The Church and the Jewish People

A Study Guide for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Edited by Clark M. Williamson

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Preface

In its "Progress Report on Relations Between Jews and Christians" to the 1991 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Commission on Theology issued "A Call for Further Study."[1] The Commission's reflections on the relationships between the church and the Jewish people led it to conclude that a proper understanding of this relationship is vital to the church's authentic self-understanding and critically important with regard to Christian behavior toward our Jewish neighbors. How we Christians understand and relate to Jews and Judaism is crucial to how we understand our own identity and to how we understand God and Jesus Christ.

The rootage of the church is in Israel, in the people Israel, and in the history of the Israel of God with the God of Israel. The God whom Christians worship is the God of Israel—the God to whom Jesus prayed—and it is this God on whose unconditional grace the church is utterly dependent, and it is this God who chose to call the people Israel into covenant and who was present in Jesus Christ for the reconciliation of the whole world. When Christians encounter Jesus Christ—in preaching, sacrament, or Christian witness—they are laid bare before the God of Israel, the maker and redeemer of heaven and earth. This God is the God of a singular promise and a singular command. The promise is that the love of God is graciously, unconditionally given to us and the command is that we who are loved by God are in turn to love God with all our selves and our neighbors as ourselves. Neighbors, including our Jewish neighbors, are defined as those whom God has given us to love.

The tragedy of Christian history, from late in the first century until late in the twentieth, is that Christians have, with rare exception, not understood that their Jewish neighbors were those people whom we are given and called to love as we love ourselves. Rather, Christian history has manifested a profound negation of Jews and Judaism. Theological or ideological polemics against Jews and Judaism became essential to Christian identity. Jews were made into the paradigm case of divine judgment and an unremitting parody of evil was projected onto them as Christ-killers, children of the devil, or as the "synagogue of Satan." Such attitudes eventually led to the marginalization of Jews in European Christendom, to their institutionalized oppression, and to massive and repetitive outbreaks of violence, murder, and rampage against them on the part of Christians. The Holocaust against the Jews, carried out under the darkness of war by Hitler and the Nazi movement, was the largest and

latest *pogrom* (Russian: "devastation") conducted against Jews by baptized Christians. For all the ways in which Hitler and the Nazis were anti-Christian, they were also baptized Christians and remained so until their deaths, never having been excommunicated by their churches.

We do our thinking on what it means to be Christian in the context of lived history, which means, among other things, that we do it *after Auschwitz*. The time has come to put our theological house in order. If at one time ignorance and naiveté with regard to anti-Judaism in the church were understandable, no longer is it so. This study guide is presented to the church in the hope that it will help us all to understand and act on the Christian faith in ways that are appropriate to the good news of the love of the God of Israel made known to us in Jesus Christ, a son of the covenant, and to the command of God and Christ that we love our neighbors as ourselves.

The purposes of the study guide are several: to be informative, to promote discussion, and to generate interest and further study. That genuine conversation with Jews might take place is greatly desired. The writers of the various chapters of this study guide are introduced in the list of contributors. They strove to be straightforwardly factual, but each one presents a point of view. Each writer's perspective is her or his own and not that of the editor or of the Commission on Theology.

In addition to the writers of the following chapters, who took time out of already busy schedules to donate their energy to this project, I wish to thank Kathy Siler, faculty secretary at Christian Theological Seminary for pulling the whole document together from a wild variety of typescripts, diverse software programs, and apparently incompatible computers.

NOTE: As this book refers to both Christian and Jewish cultures, the more general terms B.C.E. (Before Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) are used instead of the Christian-specific B.C. and A.D.

1. This Progress Report was business item number 9114 of the 1991 General Assembly.

List of Contributors

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Clark M. Williamson (Ph.D., The University of Chicago) is the Indiana Professor of Christian Thought at Christian Theological Seminary. His books include: *A Guest in the House of Israel: Toward a Post-Holocaust Church Theology*, *A Mutual Witness* (ed.), *When Jews and Christians Meet*, *Baptism: Embodiment of the Gospel*, *Has God Rejected His People?*, and *God Is Never Absent*. With Ronald J. Allen he has co-

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What Is Scripture for Jews and Christians?

by Walter Harrelson

The Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament

Jews and Christians have much in common that binds them together. Their history, culture, and religion overlap and intertwine in many ways. Of special importance is the fact that they share in common a large part of their biblical heritage. Christians traditionally refer to this common heritage by the term *Old Testament.* For the Jewish community, the name is simply *Bible,* or *Scripture,* or *Tanakh.*[1]

Neither community finds its complete scriptural heritage in the Hebrew Bible. Christians have the New Testament, the founding documents of the church, while Jews have the oral heritage that has been handed down by the community's teachers and leaders. This oral heritage, now available of course in written form, includes the Mishnah and the Gemara, which together are called the Talmud. *Mishnah* is the term used for a major collection of sayings and traditions of Jewish scholars and biblical interpreters. This collection was organized and completed about 200 C.E. *Gemara* is the term used for an even larger body of tradition developing out of the study of the Hebrew Bible and the Mishnah, brought together and organized by about 500 C.E. The two parts, Mishnah and Gemara, are called *Talmud,* which means "(authoritative) teaching." The Talmud that

developed in the Jewish community living in Babylonia differs considerably from the Talmud preserved in the Jerusalem community.

In addition, Christian Bibles from earliest times have included Jewish writings not now found in the Hebrew Scriptures, writings preserved by the Christian community. These writings are called *apocryphal* or *deutero-canonical,* or simply *the Apocrypha.* Most churches consider them to have lesser authority than the writings of the Hebrew Bible, but even so, these writings are a further link between the Jewish and Christian communities, since all of them were produced by Jews during the period 200 B.C.E.—200 C.E.

The two communities, as we see, share a very large scriptural heritage. How did their overlapping but distinct collections come to be Scripture for the two communities? And what about the *order* of the writings in the two collections? Does the order help us to understand the ways in which the two communities are both similar and different?

Developing a Canon

The Jewish "canon" developed over a very long period of time. Ancient poems, narratives, legal collections, prophetic oracles, genealogies, wisdom sayings, and liturgical texts developed within the different communities, were collected, revised, and eventually were all written down (especially during the Babylonian exile) in standard and accepted form. There were differences among the Babylonian, the Egyptian, and the Palestinian collections. Eventually, perhaps soon after the end of the first century C.E., the Babylonian collection became the standard one, though for the Christian community, the Egyptian (or Alexandrian) collection of Jewish writings became the accepted form of the "Old Testament," as the Christian community came to call the collection.

Stages in the development of the Jewish canon can be traced. The Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) was clearly first and most important. By 400 B.C.E., the text of the Torah had become standard and fixed. Within another two hundred years, the collection called The Prophets (including Joshua, Judges, the books of Samuel and Kings, plus the four prophetic collections, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Prophets) had been completed and standardized. The last collection, called The Writings (including Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and the small books of Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, and Lamentations), probably was not entirely fixed and settled before about 100 C.E.

It is very important to see how the three parts of this collection end. The Torah ends with the death of Moses and Moses' burial in a location known only to God (Deuteronomy 34). Moses was able to see the land of the Promise, but he never managed to enter the land. Even so, the Torah detects no great tragedy there. Why? Because the *people of God* will enter the land, and Moses lives on in the lives and hearts of the people. Moreover, the

people of Israel know that a life of faith is a life lived in Promise. Promise on the way to fulfillment, but never fully fulfilled—that is a theme for the entire Hebrew Bible. Is it not also the theme of the New Testament?

The collection called the Prophets ends with the Promise of the return of Elijah (in the book of Malachi), who will turn the hearts of parents to their children and of children to their parents. The future lies open, and the life of Israel awaits what God has in store. And the collection called the Writings ends with the story of young King Jehoiachin having been released from prison in Babylon and given permission to eat at the table of the king of Babylonia. Life is possible in Exile; the future remains open. Israel's hopes have not vanished, just as Jeremiah had said (Jeremiah 29).

Such a canon of Hebrew Scripture, which in its very structure seems intended to keep faith and hope alive, must not be misunderstood by the Christian community to be the record of a failure to be God's faithful people. Rather, it is the record of a people of faith on pilgrimage on this earth, in covenant with the God who accompanies them. They fail repeatedly, but look at the glorious insights and accomplishments that are found throughout the entire record. As the author of Hebrews 11 makes clear, this is a record of heroes of faith, never fully entering into the blessing God purposed and purposes for them, but on their way—in faith and by faith.

The New Testament Canon

The Bible of Jesus and of the first century church was, of course, the Hebrew Scriptures plus the books called today the Apocrypha. The earliest *written* parts of our New Testament were the letters of Paul and perhaps letters by other apostles as well. The sayings of Jesus and stories about Jesus first survived in the memory of Jesus' disciples. They were written down as the church was threatened by the Jewish uprising against Rome in 66-70 C.E. and to address particular needs of Christian communities in the different localities of the Mediterranean world. Like the letters of Paul and the other apostles, the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Revelation to John were written down to address particular circumstances that distinct Christian communities faced.

While Paul's letters were written to specific churches, they were intended to be preserved, studied, and shared with other congregations. They were written during the period from the early 50s to the early 60s, were soon thereafter collected, and became a recognized written authority within the churches. The Gospel of Mark was written around the time of the Jewish War (66-70 C.E.), with John and Luke (plus Acts) appearing a decade later, and the Gospel of John no earlier than 90 C.E. in its present form. Most of the other New Testament literature was written prior to 100 C.E.; Second Peter may be the latest document in the New Testament.

Just as the Torah is the most significant part of the Hebrew Scriptures, and therefore comes first in the collection, so the Gospels are the most important parts of the New Testament, and therefore appear in first place.

The four Gospels do not agree in details; each of them tells the story of Jesus in its distinct way. The early Christian community preserved materials about Jesus that had been collected by different groups and individuals at different times and places. The same is true of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Requirements for the observance of the three major festivals—Passover/Unleavened Bread, Weeks or Pentecost, and Succoth or Ingathering—developed over time. The descriptions therefore differ from one another (see Exodus 23: Deuteronomy 16; Leviticus 23; and Numbers 28–29), but the community saw no need to regularize these and make them read in identical ways. So it is with the New Testament Gospels.

Conflicts Between Jews and Christians

The New Testament reflects the conflicts between those Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and those who did not. Even the words of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels were, to some extent, shaped by these conflicts. As each Gospel writer sought faithfully to record the tradition of Jesus as it had been handed down to the author's day, inevitably the concerns of the particular author and the circumstances of the place and time of the author affected the shaping of the Gospel story. The truth and power of the Gospel story come through strongly in each of the Gospels. But so do the human limitations of the writers, the conflicts between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and the frequently bitter hostility between Jews who accepted the gospel and those who did not.

For centuries, the Christian community continued to make use of the majority of the books bound in the Apocrypha as well as the Hebrew Scriptures. Efforts to eliminate the Old Testament from the Bible, in particular by the Christian leader Marcion (second century C.E.), all failed. Jews and Christians continue to draw life and strength from this biblical heritage. It is one of the great blessings of the last half of our century that this biblical heritage does more to bring Jews and Christians together than it does to divide them.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe the major differences between the New Testament and the Old Testament? How do you think a member of a synagogue might describe these differences?

2. How would you define the terms *Jew* and *Christian* as they are used in the New Testament?

3. Why should we as Christians not claim that all promises of God to the Jews have been fulfilled in Christianity? What should we claim?

For Further Reading

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McCarter, Jr., and P. Kyle, *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible*. Fortress, 1986.

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Footnote

1. The term is an acronym, created by using the first letter of the three parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, T for Torah (the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy), N for Nebi'im (the Prophets, which includes the former prophets Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings as well as the latter prophets, the four major prophetic collections, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets), and K for Kethubim (the Writings, which includes all the remaining books of the Hebrew canon, usually in this order: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1-2 Chronicles). From these letters, *T, N,* and *K,* the term *Tanakh* or *Tanekh* has been formed to refer to the whole collection of Hebrew Scriptures. For example, an excellent new translation of the Hebrew Scriptures has as its main title the one word *tanakh.*

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Judaisms in the Time of the Second Temple (520 B.C.E. —70 C.E.)

by Marti Steussy

Introduction

When Christians think about biblical faith, they tend to jump from Second Isaiah's words to the exiles (Isaiah 40—55) to Jesus' time, as if the six centuries between did not exist. Indeed, the Bible itself doesn't say much about the intervening period. (The narratives from Genesis through 2 Chronicles focus on the period before Jerusalem burned in 587 B.C.E. Only Ezra/Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel tell stories about times after Jerusalem's fall.) But though they don't talk much *about* it, most books of the Hebrew Bible were written or edited (put out in new versions that spoke to the concerns of new times) during this later period, and they were profoundly shaped by its concerns. At the other end, we must remember that Jesus' own Jewish faith was a product of these forgotten centuries of prayer, struggle, and martyrdom.

A New Age

From the time of Saul until the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, Israelite religion had been tied to Israelite nationhood. The king was God's chosen and anointed ruler (Messiah). The temple housed the national

treasury. Prophets concerned themselves with business practices and government policy as well as "religion." People believed that if they did what their God wanted, God would protect and uphold them—economically, agriculturally, and militarily as well as spiritually. Other nations? Looking out for them was the business of their gods, not Israel's God.

Then Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem. Following the usual policy of harsh retribution against a rebel nation, he burned Judah's temple, looted the sacred treasury, blinded the king and carried him off in chains (2 Kings 25). He deported thousands of other Judeans and resettled them in foreign lands. Did this mean Israel's God was too weak to protect the people—or perhaps just unconcerned about them? No, said the biblical writers. What it meant was that their God ruled the entire earth. The Babylonians were tools in God's hand. If Jerusalem fell, it was because of Israel's sins, not God's weakness.

About fifty years later, a new star appeared on the international horizon: Cyrus of Persia. Instead of governing by terror, Cyrus allowed subject nations to continue under their own rulers according to their own laws—provided of course that they paid their taxes to him. Second Isaiah (not the Isaiah who prophesied in Jerusalem in Ahaz's time, but a prophet of the exile who speaks in Isaiah 40—55) went so far as to call Cyrus God's anointed ruler ("Messiah," Isaiah 45:1). Cyrus told the Judean exiles they could go home (not all of them did), live under their own rulers according to their own laws, and rebuild the temple (henceforth known as the "Second Temple"). He even returned the sacred implements that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away (Ezra 6:3–5).

The key elements of the Second Temple period were now in place. (1) God's people clearly understood that there were no other gods. Their one God controlled the whole universe, although Israel retained a special place—the defining of which was a matter of controversy. (2) Worshipers of this God were now scattered throughout the Near East. (This is called the *Diaspora*, from a Greek word for scattering seeds.) These Jews gathered for prayer and study meetings that eventually became the synagogue. They showed their loyalty to God through Sabbath, circumcision, and diet restrictions—sacraments that could be practiced even in foreign lands. (3) Jerusalem and the temple still held special significance, which is why Diaspora Jews such as Daniel faced the holy city as they prayed (Daniel 6:10).

The Persian Period

Not all faithful Jews responded to the new times in the same way. Paul Hanson distinguishes three main streams of response: (1) the priestly tradition, (2) the visionary tradition, and (3) the wisdom tradition. These streams flow through Christian and Jewish life even today.

Cyrus returned command of Judah to the same royal and priestly families that had been in charge before the exile (Ezra 3:2). Soon, however,

the royal prince dropped out of sight. This left representatives of the *priestly tradition* as primary rulers and policy-makers in Judah.

