruct from the various gospel accounts and their sources the nature of early disputation regarding religious matters, Jewish law being prominent among them. The gospels relate various disputes of Jesus with the Pharisees. This kind of relationship is to some extent confirmed by the post-crucifixion account in which the Pharisaic head of the community Rabban Gamliel I (Gamaliel) instructed the Sanhedrin to leave the apostles alone, since if their actions are not from God they will fail in any case (Acts 5:38-39). While I fully admit that other positions could be taken on this material, I take the view that disputes that took place

during the lifetime of Jesus were being conducted in a much more issue-centred and irenic manner.

If one accepts the evidence of Acts, Paul appears to have found himself quite comfortable among Diaspora Jews, even if he sometimes found that his message made him unwelcome in their synagogues. One gathers that in numerous places, especially because the schism had not yet proceeded to completion, Jews and Christian believers lived together and constituted overlapping communities. Later Diaspora evidence points to a similar situation, even after the two faiths had separated.

I believe that there is some evidence that would provide us a positive model for Jewish-Christian relations in the earliest stages of the development of Christianity, even if over time these relations became more and more antagonistic. I see a kind of rising graph of antagonism, starting already before the crucifixion but intensely increasing through the completion of the gospels and the literature of the church fathers. Even within this complicated period, some references to the rabbis in the church fathers continue to provide us with positive models for both interfaith exchange of ideas and for the maintenance of good relations among those who have much in common, even if they at the same time have very deep disagreements.

### **New understandings**

While it is a subject way beyond what we are discussing today, it is very clear that modern scholarship about ancient Judaism and Christianity has radically changed the context in which the earliest Jewish-Christian relations are understood. In the post-Holocaust period, an amazing partnership has ensued, taken as totally natural in the academic world, in which Jewish and Christian scholars have worked together to create a completely different picture of the background of Christianity and the history of both communities in the first few centuries CE. From this angle, earliest Christianity is viewed as an originally



Jewish sect, the subsequent history of which led to its separation from the larger Jewish community. Thus, Christianity is no longer seen as a fundamental rejection of Judaism but rather as what was originally a form of Judaism that later developed specific beliefs and practices turning it into a separate religious community. At the same time, the notion that the authoritative texts of Jewish and Christian tradition reflect totally accurate accounts of those religions in this period has been essentially dethroned, sometimes even to an extreme that leads to exaggerated conclusions.

This new way of looking at the separate and combined histories of Judaism and Christianity provides a model of interrelationship and commonality of origins that, when taken as a whole, provides a model for a relationship of a positive nature. A common and interactive past, despite the antagonisms and differences of opinion, becomes in this form of scholarship either a model for, or a reflection of, an already existing modern set of relationships.

In other words, the more we find that Jews and Christians shared a heritage, disputed over a common Bible, lived in many of the same places, exchanged ideas and influenced each other, and shared ties to the same land if they lived in the Diaspora, the more commonality overcomes difference. This commonality of the ancient groups, in turn, serves as a model for contemporary Jewish-Christian relations.

### **Learning from negative history**

I have already mentioned that modern relations cannot be constructed based on a false view of the past that somehow hides the truth of strong disagreement, antagonism, persecution and anti-Judaism/antisemitism. It is my firm belief that only an honest view of the past and a willingness to fully admit the extent to which we disagree can be the basis for friendship. I therefore feel strongly that we should look at some of the negative experiences of the past as a basis for learning how not to relate to one another

and for understanding the dangers – even horrors – that can result when our disagreements are allowed to go way too far.

Clearly, some important Jewish leaders were connected with the high priest and the Herodian aristocracy. Because of their close relationship to the Romans, they were highly opposed to Jesus and his followers. While most Jews simply were not prepared to accept some of the teachings of Jesus, and certainly did not accept him as the messiah and/or divine after his death, these particular Roman allies took actions against Jesus and his followers that, to say the least, went beyond the kind of intergroup relations that we would advocate. In turn, after the death of Jesus, Christians, especially after Gentile Christianity became the norm, came to see the Jews as a people (that is, each and every individual Jew) as collectively at fault for Jesus' death. Even as Christians were themselves a persecuted minority in the Roman Empire, they began to include more and more anti-Jewish expressions in their texts. By the time Christianity became dominant in the Roman Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, it was prepared to regulate and restrict the practice of Judaism, to dismantle Jewish self-government in the form of the Patriarchate, to pass all kinds of anti-Jewish legislation, and, in some cases to undertake physical violence against Jews whose only crime was holding on to their ancestral faith.

No matter how we see some of these particular literary texts and historical events from the past, this model of antagonism and persecution cannot be a model for present-day relations. Nevertheless, to act as if it never happened, or to claim that there is no anti-Judaism in Christian sources or that uncensored versions of rabbinic literature do not severely criticize Christian ideas is to try to base our relationship on a false view of the past.

### **Conclusion**

Scholars will continue to develop our view of the past and it will continue to reflect

aspects of our present whether we intend that it be so or not. Our common past can be used as a model for present relations provided that we are willing to honestly interpret and confront it. We will find models both for good relations and bad. Our job, put simply, is to take hold of those examples from the past that lead us to construct good relations in the present and future. It is also our job, as they say in the United States, “on both sides of the aisle,” to confront our past reactions to one another, even when they were negative. Only in such a way can our continued study and reconstruction of the history of Jewish-Christian relations in Antiquity serve us to advance the new and better relationship that has developed in the post-Holocaust era.

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<sup>1</sup> L. A. Segal, *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azariah de' Rossi's Me'or 'Einayim* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 54-6; Azariah de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, translated from the Hebrew with an introduction and annotations by J. Weinberg (Yale Judaica Series; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xxxviii-xli.

<sup>2</sup> J. Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, 4 vols., repr. 1889 ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 5 vols. (Munich: 1922-56).

<sup>4</sup> J. H., Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983-85).

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<sup>5</sup> First published by S. Schechter, *Documents of Jewish Sectaries, Volume I, Fragments of a Zadokite Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), repr. Library of Biblical Studies (New York: Ktav, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> E. Schuler, “The Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Judaism to Christianity: Tradition and Transition: A Festschrift for Thomas H. Tobin, S.J., on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, P. Walters (ed.), *Novum Testamentum Supplements* 136 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 43-58.

<sup>7</sup> Much of it collected in L. H. Feldman, J. L. Kugel, and L. H. Schiffman, *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society; Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Ironically, the discovery of the Nag Hamadi papyri seems to have thrown something of a monkey wrench into these developments. These papyri should certainly be seen as a boon for our understanding of Christianity in Late Antiquity. But they cannot be seen as reflecting the realities of 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christianity. The constant use of these texts for sensationalistic purposes has to a great extent prevented them from making the contribution that they should to our understanding of the variegated nature of early Christianity and to the complex paths that it travelled before arriving at its classical form.

<sup>9</sup> L. H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1985), 62-7.

<sup>10</sup> We purposely avoid here the question of whether the picture of the conference described in Acts is to be seen as historical or not.

<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon is separate from the late medieval Judeo-Greek communities on mainland Greece and in the Aegean.

<sup>12</sup> Schiffman, *op. cit.*, 53-61.

<sup>13</sup> L. H. Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Schiffman, *Who was a Jew?*, 75-78.

<sup>15</sup> L. H. Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1998), 576-85.

<sup>16</sup> R. T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, repr. of 1903 ed. (New York: Ktav, 1975), 35-315; P. Schafer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 15-129.

# **Joint Communiqué of the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting for Dialogue between the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the World Council of Churches**

**16-17 November 2015**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue (CID) of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation (Tehran, Iran) held their eighth meeting for dialogue in the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, Switzerland, on 16-17 November 2015, which corresponds to 25-26 Aban in the Persian calendar. The overall theme for this meeting was “Religion, Peace and Violence.”