Believing that the earlier monarchy had fallen because of its failure to obey God's instructions, they were determined not to repeat that mistake. They worked hard to observe the Torah, including the parts about social justice (note Nehemiah's action against debt slavery, Nehemiah 5:1-13). Since the Bible said mingling with pagans had been an important part of Judah's downfall, Ezra ordered citizens to divorce foreign wives (Ezra 10:10-14). This was not "empty legalism" (going through the motions without inner conviction). Rather, it rose from the conviction that faith that has no works is dead (compare James 2:14-18).

Naturally, the priests were also concerned with sacrifices, tithes, and rebuilding the temple. In this they had the support of prophets like Haggai and Zechariah:

> Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I
> may take pleasure in it and be honored, says YHWH.
> (Haggai 1:8, author's translation)

They also had support from the writers of 1 and 2 Chronicles. These writers retold the history covered in Genesis through 2 Kings, downplaying the political parts but focusing in loving detail on everything to do with worship and the temple. They especially dwelt on David's role in planning the temple and setting up its guilds of priests and singers. Their story showed that the priests and temple servants of their own day were the true heirs of David. This is an example of how a book that tells *about* earlier times was profoundly shaped by the later times in which it was written.

As we have seen in the Soviet Union's collapse, the jubilant hopes of liberated people contrast sharply with the grim realities of rebuilding. Judah, like the countries of Eastern Europe today, had a battered economy, ruined infrastructure, and lingering ethnic conflicts and resentments. Not everyone agreed with the priestly leaders. Over against Ezra's exclusion of foreigners, the writers of Jonah and Ruth showed that foreigners might be more responsive than God's own people to God's initiatives. Over against the new temple and its activities, Third Isaiah (the disciple or disciples who added chapters 56-66 to the book of Isaiah) quoted God's scornful words:

> Heaven is my throne
> and the earth is my footstool;
> what is the house that you would build for me,
> and what is my resting place? . . .
> Whoever slaughters an ox
> is like one who kills a human being.
> (Isaiah 66:1,3a; contrast 1 Chronicles 28:2)

These writers of the *visionary tradition* concluded that their beloved predecessor Second Isaiah must have been wrong in declaring Cyrus the

agent of the new creation. The day when God would *really* vindicate God's own people must be yet to come. For the righteous, it would be a time of fulfillment:

> You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice;
> your bodies shall flourish like the grass;
> and it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants.
> (Isaiah 66:14)

But those who presently oppressed them had better look out:

> For by fire will the LORD execute judgment,
> and by his sword, on all flesh;
> and those slain by the LORD shall be many.
> (Isaiah 66:16)

The priests looked back to foundations laid by Abraham, Moses, and David. The excluded, resentful visionaries responded with hopes of a *new* heaven and earth. Teachers of the *wisdom tradition* bypassed the issue of God's grand historical interventions almost entirely, focusing instead on how individuals could survive and succeed in the present day. They passed along old farm sayings (Proverbs 10:4–5), the insights of middle-management bureaucrats (Proverbs 23:1–3), and commonsense observations (Proverbs 24:30–34). They were not afraid to learn truth from foreigners: Proverbs 22:17—23:11 draws from an Egyptian advice book. Stories like Daniel 1—6, Esther, and the Joseph tales reflected their conviction that if you're smart and keep your nose clean, you can do well—even in a dangerous foreign land. Of course, life doesn't always work out so neatly. Thus the wisdom teachers also gave us the story of Job, a righteous man for whom all did *not* go so well.

The Hellenistic Period

In the 320s B.C.E., a brilliant young conqueror named Alexander swept from Macedonia to India, trailing mercenaries who settled in the conquered lands (many Jewish soldiers remained in Egypt—it was their descendants who translated the Jewish Scriptures into Greek). When Alexander died, his empire broke into chunks, all using the Greek language for diplomacy, commerce, and higher education. In this world, "civilized" meant "Greek."

The *wisdom tradition* reacted in a mixed way to the onslaught of Hellenistic culture. ("Hellenistic" refers to things Greek in the age between Alexander and Rome's takeover.) Wisdom teachers were ready enough to learn the language and adopt what seemed wise and true from those who spoke it. The opening poem of the book of Ecclesiastes refers to the Greek elements of earth, fire, air and water (Ecclesiastes 1:4–7). "The Wisdom of Solomon" (an apocryphal book written in Hellenistic Greek) adopts Plato's list of cardinal virtues (Wisdom 8:7; *Phaedrus* 69.c.2).

But the Jewish wise folk rejected the polytheism and loose morals of most Hellenistic culture. They celebrated the value of Torah, declaring that their lovely lady Wisdom, who had helped God create the heavens and the earth, was identical with the Torah (Sirach 24:23). This tradition, anchored in the portable Torah rather than the fixed temple, and dialoguing vigorously with the larger Hellenistic society, was especially well adapted for the Diaspora, but thrived in Judea as well. Over time, it began to attract Gentile converts.

Jerusalem's leaders, who had a strong stake in the *priestly tradition,* needed Greek education if they wanted to keep their jobs and perform them effectively under Alexander's Greek-speaking successors. They could boast about Judaism's monotheism and superior ethical standards, but to their Gentile classmates customs such as circumcision appeared absolutely barbaric. Many leading Jews felt that the time had come to develop their religion's universal truths, while laying aside antiquated, "culturally relative" customs such as circumcision and dietary restrictions.

These issues came to a head under the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus owed a lot of money to Rome. To get it he raised taxes and raided temple treasuries—even Jerusalem's. He further embittered the Jews by selling their high priesthood to the highest bidder. Furious at the riots and civil disorder in Judea, and perhaps believing that the people's faith was responsible for their stiff-neckedness, Antiochus decided to stamp out Judaism. He outlawed circumcision and possession of Torah scrolls and forced Jews to eat pork. (He probably received at least some support from liberal Jews who wanted the quaint old regulations eliminated.) Finally he erected the "abomination of desolation" (Daniel 8:13 and 12:11—probably an altar to a foreign god) in the Jerusalem temple itself.

For those who embraced the Torah's teachings, these events posed terrible questions. When the temple had fallen in 587 B.C.E., it had been possible—with perhaps a little strain—to explain the event as God's punishment of a faithless people. That answer could not apply this time, for it was the *most* faithful people who died (for some of their stories, see 2 Maccabees 7). Had God abandoned them? Or did God lack power to stop Antiochus? Certainly not! The persecuted people concluded that God, according to a plan laid out long ago, had delivered the world into the hands of evil principalities who even now approached the climax of sin and blasphemy. The faithful must persevere and not capitulate, for the very enormity of evil proved that the end had nearly come. *Soon* (1335 days, according to Daniel 12:12) the Day of the Lord, so long predicted by the *visionary tradition,* would come. God would break into history, smash the evil powers, and elevate God's own people to rulership. The kingdom of God was at hand!

And what of those, like the seven brothers described in 2 Maccabees 7, who were slaughtered in the struggles of the final days? Daniel 12:2–3 gave a powerful answer: They would be resurrected to everlasting life and glory.

This new vision of history found expression in a literary form called the apocalypse (Daniel 7—12 and Revelation are the most familiar examples). Number codes, animals, angelic visitors, and figures from ancient mythology provided symbols with which to paint the battle between good and evil and the vision of coming deliverance. Politically, the apocalypticists were uncontrollable, for they believed the rulers had no ultimate power over them. Their commitment to personal piety had revolutionary consequences.

Antiochus did not destroy Judaism. Instead, Jews rose up against him, recaptured the temple, cleansed it, and in 164 B.C.E. held a Hanukkah ("dedication") service that has been commemorated every year since. Lest we fall too quickly into stereotypes about priests, let us remember that it was a country priest who instigated the Maccabean rebellion (so called after his son, Judas Maccabeus—"Judah the Hammer"). After two further decades of fighting Judea won complete political independence and was ruled by the Maccabee family (also known as the Hasmoneans) until the Romans came in 63 B.C.E.

Roman Times

With the Romans, we re-emerge into familiar biblical history. We have four major sources of information about Judaism in this period, each with a particular "slant." The New Testament paints Judaism in very negative colors because of the church's bitterness about its divorce from the synagogue. The Mishnah (a collection of Jewish teachings made around 200 C.E.) focuses on those aspects of the Second Temple period that point toward Rabbinic Judaism. Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian who wrote in Greek, is anxious to portray Judaism in a light that will appeal to educated Gentiles. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered at Qumran, tell us about a Jewish sect that Josephus mentions only in passing and that the New Testament and Mishnah ignore entirely. Other archaeological finds support the idea that there were far more kinds of Jews in this time than just Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes (the group who established the Qumran community).

The Sadducees were highly placed, religiously and politically. Since they had to deal with the Roman government, they wanted friction kept to a minimum. Like their predecessors in the *priestly tradition*, they stressed the temple as center of national and religious unity. They rejected doctrines (such as resurrection) that were not in the Torah. They lost power when the Romans burned the Second Temple (sometimes called the Third Temple, after modifications made by Herod the Great) in 70 C.E.

The *visionary tradition* was still alive, well, and battling with the rest of Judaism. One visionary group was the Essenes, who left Jerusalem and went to Qumran to protest Maccabean claims to the high priesthood. They awaited a war between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness," after which their own priestly candidate would ascend to power. Jesus, with his message that "the Realm of God is at hand!" and Paul, who believed that

"the present form of this world is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31) also stood in the visionary/apocalyptic line.

The Pharisees represent the *wisdom tradition* in its rapprochement with traditional Torah Judaism. The Pharisees were famous for their knowledge of scripture and insight into it, but like all good wisdom teachers, they stressed the relation of faith to ordinary living. For instance, they treated the family table as comparable to the temple altar (which is why impure people were not invited to dine with them). Politically, the Pharisees provided a counterweight to those who compromised too readily with paganism.

Most Jews were not Essenes, Pharisees, or Sadducees. They might hope for God's intervention in history, but they did not train in the desert for action with an angelic army. They might admire the Pharisees' strict piety, but they themselves lived more "realistically" (like Christians who vaguely admire the Amish, but would never dream of joining them). They did not move in the influential circles of the Sadducees. Some, in Palestine, favored a revolt against Roman rule. Others felt this was stupid, and that they had better learn to get along as best they could. Most Jews did not live in the homeland at all, but in Diaspora communities in Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, Italy, Mesopotamia, Persia, and beyond. Occasionally these Diaspora Jews came into conflict with their Gentile neighbors. More often they lived at peace, and gathered a fringe of "God-fearers," Gentiles eager to learn more about the One God of Israel.

Questions for Discussion

1. *New Visions.* What was your picture of Second Temple Judaism before you read this chapter? What was new or surprising for you in the information given here?

2. *Legalism.* Explain the reasoning behind Ezra and Nehemiah's policies, as sympathetically as you can. What other Jewish positions existed during the Persian period? Which would you have adered to?

3. *Circumcision.* Some Jews supported Antiochus' move to stamp out circumcision and diet laws. How does this compare to Paul's teachings on the matter? How would memory of the Maccabean struggle have affected Jewish responses to Paul? How do you feel if you see yourself on Antiochus' side of the issue?

4. *Worldviews.* How would each of the three basic traditions (priestly-sacramentally celebrating a fundamentally good creation and relationship to God; wisdom—a commonsense approach to life; and visionary-stressing special revelation and God's coming judgment) respond to people of other faiths? Do you see the same basic stances replayed in controversies today? Which do you identify with?

5. *The Bible in Its Own Time.* This chapter argues that Bible writers approached issues with a certain "slant" (Chronicles supports the priestly

party and its policies; the New Testament justifies the church's divorce from Judaism; Daniel encourages resistance to Antiochus Epiphanes). The Bible writers even argue with each other (Isaiah 66:1–3 attacks the position of Haggai and 1 Chronicles 28:2). Can you think of other examples? How do you feel about this? What implications does this have for how we use the Bible?

For Further Reading

One of the best ways to get acquainted with Second Temple Jews is to let them speak for themselves. For samples of their work, see the "Writings" part of the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha, and Charlesworth (below).

Charlesworth, James H., ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 2 vols. Doubleday & Company, 1983. A wide variety of ancient Jewish and Christian writings that are not part of the Western world's Bibles. The Letter of Aristeas (from the Diaspora wisdom tradition) and First Enoch (an apocalypse) are good selections to start with.

Hanson, Paul D., *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible.* Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986. Chapters 7-12 cover the period discussed in this chapter. (Presumes some acquaintance with historical scholarship.)

Humphreys, W. Lee, *Crisis and Story: Introduction to the Old Testament.* Second Edition. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990. Part Two, "The Rise of Judaism," covers the period from 587 to formation of the canon in the first century C.E. (An easy-to-follow introductory text.)

Murphy, Frederick J., *The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism.* Abingdon Press, 1991. A college/seminary introduction. Note that it focuses on *Palestinian* Judaism, not the Diaspora.

Stone, Michael Edward, *Scriptures, Sects, and Visions: A Profile of Judaism from Ezra to the Jewish Revolts.* Fortress Press, 1980. A peek into the incredible diversity of Judaism, especially late in the Second Temple period.

Judaism and Early Christianity in the New Testament

by Ronald J. Allen

The Christian community believes that God is revealed through Jesus Christ. The earliest literature to come from the hand of the church—the New Testament—tells of how Jesus was interpreted by some of the first Christian leaders and communities.

These writings continue to play a formative role in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We have often thought of ourselves as a "New Testament church." A study of 206 Disciples sermons preached in 1988 finds that 76 percent were based on texts from early Christian writings. Of these, 62 percent were based on the Gospels, 30 percent on Paul, and 8 percent on other documents.[1] Thus the writings from the hand of the early church, especially the Gospels, contribute significantly to Disciples' belief and action. This fact is important as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) considers its relationship to Judaism. For Christian anti-Judaism makes its first appearance in the formative literature of the church and is at its worst in the Gospels, the sacred texts most prominent in our preaching.

In this chapter, we look at the relationship between Judaism and the major figures and documents of the canon. From Jesus through Paul, we find a high degree of respect between Christians and Jews. Anti-Judaism gains prominence in materials that were prepared after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. We might think of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity using the analogy of a family. At one time, the family of origin

was close and supportive. But tensions escalated to the point that eventually, sibling Christians and Jews became acrimonious. Family fights are often the worst kind.

Jesus

Jesus was not the first Christian. He was born, lived, and died a Jew. To our knowledge, he never intended to found the Christian movement. However, the church's interpretation of his life, death, and resurrection is the fulcrum of Christian faith.

Readers might think that we have a lot of direct information about Jesus since the four Gospels tell his story. However, many scholars of the Bible have found evidence that indicates that the four Gospels are not neutral biographies. Rather, the Gospels are written from the standpoint of churches that believed that Jesus was raised from the dead. Most scholars believe that the stories and sayings of Jesus in the Gospels have been "touched up" in order to interpret the risen Jesus in the forms of the Gospel narratives for the churches.

Of course, the Gospels contain authentic remembrances of the historical Jesus who walked and talked in Palestine. But can we confidently distinguish them from those elements that have been influenced by the resurrection and the situations of the later churches? From the 1920s until recently, most scholars answered yes. They employed a method to peel away the layers of interpretation (rather like one peels an onion). They examined every saying and story for elements that could come only from a church that believed in the resurrection. They also looked for elements that were unlike the Judaism of Jesus' day. Gradually, however, many scholars noticed a fallacy in this approach. It left a picture of a Jesus who had no continuity with church or synagogue. He was ahistorical.

We do not currently have a method that is widely accepted by scholars for confidently recovering the historical Jesus. Many scholars think that between the Gospels and our knowledge of the Judaism of Jesus' day, we can project what he might have been like: an itinerant preacher, teacher (rabbi), and miracle worker whose dominant theme was the coming of the rule (NRSV: kingdom) of God, perhaps as this rule was conceived by the visionaries. As the previous chapter indicated, Judaism in Jesus' day was a hotbed of passionate discussion about the character of God's rule and how to prepare for it. Jews were struggling with what it meant to be faithful and they frequently disagreed with one another (rather like fundamentalist Christians disagree with liberal Christians today). Jewish religious movements were somewhat syncretistic in Jesus' day, so we are not surprised to find elements of the visionaries, the sages, and the priests in Jesus' material. Very likely Jesus debated with his contemporaries as a faithful Jew debating with other faithful Jews.

Jesus was crucified by the Romans. The Jewish people could not crucify him since the Romans did not give them authority to crucify. We

do not know exactly why Jesus was put to death. We can surmise that he was crucified because the Romans perceived that he was a threat to their control since that was one of the most common reasons for crucifixion. Later Christians recognized salvific overtones in Jesus' crucifixion as well as in his resurrection.

In any case, Christians are less concerned about the Jesus of the past than about the effect of the risen Jesus today. Through the risen Jesus, "the meaning of God for us, and hence the meaning of ultimate reality for us, is decisively represented."[2] Indeed, ". . . for us, it is true that all who have Jesus Christ as Lord have God as Father. To have Jesus Christ as Lord is existentially the same as knowing God."[3] Thus, the task of the church today is much as it was for the writers of the earliest Christian literature: to identify how God is attempting to reshape and redeem our world so that it more closely conforms to God's will for love and justice.

The Earliest Christian Communities

We have no direct sources about the life of the earliest Christian communities. (The book of Acts tells a version of the story, but Luke has so reshaped the narrative that it is difficult to separate Luke's editing from "the way things were.") Presumably, the most important Christian community was in Jerusalem and existed as a sect within Judaism (somewhat like a Sunday school class exists within a congregation). We should probably refer to that group as Christian Jews. Likely they were faithful Jews who had come to see Judaism in the light of the resurrection. They did not regard Christianity as a new religion but as a renewal movement within Judaism. In their view, the rule of God had begun and the resurrection of Jesus was its first embodiment. Insofar as Christian Jews witnessed to their comrade Jews, the Christians did not deny the validity of Judaism but called attention to the resurrection of Jesus as the demonstration that God was beginning to manifest the fullness of God's rule over all.

A second Christian center emerged in Antioch of Syria, a cosmopolitan port on the Mediterranean Sea about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. Antioch had a thriving Jewish community that was noted for a high number of God-fearers. God-fearers were Gentiles who were attracted to the monotheism and ethics of the Jews but who, for various reasons, did not become Jews. Judaism in Antioch was thus especially Gentile-friendly. Presumably, Christian Jews brought from Jerusalem to Antioch the message of Jesus' resurrection as the dawn of God's rule. This was especially potent news, for many Jews believed that when God's rule manifest itself in fullness, Gentiles would come to God. Some in Antioch may have concluded that God-fearers could now enjoy the benefits of God's rule by means of turning away from idols, repenting from sin and being baptized but without otherwise being initiated into Judaism.

Paul

Paul is the first Christian figure about whom we have much information. We have seven letters that came from his hand (1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, Romans). We have six other letters penned by later followers who wrote in Paul's name and who sought to apply his thought to their situations (Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Thessalonians). The book of Acts 9:1—28:31 also recounts his missionary career, but (as in the case of the earliest Christian communities) it is hard to sort Luke's editing from authentic memories about Paul.

Until about twenty-five years ago, most Christians interpreted Paul as opposed to Judaism. These interpreters regarded the Judaism of Paul's day as works-righteous (meaning that one had to be obedient to the Law—Torah—in order to merit God's favor). The God of Judaism was represented as judgmental and graceless. These scholars regarded Jews as legalistic, self-righteous, and preoccupied with following the letter of the Law.

However, as the previous chapter indicated, most scholars now think that this picture of first century Judaism is obsolete. We recognize that Judaism was a pluralistic phenomenon centered in a gracious God whose Torah is the fullness of God's revelation to the world. Some translators point out that the word *Torah* would be better translated by *revelation*, *instruction*, or *guidance* than by our word *law*.[4]

With the change in perspective on Judaism, we discover a new picture of Paul's attitude toward Judaism. While scholars do not yet agree on the details of this new picture, most do think that Paul regarded Judaism positively. Paul grew up and was educated as a Jew (evidently in a Judaism similar to that found in Antioch). He became a missionary to the Gentiles because he believed that the death and resurrection of Christ confirmed that God is faithful to the Gentiles even as God continues to be faithful to the Jewish people (e.g., Romans 15:8). Where once we spoke of Paul's conversion, as if he rejected Judaism in favor of Christianity, we now tend to speak of Paul's call. Paul felt called from one arena of service (Judaism) to another (the Gentile mission). Paul seems to regard the Christian and Jewish communities as parallel households of the one living God.

Why, then, does Paul seem to stress that Christians are freed from Judaism? Most scholars today think that prior to Romans, Paul did not discuss Judaism per se. Rather, Paul dealt with similar situations that arose in several of his congregations. After Paul established a Christian community that was largely Gentile, Christian Jews would pass through and urge the Gentile Christians to become Christian Jews. Paul does not denigrate Judaism, but replies that it is not necessary for Gentiles to become Jewish in order to be fully acceptable to God.

In Romans Paul deals for the first time with the relationship of Jews and Christians. Paul first establishes that Gentiles and Jews both are sinful and both are justified by grace. Christians learn this through Christ, where Jews

learn it through Jewish tradition (chapters 1—3). Paul then shows that God's promise that God will be faithful to Abraham and to Abraham's children is a promise to Gentiles as well as to Jews (chapter 4). The proof of God's faithfulness to the Gentiles is faith in the Gentiles who come to God through Christ (chapters 5—8). In chapters 9—11, Paul says that in these last days before Jesus returns in glory (and establishes God's rule in its fullness), many Jews fail to recognize the church as a genuine house of God. However, according to Paul, this has worked to the church's advantage. Because the Jews have not hoarded the Gospel, more Gentiles have had a chance to say yes. Paul's essential point is that God will be faithful to the Jews just as God promised. All Israel will be saved. The church is a wild olive shoot that God has grafted onto the root of Judaism.

The Gospels and Acts

The Gospel writers had multiple purposes in mind when writing the Gospels, but one purpose common to all four Gospels is to help the Christian communities understand their relationships to Judaism. All the Gospels and Acts picture Judaism more negatively than Jesus, the earliest Christian communities, or Paul. Matthew and Luke are somewhat more friendly to Judaism than Mark and John.

Scholars generally agree that the portrayal of Jesus and Jewish people, practices, and institutions in the Gospels refers less to the time of the historical Jesus (about 30 C.E.) than to the times when the Gospels were written (about 70-95 C.E.). The Gospel writers often use the literary figure of Jesus to instruct their churches in proper attitudes and behavior toward Judaism. The Gospels often criticize Jewish people, attitudes, and behavior by presenting these latter in negative lights.

At the same time, each Gospel writer draws extensively upon Jewish literature and language in order to interpret Jesus and the Christian community. Without a knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and Judaism of the Second Temple, we could scarcely understand the Gospels.

The reasons for the church's acrimony toward Judaism are complex. Three interrelated reasons seem likely.

(a) The church's readiness to invite Gentiles into membership without asking them to become Jewish may have led some Jewish people to be critical of the church even after the Jerusalem conference of Galatians 1—2 and Acts 15. The church responded defensively.

(b) Some Jews may have used the church as a scapegoat for the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. The temple was a profound symbol of God's faithfulness. After its destruction, the Jewish people asked, Why did the temple fall? Is God no longer faithful? Was God powerless to prevent the destruction of the temple? Some Jewish leaders may have identified the presence of Gentiles in the church as a sign of unfaithfulness. Thinking along the lines of Deuteronomy (obedience begets blessing; disobedience begets curse), these Jews may have concluded that the unfaithfulness of the

church was a piece of the larger patterns of disobedience in Judaism that led to the curse of the fall of the temple.

(c) In the wake of the destruction of the temple, Judaism and Christianity both questioned what direction they should take in the future. Gradually, Judaism adopted the route of the Pharisees. The church saw its future in the Gentile mission. Church and Judaism came to regard these as competing directions. The church, for its part, sought to show the rightfulness of its claim by denigrating Judaism.

Mark. This Gospel was probably written about 70 C.E. in the wake of the fall of Jerusalem. Its main theme is that Jesus inaugurated the rule of God (Mark 1:14–15). Jesus is soon to return in glory in order to manifest God's rule over the whole earth (13:24–27). The fall of Jerusalem is a sign that the time is near (13:14). The future of the church is in the Gentile mission (13:10).

We note two strains in the Jewish response to Jesus. The common people frequently welcome Jesus and witness to him (e.g., 1:21–28, 32–34, 40–45). The Jewish leaders—Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, priests—immediately and universally oppose Jesus and seek to have him put to death (e.g., 2:6, 23—3:6, 8:31). The Jewish leaders manipulate the common people to turn against Jesus (15:13–15). We note three important passages.

In 3:22, the scribes claim that Jesus' exorcisms are the work of the devil. In 3:23–27, Jesus points out that Satan's house is divided against itself and cannot stand. In 14:56–59, we learn that the Jewish house is itself divided. The fall of the temple demonstrates that Judaism was possessed.

In 7:1–23, Pharisees and scribes question Jesus about why some of his disciples eat without washing their hands (7:1–5) (a venerable Jewish tradition). Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of abandoning the commandments (7:6–12). Jesus then declares that Jewish ceremonial and dietary practices are pointless (7:14–23).

In 12:1–12, Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants. The Jews are like the tenants who reject the messengers whom the vineyard owner sends (12:2–5). When they killed the owner's beloved son, the owner resolved to destroy them and to give the vineyard to others, i.e., the church (12:6–9). The church has superseded Judaism.

Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew may be described as a handbook of Christian Pharisaism. Matthew seems to regard Christianity not as a separate religion from that of the Pharisees, but as a type of Pharisaism that is embracing Gentiles. The Gospel seeks to help the members of the church understand how this new mode of Pharisaism is both continuous and discontinuous with conventional Pharisaic life. We can see this in three ways.

First, Matthew presents Jesus as a rabbi (teacher) and healer in the Pharisaic mode. For instance, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5—7) is thoroughly Pharisaic in the way in which the Matthean Jesus articulates fundamental theological principles (5:21–48). This teaching reflects a Pharisaic model of reinterpreting scripture for new situations.

Second, Matthew values the teaching of the Pharisees, particularly about justice, even as Matthew criticizes Pharisaic practice in his own day. In Matthew 23:2–3, Jesus says, "The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach." The Pharisees do not live up to the best of their own teaching (12:1–8).

Third, Matthew seems to defend the church against criticisms from non-Christian Pharisees. Matthew's point is that the church—with its Gentile constituency—is in harmony with the essence of Pharisaism, which is love, compassion, mercy, and justice. Unfortunately, Matthew accompanies this point with bitter invectives (e.g., 23:1–39) that are notable for their lack of love, compassion, and mercy for non-Christian Pharisees.

Luke and Acts. Luke intends for us to read these two volumes as one continuous narrative. The story tells how God's promises are extended to the Gentiles through Christ. Along the way, Luke pictures increasing hostility between Jews and Christians.

Jesus is born into a thoroughly Jewish environment in which most of the major characters—Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, Anna, Simeon-are model Jews (Luke 1:1—2:52). However, Jesus' sermon at Nazareth, which foresees the Gentile mission as the goal of the church (4:25–27), angers the Jews so much that they seek to kill Jesus (4:14–30).

Some Jews believe in Jesus or allow the ministry of Jesus and the church to go forward (e.g., Acts 2:37–42; 5:33-39). Nonetheless, Luke sees most Jewish leaders repeatedly imprison the leaders of the church (e.g., Acts 4:5–22), 5:17–21), kill Stephen (6:8—8:1), threaten and do violence to Paul (e.g., 9:23–25; 12:1–19; 13:44–52; 21:27—23:30). The Jewish reaction is so negative that by the end of Acts, Luke says, "... this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (28:28).

John. We see an irony in John's presentation of the relationship between Judaism and the church. On the one hand, John draws virtually all his descriptions of Jesus and the Christian life from Jewish literature. For example: word, bread, water, light, life, shepherd. On the other hand, John is utterly vicious in his portrayal of the Jewish people.

John 9 gives John's interpretation of the reason for this antagonism. Christians have been excommunicated from the synagogue (John 9:22, 34). John responds forcefully. He pictures most non-Christian Jewish leaders as spiritually ignorant and hostile to Jesus and the church (e.g., 1:11, 5:18, 5:39–47, 7:1, 10:22–39). John's condemnation of the Jewish people is so great that John uses the phrase "the Jews" to represent all who oppose Jesus. Only a few Jewish leaders respond positively to Jesus, and they do so guardedly or surreptitiously, e.g., Nicodemus (3:1–21, 19:39).

John 8:12–59 is the most savage commentary on Jewish people in the Bible. The Johannine Jesus says very plainly to the Jews that they are not children of Abraham at all. "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him" (John 8:44).

Jesus is now the means through whom God's bread comes (6:35), God's light shines (8:12), God shepherds the world (10:11), God gives life (11:25), God's commandments are made known (14:8), God's community is formed (15:1), and God's love is made known for all (3:16–21). The Jewish people have been replaced by the church as God's beloved.

Other Literature

Hebrews appears to be an early Christian sermon with the purpose of showing that Jesus and the church are superior to the major figures and practices of Judaism. Jesus is superior to the angels (1:5—2:18) and to Moses (3:1–18). Jesus' rest is superior to the Jewish rest (4:1–13). Jesus is now the real high priest (4:13—5:14). Perfection was not possible for the Jews but is now possible for Christians (6:1–20). Unlike the Levitical priests, Jesus is a priest after the order of the great Melchizedek (7:1–28). The sacrifice of Christ and the worship of the church supersede those of Judaism (8:1—10:39). Christian faith makes it possible to dwell with God, a possibility denied to the Jews (11:1–23; 12).

The other documents of the earliest Christian literature contain only a few references to the relationship between the church and the Jewish people. None are as fully developed as the material at which we have looked.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the new insights and questions regarding the relationships (a) of Jesus and Judaism and (b) of the early churches and Judaism as a result of reading this survey?

2. Which of the documents or authors in the earliest Christian literature present attitudes toward Judaism that are most disturbing to you? Why are they disturbing?

3. What do you think Christians should say about biblical passages that seem to denigrate and attack Jews? Are these passages authoritative for Christians? If so, why? If not, why not? For example, what is a Christian response to John 8:31–59?

4. Which early Christian authors or documents seem to you to offer the most promising guidance for Christian relationships with Judaism? Why do you prefer these materials? What is your basis for regarding these as more authoritative and other materials as less authoritative?

5. Suppose your Jewish friend says to you, "The New Testament is one of your sacred books. Quite a bit of it bashes my ancestors and it bashes practices that are important to me. On the one hand, if your sacred book bashes my people and practices, why should I not expect the same from you? On the other hand, if you do not follow the precepts of your sacred book, why should I think you are serious about your religion?"

6. Where do you think the risen Jesus is leading Christians in our relationships with Jewish people?

For Further Reading

Beck, Norman, *Mature Christianity.* Susquehanna University Press, 1985. A study of anti-Jewish polemics in the canonical literature of earliest Christianity contends the church must be self-critical of polemics.

Dunn, James D.G., *The Parting of the Ways.* SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1991. Detailed study of four differences between Judaism and Christianity that resulted in their separation: monotheism, election, covenant, the land. Minimizes tendentious elements.

Richardson, Peter and David Granskou, editors, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christianity.* Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986. Anthologies of detailed studies of texts and topics. Diverse viewpoints.