The meeting was the continuation of the process of dialogue between the WCC and the CID, which began in 1995. Participants representing the WCC came from Germany, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. They met with four Islamic scholars and religious leaders who came from Iran and the United Kingdom. Mr Jahandar Mahdi, who is an Imam of the Shia community in Geneva, was a guest at the meeting.

All participants agreed on the importance of the subject that was the focus for the current meeting, and that given the heightened global tension at the current time it was especially relevant to be discussing this topic of Religion, Peace and Violence. During the two days of the meeting, participants listened to stimulating papers and reflections exploring specific aspects of the overall theme. There was a real feeling of warmth and openness among the delegates. The participants from the World Council of Churches expressed their gratitude to their dialogue partners for their willingness and ability to allow this meeting to be held in English. The papers and discussion reflected the different

geographical, social and religious contexts of the participants:

- A particularly important contribution, emphasized by several of the participants, was the role of rationality in Shia Islam. The importance of *‘aql*, understanding, and the use of the intellect, was highlighted. In order to guard against the abuse of religion, it is important that people of faith observe three characteristics: spirituality, rationality, and the quest for social justice. These act as a balance enabling extremism and violence to be avoided.
- The different aspects of the nature of religion were discussed, ranging from religion’s role in exploring the meaning of life, to the communitarian and identity-giving aspects of religion, which can on occasion lead to an ambivalence regarding peace and violence. It was noted that the interaction between expression of religious beliefs and the human propensity to violence is not a new issue, but one that could be said to date back to the beginning of human history.
- The need for a balance between unity, harmony and diversity between people of different religions was noted. Both an overemphasis of our differences, but also an overplaying of commonalities can be dangerous to peaceful relations between people of different religions. However Christians and Muslims need to take account of the comparative weight of differences and commonalities, in the awareness that the values of mercy and compassion are deeply and widely

cherished by the followers of both religions.

- All participants acknowledged that there are resources within our different religious traditions which enable us to acknowledge that truth is greater than ourselves.
- There was a profound discussion about the fact that, though the means of violence and killing have become increasingly sophisticated in our world, the means for working for peace are still very simple and straightforward, namely the meeting with and openness towards those who are different to ourselves. It is important to speak *with* rather than *about* those who were seen as “other.”
- Issues concerning the often ambiguous relationship between religion and power in our different geographical contexts were raised. In the course of our conversation we acknowledged that this is potentially a very fruitful area for discussion in which we can learn from the wisdom of the traditions of each other, in the context of our regular meetings for interreligious dialogue in which a level of mutual trust has now been built up.
- Specific contexts such as the minority situation of Christians in the Middle East, and that of Muslims in Europe were explored. The need for equality before the law was mentioned, especially as a means to protect the rights of religious minorities.
- The need for religious people to ensure that their own self-understanding and desire for identity does not lead to a denigration of others was clearly expressed.
- The particular difficulties that women experience in relation to religious violence were noted. Religiously motivated violence is often targeted

directly or indirectly against women, and they are disproportionately victims.

- The need to work together to build up a cadre of younger people, who are willing to work openly and constructively in the area of interreligious concerns, was emphasized.
- As a gathering of Muslims and Christians, the group wanted to acknowledge the common heritage they share as part of the family of Abraham and to work towards the restoration of the “House of Abraham.” One particular aspect of this that was mentioned was the way that the scriptural traditions linked to the figure of Abraham made clear the value of human life. It was stated clearly that this profound insight should feed into any discussion and reflection on the subject of violence and religion.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to visit the office of the Globethics Network, which is located in the Ecumenical Centre, and to hear about the work of the GlobeEthics Library.

At the close of the meeting, the group was welcomed to the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, by Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, to meet with the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, and they shared with members of Executive Committee the highlights of their discussions.

The group committed themselves to taking steps to work further on the issues and concerns mentioned in this communiqué and will ensure that they remain in contact in the interval before the next meeting, anticipated to take place in Tehran, Iran, in early 2017.

## **Participants**

### **Christian**

Rev Dr Jean-Claude Basset  
Rev Sargez Benyamin  
Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills  
Rev Dr Detlef Goerrig  
Dr Heidi Hadsell  
Dr Elias Halabi  
Rt Rev Leo Paul  
Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian (also a member of the delegation of the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue)

### **Muslim**

Dr Abdolrahim Gavahi  
Dr Ali Mohammad Helmi  
Ms Zahra Rashidbeygi  
Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali

### **WCC staff**

Dr Clare Amos  
Ms Marietta Ruhland

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## **Human Sacrifice: The Ritual of an Emerging Sect**

### **Elias Halabi**

During the month of November 2015, there was a double suicide bomb attack in the southern suburb of Beirut. A few days later, the world was shocked with the news about the terrorist attacks in Paris. This sequence of events has triggered a series of questions regarding these events, the perpetrators, the victims, and the complications. This process led to two main observations that will be examined in this article:

1. Violence is no longer a means to achieve a certain goal; it became an aim in itself.
2. A new sect that glorifies violence and is based on human sacrifices is emerging.

Since the 9/11 attacks and the dramatic events in Iraq, later on in Syria and now in Lebanon and France, there has been a recurrent discourse about the use of violence in the name of religion, and about the misuse of religion to justify violent acts. On one hand, this discourse has become redundant and lost any effectiveness, and on the other, the acts of violence started to take on devastating dimensions. The videos of ISIS are clear displays of what can be called “The Art of Killing.” In the videos

themselves there was an evolution in killing methods: from shooting, to slaughtering, to burning alive and drowning. Moreover, when we analyze these videos, we observe that the execution itself is not the concluding scene but, rather, most of the video concentrates on violent actions with special effects in a Hollywood movie-making style. Such acts can be labeled as rituals since they have acquired a religious nature. There is a special dress code for executioners and victims. The videos start with a procession, then a recitation of verses from the holy book, a speech, and finally, execution. These steps are very similar to a liturgy; the basic difference being that they are rituals of an emerging sect that glorifies violence and is founded on human sacrifice.

In the past, people fighting for a certain cause resorted to violence only when they felt absolutely hopeless or helpless in the face of a powerful, wicked enemy. In some cases, the violence directed towards this aggressor was a reaction or a form of self-defence. Nowadays, suicide bombers do not blow up enemy barricades, but mostly innocent civilians instead, who are considered legitimate targets simply because

some of their religious community members have been engaged in actual warfare with the bombers. In addition, the more innocent people are killed, the more the attack is rated as successful. This becomes obvious when there is a double blast; the first bomb is meant to attract more people to the explosion scene before the second bomb explodes. The real targets of such attempts are the people who decide to leave the comfort and safety of their homes and run to the rescue of the victims. As a result, these attacks are “sacrificing” the innocent and good civilians. These changes have a direct impact on the concept of martyrdom, on God’s image and the essence of divinity.

Martyrdom is an act of self-sacrifice for the sake of those whom we love or on their behalf. In our time, the criteria for martyrdom is not self-sacrifice to protect or prevent harm, but the infliction of as much harm and pain as possible. What we are seeing today with suicide bombers is an attempt to inflict maximum pain and human loss, not on the side of the enemy, but on the side of the innocent, simply because they belong to a certain religion or sect which has been deemed heretical. The problem is that all these atrocities are committed in the name of Allah.

There is a crucial question to answer at this point: Is God really pleased with such a huge death toll? Is the God of Abraham pleased with the sacrificing of the innocent?

If we turn to Abraham, as the father of faith and a common faith ancestor of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, we see clearly that God, who first commended Abraham to sacrifice his only son (whether Isaac or Ishmael)<sup>1</sup> as a proof of total surrender and obedience, did not allow him to go till the end but rather sent a lamb as a substitute. This therefore put a ban on human sacrifice for these three monotheistic religions.