Sanders, E. P., et. al., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition.* Fortress Press, 1980. 3 volumes. Technical studies of specific topics. For specialists.

Siker, Jeffrey S., *Disinheriting the Jews.* Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. Traces how Christians used the figure of Abraham through earliest Christian literature into the second century. Finds that Christian interpreters used Abraham in increasingly anti-Jewish ways.

Williamson, Clark M. and Ronald J. Allen, *Interpreting Difficult Texts.* SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1989. Examines paradigm of anti-Judaism, surveys anti-Judaism in earliest Christian literature, and offers case studies of the use of texts in preaching and teaching.

Footnotes

1. Joseph E. Faulkner, "What Are They Saying? A Content Analysis of 206 Sermons Preached in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) during 1988" in *A Case Study of Mainline Protestantism,* ed. D. Newell Williams. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. and Chalice Press, 1991, p. 427.
2. Schubert Ogden, *The Point of Christology.* Harper & Row Publishers, 1982, p. 42.
3. Clark M. Williamson, *Has God Rejected His People?* Abingdon Press, 1982, p. 61.
4. Some of Paul's discussions of the Law seem to follow the old paradigm (e.g., Romans 7). However, Lloyd Gaston points out that Paul uses the word *law* (Greek: *nomos*) in two ways. (1) It sometimes refers to Torah as God's gracious revelation. (2) It sometimes refers to the condition of the Gentiles as under condemnation as in the Apocrypha's 4 Ezra (2 Esdras) 7:22–25. Interpreters must determine the proper use for each occurrence. Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah.* University of British Columbia Press, 1987, pp. 27–28. Example: "For in my inner self I rejoice in the Torah of God (sense 1) but I see that other law (sense 2) in my members. . . ." (Romans 7:22–23) (Gaston, p. 176).

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The Teaching and Practice of Contempt

by Clark M. Williamson

Introduction

Whereas our first three chapters dealt with the Bible, here we are concerned with the history of Christian attitudes toward Jews *since* the time of the New Testament. We will use a few expressions that require explaining. First is *the teaching of contempt,* coined by a French historian, Jules Isaac. Isaac, a Jew, returned to his home during the Nazi occupation to find his family missing. He never saw them again. Later, puzzling over how the Holocaust could happen in the heart of Christian Europe, he described the history of Christian teaching about Jews and Judaism. He coined the term *the teaching of contempt* to characterize that teaching.

The second phrase is in Latin: the *adversus Judaeos* tradition. *Adversus Judaeos* means "against the Jews." Many Christian writers down through the centuries wrote treatises "against the Jews" and gave them this title. When Christians familiar with the history of Christian practice in relation to Jews speak of the "anti-Jewish" or "*adversus Judaeos* tradition," they use a name that the founders and perpetuators of this way of thinking took for their own writings.

The *Adversus Judaeos* Literature

Images of Jews and Judaism in Christian writings performed a number of functions. They formed a Christian social identity by telling Christians

who they were not. Christians were to understand themselves as other than Jewish, better than Jewish, anti-Jewish, as having replaced the Jewish people in the covenant with God. Whereas God had once made a covenant with the "old" Israel, God has made a new covenant with the "new" Israel and Jews are left on the outside of it looking in. This literature also defines for Christians who Jews are: a people who do *not believe* in Jesus Christ, who have been abandoned by God, who are old, carnal, ethnocentric, who killed Christ, who are blind to the truth. Jews are everything bad in religion—legalistic, works-righteous, hypocritical, old, judgmental, carnal and particularistic—that new, good, spiritual, universal, Gentile Christians could never be.

Much *adversus Judaeos* literature prior to the fourth or fifth century was addressed to the beleaguered Christian community to reassure it amid the persecutions that it suffered. Yet five points must be noted. First, this literature continued to be produced long after Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire. Second, anti-Jewish attitudes did not abate as a result of the Protestant Reformation or the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Anti-Judaism became more virulent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as witness its transformation into racist anti-Semitism and the Nazi attempt to make the earth "clean" of Jews. Third, there is a genocidal logic to the teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism. It held that Jews had no right to exist as Jews, that they should see the light, become Christian, and cease being Jews. Ideally, there should be no Jews. Surely, after the Holocaust there is reason for the church to repent and rethink. Fourth, the "teaching of contempt" cannot be dismissed as of no concern of ours. Disciples might think that anti-Judaism is, after all, European, and worst of all, theological! It has nothing to do with us. This overlooks several matters. First, the anti-Jewish literature is not theology so much as it is preaching, pastoral care, and community organizing. Second, our movement's hands are less than clean when it comes to anti-Judaism. Unknown to most Disciples is that one of the most influential anti-Semites in American history was Gerald L. K. Smith, who had been an ordained minister among the Disciples prior to launching his career in race-baiting, anti-Semitism, and anti-Catholicism. Smith published *The Cross and the Flag:*

> America's oldest, most virulent hate publication. Through it he has pumped into the body politic all the ancient poisons employed by anti-Semites throughout the world, including the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (a forgery conceived by czarist secret police officials at the turn of the century which set forth a purported Jewish plot by a nonexistent group for world domination, the *Protocols* were spread by like-minded bigots everywhere and were employed as a major propaganda weapon by Joseph Goebbels during the Hitler nightmare in Germany). And although Jew-baiting is its chief topic, Smith's magazine

constantly reveals a noxious, racist hatred of black people; according to its November, 1966 issue, for example, Negroes are "fundamentally an inferior race" which, without whites, would never "have got past the loin cloth or the G-string."[1]

Fifth, anti-Judaism is a way of talking about Christianity, of which its users may be unaware. This manner of speaking reflects and reinforces prejudice against Jews and Judaism. Studies show that the more Christian people hold nasty attitudes toward Jews of biblical times, the more they project those attitudes onto their neighbors across the street. Sociological analyses of the connection between religious belief and prejudice call us to be responsible for our language.[2]

Images of Jews in Christian Literature

According to the teaching of contempt, ***Jews are an abandoned people.*** From the second century we have the *Letter of Barnabas.* Barnabas (whoever "Barnabas" was) writes to correct the views of some members of the church in Alexandria. He accuses them of "recklessly" saying that the covenant belongs both to Jews and to the church. He opposes this, asserting that the covenant between God and the Jews has been "abolished" and a new one made with Christians. Jews are a *displaced* people, Christians the *replacement people.* All forms of Jewish religion are now illegitimate, because they depend on a covenant that has been canceled. Jews have "proved themselves unworthy" and been displaced by Christians. Jews as Jews are religiously out of business. By rights, they should cease being Jews and become Christians.

Jews are a deicide people. A bishop named Melito (who died about 190 C.E.) lived in Sardis, in west Asia Minor (Turkey). In his sermon "On the Passover," he became the first to talk of deicide (killing God). With Barnabas he contrasted the "old" type with the new "reality," claiming that the type, to which Jews adhere, was "discarded" when the new reality appeared. Like a dressmaker who starts with a pattern, but throws it away when the dress is made, "so also the law was finished when the church was established." Melito's original contribution to the teaching of contempt was the charge of deicide against Jews:

> He who hung the earth was hung;
> he who affixed the heavens was affixed;
> he who sustained all was suspended on the tree;
> the master has been outraged;
> God has been murdered;
> the King of Israel slain by Israelite hand.[3]

That Jews "killed God" (a ludicrous idea if one tries to think about it) became the most damaging accusation Christians hurled at Jews and would often presage the killing of Jews by Christians.

Jews are a blind people. Many visitors to European cathedrals wonder who the two women are who are carved in stone and located slightly above and to either side of the main entrance. One, on the left, holds a broken spear, and her head is bowed, the crown having toppled from it. She is blindfolded. She is the way the medieval church depicted the synagogue in art and can be found in stained glass windows as well. The church had long taught that Jews are willfully "blind" and that they stubbornly refuse to see the truth. One of the earliest Christians to make this charge was Justin Martyr, who lived in Rome in the early part of the second century (about 100-165). Justin argued that Jews read the scriptures but "do not understand what is said." They are blind to the Messiah and, indeed, they killed him.

Jews are a disloyal, an unfaithful people. Tertullian, a north African theologian in the third century, accused Jews of having forsaken God when they declined to convert to Christianity. He contrasted their situation with that of Gentile Christians. We Gentiles, he said, departed from idolatry and turned to worship the true God in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Jews, in refusing to quit worshiping the God of the Bible, actually commit idolatry. Consequently, any ills that befall Jews are what they should expect for their disloyalty to God.

Jews may be attacked with impunity. In the late fourth century, when Christianity had virtually become the established religion of the Roman Empire, Ambrose (the bishop of Milan in Italy) got into an argument with the emperor Theodosius. What had happened was this: In the year 388 the bishop of an obscure Roman town urged Christians there to burn down the local synagogue. They did. When Theodosius heard of this crime, he ordered the bishop to pay for rebuilding the synagogue. Here Ambrose enters the story. Learning of the emperor's order, he argued that a synagogue could not be rebuilt with Christian money. He claimed that bishops have a right to burn synagogues so "that there may be no place in which Christ is denied." Christians should not be concerned about burning a synagogue because "it is a place of unbelief, a home of impiety, a refuge of insanity, damned by God himself."

With this incident a line has been crossed. Anti-Jewish rhetoric always has its practical side, but heretofore that practical side had to do with matters internal to the Christian community—how it preached the gospel, interpreted scripture, and understood itself. With Ambrose's defense of the burning of the synagogue, we see that how Christians talk about Jews translates into the willingness of Christians to commit crimes against Jews and to justify those crimes by appealing to the teaching of contempt. To teach contempt is to practice contempt.

Jews are a nomadic people. Augustine, fifth century bishop of Hippo in northern Africa, created the myth of the "wandering Jew." According to him, Jews are condemned to wander the earth, eternally homeless, because of their unbelief. In their suffering, they perform an important service for the church. They provide the "strange witness of unbelief," by

which Augustine meant to say that Jews bear a witness from which they are *estranged.* In spite of themselves they witness to Jesus Christ, by reflecting in their suffering the fate of those who turn their backs upon the truth. Augustine argued that Jews are to be preserved in their homelessness "until the end of the seven days of recorded time." His views became official church policy for the next thousand years. This was a two-handed policy. According to it, Jews were to be protected, because it was important that they continue to provide the strange witness of unbelief. With one hand the church protected Jews. But with the other hand the church saw to it that the state of Jewish existence reflected the suffering that was to be their lot as far as church policy was in control. Hence the church passed church laws designed to keep Jews in their place. It also called on rulers to enforce public laws that served to make the state of Jewish existence as miserable as possible. Legally and economically, Jewish life was to give all the appearances of a life of subjection so that Jews could make the "strange witness of unbelief."

Jews are fit only for slaughter. In the ancient church, the most overblown outburst of anti-Jewish rhetoric was from John Chrysostom (about 344-407), a presbyter in Antioch, the very town in which followers of Jesus were "first called Christians" (Acts 11:26). Chrysostom was nicknamed "the golden-mouthed" for his gifts as a public speaker. But in a series of eight sermons "against the Jews" in Antioch in 386-387, he became poison-mouthed. The first sermon makes clear what agitated Chrysostom. He comments that "the festivals of the wretched and miserable Jews . . . are about to take place. And many who belong to us . . . attend their festivals. It is this evil practice I now wish to drive from the church." His words disclose that ordinary Christian people were getting along with their Jewish neighbors and enjoying cordial relations with them. Chrysostom complains that some Christians and Jews are friends with each other, visit in each others' homes, and that Christians accept invitations from Jews to celebrate major Jewish holidays.

To stop this activity, Chrysostom attacked Judaism and the synagogue, asserting that the Jews had discarded all the good things they had received from God, turning their backs on the light to sit in darkness. Unlike them, we Gentile idolaters, who had been in the dark, welcomed the light when it appeared. Even worse, they crucified the very one whom we worship. As Chrysostom's venom rose, he fell to a new low in talking of Jews as "dogs, . . . wild animals . . . suited only for slaughter." He called the synagogue a house of prostitution and den of thieves, a "temple of idolatry" where "no Jew worships God."

Jews may not live among us. The historian Raul Hilberg claims that three logical steps made for the run-up to the Holocaust.[4] First was the claim that Jews have no right to live among us *as Jews*. We have seen this claim in Barnabas. Second was the claim that Jews have no right to live *among us*. We will look at this claim shortly. Last was: Jews have no right *to live.* That was what the Nazis sought to implement. Christian governments

committed themselves to Augustine's theory of the wandering Jew by expelling all Jews from the country. England, in 1290, ejected all Jews from the country "permanently." No Jews lived in England until the Puritans persuaded some to return in 1650. France expelled all its Jews in 1306 and, again, in 1394. Ferdinand and Isabella, the Christian rulers of reunited Spain, expelled all Jews from Spain in 1492, when many Jews went to Portugal from which they were again expelled in 1497. Ferdinand and Isabella also expelled all Muslims from Spain. The first Jews to come to America came from Brazil from which they had been expelled in 1654.

The first Protestant to support persecuting and evicting Jews was Martin Luther. The young Luther knew and disapproved of how the church had treated Jews. In his 1523 treatise, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew,* he expressed compassion for Jews and argued that church leaders "have until this time so treated the Jews that to be a good Christian one would have to become a Jew." Luther hoped that the Reformation churches would be friendly toward Jews and that, as a result, Jews would convert. However, Jews did not convert, although they responded warmly to the possibilities for a freer life that Luther briefly opened up for them. Because Jews remained faithful to the covenant with God, Luther in his sick old age, exasperated about many things, voiced his bitterness in two anti-Jewish tracts. In *On the Jews and Their Lies,* he suggested that his readers "practice a merciful severity" toward Jews: Burn their synagogues, destroy their homes, remove their prayer books and Talmuds, ban rabbis from teaching under threat of death, forbid traveling privileges, force Jews to work at hard labor. Then, if still we are unhappy with them, let us kick them out of the country. His writings resulted in the expulsion of Jews from Saxony in 1543 and his last sermon appealed that all Jews be driven from Germany.

Church Laws on Jews and Christians

Beginning in the fourth century, church councils passed laws on relations between Christians and Jews. The first council to do so was held in Elvira, Spain (ca. 304). It forbade intermarriage between Christians and Jews, prohibited Christians from eating with Jews, banned adultery between Christian men and Jewish women, and banned Christian farmers from asking rabbis to bless their crops. The bishops sought to put an end to close relationships between Christians and Jews. Later councils decreed that Christians may not accept invitations from Jews to participate in the Passover meal, may not enter a synagogue, may not share feasts with Jews or accept gifts from Jews on the occasion of Christian feasts. Jews were barred from appearing in public during Holy Week, from conversing with nuns, from being judges or tax collectors, from working on Sunday, from seeking public office without becoming Christian, and from owning slaves.

Such laws proliferated throughout church history and they number in the hundreds. By way of example, some laws gave Christians the right to

kidnap Jewish children and raise them as Christians, made it compulsory for Jews to live in ghettos, required Jews to support the church financially, and excluded Jews from attending medieval universities. The law from the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (an ecumenical council that met in Rome) required Jews "in every Christian province and at all times [to be] marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress."

When the Nazi regime began legislating against Jews in 1935, they found all the precedents they needed in laws passed by councils of the church. Every Nazi law against Jews was simply a modern, racist version of a traditional Christian law. The law requiring all Jews to wear the Star of David took as its precedent the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council mentioned above. The law banning Jews from dining cars on trains appealed to the fourth-century Council of Elvira. The law for the protection of German blood and honor did the same. The barring of Jews from the streets on Nazi holidays drew upon the law barring Jews from the streets during Holy Week. The law against "overcrowding German schools and universities" updated the Council of Basel's 1434 decision banning Jews from attending universities.

Violence

Until the twelfth century, anti-Judaism seems to have been limited to rhetoric and legislation, although we should not underestimate the devastating effect of this legislation on the lives of Jewish women, children, and men. The aim of these laws was to make Jewish life reflect the negative Christian images of Jews and it succeeded. Yet in the twelfth century, matters took a turn for the worse. Here we find a new thing: violent mob action directed against Jews and resulting in *pogroms* (a Russian word) of mass murder. It began with the Crusades, the first of which was preached in late 1095 and began in 1096. The Crusades waned in the late fourteenth century, when support for them eroded.

Those who volunteered for the First Crusade, largely boors and bandits, could not wait upon arrival in Palestine to start killing infidels. In Rouen, France, the crusaders said: "We desire to combat the enemies of God in the East; but we have under our eyes the Jews, a race more inimical to God than all the others. We are doing this whole thing backwards."[5] Down the Rhine and Danube valleys, mobs let Jews choose between baptism or slaughter. Although sometimes protected by bishops and priests, tens of thousands were killed. Most refused baptism, dying "to the sanctification of the divine name." Typically, the crusaders would follow the slaughter with a service of thanksgiving. The First Crusade ended in Jerusalem in 1099 with the burning of a synagogue filled with Jews.

Later, illiterate medieval mobs would become inflamed by a variety of outrageous and preposterous charges made against Jews, and proceed to attack and kill all the Jews in the village, town, or region. The charge of

ritual murder claimed that Jews would slay a young Christian every spring and use the child's blood to make unleavened bread for Passover. The last cases of this charge were in Bavaria, Germany in 1949. Another was that Jews *profaned the Host,* that they would steal consecrated communion bread and desecrate it. Since the bread was, in medieval theory, really the body of Christ, Jews were trying to "kill Christ" again. Each time this charge surfaced throughout the Middle Ages, an outbreak of mass murder would occur. The last charge is *well-poisoning*. Christians blamed Jews for the outbreak of plague in Europe, claiming that Jews systematically poisoned the wells of Christians. They did not bother to explain why Jews were victims of the plague as often as anybody else.

Critical historical inquiry denies the truth of all these charges. The important point is that they, together with population expulsions, forced baptisms, mass murder during the Crusades, and offers of "baptism or death," resulted in the murder of untold numbers of Jews. Counting the pogroms against Jews in Czarist Russia and the Holocaust in Germany, scholars estimate that Christians have killed about half the Jews born in the world in the last eight hundred years.[6]

Theological Critique

To describe the teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism *is* to criticize it. Christians with the slightest grain of moral sensitivity will recoil with horror from this tradition and respond with repentance and a sincere resolve to take responsibility for how Christians talk about and act toward their Jewish brothers and sisters. Christians today are no more guilty for what other Christians did in 1492, than are Jews today for what some did in the year 30. Christians are, however, responsible for a tradition badly in need of reformation and repair.

A straightforward theological observation is pertinent. Anti-Judaism is utterly inappropriate to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the witness of Paul the apostle, both of whom were Jews and neither of whom questioned the faithfulness of the God of Israel to the Israel of God. Anti-Judaism presumes that God would dump a people because of its moral failures. It presumes that Jews merit such abandonment, and that they get what they deserve. It presumes that we merit acceptance by God, and that we get what we deserve. It assumes that Jesus Christ is the kind of mediator who would work such an exchange with God, swapping a deserving for an undeserving people. It assumes that *we* benefit from all this. We get the pay-off of salvation, which Jews lose. The gospel, on the contrary, proclaims God's love for sinners, God's unfathomable love graciously offered to us, God's affection for us in spite of our sinfulness. Anti-Judaism is that specific form of sin that Karl Barth called a "lie." Lying, Barth said, is that form of sin that is specifically Christian, because only those who have encountered the truth (disclosed in Jesus Christ) can lie about it. Only those who know the truth are able to deny it. The truth is that the God of Israel is gracious and

graciously reveals God's love to us through Jesus Christ, who took form in the people Israel and is a gift to the church from the God of Israel and the Israel of God. This is what the entire tradition of anti-Judaism seeks to deny. The denial is a lie. That is what is wrong with it.

Questions for Discussion

1. To what extent are the images of Jews and Judaism described in this chapter similar to or different from those you have acquired in your life in the church? How would or do these images affect your attitudes toward Jews today? Do you know any Jewish person well and does that person correspond to Christian stereotypes?

2. Does the language about Jews and Judaism that we use in church make a difference in the larger world? Is it important and, if so, why? How do our ways of talking and thinking in church affect matters of public behavior? If a local synagogue is smeared with swastikas, how should members of your congregation respond to that fact?

3. Given the fact that a lot of water has passed under the bridge since the New Testament was written and that Christianity has a long and inglorious track record in the area of moral behavior, what is your assessment of the view that we stand before God on the basis and only on the basis of our merit?

4. If it is true that God is gracious, that God justifies the unjust and loves those who can make no claim on God's love, can that statement be true for Christians without also at the same time being true for Jews? If it is not true for Jews, can it be true for Christians?

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Footnotes

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3. *Sermon "On the Passover,"* tr. Richard C. White. Lexington Theological Seminary Library, 1976, p. 47.
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Stages in Jewish History Since 70 C. E.

by Clark M. Williamson

To survey nineteen centuries of Jewish history in a short chapter is presumptuous but necessary because few Christians know that Judaism has a history since the time of Jesus and Paul. We will hit only the highest points and must make large omissions, but must learn the story of our Jewish neighbors.

The Development of the Talmud: 135-425

Before the church finished writing the New Testament, Judaism underwent the first watershed event in its post-biblical history. In 66-73, Jews in Palestine revolted against their Roman occupiers. This first war with Rome (the second was from 132-135) ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Rome forbade the reconstruction of the temple. If Judaism were to continue, it would have to create new institutions and forms of leadership. It did and so began rabbinic, synagogue Judaism. The Judaism we know is not biblical religion, but a new form of that faith born in the same century as Christianity.

In 70, the temple and high priesthood came to an end. But the Pharisees already commanded wide respect from the people. In the year 70, Johannan ben Zakkai (John the righteous), a scholar in the Pharisaic tradition, escaped the Roman siege of Jerusalem. The Roman general, Titus, allowed Johannan to settle in the seaport town of Javneh (Jamnia). There he started a school dedicated to the study and exposition of the written and oral

Torah. From this school eventually developed the codifications of the Torah discussed in the first chapter, the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud.*

Three historical pillars of meaning undergirded the Pharisees' and rabbis' understanding of faith in God: (1) the Exodus covenant given to Moses; (2) the teachings of the prophets; and (3) the Deuteronomic reform. The rabbis understood that the Exodus covenant enlarged the meaning of faith. The covenant is concerned with justice and mercy. It is idolatrous to separate concern for worship from issues of justice and mercy. Justice and worship must be firmly linked together. The teachings of the prophets turned mainly on issues of social justice and mercy. They criticized the tendency to relapse into understandings of faith concerned only with ritual and worship. They attributed the plight of Israel to its failure to practice justice and mercy. Under King Josiah, the Deuteronomic reform realized that to approximate the ideals of the covenant with Moses and to actualize the sweeping demands of the prophets, structural changes were needed in Israel.

These rabbis built on these foundational meanings. They accepted the Exodus meaning of faith in God. They maintained the prophetic criticism of injustice and the principle that all human achievement is relative and can be transcended. They agreed with the Deuteronomic reform that the sweeping proclamations of the prophets were inadequate. Their three structural reforms were the oral Torah, the figure of the rabbi, and the synagogue. Oral Torah was their response to the attempt of the Sadducees to freeze the Torah in its written form. The Pharisees understood that no society can achieve justice and mercy without rendering its moral norms contemporary. "Time makes ancient good uncouth; new occasions teach new duties." According to rabbinic tradition there are two sources of authority from the beginning: the written Torah—scripture—and the oral Torah.

In oral Torah, change takes place, hidden by the fact that the rabbis used a method of interpretation that looked conservative. They found their new ideas by searching the scriptures and "discovering" them there. "You have read," they would say, "but the meaning is" something new. An interpretation ascribed to Rabbi Jonathan ben Joseph reads: "Scripture says, 'The Sabbath is holy for *you'* (Exodus 31:14). This means it is given to you, not you to the Sabbath." Christians are familiar with this bit of oral Torah (Mark 2:27). The word *Torah* refers to the written Torah, to oral Torah, to whatever a scholar discovers by probing *(darash)* the text. The latest interpretation *(midrash)* is as much Torah as was the original revelation given to Moses.

The importance of oral Torah called forth the role of the *rabbi*, an affectionate term meaning "my teacher." The rabbi's responsibility is to teach the Torah, to interpret and specify religious commitments. Jews need to find new ways to apply the Torah because circumstances constantly change. It is not enough to say, "Love your neighbor." We must specify what that means in particular circumstances, if statements like "Love your neighbor" are to be more than clichés.

The rabbi taught in a new institution called the *synagogue*—a Greek word meaning "congregation." In traditional Judaism ten adult males constituted a congregation; in liberal Judaism ten adults (women and men) constitute a congregation. The building in which the people gathered eventually acquired the name; unlike the temple, it was not so much the house of God as the house of the people of God. The synagogue gave institutional expression to the covenantal ideal of Jewish faith. It was a community assembly hall, court of law, hostel for wayfaring strangers, welfare system for the poor, and philanthropic organization. It was the civic center of the Jewish people, recognizing no separation of the sacred from the secular.

The Talmud records the discussion, over several centuries, among the scholars who participated in the deliberations concerning what Judaism required of its adherents. In one sense it is a code of law; more importantly, it is a code of life. Every point of view is represented in it; like the Bible it should not be carelessly quoted.

The Diaspora in Europe: 425-1492

Jews had long lived in far-flung parts of the known world. At the time of Jesus, about five-sixths of all Jews lived outside Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. When Paul the apostle traversed the Roman Empire, he found synagogues everywhere he went. Under the Roman Empire, until the triumph of Christianity, Jews lived fairly normal lives and in some respects were privileged. Rome recognized Judaism as a legal religion *(religio licita)* and large numbers of people became semi-converts, God-fearers. Jews did have to pay the old temple tax, now sent to the coffers of the Roman government, but other than occasionally did not suffer great disabilities.

With the triumph of Christianity under Constantine, their position began to deteriorate. The church was too insecure to tolerate Judaism and regarded it as a dangerous rival to be suppressed. The church persuaded the Empire to redefine Judaism from a legal religion to "a nefarious sect." In 329, converts to Judaism and those who had converted them were threat-ened with the death penalty. Intermarriage between Jews and Christians was threatened with capital punishment. Imperial proscription of Judaism reached its height under Theodosius II (408-450 C. E.). Orthodox Chris-tianity, east and west, was less friendly to Jews than were heretical movements. Gregory the Great, Pope from 590 to 604, set the pattern followed by later generations. Persecution was discouraged and forced baptism disapproved. Jews were free to worship and maintain synagogues, but not to build new ones or improve old ones. Conversion was sternly repressed. In France, Jews were attacked by mobs led by local bishops. The Eastern Emperor Heraclius (610-641) banned the public exercise of Judaism. In Gaul King Dagobert ordered all Jews expelled. Similar policies were followed in Burgundy and Lombardy. We have seen the action in Spain at the Council of Elvira.

Charlemagne (Charles the Great), who became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire on Christmas Day, 800, granted Jews a respite from oppression. A far-seeing ruler, he realized the important contribution Jews could make to the economic life of the Empire, in their role as moneylenders, which was one of the few occupations allowed to them. Consequently, Charlemagne encouraged Jews to immigrate to the Holy Roman Empire, and Jewish communities were established throughout the Carolingian region of Europe. In France and Germany, Jewish communities prospered. In response, Christian bishops labored to reenact the old, repressive legislation, which was passed with monotonous regularity by medieval councils of the church.

Meanwhile, Spain was under Moslem control and would be until 1492 when Ferdinand and Isabella reunited it as a Christian country. Spanish Islamic culture kept alive the philosophical tradition of the ancient Greeks, particularly the study of Aristotle. Scientific naturalism and Arabic mathematics flourished. Jews in Spain produced poets, physicians, and scholars and developed their own language—Ladino—a combination of Hebrew and Spanish. Talmudic scholarship flourished, commentaries were written, schools of thought thrived.

Medieval Jewish intellectual life reached its zenith in a commanding figure who combined the humanism of Spain with practical interests. Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204) (Maimonides) was born in Cordova, to a learned family. His family moved to Cairo and he became a physician. Maimonides wrote *A Repetition of the Law,* restating the whole of traditional Jewish teaching in a logical order. He is famous for his *Guide to the Perplexed,* a philosophy of Judaism written in conversation with the philosophies of the time. When Christian violence against Jews had heightened, Maimonides represented a gracious and generous spirit. He repeated the Jewish traditional claim that "the righteous of all peoples have a share in the world to come," that one does not have to become Jewish to be saved. And he declared that Christians fit the definition of Noachides (those included in the covenant with Noah). This covenant forbids idolatry and although to many Jews Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation look like idolatry, Maimonides ruled that Christians are genuine monotheists.

In the same century—the twelfth—the Crusades began, with the mass murder of Jews and Muslims. This era of Jewish history ends, after the expulsion of Jews from many European countries, with the crowning tragedy of the diaspora of Spanish Jewry in 1492. Five hundred years later in 1992, several anniversaries are observed. One is that of Columbus, with whom sailed some Jews who had been forcibly converted to Christianity. Another is that of Ferdinand and Isabella, who expelled the Jews and whom (in the case of Isabella) the Roman Catholic Church is thinking of making a saint. That sainthood could be considered for a person deeply complicit in the tragedy of Sephardic (Spanish) Jewry indicates how far Christians have yet to go in understanding their relations with Jews. Another is that of the

diaspora of Sephardic Jewry itself. From Israel, to Latin America, to many communities in the United States, Sephardic Jews are celebrating a creative heritage worked out in the face of Christian hostility.

Renaissance, Reformation and the Modern World

Germany and Italy were the only two countries in Western Europe where Jews were able to remain throughout the period in which they were being expelled from other western European lands. Both Germany and Italy were subdivided into numerous, tiny states. No united action in matters of public policy was possible in such conditions and if Jews were expelled from one small state, they could find another to which to move. In Italy some Jews functioned as loan-bankers, operating out of Rome. Although subject to local and sporadic antagonism, Jews in Italy were never subject to *systematic* persecution.

In Italy Jews played a significant role in the intellectual activity of the Renaissance. In Florence, rabbis were accepted figures in humanistic circles. Of them, Elijah del Medigo of Crete (1460–1497), a physician, translator, and philosopher, is most well known. Pico della Mirandola studied Aristotle and Jewish mysticism with him. The Renaissance Popes, Leo X (1513-1521) and Clement VII (1523–1533), were well disposed toward Italian Jews, appreciating their contributions to the culture. Jews in Italy were alert to the possibilities of the arrival of the printing press. The first Hebrew book to be printed was Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch.