In his psalm, David says: “For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A

broken and a contrite heart – ‘These, O God, You will not despise’”<sup>2</sup> (Psalm 51:16-17). In the Qur’an it says: “And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.”<sup>3</sup> In Christianity, Jesus was the lamb that was crucified for the salvation of all humanity. This act of self-sacrifice was executed once and for all.

So what image of God emanates as a result of such violent acts?

It is an image of a God who is thirsty for blood and pleased with the slaughter of the innocent. It is also an unjust God who lets people pay the price for actions they did not commit but are committed by others. “And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another,”<sup>4</sup> says the Qur’an. This God who sacrifices the many for the privileged few is no longer the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine searching for the lost goat.<sup>5</sup> In addition, this creator who seeks vengeance upon the created will not be all merciful.

Consequently, these acts that were meant to make religion pristine have distorted God’s image and essence as well. There is no one God anymore. There is my God, your God, his God, and her God etc. It is a pantheon of gods who use human sacrifices to settle their disputes and establish their ranking. As a result, the God of Abraham is no longer omnipotent since his dignity and authority depend very much on human intervention.

Nevertheless, there is the counter example of Adel Termos, the person who prevented the suicide bomber in the southern suburbs of Beirut from blowing himself up inside the mosque.<sup>6</sup> He saw that the perpetrator had an explosive belt on his waist and instead of fleeing for his life and seeking refuge, he decided to hug him and push him away. He was the first to be blown up. He sacrificed himself and in this act he saved many, many lives. He also protected the house of God, thus keeping it a place of refuge for all people who seek God’s mercy and protection.

It would be a useless question to ask about the religious background of Adel. He lived his life as Shi'a and died as a true Muslim in an act of Jihad to protect and be sacrificed for his brothers and sisters in faith. I dare to go one step further to say that Adel was also a martyr in the Christian sense of the word because he sacrificed his life for the sake of others. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

"Today more than ever we are united by the ecumenism of blood, which further encourages us on the path toward peace and reconciliation,"<sup>7</sup> said Pope Francis. Adel, through his act of genuine faith, has expanded this notion of ecumenism of blood and witness to encompass all people who believe in the God of Abraham irrespective of their religions or sects.

In conclusion, I propose that in the face of this insanity and these atrocities, we have to take bold steps to try to stop the distortion of the image of God and religion and affirm the essence of religion as a way of salvation to all mankind. We need to:

- Go back to basic religious precepts of mercy, love and compassion.
- Provide a down-to-earth interpretation of religion that assures people of God's intention towards humankind. God is love and the Most Merciful.
- Affirm the common duty and shared responsibility of all to stand for justice for all.

- Shoulder each other's burdens and strive for peace and reconciliation.
- Provide a new religious discourse that responds to acute identity questions not only about the self but also about God and creation. This discourse needs to be clear, true and simple, with no room for misinterpretation, manipulation or diplomacy.

Time is running fast and the bloodshed continues. All people of faith have a moral and ethical responsibility to protect the innocent and to witness to the only one God of love, justice and peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 22; verses 99-112 of Surat Al-Safat from the Qur'an.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 51: 16-17, New King James Version (NKJV).

<sup>3</sup> Al Qur'an English al Anbiya 107.

<sup>4</sup> Al Qur'an English Fatir 18.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 15:4.

<sup>6</sup> During the double suicide bombing attack which took place in Beirut 12 November 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Cindy Wooden, "Ecumenism of Blood Unites Us' Francis tells Coptic Pope." *Catholic Herald Website*. Catholic Herald. Web. 12 May 2015. Accessed 25 May 2016.

## **How to Avoid Religious Violence: A Shi'i Perspective**

**Mohammad Ali Shomali**

A sad reality that we witness today and indeed has many times been the case is the misuse of religion to justify violence and injustice and secure selfish interests. There is no doubt, some terrible events have and may still happen in the name of religion. This has led to several results, to which I will respond:

1. Damage has been caused to some innocent people.
2. Damage has been caused to the status of religion in the sight of many people.
3. Some of those who are against the whole concept of religion and “sacredness” have taken advantage of these incidents and have argued that religion is the root cause of most injustice and atrocities; therefore, we need to get rid of all religion to avoid further conflict and troubles.

### **Evaluation**

1. In reality, most of the war and conflicts in the world are not caused by religious people. For example, if one considers World War I and World War II, one will realize that they were not religious wars.
2. Another reality is that any powerful institution or instrument that has the chance and ability to unite people can also be misused by people affected by ignorance and injustice. Many things hold the potential for misuse; yet this is not a sufficient reason to keep religion out of socio-political life. The misuse of religion should not therefore mean that we do not need religion at all; this would be akin to arguing that we should dispense of the judicial system because of the occurrence of any miscarriage of justice. No one, anywhere in the world, can claim that in all courts justice is served. However,

despite the occurrences of injustice, nobody in their right mind would advocate for the abolition of the courts. The same is true about armies and weapons: they are often deployed for bad purposes, yet nearly everyone believes – in one way or another – that they are necessary. So why, when it comes to religion, are abuses rolled out to argue for the elimination of religious influence from social and political life?

3. Religions have brought great good to human life. In addition to the good that religions have brought, religious people can do still more to demonstrate the usefulness of religions, not to serve ourselves, not even to serve our religious ideas, but to serve humanity. That is why we want to offer our religion to anyone who is interested. We feel that it is the right of every human being to, at the very least, receive fair access to what religious people have found useful and uplifting.

4. Religious people should offer a joint testimony of faith and its beauties. In my opinion, we have entered a new era. If so far, world religions have done well individually by themselves, we have now reached a point in history during which our future can only be guaranteed if we work together. There will not be any other way for religions to progress in the face of the pressures coming from secularism, liberalism or materialism unless we work together. We are all in the same situation. Unfortunately, in the past, many religious people did not appreciate the value of working together and they even saw each other as major enemies. Even today, in some parts of the world, the greatest enemies of Muslims are Christians or vice versa. This thinking belongs to the past. Today, the paradigm has completely changed and we have to understand that



from now on, our success lies in working together.

We need associations and partnerships of people from different religions who can work for the unity and happiness of humankind in the face of two major challenges. The first comes from secular and materialistic life and the forces promoting it, and the second from fellow believers who do not want us to work together towards unity. This necessitates partnerships between Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus and people of other faiths all working towards the same goals.

### **What are the fundamental roots of all problems?**

The Qur'an tells us about a great trust which was put to the mountains, the sky and other parts of creation and of their refusal to undertake it as they felt it would be too much of a burden. However, human beings accepted the challenge. Humanity was willing to undertake this trust and be the vicegerent of God on earth. But two problems soon appeared: humankind began to exhibit signs of ignorance and injustice. Humanity, to be able to function at its best and become a true vicegerent of God, has to remove the above obstacles.

The question now is how can we, without some kind of guidance, confront these problems and get rid of them? If we divest ourselves of religious guidance, received through divine revelation, how can we face the challenge of ignorance?

Ignorance is not only about the absence of scientific knowledge. When it comes to socio-political life, a great deal of ignorance can only be overcome when we refer to this revelation and guidance received from God. If we deprive ourselves of such revelation and guidance, it means we have decided to remain ignorant – this is to no one's benefit.

Another issue is the presence of injustice in society. If we disconnect our socio-political life from our responsibility and accountability to God, and we encourage

people to do whatever they please and enjoy life selfishly even within the limits of the law and without harming anyone, this would not result in the removal of injustice. Injustice is caused by people's greed, by those who are not happy and content with owning a country, continent or even a planet. Their dissatisfaction has no limits. Only when we believe we are servants of God and act in a godly way will we be able to humble ourselves and find prosperity and happiness by serving others. If we deprive our socio-political life of commitment towards God and the deep desire to serve the children of God, we will not be able to challenge and remove injustice.

### **How can we avoid the misuse, malfunction and misinterpretation of religion?**

As a message from God, religion cannot be but good and beneficial. A true religion teaches the way to meet all genuine needs of humankind: both physical and spiritual. What I, as a Muslim, need to do is make sure that I have proper understanding and then proper practice of my faith.

In addition to the adoption of a proper methodology and the acquisition of necessary qualifications for a scholarly understanding of religion in its entirety and depth, one has to remember that religion's role is to bring happiness and satisfaction in this world and hereafter. This can only be achieved when everything is given its due right and one is able to strike a balance. According to Imam Ali, the ignorant and unwise always miss the balance and go to extremes.

*Balance between reason and revelation*

*Balance between this world and the hereafter*

*Balance between individual and society*

*Balance between spirituality and performance of rituals*

*Balance between self-building and social engagement.*

In what follows, I will refer to some of the characteristics of Islam from a Shi'a viewpoint, or in other words, the main

features of Shi'i thought. I believe that these can help in the elimination of extremism, violence and suffering and to avoid the creation of violence in the name of religion.

### Spirituality

Islam urges its followers to go beyond the daily, material affairs and seek the real nature of human life in the unseen world, in the spiritual world.<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an invites human beings to investigate the spiritual world in themselves as an entrance to the world of spirituality:

*We will soon show them our signs in the horizons and in their own souls, until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth.* (41:35)

*And there are signs on the earth for those who are certain. And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?* (51:20, 21)

In a well-known hadith, the Prophet Muhammad formulates the relation of one's knowledge of self to one's knowledge of God: "Whoever knows himself (his soul) has known his Lord."<sup>2</sup>

The other side of this relation, i.e. the relation of one's knowledge of God to one's knowledge of one's self, is referred to in the Qur'an itself: "And be not like those who forgot God, so He made them forget their own souls; these it is that they are the transgressors" (59:19).

Therefore, the knowledge of the most valuable object in any religion, i.e. God, is tied with one's knowledge of one's reality, which by no means can be identified with the physical aspect of humanity, i.e. the human body.<sup>3</sup> It also has to be noted that the knowledge of one's self is not sufficient by itself. Having known the reality of the self, one would be able to take care of it by educating, training and purifying it.

One of the manifestations of this spirituality in Shi'i Islam is prayer, *du'a*. There has been a great emphasis on the prayer in the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet and his household. For example, the Qur'an says:

*If My servant asks you about Me [tell them:] surely I am near. I answer the call of the caller when calls Me.* (2:186)

*Call Me! I will answer to You.* (40:60)

The Prophet Muhammad said:

*The prayer is the weapon of the believer and the pillar of the faith.*

Imams of the household of the Prophet said:

*The best type of worship is the prayer.*

*The prayer is the core of worship.*

*Surely the prayer is the cure for all types of illness.*

In addition to many sayings of the household of the Prophet regarding different aspects of the prayer, such as its philosophy, instructions on how and when to pray, and obstacles of prayers being answered, there are many short and long pieces of prayer narrated from the Imam of the household of the Prophet in Shi'a sources. Many volumes of books have been compiled by Shi'a scholars containing those prayers and/or commentaries on them. The most well-known collection of prayers in Islam, *Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyah* belongs to Imam Ali ibn Husayn.<sup>4</sup> *Al-Sahifa Al-Kamila Al-Sajjadiyya* is made up of 54 Supplications.

### Rationality

One of the important issues in religious studies and in the philosophy of religion is how to define the role of reason and its relation to revelation. In the Islamic worldview, the intellect is seen as one of the greatest blessings of God for human beings. It is by means of our intellect that we understand ourselves and the world around us and we realize that we have to investigate to understand who has created us. If we had no intellect, we would not be responsible. In Shi'a Islam, there has always been a great emphasis on the intellect and intellectual sciences. This high interest in the intellect is rooted in the Qur'an and in the traditions of

the Prophet and the Imams of his household. The Qur'an says:

*Surely there are some signs in this for those who ponder.* (13:4; 16:12; 30:24)

The Qur'an also complains about those who do not think and do not use their intellect. I have selected two traditions to show the place of the intellect in Shi'a hadiths. Imam Sadiq says:

*Whoever has 'Aql has faith and whoever has faith will enter the Paradise.*<sup>5</sup>

If we have 'aql we will understand the truth. There is a very beautiful and insightful tradition from Imam Kazim on the importance of 'aql.<sup>6</sup> Addressing one of his companions, Hisham ibn Hakam, the Imam said:

*With the intellect God completes His proof. God has equipped his prophets with the ability of expressing their ideas in a way that all people can understand. God showed the people His lordship through reason. Then the Imam recited this holy verse of the holy Qur'an: "Your God is the One God, there is no god but God who is the Compassionate the Merciful ... Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the coming of days and night and in the ships that move in the sea and the rain that descends from the sky to bring life on the earth and all kinds of animals that God has spread over the earth and also the movement of the wind and the cloud which is kept by God between the earth and the sky in all these there are signs for those who are thoughtful."... "Allah has made these signs a reason to show people that they have a Creator Who arranges everything for them and Who directs everything, because God then says "surely there are signs in these facts for those who utilize their intellect."*<sup>7</sup>

Many other references in the Holy Qur'an illustrate this tradition which show that God in his final message considers 'aql as the only means by which human beings become responsible and by which a human being can understand the truth. All questions on the Day of Judgement are proportionate to the rational capacity of the people. Those who are given more talents or are genius will

be questioned more seriously than ordinary people.

If people rationally choose their religion and rationally interpret their scriptures and practice there will not be that much space left for extremism.

### Seeking Justice

One of the principal doctrines of Shi'a faith is the principle of justice. Accordingly, God is just and never does anything unjust or against just standards. Divine justice is known by reason and confirmed by revelation. God treats human beings with justice and wants them to deal with each other justly and establish justice in society. The issue of Divine justice is not merely a theological subject. It has clear and significant, practical implications. All the prophets were sent to establish social justice (57:25).

It is a universal duty for every person to implement justice, both in their individual and social lives. A Muslim is the one who is just to himself,<sup>8</sup> to his spouse and children<sup>9</sup> and to everybody else, including his enemies.<sup>10</sup> According to Shi'a jurisprudence, there are many religious or socio-political positions that require the position holder to be just. For example, Imams of the daily prayers who lead the congregations, Friday prayer leaders, witnesses, judges, religious authorities and statesmen all must be just.

In Islam, the government is envisaged as an irreplaceable means for establishing and safeguarding social justice. A just society can be only maintained by fair distribution of power and wealth. Following are some hadiths which are relevant to this issue from the Prophet and his household.

According to Islam, rulers must be just, both in their individual lives as well as in their social lives. They must observe their personal duties as well as their social responsibilities, including respect for the rights of their citizens. They must observe justice in their personal acts and in all their administration. Moreover, they have to

establish social justice in society and to make sure that neither their agents nor ordinary citizens violate standards of justice. Imam Ali said:

*If I had so wanted, I could have very easily found ways and means to provide for myself the purest honey, the best variety of wheat and the finest silk clothes that could be woven. But inordinate cravings cannot overcome me and greediness cannot persuade me to acquire the best provisions, when in Hijaz and Yemen there may be people who have no hope of obtaining a piece of bread and who have never satisfied their hunger fully. I cannot satiate myself when there are people around me whom hunger and thirst keep restless and agonized. Do you want me to be like that person about whom somebody has very aptly said, "Is this disease not enough for you that you keep on sleeping with your stomach full, and around you there are such starving mouths that will greedily eat even dried goat-skin"?<sup>11</sup>*

One of the features of an ideal political system in Islam is to let people enjoy the right to protest against any breach of Islamic laws or violation of human rights. In his letter to the newly appointed governor of Egypt, Malik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali writes:

*Out of your hours of work, fix a time for the dissatisfied and for those who want to approach you with their grievances. During this time you should do no other work but hear them and pay attention to their complaints and grievances. For this purpose you must arrange a public audience for them, during which, for the sake of Allah, you must treat them with kindness, courtesy and respect. Do not let your army and police be in the audience hall at such times so that those who have grievances against your regime may speak to you freely, unreservedly and without fear.*

*All this is a necessary factor of your rule because I have often heard the Holy Prophet(s) saying, "That nation or regime, where the rights of the depressed, destitute and suppressed are not observed and where the mighty and powerful persons are not forced to accede these rights, cannot achieve salvation."<sup>12</sup>*

Muslims must not be indifferent towards the wrong acts and unjust behaviour of others. Everyone must be sensitive to

whatever wrong or bad acts are performed by others, especially with respect to social crimes, since they are the most severe of crimes, and the criminal rulers the worst criminals.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, when statesmen fail to observe the laws or morals, everyone must advise them and enjoin them to do good, and prohibit them from doing bad, but when they still insist in acting in such a way or when transgressors take power in society and deliberately overlook Islamic laws and civil rights, Muslims are required to protest and rise up against them. The Prophet Muhammad said: "The best struggle (*jihad*) is to utter words of justice in front of an unjust leader."<sup>14</sup> He also said: "You must certainly enjoin the good and prohibit the bad; otherwise the evildoers will rule over you such that the good people among you will pray, and their prayers will not be answered."<sup>15</sup>

The Imams of the household of the Prophet always resisted and protested against the aggression and oppression of unjust rulers. They proved their readiness to undergo all sorts of sacrifices and struggles, by the simple fact that they all met their deaths by being killed. Similarly, many of their followers were imprisoned or murdered.

The history of the Shi'a is full of struggle and revolutionary movements calling for the implementation of Islamic laws and justice. The most striking and inspiring incident throughout the history of the Shi'a has been the event of *Karbala*. Explaining his aims in refusing to pay allegiance to Yazid (the self-proclaimed Caliph), and rising up against him, Imam Husayn said: "I only see death as salvation, and life with the oppressors as misfortune."<sup>16</sup>

In his *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, Tabari narrates from Imam Husayn:

*O people, whoever witnesses an unjust ruler permitting those acts prohibited by God breaking Divine covenants, acts against the Sunnah of the Prophet and treats people sinfully and with enmity*

*so does not protest against him with his words or acts God will certainly treat him in the same way as he has treated that oppressor.*<sup>17</sup>

The doctrine of al-Mahdi is yet another aspect of Islamic justice in general, and Shi'i thought in particular, that shows the significance of that justice. Among all the tasks of al-Mahdi and his followers, and indeed the first thing in his agenda is to "fill the earth with justice." This phrase is mentioned in many hadiths.

## Conclusion

By having rationality, spirituality and a search for justice together, balance in every aspect of religious life and practice can be achieved and extremism and violence can be avoided. If the understanding and introduction of religious rulings are left to the highly educated and pious scholars – who rely on great existing scholarship and follow a methodical and rational approach to religion and the problems of life – one should be able to witness those three, i.e. rationality, spirituality and a search for justice, in all aspects of religious life and practice and, as a result, internal and external peace and harmony should be achieved.

*To read more about this topic, reference Mohammad Ali Shomali's publication Shi'a Islam: Origins, Faith & Practices (2nd edition 2010).*

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*Studies in Theology & Spirituality (2004 & 2011)*, *Catholic-Shi'a Engagement: Reason & Faith in Theory and Practice (2006 & 2011)*, *A Catholic-Shi'a Dialogue: Ethics in Today's Society (2008 & 2011)*, *Monks and Muslims: Monastic and Shi'a Spirituality in Dialogue (2012)*, *Monks and Muslims II: Creating Communities of Friendship (2014)* and *Monks and Muslims III: Towards a Global Abrahamic Community (2015)*.

<sup>1</sup> In a portion of a poem attributed to him, Imam Ali stresses on the greatness of the spiritual world inside humankind: "The cure is with you, but you do not see / And the illness is from you, but you are unaware. / You are the clear book whose / Letters make manifest the hidden. / Do you think you are some small mass / While within you there dwells the greatest world?" See Mutahhari, *Insan-e Kamil*, 203.

<sup>2</sup> Majlesi, Vol. 2, 32, no. 22 and Vol. 95, 456, no. 1.

<sup>3</sup> It is a clear Qur'anic principle backed up by many philosophical arguments that the reality of man is his spirit and not his material body. For example, see *Self-Knowledge*, chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>4</sup> This book is translated into English by different translators. A well-known translation is *The Psalms of Islam* by William Chittick (Ansariyan Publications, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Usul al-Kafi, V.1, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> In the Islamic worldview, whoever disobeys God has oppressed himself. The Qur'an says: "whoever breaks Divine laws has oppressed himself." (65:1)

<sup>9</sup> According to a hadith, similar to which there are many others: "Surely God does not get angry for anything as much as He gets angry for the women and children (being oppressed)."

<sup>10</sup> Muslims are required to deal with justice and fairness even with their enemies. The Qur'an says: "Do not let your hostility towards some people to make you unjust. Be just. Justice is closer to the piety." (5:8)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter 45.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter 53. This letter is considered "one of the earliest records extant, outside the Qur'anic text and the Prophetic traditions, on the model of rulership, in theory and practice." See Nasr (1989), 73 and W. C. Chittick (1981), 66.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Usul al-Kafi, V.1, Letter 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> *Tuhaf al-Uqul*, 245.

<sup>17</sup> Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, Vol. 3, 307.

# Christian and Muslim Women Working for Peacebuilding

**Kerstin Pihl and Marietta Ruhland**

In November 2007, a Christian-Muslim Women's Network was launched in Tehran with a focus on the role of women in peacebuilding. The initiative, led by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Church of Sweden (CoS) and the Institute of Interreligious Dialogue (IID) of Iran was titled "Moving towards Peace through Religion: Muslim and Christian Women in Dialogue."

The network brought together 25 Christian and Muslim women, from Iran, the United States, Pakistan, Senegal, Palestine, Greece, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Sweden and Syria, and from diverse professional backgrounds including the arts, media, politics, education, anthropology and theology. The aim was to discuss the key role that women play in their communities to overcome divisions created by religious or cultural differences in order to build communities of peace and reconciliation.

The network of Christian and Muslim women offered a venue for working together in critical solidarity to bring new perspectives, attitudes and understanding of interreligious dialogue as well as of women's roles within religious traditions.

The premise was that if people understand one another, this can help to create a more peaceful world. A major role that the WCC can play in our world is to act as a bridge builder: and in this project it is the women that are the force in peacemaking and bridge building. Theory is important, but there have been many, perhaps too many, theoretical talks and now it is time to be practical. Women are often pragmatic and not so dogmatic.

## **Two Encounters: Intercultural and Interreligious**

The first encounter in Tehran was hosted by

the Institute of Interreligious Dialogue (IID); the hospitality provided by the local participants and the cultural visits helped create bonds of friendship among all members of the network, as one of the participants wrote:

*Being in Iran, participating in the workshop and supported by the organizer and participant friends, I could see how "bringing the change" could be possible. Maybe it is through bringing the change in the way we perceive ourselves as women, as women of faith and actors of dialogue and peace, considering being challenged and transformed as a key to bring the change.*

The meeting in Tehran was an opportunity to define the objectives of the network, with a focus on: promoting the role of women in their own society; overcoming ignorance (through a focus on education); overcoming self-centeredness by being open to others; and overcoming abuse of religion.

The following year, in September 2008, the group met in Gothenburg, Sweden. The meeting in Gothenburg was hosted by the Diocese of Gothenburg and the Church of Sweden. It provided a space for new members to join the existing group; at the same time, it provided an opportunity for deepened friendship between the participants and helped to strengthen the sense of community.