In its early days, the Protestant Reformation promised improvements in the conditions of Jewish people. The young Luther, as part of his criticism of the medieval church, claimed that Jews had been treated more like dogs than human beings, so that good Christians might well have desired to convert to this much persecuted faith. Little wonder, he thought, that Jews found Christianity so unattractive. Luther hoped that a result of his work would be that Jews would convert to the true faith. When this did not happen, his reaction was hostile and venomous and he advised his followers to deal with them mercilessly. Meanwhile, Roman Catholic leaders easily attributed to Jews some responsibility for the Reformation. Consequently, the tolerance of the Renaissance Popes evaporated and was replaced by a rigorous policy of repression. Cardinal Caraffa oversaw the burning of copies of the Talmud in 1553. When he became Pope Paul IV (1555-59), Caraffa renewed the repressive medieval legislation and de-creed that henceforth Jews would live in strictly segregated ghettos. The term *ghetto* was drawn from the original Jewish quarter in Venice near the *geto* (foundry). From the middle of the sixteenth century until the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man in France, the ghetto was a familiar feature of European Jewish life in France, Poland, Germany, Italy, and Bohemia. Jews learned that the walls intended to keep them in kept their enemies out. Jews used their enforced segregation to develop a powerful culture and sense of solidarity.

It was the French Republic in 1790 that recognized Jews as equal citizens in the country of their birth. The French influence on the rest of Europe, sometimes mediated by the armies of Napoleon, liberated Jews elsewhere from the ghetto. Holland granted full citizenship to Jews in 1796 and Venice and Rome did the same in 1797 and 1798. This course of events took place in the German countries, although more slowly. The Constitution of the United States, which went into effect on March 4, 1789, formally prohibited the federal government from either establishing or prohibiting the free exercise of religion. Where democracy took and maintained hold (unlike Germany where democracy yielded to totalitarianism under Hitler) and where the rights of minorities receive statutory protection, Jews and all other religious groups (particularly Christians) have prospered. That the largest number of Jews in the world today live in the United States is no accident. For the church this means two things: (a) the church needs to appreciate, rather than merely put up with, the vital and pluralistic society in which it is blessed to live and (b) it needs to take advantage of its pluralistic context in a religiously neutral political situation to develop conversation with and understanding and appreciation of its Jewish neighbors who are also bearers of the tradition of biblical faith.

Questions for Discussion

1. Judaism, like Christianity, is very different from the religion of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. Yet Judaism, like Christianity, develops in continuity with biblical religion. How can we use our common roots in the faith of Israel to come to better understandings of one another?

2. What was the situation of Jews in the Roman Empire before the triumph of Christianity? Why do you think Christianity went out of its way to suppress Judaism?

3. Is there any connection between the facts that Judaism and Christianity both prosper where there is separation of church and state, and that both face difficulty where there is an established religion? If so, what is this connection?

4. Christians in the United States tend to take our religious freedom and pluralism for granted, and to do nothing with it. What should be our attitudes toward pluralism and religious freedom and what should we do in a free and pluralistic context?

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Judaism in the Twentieth Century

by Clark M. Williamson

This chapter is a list of topics relating to contemporary American Judaism—things that Christians committed to understanding and conversing with their neighbors need to know.

What Is a Jew?

It is fairly easy to say what it means to be a Christian or to offer a definition of Christianity. A Christian is anybody who believes in Jesus Christ and is a member of some congregation of Christian people. Some Christians would insist that we cannot leave matters at that point, that Christians believe certain things about God, the church, the world, humanity, and so forth. But at the heart of the matter is belief. Christians are people who at some point confess their faith in words and deeds, certainly never without words.

With Judaism things are different. Jews are prone to comment that belief is more critical to Christians than to Jews, for whom practice is more important. One way to differentiate Christianity from Judaism is to say that Christianity is a "religion," whereas the term *religion* partially and misleadingly describes what it means to be a Jew. To be a Jew means, foremost, to belong to and identify with the Jewish people, the Jewish *laos*. Beliefs are secondary to loyalty to a people and one may be a Jew without any religious beliefs.

A good analogy for "the Jews" is "the Americans," used to refer to citizens of the United States. "The Americans" are a people. To be an

American is to pledge one's loyalty to a people and country. Both Jews and Americans are peoples. Neither is a "race." One may become a Jew by conversion, as one may become American by naturalization. People of all ethnic groups are Jews. Some Jews are African-American and the *Falasha* Jews of Ethiopia trace their history to the time of the Queen of Sheba's visit to the court of King Solomon. *Ashkenazic* Jews are Caucasians of central and eastern European origin; *Sephardic* Jews are of Spanish background and many have lived in Arabic countries so long that they might be mistaken for Arabs.

The insistence that Jews are a "race" and that they exhibit distinctive "racial" characteristics was a central claim of the Nazis. The Nazis sponsored so-called "scientific" institutes committed to defining the particular characteristics of the Jewish "race." They failed, because it cannot be done. Jews are not a race. Finally, the Nazis defined as a Jew anyone whose grandparents were Jewish. They defined Jewishness in terms of religion. If enough of your grandparents decided to remain faithful to the Jewish tradition, you were Jewish. Therefore, while belief is not determinative when it comes to being Jewish, neither can it be ignored. Jews are members of the Jewish people, among whom there is a tradition of faith passed down the generations.

Kinds of Jews

As the above discussion makes clear, not all Jews are religious Jews, or as Jews say, not all are "practicing Jews." Among religious Jews, however, there is considerable variety, although considerably less than there is among Christians. Basically, there are four "movements" in American Judaism. They range from Orthodox, to Conservative, to Reconstructionist, to Reform. We may explain them as follows: The three pillars of Jewish theology are God, the Torah, and Israel. Each branch of Judaism affirms all three, but puts the emphasis on a different term. Orthodoxy stresses Torah. Reform stresses God. Reconstructionism and Conservative Judaism stress Israel (in the sense of the people Israel). Differences have more to do with practice than theology.

Orthodox Judaism regards Torah as the result of divine revelation. Torah includes the written and oral Torah and the codification of these teachings in rabbinic authorities respected by Orthodox Judaism. The requirements of Torah are strictly interpreted, although some Orthodox Jews propose radical new forms of observance. Orthodoxy is not monolithic and orthodox communities can reach great heights of warmth and enthusiasm. Orthodox worship services are conducted in Hebrew and the dietary laws are binding, although orthodox Jews vary in keeping these laws and some non-orthodox also keep them. Orthodoxy tends to a strict interpretation of the Sabbath laws, prohibiting anything defined as work.

Reform Judaism began in Europe in the nineteenth century, with the intention of overcoming the gap separating medieval Judaism from the

burgeoning modern world. Early Reform Jews did not think that being Jewish required one to be medieval; in this they were like Protestant liberal theologians of the same time. They moved to update Jewish law, dropping many ritual requirements and accentuating the ethical aspects of Judaism that they defined as ethical monotheism. They made liturgical innovations, creating a service of confirmation for young women and men. Reform Judaism largely defined its mission in terms of social justice for all people. Until the Holocaust, Reform Jews were non-Zionist, contending that Jews needed to be fully at home in whatever culture they were living. Change continues to characterize Reform Judaism, which along with Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism ordains women to the rabbinate.

Conservative Judaism stresses the people Israel. On matters of practice, it takes a moderate stance between Orthodoxy and Reform. It seeks to establish a wide base of unity among American Jews. Unlike Orthodoxy and Reform, Conservative Judaism began in America. It early introduced English into its prayers and sermons, but continued to stress the dietary laws, Zionism, the Sabbath observance, and the use of Hebrew in worship. From its point of view, Orthodoxy was too fixated on traditional forms of Torah and Reform too fixated on restricting Judaism to reflection on ethics and God. What is important is the needs of the Jewish people. Conservatism seeks to unite Reform's stress on development with a deep respect for the Jewish past.

Reconstructionism also began in America, largely by the work of one rabbi, Mordecai Kaplan, who is its chief source of inspiration. Kaplan tried to implement a radical "reconstruction" of belief and practice for contemporary Jews. He wanted to reverse the deterioration of Jewish life in America. Kaplan reconceived Judaism in terms of John Dewey's practical understanding of religion. Reconstructionism denies the idea of "chosenness" as applied to the Jewish people, preferring to think of Judaism as an "evolving religious civilization." Kaplan rejected chosenness because it was often interpreted to mean that Jews think themselves superior to other persons. Reconstructionism values highly the development of human beings to their full actualization and places a premium on social ethics. Its attitude to traditional Jewish law is to test each law by asking how it contributes to a significant religious life.

Jewish Worship

A few words on Jewish worship and piety (today widely called "spirituality") will help Christians orient themselves to the inner world of Judaism. Worship is inseparable from the emphasis on Judaism as a way of life comprised of good deeds *(mitzvot)* and guided by practical moral reason *(halakah)*. Judaism is often called an optimistic faith. This is a mistake. Judaism is a *redemptive* faith, believing that the world needs redemption, that it is not yet redeemed, but that it is redeemable. Popular among contemporary Jewish thinkers is the medieval mystical idea of "mending the world." The world is in urgent need of mending *(tikkun)*, and

tikkun is accomplished by good deeds *(mitzvot)*. We contribute to mending the world by doing good deeds; our responsibility is to join God in mending and liberating the world. That we do not do this more readily shows that we need more than proper teaching: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).

A good deed (a *mitzvah*, singular) is any act that ennobles life. Enjoying a good time with one's family is a *mitzvah*, as is loafing systematically on the Sabbath. It is a *mitzvah* to keep one's body clean, to teach others, to provide a person with honest work, to smile at a friend, to work for the liberation of the oppressed. Jews practice charity and think that we should help "the least of these," but insist more strongly on the fundamental issues of justice and trying to make charity unnecessary by preventing poverty. In Judaism, peace *(shalom)* in all its aspects—health, economic sufficiency, cultural creativity, absence of war and killing—is the highest moral concern.

Only in a morally serious faith can the grace and forgiveness of God be properly affirmed. Outside a morally serious faith, the stress on grace becomes "cheap grace." Outside a redemptive faith, the stress on moral seriousness becomes works-righteous. Two terms are important to understanding Jewish piety. One is *kavvanah*, intention. As a rabbi commented: "It matters not whether you do much or little, so long as your heart is directed to heaven [God]." Judaism is disinterested in a mechanical keeping of the Torah. One's intention should be to respond to God's love with love for God and the neighbor and act accordingly. Rabbis would caution that we may not wait to do the right thing until we feel the right way. Rather, we should do the right thing and so learn how to feel. The other term is *lishmah*, love for God. To do something with love for God is to do it for its own sake and not for any ulterior motive. To do a good deed for the neighbor in order to be loved by the neighbor is to fail to do the deed out of *lishmah*. One rabbi went so far as to say: "Better is a sin which is done *lishmah* than a commandment which is not done *lishmah*."

God commands us to mend the world by doing justice, but beyond our deeds lie God's compassion and grace. God created the world out of grace, fully aware that human beings would sin. To repent in Judaism is simple: all one has to do is "turn" (or "return") to God with the slightest indication of genuine repentance and one will find God's arms open in love to God's returning children. Jewish piety is oriented to mending the world by good deeds that only human beings can do. Yet it is acutely aware of our weakness and sinfulness, our continuing need for repentance and forgiveness. The God of Israel lays upon us a singular commandment—that we love our neighbors as ourselves—and makes unto us a singular promise—that we are loved by the all-embracing God who loves all God's other creatures too.

Basic to Jewish worship is the Sabbath *(Shabbat)*, the seventh day every week commemorating the creation of the world when God "rested" from the work of creation. The Sabbath is a day when Jews are commanded

to loaf systematically, to do no work. They are encouraged to play, to take a walk with the family, to take a nap, to visit relatives. Employees, servants, and work-animals are to have the day off, and the land itself receives a sabbatical every seventh year. The Sabbath curbs our propensity to exhaust ourselves and to exhaust nature through our commitment to being productive. The Sabbath is a day of joy, the jubilee of the whole world, the day when life is redeemed from drudgery and becomes an end in itself in the presence of God.

The Jewish liturgical year begins in the fall with the "Ten Days of Remembrance," the "High Holy Days," a solemn period of self-appraisal. The High Holy Days begin on *Rosh Hashanah*, the New Year, and conclude on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. They emphasize the seriousness of sin and repentance with the reassurance that God is forgiving and we can begin again. The period is one of hope, sanctified with wine and bread.

Throughout the year are three pilgrim festivals, occasions on which, in biblical times, Jews would try to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. First is the feast of Tabernacles, *Sukkoth*, when Orthodox Jews (or some of them) build a fragile, temporary hut or tabernacle on the lawn. The roof of the tabernacle is open to the sky. The family eats its meals in it and sometimes sleeps there. Tabernacles recall the wilderness wandering when Jews lived in collapsible, portable shelters. Today *Sukkoth* reminds Jews of the plight of the homeless, of the impermanence with which we occupy the earth, and it is also called the ecological festival when Jews live close to the earth.

Passover *(Pesach)*, the next major festival, celebrates the liberation of Israel from oppression in Egypt and proclaims God's intent to liberate all peoples from oppression. Jews were liberated from slavery not merely for their own benefit, but to promote freedom for all peoples. Passover is celebrated with a sense of incompleteness. Its central symbol is unleavened bread, the *matzah*, which in the Exodus story Jews had to bake because of the need for haste in leaving Egypt. Churches that use unleavened bread in communion services use this "bread of freedom." The major celebration of Passover is the *seder*, a meal celebrated at home. The whole meal is a profound spiritual occasion that retells the story of God's liberation of the people; children are involved significantly in it.

The last pilgrim festival is Pentecost *(Shavuoth)*, so named because it takes place fifty days after Passover. It reenacts the giving of the covenant and Torah at Sinai. Many *bar* and *bat mitzvah* services for girls and boys are scheduled at this time to stress the importance of studying Torah. One thing Christians could learn from Judaism is that there is no higher form of worship than study. Mainline Christianity has lost this emphasis, particularly among its adults, and desperately needs to recover it. The spiritual discipline required by study entails genuine humility and a capacity for self-criticism.

Christians are familiar with *Hanukkah*, a December festival. *Hanukkah* observes the rededication of the Jerusalem temple after the Maccabees regained it from the tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The theme of *Hanukkah* is freedom of religion. Although well-known to American Christians, *Hanukkah* is a minor, non-canonical festival. The Jewish tradition was pacifist (until the uprisings in the Warsaw Ghetto) and its adherents did not wish to have a major festival that commemorated a military victory. *Hanukkah* is important in America because of the pressure of the Christmas season and in Israel where, after the Holocaust, liberation from oppressors meets with a new appreciation.

In these occasions of Jewish worship and their themes, we see the Jewish understanding of God's love. God loves God's children with four kinds of love. First is the love that overflows with grace, the love God gives to us irrespective of any merit on our part. The love of the Day of Atonement, this is God's unconditional love, which Christians call God's *agape*. Next is God's compassionate love, God's anguishing over our suffering, God's feeling for and with us, God's passover love for those of God's children who are being oppressed. This Christians call God's suffering love. Then there is God's parental love, the love with which God cherishes God's children, finds us valuable, declares that we have "found favor" with God. This is the love that nurtures, treasures, holds us dear to God. It is what Christians talk about when they image God as a shepherd folding the sheep in God's arms. Then there is the patient love of God, the love that manifests that God knows us, but loves us anyway. This is God's justifying love, the love with which God loves us in spite of the fact that we remain sinners.

Questions for Discussion

1. What have you learned from this chapter about similarities and differences between Judaism and Christianity? In what ways is it misleading to think of Judaism as a "religion"? In what ways is it helpful to think of Judaism as a "religion"?

2. How are the different branches of Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform—similar to and different from different denominations within Christianity?

3. Since Christian worship emerged from the context of Jewish worship, how do Jewish worship and the Jewish liturgical year help you to understand better, if they do, Christian worship and the Christian liturgical year?

4. How does the Jewish understanding of God and what worship (service) of God entails compare to Christian understandings of God and worship? Is there anything in these Jewish understandings that you cannot affirm?