One of the main objectives of the Gothenburg meeting was to reflect on the role of the individual (each member of the group) in bringing change and transformation to their own realities, and to explore their collective effort in supporting and strengthening each other as women of faith and as actors of dialogue and peacebuilding. Moreover, the meeting provided the opportunity for visiting and interacting with Swedish families in their homes, and with local Christian-Muslim

women's groups in Gothenburg. Hence, the participants continued with the process of identifying issues where women can play an effective role in peacebuilding, and developing local initiatives to be carried out by the participants in 2009 in the areas of media, health and interreligious education.

In Gothenburg, the participants indicated that their experience of dialogue between Christian and Muslim women had led to their empowerment to play more effective roles in their own traditions and society in general. Hence, it was suggested that this Christian-Muslim women's network should expand, invite new members and build bridges with other women's interreligious networks around the world. At the same time, the members of the network wanted to share their reflections and stories of transformation with others, highlighting in particular the learnings, the challenges they faced and the resources and methodologies they used in their local dialogue initiatives.

It was agreed to produce a handbook, containing case studies written by the members of the network to be shared as a useful tool for dialogue at the grassroots level and with member churches, interreligious networks and different women's groups.

The next meeting, scheduled to take place in Geneva in 2009, was affected by the situation that emerged in Iran following the post-election protests. Only one of the Iranian participants, who happened to be residing in Europe, could attend the meeting. This meeting was held to discuss the case studies that had been submitted by members of the network, and to discuss the shape and content of a publication, which could provide a basis for new initiatives on women in interreligious dialogue.

The Geneva meeting decided to take forward the concept of a handbook to offer a theoretical framework and methodologies for interreligious dialogue practiced by women, to share case studies with different examples of initiatives in different contexts

and different levels, and to analyze the common thread of the initiatives.

It became clear that personal relationships are at the core of all successful initiatives; only in a trusted, safe space created through friendship is it possible to discover similarities and accept differences in our identity and religion; only under those conditions can we accept the challenge to deepen our own faith and to hold significant conversations on fears and hopes.

Therefore, the handbook would present appropriate methodologies for creating safe spaces for interreligious dialogue in different cultural and geographical contexts, taking into consideration the needs of our constituencies.

One of the case studies showed how spirituality can nurture the dialogue encounter and help create these safe spaces; another highlighted joint action for citizenship or how to work together to end violence. All of them challenge, in one way or another, structures, power concepts and roles inside and outside our religious institutions, and all of them show how (inter)religious dialogue is a practice for everyday life.

One of the case studies is included in this issue of *Current Dialogue* and immediately follows this report.

In general, the experiences presented in these case studies show how the feelings of mutual belonging, empathy, solidarity and respect for our diversity can empower women in interreligious dialogue.

The working meeting considered various ways to share the resources produced by the group and others through social media and web platforms in order to connect initiatives and build a network of Christian and Muslim Women for Peacebuilding.

The group hoped and expected to put their findings into practice, to maintain their friendships formed over the 3-year project period, to take action together in cases of

crisis, to share resources and to follow up on the learnings depicted in the case studies. We offer here a brief synopsis of some of their findings.

### Reflection and Analysis

Women often have an important role in education, media and health care and these areas are very important in society, but women's role in peacebuilding is often forgotten although it is mainly women working in this field.

The question was explored as to whether there are any authentic religions/faiths that have never been influenced by culture or context; all agreed that the answer is no. Religion and faith are always influenced by culture and context.

Women are close to the basics of life. They give birth, feed their children and look after the sick. Women are good at building relationships and the communality among women is often stronger than in the wider culture. They belong to the "small tradition" (the daily life) and not to the "big tradition" (dogmatics and power). If women enter the space of the big tradition they challenge the power of men.

Women are also used to meeting and dealing with hardships. Both inter-faith and intra-faith relations can be complicated and difficult. Some women shared the experience of working more easily together with sisters of another faith than with people of the same faith as themselves. Honesty and openness in admitting weakness and negativity is a key. Any effort to share, explain, listen, demonstrate tolerance and overcome fears and misconceptions requires courage.

Inspired by our common desire to work for good, women are often ready to move together, talk about problems and solve them on the way.

To visit and meet with others can give another perspective and new friends. The women bore witness to difficulties, struggles

and deep friendships both in villages, homes and at educational institutions where people live together.

Interreligious dialogue can also empower people and open up new paths. It is important to ensure that there is a safe space where women can meet and talk as women, but also that there are paths where women can walk into an area controlled by men and share their experiences to help make an equal balance of power. To do this, women have to support each other, as there is always a risk that others will get jealous or feel left behind. Instead, push! It is a process; we have to struggle with ourselves, but at the same time we struggle with the society of which we are a part. We must challenge our perceptions of doctrine with the perspectives of daily life.

Interfaith dialogue can also develop democracy. Hierarchy is present in religion and it is mainly men headed up by men. A good example of this is in Senegal, where Christian and Muslim women together challenged hierarchy in the society and stopped the introduction of a religious law; they managed to keep the secular law in place by which women and men are considered equal. We do not always mean exactly the same thing when we talk about equality, violation, culture etc.; words can be tricky and we have to be careful, sometimes asking a second question to fully understand what is at stake. We also have to listen to the other person's narrative. The women agreed that this is not easy to do, and will challenge our own faith, roles and society.

We agreed to work in the three fields of education, health and media. We all wanted to publish articles about our new insights and experiences and to challenge the education and the health sectors. We would make use of Facebook, blogs etc.

Dr Helene Egnell, one of the lecturers, in her study and analysis of women's interfaith events, highlighted eight significant traits

that characterize these encounters, which



can be summarized thus:

1. a **Feminist Methodology** emphasizing process and participation with attention to creating a “safe space” for dialogue;
2. a **Common “We”** that is quickly established and experienced as “stable ground” for dialogue, that allows them to recognize differences and act out conflict;
3. the **Role of Rituals** in creating a bond on the basis of reclaiming tradition;
4. **Dealing with Conflicts** when they arise in a constructive manner so that they enhance, rather than destroy;
5. the **Affirmation of Change as Normative** and at the heart of bringing women together seeking change within their traditions;
6. the **Affirmation of Diversity** within religious traditions, which contributes to the absence of defensiveness and dogmatism;
7. the **Ambiguity of Religion** as a meeting point, where participants have been able to identify with each other’s struggles, discover similarities and gain courage and confidence; and
8. the **Experience of Otherness and Marginality**; women in interfaith encounters operate from a position of marginality in their tradition or society, this in turn can be an asset which makes dialogue possible – for it is at the margins where religious change takes place. The marginal position of women makes women flexible and capable to acquire the perspective of those who are from the other side. It is fair to say that many of the aforementioned traits have been observed and experienced during this project.

This summary is an attempt to communicate the findings of the project and to reflect on the process of dialogue, learning and transformation that occurred. While the project itself sadly ended in 2009, the it continues to inspire and nurture further work. We would like to thank the women that took part in it as participants, lecturers or as local women who told their stories. We also wish to thank those who envisioned, planned and organized these meetings along with those of us from the World Council of Churches: Rev Dr Hans Ucko and Ms Rima Barsoum; and from the Church of Sweden: Rev Marika Palmdahl.

*With a special thought of remembrance for Mrs Farideh Mashini, a member of the group from the beginning of the project, who passed away in 2012.*

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# **Case Study: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Women in Interreligious Dialogue**

**Cvijeta Novakovic**

## **The Place of the Story – The Neighbourhood of Srebrenica**

Indian summer in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina is wonderful. Travelling through the Drina Valley and its mountains you have to be touched by the beauty of the jade-coloured river, woods shinning in gold, orange, red and brown, and pines touching the blue of the sky. Small villages with thin white minarets and churches at its heart, and spread like pearls on still green hills and fields, making an idyllic picture. But the ruins of houses all along the road contrast this beauty, and remain a reminder of war, the legacy of which is still alive fifteen years later.

Three ethnic, national and religious groups – Bosniak Muslims, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats – have lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries now, mixing within each other and with the existing minorities. From April 1992 to December 1995, they fought for every small village, every little hill, every step of this beautiful and fertile land, in one of the most violent wars of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The eye of the storm was in this by-God-so-blessed region of Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Everyone probably heard about Srebrenica and the genocide that happened there on 11 July 1995. The memorial Potocari lists the graves and names of nearly 8400 Bosniaks killed in just a few days in this place, and now warns of its horror. Potocari is just a few miles away from Srebrenica, and is even closer to another little town called Bratunac, the place of this more encouraging story.

## **The City of Sisters**

In our language, the name Bratunac means “Town of Brothers.” This story will tell you it could just as well be called “Town of

Sisters,” as the story speaks about women and their efforts to overcome gaps and divisions, stop prejudices, make and keep friendships, and bring real peace back to this beautiful valley. The majority of the population in Bratunac are Orthodox Serbians. There is also a significant number of Bosniak Muslim returnees who mostly live in the rural areas of the municipality, and Catholic Croats are present in very small numbers.

At the beginning of my work on a peacebuilding project for youth in the area of Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the spring of 2009, I met Zeljana, the leader of the local NGO Priroda (Nature). That was when I heard about the very first ecumenical project in this turbulent region called The Tradition and Heritage Connect the People project. The significance of this initiative – specifically its focus on interreligious dialogue – captured my interest, and I followed its implementation with great interest as an experienced practitioner and professional in peacebuilding. I was amazed by the project results and achievements.

The project implementation was planned for the summer, with support from the Ecumenical Initiative of Women from Omis (Croatia), formerly known as the Ecumenical Women Solidarity Fund. The project involved several activities designed to address and use positive values from each tradition to promote understanding and tolerance, dialogue and coexistence within the diverse ethnic and religious groups still living in a post-war atmosphere of fear and division.

## **Tradition and Heritage Connect the People**

The first step in the realization of the project idea was to locate a place for

gathering women from different cultures. Over forty women from different ethnic, religious, national and social backgrounds – a few of whom are members of the Municipality Council and active in political life – made up the first ecumenical group and gathered regularly at Nature with the intent to start to communicate, share and learn about different traditions from one another.

The second step in this process was the demystification of the tradition and habits of “the other” by giving the group the opportunity to learn from each woman’s experience in a personal way. With this in mind, a short trip to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was organized. In Sarajevo, a mix of cultures and traditions and their coexistence throughout history is visible with every step. The group of 25 women, both Muslims and Christians, took part in this activity, together visiting museums and the oldest sacral buildings of different religions.

The last activity gave the women an opportunity to share with the group and the local community something simple, important and common to all of our religions and cultures: food. A small food festival of traditional meals was set up with about thirty women from both backgrounds and people from the surrounding towns and villages took part in the event, which was visited by hundreds.

### **Learning about Difference and Commonality**

When I reflect more upon the activities and challenges of the project, as well as the benefits and changes that emerged from it, I can say I have definitely learned something from a number of women in the group. Each woman reflected on something very important for her personally, and touched upon different aspects of what this project meant for her – socially, politically, emotionally and spiritually.

For Zeljana, the group leader, the most interesting and important parts of the project were the visits and lessons learned in the oldest churches and mosque in Sarajevo, which the group visited during their short trip this summer. For many of the women, it was their first time travelling from Republika Srpska to another part of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina since the war, though Bratunac is just a few miles from the dividing line.

The ecumenical group visited the beautiful Beg’s Mosque, the gorgeous Catholic Cathedral and the equally impressive Old Orthodox Church of Sarajevo. All of these, including the majestic Jewish Synagogue, are located in the oldest part of the city and stand next to each other, sometimes only a few steps away. Having survived centuries and wars, these buildings stand as a witness of the multicultural life of the city and the state throughout its history.

During their short visit to Sarajevo, the women from the ecumenical group from Bratunac had the opportunity to see this living history first hand. For the first time, many of them were in another religion’s place of prayer, and for the first time, they got to see and take part in the service; in this way, they learned about the symbols and rituals and their meaning in context. The Christian women learned about the habit of taking off one’s shoes before entering the mosque, the separate prayers for men and women, the role of women in Islam, the Qur’an, and many other things. “I was really surprised to gain a new picture of a Muslim woman, which I discovered for the first time during this visit, when the Qur’an was explained to us more in detail,” said Zeljana. This newly acquired picture helped the women to understand each other, and started to change existing stereotypes.

The Muslim women, together with the Christian women, lit candles in the Catholic Cathedral and the Old Orthodox Church, and discovered common saints while they heard the story of Jesus or Isa, Mejrema, Madonna or Bogorodica, the mother of

God – a woman respected in both Christian and Islamic traditions. In Sarajevo's Old Orthodox Church, the women heard an interesting story about its reconstruction four centuries ago with the permission of the Sultan, in a time when Bosnia and Herzegovina formed a part of the Ottoman Empire.

The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina was the place where the group discovered that which most obviously connected their traditions: clothing. They visited a clothing exhibition of the three traditions present in the region, and the women found it difficult to recognize the origins of each tradition due to the high degree of similarity and common elements between them. "It was so impressive for us," said Zeljana. "Shirts are the basic clothes, the first to the body. Watching how similar they are, we understood how many commonalities there are in our traditions, and these connect us much more than they can divide us," shared Zeljana.

The small gastro festival was held in September as the last project activity. There were many things presented during the event, "From *sinija* to *panaia*, Muslim and Serb traditional tables and meals," said Zeljana. The meals were prepared and served by women from the ecumenical group to a number of guests, Serbs and Bosniaks, who came to support the event and enjoy rare delicacies. The festival was an opportunity to gather and share food, and also to get acquainted with the typical meals of both traditions, as well as with the richness of this diversity. The broad interest of the community resulted in a promise from the municipality to support further organization of the festival and its development as an annual event, with the aim to keep this kind of tradition alive, as it really seemed to connect the people.

### **The Essence – Respect and Love**

Zeljana gave me a bit of information not only about the project activities, but about the project's essence and true meaning. I

also heard from two other women, Sena and Rada, the most active members of this small yet brave ecumenical group.

Sena greeted me warmly, as if I were an old friend, even though it was our first meeting. She then offered me a small typical chair (nowadays an almost lost tradition) to sit in in the backyard of her family house – a small, unpainted and half-rebuilt house that barely had a roof. It is similar to the homes of many other Bosniak returnees.

The first thing she told me after the greeting was:

*I love Priroda as my own home! This is a window through which we see the world! I love the gatherings of our group there, I love to meet other women, Bosniaks, Serbs ... We want to show and prove to everyone that there is coexistence, and we want it! For me, it was great to learn more about the habits, the symbols and the meaning behind those in the other religions. That way I can better understand and respect them, and explain that to my children.*

Sena is a simple Bosniak Muslim village woman. Her family returned to Bratunac in 2001, and were some of the first returnees and survivors of the difficult and horrible refugee experience. Her husband, Safet, lost a brother and a sister in the war. But her family has neither hate, nor anger, nor prejudice toward other people – including Serbs – in their family. They are friends with many people, including a Serbian refugee family that lived on their property prior to moving to another part of the town. Sena shared about their regular visits and how much they missed each another, and added: "I love this family!"

When I asked her about the source of this love – which I would define as *agape*, a love which takes an immense amount of strength and forgiveness – Sena simply answered: "We are grateful for life, the gift of God. Our faith gives us the strength to overcome difficulties and forgive. Faith is in the heart ... I tell everyone that it is the future we should be looking into, and not the past!" She spoke about the need to respect each

other, about the benefits of an opportunity to visit different churches with the group, to learn about traditions and symbols, to understand better and see that there is no reason to fear and hate. She shared, “I am happy to be with the group to show to the people that we can all live together respecting one another, without the ‘we’ and the ‘other.’”