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Jewish and Christian Theology on Election, Covenant, Messiah, and the Future

by Joe R. Jones

The traditional Christian schema regarding election, covenant, Messiah, and the future can be stated with some brevity. God, the creator of all things in heaven and earth, freely chose to create the world. God also, from the depths of God's own wisdom, chose Abraham as the father of the people of Israel, promising Abraham that God will be with and bless his offspring. This choosing or electing of Abraham and Israel is inscrutable. God follows through on his covenant by rescuing Israel from Egypt and re-establishes the covenant with Moses and Israel at Sinai. This covenant calls for Israel to be God's people, to be obedient to God's will as embodied in the Ten Commandments. Through a long and difficult history, Israel repeatedly fails to be obedient to God and the covenant, resulting in a series of communal catastrophes of military defeat and exile. In response to these catastrophes, Israel looks forward to an eventual restoration or redemption by God through a representative national leader called "Messiah." The Messiah does indeed come in Jesus of Nazareth, but the Jewish people by and large reject him as the Messiah and crucify him. God raises Jesus from the dead and calls Jew and Gentile alike to a new covenant, to the church as a new community. By rejecting Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, Israel has been rejected by God and superseded by the church, the new Israel. Those who confess Jesus as Messiah or Christ are to be saved in the midst

of a world that is rushing toward a future of divine judgment and culmination. Jews will only be included in such salvation if they accept Jesus as the Messiah and their Lord and Savior.

With variations here and there, this schema of ideas reigned in most forms of Christianity until the Holocaust called such matters into serious question among Christians. The Holocaust was demonically imposed upon Jewish people—just because they were Jewish people—against the backdrop of almost two millennia of Christian diatribe against and mistreatment of Jews. While a handful of Christians repudiated the Nazi action against Jews and struggled heroically to thwart the Nazi juggernaut, many so-called "Christians" actively participated in the destruction of Jews and many other Christians watched apathetically. Was the Holocaust an inevitable development of traditional Christian teaching? If so, in what respects and how shall we rethink our understanding of Judaism and Christianity? At the same time, the Holocaust has caused some anguished reappraisals within Judaism.

This study guide stands under the long and dark shadow of the Holocaust and is written by Christians trying to understand the heart of the Christian gospel in relation to Judaism. In this section, we will examine some issues and differentia between Jews and Christians and among Jews and among Christians. Contemporary Judaism is not a monochrome reality; there are large and important differences among Jews. So, too, with Christians; the differences are sometimes overwhelming. Here we try to look carefully and hopefully truthfully, even as we look fallibly and limitedly. We are attempting to examine from a Christian perspective how Jews and Christians agree and differ in their understanding of election, covenant, Messiah, and the future.

The concepts of election and covenant go together in most Jewish and Christian thinking. God is understood as one who acts freely, that is, can make decisions without necessity or coercion. Without God being free to act, the concept of election would become unintelligible. Election or chosenness is something God freely does; God does not have to do it. Jews and Christians agree that God elected or chose Israel for a special relationship to God. The choice of Israel was not based on any virtue or distinctive characteristics of Israel that warranted God's choice. Rather, God chose Israel as an act of love and grace; in this sense, beyond saying it is a free act of God's grace, God's choice of Israel is *inscrutable*.

There is, therefore, an inscrutable *particularity* about God's election of Israel. This particularity *cannot* be reduced to some general principle of explanation, for example that God was doing the same thing for all peoples. It can also be noted that for Christians the particularity of God's election of Israel has its counterpart in the particularity of the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. Both particularities resist being explained away or subsumed under general principles.

It should be apparent that this Hebraic concept of election or chosenness can become offensive to other peoples of the world. If God elected Israel,

then are the other nations left out of God's plans? Likewise, if God acted uniquely in Jesus Christ, then does God not act in other nations and religions? If God elects some, are not those unelected thereby excluded? These are difficult questions, but for both Jews and Christians, they are old questions.

When God elects Israel, God also enters into *covenant* with Israel. God first covenanted with Abraham in calling him out of Ur and promising that his offspring would be specially blessed. This covenant with Abraham was renewed with Moses and Israel at Sinai. A covenant is not a contract negotiated by two competent equals, entailing mutual obligations on both parties. Rather, for Jews and Christians, God takes the initiative and calls Israel into covenant. This calling is sheer grace on God's part, and God promises to bless Israel and be Israel's God. On Israel's side, God lays down certain conditions for Israel's faithful obedience to the covenant, generally referred to as the Ten Commandments or more broadly as Torah. Hence, the Torah shows Israel how to be faithful to the covenant with God. Fulfilling Torah is fulfilling the covenant of being God's chosen people.

What, we might ask, is the purpose of the covenant between God and Israel from the standpoint of Judaism? Different answers abound. Sometimes Israel is said to be a light to the nations, especially by obeying Torah and forsaking idolatry. Yet for Jews, the purpose of the covenant was never to make Jews out of the Gentile nations. Some Jews today, however, emphasize that Jewish people are called to no further purpose than to be obedient to Torah, which includes the pursuit of justice even for the Gentile neighbor, and to await the final redemption that God will someday bring. From a Christian standpoint, the purpose of the covenant was to be the theater in which God finally works God's redemptive purpose in Jesus Christ for Israel and the world.

But the covenant story in Israel and Christianity sometimes gets confusing. The Torah is given by God's grace; in grace God already loves Israel. Israel does not have to do Torah in order to be loved by God. But what happens if Israel does not keep Torah? Will God then punish or forsake Israel? In making covenant with Israel, God makes promises to Israel; but are the promises conditional on Israel's own faithfulness to the covenant? The Hebrew Scriptures wrestle valiantly with this very question. God is shown repeatedly renewing the covenant and being faithful in spite of Israel's failures and unfaithfulness. God will not abandon and forsake Israel in the face of Israel's disobedience. Yet, when bad things happen to Israel, like the conquests and exiles by Assyria and Babylon, is this God's punishment for an unruly people? Are bad things, such as the Diaspora and the Holocaust, to be interpreted as God's punishment of Israel? The book of Job is a profound Jewish dramatization and meditation on the theological ramifications of these questions.

Jews today still wrestle with these questions and there is a wide spectrum of opinion. We may ask whether there are any historical consequences, whether positive or negative, to being God's people. Is

faithful Israel historically rewarded, and disobedient Israel historically punished, if not forsaken? For traditional Jews, Israel remains God's chosen people, but the Holocaust severely strains any possible interpretation that God was disciplining or punishing Israel in the death camps. For other Jews, the notion of Israel's election or chosenness is an embarrassing idea in a pluralistic world. For these, the idea of election is a burden of historic proportions that has provoked others to attack and demean Israel. Also, some Jews have pondered passionately whether the Holocaust itself is a sign that God hid and forsook the Jews or even that God is really dead. Yet even in all this, there is among Jews of many different theological opinions, the strong common conviction that the founding of the State of Israel and the reclaiming of the land is a sign of the continuation of God's election of Israel.

Here it is appropriate to introduce the term *Messiah.* In Hebrew it means quite simply "the anointed one," and in Greek it is translated as "Christ." In Hebrew Scriptures, kings and priests are the main figures who are anointed of God. But as Israel comes to grips with the frightening, destructive upheavals in its life as it is victimized by Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and finally Rome, the questions of hope and salvation emerge again and again. All along Israel thought that the Creator God had a redemptive purpose for Israel and the whole world; this was the strong Hebraic conviction that history was going somewhere. But the question emerges with urgency: can Israel have hope in the Creator God even in the midst of violent devastation and exile and diaspora? There thus emerges a hope for a future restoration of Israel by a righteous leader sent by God, probably a kingly leader. Such an anointed one would restore Israel among the nations and usher in real peace and justice. These are the loose-fitting themes that comprise what might be called the messianic hope of Israel and Judaism.

Contemporary historical scholarship has now led us to believe that in the time of Jesus, the hope for a Messiah was not nearly as precise, definite, and widespread for the ordinary Jew as Christians have historically assumed. It is, therefore, probably not true that all Israel possessed a common and clear concept of Messiah and self-consciously rejected Jesus as Messiah. But the early Jesus movement within Judaism did come quickly to apply the term *Messiah* or *Christ* to Jesus as a way of understanding who he was and what he had done. As the break between the synagogue and the church widened, two issues became sharply posed. First, whatever the church might believe about Jesus as Messiah, a typical Jew would know that the Messiah's coming would be marked by the restoration of Israel and the reign of peace and justice. To such a typical Jew, it is not obvious and tangible that peace and justice have come in Jesus of Nazareth. Second, not only is there no obvious reign of peace and justice, but a Messiah who was crucified on a tree was hardly commensurate with common notions of looking to a royal anointed one who would restore and vindicate Israel.

Hence, Jews and Christians have some different assumptions when they talk about Messiah. For Jews, the Messiah has not yet come, as evidenced by the absence of peace and justice and a fully restored Israel. For Christians, the Messiah has come in Jesus of Nazareth and manifests the very presence of God's kingdom, and Jesus' resurrection is the promise of a full realization of the kingdom of God in the future. The Messiah suffered on the cross, showing the suffering of God in the midst of and at the hands of sinful humanity, and was raised from the dead as the promise that no future can separate us from the love of God. In retrospect, we can appreciate how difficult and bracing, perhaps liberating, it would be for a Jew to call Jesus Messiah.

However, Christian belief in Jesus as the Christ is more than the belief in Jesus as Israel's Messiah. Jesus is called the very Word of God, the Son of God, and the one who comes as God's gracious gift to Israel and all humankind. In Jesus, God has fulfilled the covenant with Israel and has established a new covenant with the church and the world. Jesus is the one who all Israel, from Moses to the prophets, looked for eagerly, if unwittingly, as the Redeemer of Israel and the world.

In our time, some careful rethinking has taken place from the Christian side. Two questions can be stated. First, is the new covenant with the church of Jesus Christ one that replaces Israel's covenant or fulfills Israel's covenant or is simply God's new covenant with the Gentiles? Second, is Jesus, as Israel's Messiah, a Messiah *for Israel* or only *for the Gentiles?* Put another way, does Jesus have any theological significance for Israel, as well as for Gentiles?

Few Christian theologians and churches today would want to argue that God's new covenant with the church of Jesus Christ replaces, supersedes, and cancels God's covenant with Israel. This would mean that Israel has ceased being God's chosen people and has been replaced by the church. It is this belief that has for Christians rendered Israel useless, aimless, and subject to abuse. In rejecting this long-standing tradition of the church, some would argue that the very terms *Old Covenant* (Old Testament) and *New Covenant* (New Testament) are inappropriate theologically in our time.

Then what should we say about Jesus and the church? Are these simply to be understood as God's redemptive action *only* for the Gentiles? Israel's covenant, we might say, remains intact, and in Jesus, a Jew, God opens up a new way for Gentiles. This is a very prominent interpretation by Christian theologians today. But it renders virtually unintelligible that the earliest church was made up of Jews and that the Jewish Paul thought Jesus Christ was certainly a gift of God *for* Paul himself. To say Jesus Christ is only for the Gentiles is to say a Jew would be making a conceptual mistake to confess Jesus as the Christ and Lord and Savior. This is a conclusion that many Christians are unwilling to draw.

If it is false to speak of Israel as superseded and rejected by God and if it is unconvincing to speak of Jesus Christ as being only for Gentiles, how

should Christians speak of God's covenant with Israel and God's covenant in Jesus Christ? Can we then say that Jesus Christ *fulfills* the covenant between God and Israel in the sense that God takes up Israel's side in the covenant by being flesh and word in Jesus the faithful Jew? Here "fulfill" does not mean cancel or reject or repudiate, but is that which brings to completion. Neither does *fulfill* have to mean that the covenant with Israel was empty until Jesus; rather, fulfilling has the same function in Jesus Christ as Jeremiah's hope for a new covenant that will be written on the hearts of Israel. Hence for Jeremiah, the covenant with Israel will be fulfilled when it is written on every heart. So too in Jesus Christ, the covenant is fulfilled by God-in-the-flesh taking up the cause of Israel. Here we could say, then, that Jesus Christ is God *for* Israel and *for* all humanity, as pure unbounded grace. In Jesus Christ God was at work reconciling Jew and Gentile to Godself.

Certainly this last interpretation is not one that a religious Jew would find congenial. And the reasons for this are not hard to find. Jews and Christians will, perhaps, inevitably forever disagree about Jesus Christ, so long as Christians assert that God's redemptive actions in Jesus were unique and decisive for all humanity, including Israel. Drop this assertion and what is left of Christian belief, except a modified Judaism for Gentiles? Drop this assertion and you can say Judaism is for Jews and Christianity for Gentiles.

Here the Christian can revisit the doctrine of election. Certainly Israel was chosen by God, and chosen by God to have its salvation and the salvation of the whole world worked out in its people's history. Jesus, the Word of God from the beginning and made flesh in Israel, is the one truly elected by God in electing Israel. In God's election of Jesus Christ, it is determined by God that Israel will be the history in which God will work out God's election of all humanity to salvation. Election thus means God's gracious decision to use the particularity of Israel and the particularity of Jesus Christ for the universal redemptive purpose of saving a lost humanity. Hence, the election of Jesus Christ and the church does not cancel the election of Israel but brings it to its proper fulfillment as the redemption of Israel and the world. Put simply, in Jesus Christ, Israel and the nations are elected by God for salvation.

Does the church have a mission to the Jews? This is one of the most vexing questions in contemporary discussion. Clearly, any sense of mission as coercive proselytizing must be firmly repudiated. Yet on the one hand, it seems natural that Christians, to the extent they believe that God acted in Jesus Christ for all, would want to share that witness with their Jewish brothers and sisters. Certainly, it would seem presumptuous to refuse to confess and witness to this gospel. On the other hand, a mission to the Jews suggests that Jews don't know God and may not be saved apart from confessing the lordship of Jesus Christ. This, however, would seem to repudiate God's election of Israel and would inappropriately narrow the scope of God's salvific work in Israel and in Jesus Christ on behalf of all humanity.

Does the Jew or Judaism have a mission to the church? It has not been the practice of Judaism to seek the conversion of Gentiles to Israel's faith. As we have said, traditionally Judaism has had no mission to Gentiles. But can a Christian see in Judaism a mission, if not one of conversion, but of witness to the church? Certainly, it can be answered, Judaism serves as a witness to the church that God's grace is inscrutable and free and never the possession of the church and under its control. Judaism can witness to the church that the Messiah's work is not yet completed; peace and justice do not yet reign in the affairs of humankind. However much the church may believe that something ultimately decisive was enacted for God and humanity in Jesus Christ, there is still much to be consummated in a future yet to come.

Jesus Christ is unintelligible to the Christian without seeing him in the history of Israel as the chosen people of God. It is Jewish flesh that God used before Jesus and uses in Jesus to reconcile a sinful world. Christians deny the real incarnation of God when they neglect the Jewishness of Jesus. And yet, it is precisely the differing beliefs about Jesus that mark the line differentiating Jew and Christian. It is an insult to either faith to declare—from some vaunted general point of view—that they believe the same thing, really. Yet, it is also an insult to assert that they worship different Gods. The conversation must go on to discern the ways of faithfulness in both synagogue and church.

For Christians the hopeful word is that the God whom they know in Jesus Christ, and about whom they speak in trinitarian terms, is first and last the God of Israel. Even as this God speaks a gracious word of salvation in Jesus Christ, so too the Christian knows God is faithful from beginning to end to God's specially chosen people Israel. Just as the Christian possesses a hope in the ultimate triumph of God's grace as known in Jesus Christ and Israel, and not a hope grounded in the Christian's own righteousness, so too the Christian knows Jews as included in the triumph of God's grace. And yet this hope is not obvious and evident in a troubled world and is not corroborated by a facile reading of contemporary history. Even so, however much the present hour may involve suffering and worldly defeat, the Christian learns from Israel and Jesus Christ that in the end God's love and justice will be the last Word. The Holocaust cautions that God's reign is not readily apparent in the affairs of history, and yet the Christian believes that the God who suffered on Christ's cross suffered with unfathomable sorrow the horror of God's children burning in the ovens of hate. The Messiah has come, and he is one who suffers and in suffering finally triumphs as the Ultimate Companion of the world's victims and even of the world's tyrants.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do Jews and Christians differ on the meaning of God's election and covenant with Israel? Explain.