Sena participated in both of the main project activities; the short trip to Sarajevo, as well as the gastro festival. At the latter, there were actually two members from her family present: both Sena and her daughter, Hilda, who prepared the traditional meals they learned how to make from their mothers and grandmothers. The traditional recipes were passed on from generation to generation, and were kept and given as a present only to their closest friends. The presence of the same or similar traditional meals at the festival pointed to the common, shared or mixed traditions among them: the long-cooked wheat with a hen or a roast, called *Keske* in Christian, or *Cheske* in the Muslim tradition; *Burek* or *Maslanica*, a very special pie with chicken, called differently even in the same village; a sweet *Halvapita* or *Kliža*; and many other daily, special meals and desserts which reflected this commonality. The gastro festival was an opportunity to learn about, show and share in a tasty part of their respective traditions.

On a more curious and brief anecdotal point about the competition, I will share this: the daughter won a second place medal for the making of the traditional *Kuluk* soup – a meal the name of which is associated with the hard and forced work of the people, *raja*, conducted in the past during Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The tradition of cooking is not the only one kept in Sena’s home. Her daughter Hilda is also active in a local group and a youth peace project.

The best meal of the festival was made by Rada, the second woman I met that same day. I first found her in a little, old and decrepit ambulance. She is the main nurse and has now worked in her workplace for

more than thirty years. During our talk about the project, I heard a lot about her humanity from simple stories, most of them starting with “by the way.” She shared:

*Once during the war, a Muslim woman came giving birth to her third child. The other two children came along with her, waiting in this room all day. I gave them something to eat, and some chocolate ... It was the first chocolate for them in years, and they did not know what it was ...*

At that time, chocolate was a very special and rare delicacy for anyone, even for Rada and her own children.

For Rada, the war is the worst kind of evil to befall anyone. All people have the same difficulties and the same desire to live a normal life in peace again. Divisions prevent them from doing so. Women are more likely to overcome these divisions, because women are stronger and have more courage, Rada claims. They share the same pain of birth and more love for life.

Rada was born in Serbia, but she has lived in Bratunac for over a few decades, and she still has kept her original dialect. “The festival reminded me of the times when similar gatherings were held much more often, spontaneously on the sides of the Drina River. Those were the times when we lived without divisions, fear and hate.” She spoke about the richness of the meals served to the visitors, their interest and compliments, and the friendly and cheerful atmosphere created around the tables. Bosniaks and Serbs, young and old, came and were impressed by the event organized with little money and a lot of willingness and effort.

Along with the gatherings, cooking, traditions, and religion, Rada also spoke about love: “I love the people. Love is necessary for everything, for gathering, faith, and for cooking! Every religion speaks about respect of the other and about love. Religion should connect us, and so should the tradition we have!”

### **Initiative**

The initiative for the Tradition and Heritage Connect the People project emerged from a group of women who gathered during previous projects and contains the elements of multicultural and interreligious cooperation. The project was a natural step forward in this specific matter, and was designed to address the needs identified by the group and the wider community still living with the legacy of war and divisions based on ethnic and religious lines.

The idea for and activities of The Tradition and Habits Connect the People project have deeply touched different aspects of the women's religious and civic lives on personal, familial and community levels; the project has promoted diversity and shared traditions and habits with the aim to affirm their values and ability to connect.

The significance of the initiative is related to the specific background of the region, which was the place of the worst genocide in Europe since the World War II. Religion and ethnicity played a significant role in the background and events of the war.

Memories, fears and animosities are still alive in the region and they keep divisions among the population – a mix of Orthodox Serbs and a smaller number of Bosniak Muslims. Statistical data of the population in the region and in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not exist; a census has not been made since the war.

The establishment of the dialogue and its successful promotion in the community are rare examples of interreligious cooperation in Bratunac and the region. Even the name of the project is meaningful. The traditions and heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina are disappearing rapidly due to a lack of efforts for their preservation, and also because the traditions themselves remain hidden and are widely understood as a cause of division among the people – they were thus used to manipulate and divide the people during the war.

### **Methodology**

The project methodology contains several steps. The first step entailed the creation of a group of women from diverse backgrounds and the selection of a place for their gathering. The next step involved changes on a personal level through awareness and education, and then on a broader community level through a public event used for the promotion and animation of local people and institutions.

The methodology is based on positive approaches to peacebuilding, through addressing, emphasizing and nurturing positive aspects of both common and different elements of tradition, and by choosing the simplest elements – sacral places, food and gatherings. Still, results were significant and a long-term success on all levels, transforming the individuals and the community.

### **Results**

The project idea and its results reached not only a small, primary group of women – otherwise generally excluded from ecumenical dialogue on a higher level, which is reserved for only men who are the leaders in most of the churches – but were also shared with the broader community, reaching to and attracting people from diverse religious backgrounds. For many of them it was a rare and precious invitation to learn about and participate in the tradition of others, to find commonalities and grow through their differences.

Visits to different sacral buildings as an ecumenical group gave the members the opportunity to learn about the different histories, rituals and meanings of the religions; the women were touched by immersion into various environments and the rich, minute details of other faith traditions. The sharing of personal experiences and feelings contributed to a deeper understanding and bond among the group. For some of the group members, it was the first time they had learned how all three religions – Islam, Judaism and Christianity – have the same source and the

same father, even the same name, as Abrahamic religions. This precious knowledge the group members will share with their families, neighbours, friends, children and the people with whom they live and work.

The organization of the gastro festival was an opportunity to send the message and idea of ecumenical cooperation to a broader community. Food connects people on a very basic level. A festival holiday or celebration can give people from different backgrounds a rare opportunity to come together and make a first or further step in overcoming divisions and gaps the war has wrought between the groups, and take them further towards the dialogue, respect and tolerance so necessary for coexistence.

Although the project period was only a few months in length, the benefits of the project are visible and will be felt long term for the individuals, the group and the community. On the individual level, the participants acknowledged their personal and spiritual growth and felt enriched by the knowledge and experiences gained during the project, empowering them for further work on interreligious issues in their community. For many of the women, it was opportunity to establish and strengthen friendships with neighbours from whom they were previously divided by the invisible lines of religious and cultural difference. The group was empowered by the addition of new members and their relationships and the quality of their work was strengthened.

Upon the initiative of the interreligious group of women from Priroda, the day of the festival was, after years of disagreement about the issue in the local parliament, agreed upon as the Municipality Traditions Day of Bratunac. Not by accident, it is the Universal Day of Tourism, an activity which is seen as important for the economy of the Drina Valley region. Also, it is the Universal Day of Peace, 21 September. This significant day gives more hope that real

peace will be built in this community and the country.

### **Framework**

The foundation for the project and its success was provided by the existing framework of the organization (Priroda) and an established core group of women, along with the support of an international donor. The credibility of the organization, gained through years of prior work, defined the methodology, responsibility and leadership of the group, and with the involvement of local female politicians, contributed profoundly to the smooth realization and achievements of the results within the community and local political structures.

### **Challenges**

There were a few challenges face by the group during the implementation of the project. One of them was to recruit women from political parties and generate enthusiasm for their participation in order to send an important message: to confirm the existence of interreligious cooperation to the public and to other politicians. Their successful enthusiasm has had a positive effect for the promotion of the project idea and has caused an evident shift on some local political issues. But the main challenge for the group was the challenge of their own environment: sometimes even their closest neighbours and colleagues – sometimes even their own families – were unwilling to communicate with “the other side.” This critical step required a tremendous amount of personal strength and courage to step out and make a difference in the community.

A new challenge for the group will be to share the achievements and results of the project and to spread and expand upon the idea and its results.

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