2. If Jews are chosen people and Christians are chosen people, then what does it mean when bad things happen to Jews or Christians?

3. What are Christian reasons for not saying that God has rejected Israel and replaced Israel by the church?

4. How would you characterize the disagreements between Jews and Christians as to whether Jesus is Messiah? Is anything theologically important at stake in this disagreement?

5. For a Christian, why is God's covenant with Israel and the Jewishness of Jesus important for Christian self-understanding?

6. Is it possible from a Christian standpoint to acknowledge that most contemporary Jews do not accept Jesus as Messiah and still *not* conclude that Jews are therefore not saved?

7. What would it mean to say Judaism is for Jews and Christianity is for Gentiles? What are the issues in saying this?

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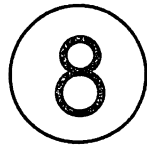

The State of Israel and Jewish/Christian Relations

by Walter Harrelson

A new dimension in Jewish/Christian relations developed soon after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. On the one hand, most Christian bodies welcomed the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, following the horrors of the Holocaust. Now at last the Jewish people had a place that they could call their own, where Jews from all over the world would be welcomed if they chose to join the thousands who were moving to the new land. Jews were finally able to take up residence in the traditional, biblical homeland. Some Christians, indeed, saw in the establishment of the State of Israel and the return of so many Jews to Israel a sign of the approaching Last Days.

Other Christians, however, were overwhelmed by the plight of Arab refugees who had fled or had been driven in warfare from their own land as the State of Israel was established. Many of these Arabs were Christians, representing Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant communions. While their Arab governments had rejected the Partition Plan presented by the United Nations, refusing to share the land with the Jewish inhabitants and the new immigrants, the dispossessed lived on in that part of the land left to them at the time of the cease-fire, or sought residence in some other land. The United Nations assumed responsibility for housing and feeding the thousands who were unable to find a place, and the Arab governments did little or nothing to ease their plight.

The situation of this large group of Arab refugees claimed the attention of the Christian world in ways that the plight of Jews in Europe and in Arab lands had not. And through the years to the present time, Jews have continued to feel that the Christian world shows disproportionate moral support for the Palestinian community. It is in this context that we must address the question of land in Judaism and in Christianity.

Biblical Perspectives on Land

Life begins in a garden. The first human pair is appointed to tend it and care for it. The ancient story implies that the earth itself is intended to be a garden, providing richly for its inhabitants, human and non-human. Human misdeeds damage all relationships: between God and human beings, between members of the human community, and between humans and the whole of the non-human creation. Hosea can speak of a land in mourning, suffering, drying up, as a result of the outbreak of human violence (Hosea 4:1–3). Cain is driven away from any given locality in the land and as a result feels mortally exposed to everyone he might meet (Genesis 4:14). The ground may be made less arable because of human sin, but for the community of the Bible, land is absolutely essential to human life. No text is more telling than the account of Naboth's refusal to sell or trade his ancestral land to the king; the refusal costs Naboth his life, but he remains adamant: The land and his family are inseparable (1 Kings 21).

It is in this context that we should place God's promise to Abraham and his descendants. Genesis 12:1–3 tells of God's mysterious choice and call of Abraham to be the one through whom God will establish a distinct people in the world, bound to God in covenant. Abraham is promised three things: divine blessing and standing in the world; many descendants; and land upon which he and his family may live and flourish. The promise of land is a limited promise: Abraham is told to march through the length and breadth of the land, and when he has done so, he hears the promise, "To you and to your descendants I will give *this* land" (Genesis 13:14–17, paraphrased). It is one particular plot of ground, not at all large—and surely, not the richest and best-endowed land of earth—that God promises to give to Abraham and his descendants.

The land is always in process of being given by God, while remaining God's land. That is the clear message found in the book of Deuteronomy: God is *giving* the land, but it is still God's, and it is extended to Israel in trust. Israel is to live upon the land responsibly, practicing justice, caring for the land, seeing to the needs of the poor and the stranger, while also enjoying its fruits and benefits (see especially Deuteronomy 8).

Israel's prophets are not slow to attack the people of the covenant when they fail to live responsibly. Beginning with the prophet Amos in the mid-eighth century B.C.E., these prophets threaten the loss of this special land that God entrusted to the ancestors of Israel—all because of their acts of faithlessness in public and private life. Land is essential for life. A

particular land was entrusted to the people of Israel. But maintaining the right and faithful relationship between God and people and between Israel and the neighbors of Israel—that is of critical importance. God's gift or grant of land was for the sake of maintaining that living relationship between God and people.

The prophets of Israel show how critically important the land of the Promise was when they portray in many different visions how God will bring to consummation the promised blessing for Israel and for the nations. Often the emphasis falls upon the ingathering of the exiled people of God from the ends of the earth, back to the land of the Promise, back to mother Zion. Sometimes the prophets stress the political dimensions of the fulfillment of God's work on earth, picturing a ruler who rules over David's former kingdom, but does so peacefully, justly, humanely. Sometimes the emphasis falls on the inclusiveness of the community of the Consummation: Gentiles as well as Jews will be found there, the nations will learn of God's Teaching, and harmony among the nations will prevail.

While some of these images of fulfillment envision the transformation of the whole of the creation, many of them, though universal in scope, still focus upon the Holy Land, with Jerusalem, or Zion, as its center. God brings the divine purpose to consummation for the whole of earth and for all peoples, but does so with Zion as the center of the transformed universe. Note the remarkable picture of Mother Zion as the one who gathers the blind, the deaf, the speechless, the wounded, even the lepers and those who are mentally impaired, drawing all to new health and life and blessing in the transformed land (Isaiah 35).

In the New Testament this understanding of the place of land is presupposed. The Christian community extends to the Gentile world this promise of God to provide life, blessing, and meaning to all. The Christian vision becomes a vision of a transformed universe in which Gentile as well as Jew have equal opportunity to claim the benefits of divine love and grace. The image of heavenly Jerusalem, lowered to a transformed earth, is itself quite in line with the visions of Israel's prophets. The gates of the city stand open. The nations of earth have equal access to this new reality. While the whole earth is transformed, the center of it all, the very "navel of the earth," as it is called frequently in Semitic religion (see Ezekiel 38:12), is this transformed Zion (see Revelation 21:22).

The Continuing Importance of Land for the Christian Community

It is clear, therefore, that Christians have an interest in Zion and in "Zionism." While the Christian community may not be expected to view the land of the Promise in quite the way that religious Zionism views it, two aspects of the promise of the land claim Christian attention very strongly indeed. The first is this: The promise of land is a reminder that all human beings need to have a stake in the world of God's creation, in the goods of the earth. The hunger for land and deep longing for land that has been lost

in warfare or through other means represent a hunger for place, for the possibilities of life, for meaning in life. Surely, that must have been the experience of those who preserved and developed the promise of God to Abraham. Abraham was being promised a meaningful and productive life: companionship with God, a position from which to enter into relations with other peoples, a family large and strong enough to endure, and hope for the future. Those who live today without land, or with only the most tentative hold upon their ancestral holdings, live without adequate means of livelihood. Land, then, is a symbol of life that is sufficiently secure to keep hope alive. The homeless in our contemporary cities are vivid reminders of what it means to live without land, without a place.

The second aspect of the Christian understanding of land is how the land of Israel, the geographical and physical Israel or Jerusalem, symbolizes the concreteness of God's gift to the whole world in Jesus as the Messiah. Christian faith affirms that the promises of the prophets and sages of Israel received a definitive culmination in this gift of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus announces the day of consummation, when what the prophets had promised stands ready at hand, breaking in upon the world in power. Zion is indeed the place of refuge for all, just as God had promised through the prophets. Life is being transformed, the goods of earth do belong equally to all, and none dare be denied what God purposes that they have.

It is true that more awaits, that the community lives by faith and hope. But it is also true that for the Christian community, the Holy Land, and Jerusalem in particular, becomes the scene of the consummation of God's work for the universe, ready at hand, beckoning and demanding. The Christian community, then, can hardly turn aside from the importance of land as such or the land of the divine Promise in particular.

Sacred Memory Kept Alive

The Holy Land remains holy for the Jewish and Christian communities because it is the site of God's great and cosmic and immensely costly struggle to bring blessing to earth. This is the land where prophets and sages and poets and teachers of Torah struggled for a more just and faithful people of God, for a fairer and more humane world. This is the land where Jesus witnessed to God's presence and purpose and love for all, where he suffered and died, where God raised him to newness of life, thereby affirming the triumph of life over death, meaning over futility, and possibilities for earth and all its inhabitants.

Jews who do not claim to be religious at all still see in the land of Israel, and especially in Jerusalem, a reality that claims their allegiance and devotion. Christians may well not share that attachment to the particular land. But they will surely understand what land stands for in our turbulent world. And they may indeed share in the allegiance and devotion of Jews for the land of the Promise, the land of Jesus, the land of the birth of the

Christian community, and the land that symbolizes ultimate consummation of the divine work and plan for the universe.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the importance of the Holy Land for Christians today? Do Jews of your acquaintance have an entirely different attachment to the land of Israel than you do?

2. What about Christians in the Middle East? When you hear news of their situation, are you drawn to help them because they are Christians? Do you think of what kind of Christians they are (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant)? Or do you only think of them by reference to their situation, regardless of their religious affiliation?

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Signs of Hope in Jewish-Christian Relations

by Michael Kinnamon

It would be difficult to overstate the astonishing change in Jewish-Christian relations that has occurred over the past generation. The historic visit of Pope John II to a Roman synagogue, where he embraced that city's Chief Rabbi as a "brother in the faith," is a vivid image of this revolution in Christian attitudes toward the Jews and Judaism; but there are also numerous signs of hope closer to home.

- A recent survey by the National Council of Churches of Christ found that synagogues are now members of roughly one-quarter of local "councils of churches" or "church federations" and that more than 75 percent of these bodies have programming that involves both Christians and Jews. The NCCC itself has had an Office on Christian-Jewish Relations since 1974.
- A National Workshop for Christian-Jewish Relations, jointly organized and sponsored by various Christian and Jewish agencies, has been held every eighteen to twenty-four months since 1974.
- There are more than seventy local chapters of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. One of the NCCJ's most exciting programs, called "Seminarians Interacting," brings seminary students from both faiths together for intensive dialogue on contemporary issues.
- Courses dealing with the Holocaust, and Jewish studies in general, are now standard fare on a great many college campuses.

• Christian participation in Holocaust Memorial Day (Yom Ha Shoah) observances is widespread. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, opened in April of 1993, should focus even more attention on the destruction of European Jewry and its implications for the churches.

• Local dialogue groups are active in various parts of the country. One prominent example, the Catholic-Jewish Respect Life Committee in Los Angeles, has prepared joint educational statements on such issues as health care, death and dying, and the Holocaust.

The most remarkable change, however, may be at the level of official church pronouncements. The seminal document is that of the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" *(Nostra Aetate)*, issued in 1965. This declaration "deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews." It explicitly affirms "the spiritual ties which link the people of the new covenant to the stock of Abraham" and encourages "further mutual understanding and appreciation" among those who share this common heritage. Perhaps most significantly the Council reverses centuries of official church teaching by acknowledging that "the Jews" cannot be charged with the death of Christ. "It is true that the Church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture."[1]

Since that time, the Vatican has issued two important elaborations: "Guidelines on Religious Relations with the Jews" (1974) and "Notes on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis" (1985). Among Protestant and Orthodox Christians, the most influential statement is probably the "Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue" developed, after years of consultation (including Jewish advisors), by a working group of the World Council of Churches. This text was received and commended to the churches for study and action by the WCC's Executive Committee in 1982. Such ecumenical study strongly reflects the work done by Protestant churches in Europe, including the Evangelical Church in Germany. The following is typical of these statements: "We confess with dismay the co-responsibility and guilt of German Christendom for the Holocaust. . . [by denying the permanent election of the Jews as the people of God] we have made ourselves guilty of the physical elimination of the Jewish people."[2]

Several U.S. denominations—including the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, and the Presbyterian Church (USA)—have also adopted in their highest governing bodies pastoral, teaching statements on the relationship between Christians and Jews. These statements have been followed by often lively, church-wide discussions, especially among Presbyterians and members of the UCC.

Why this sudden flurry of interest and activity? The statements themselves suggest the following reasons:

1. "After Auschwitz, the world looks different. The Holocaust has sent Christians back to their texts and traditions to reexamine their theology and to ask about their own complicity in the anti-Semitism that gave rise to this horror. The Shoah has also sensitized us to the continuing and sometimes growing virulence of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in our own country and other parts of the world."[3]

2. "The formation of the state of Israel in 1948 is also a new setting for examining old ideas."[4]

3. "Christians and Jews live side by side in our pluralistic American society. We engage one another not only in personal and societal ways, but also at deeper levels where ultimate values are expressed and where a theological understanding of our relationship is required."[5]

While the official statements mentioned above differ in emphasis and format, they share certain themes:

1. All of them repent of the church's complicity in the persecution of the Jewish people, repudiate anti-Semitism in all its forms, and state a commitment to oppose anti-Jewish attitudes and actions in both church and society. The Vatican's 1974 "Guidelines" insist, for example, that anti-Semitism isn't just wrong but utterly "opposed to the very spirit of Christianity."[6] In other words, for Christians to be Christians, they must stand against such hatred.

Several of the texts identify ways that the church might begin to make good on these commitments. The statement adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1987 argues that

> ... the public reading of scripture without explicating potentially misleading passages concerning "the Jews," preaching which uses Judaism as a negative example in order to commend Christianity, public prayer which assumes that only the prayers of Christians are pleasing to God, teaching in the church school which reiterates stereotypes and non-historical ideas about the Pharisees and Jewish leadership—all of these contribute, however subtly, to the continuation of the church's "teaching of contempt."[7]

The Roman Catholic text from 1985 goes still further by suggesting that any teaching of the church that does not make *positive* use of the Jewish tradition, past and present, is simply incomplete.

Nearly all of the statements observe that, in our own century, the merger of Christian-fed anti-Semitism with fascist totalitarianism led finally to the Holocaust. "It is agonizing," says the Presbyterian statement, "to discover that the church's 'teaching of contempt' was a major ingredient that made possible the monstrous policy of annihilation of Jews by Nazi Germany. It is disturbing to have to admit that the churches of the west did little to challenge the policies of their governments... hence we

pledge to be alert for all such acts of denigration from now on, so that they may be resisted."[8]

2. The documents, in line with the point just made, reflect the tendency to stereotype and caricature Jews and Judaism and affirm the need for Christians to be better acquainted with the life of the Jewish people, past and present. The World Council's document captures the essence of this concern:

> Bible-reading and worshiping Christians often believe that they "know Judaism" since they have the Old Testament, the records of Jesus' debates with Jewish teachers and the early Christian reflections of the Judaism of their times . . . This attitude is often enforced by lack of knowledge about the history of Jewish life and thought through the 1900 years since the parting of the ways of Judaism and Christianity. For these reasons, there is special urgency for Christians to listen, through study and dialogue, to ways in which Jews understand their history and their traditions, their faith and their obedience "in their own terms."[9]

3. The churches, through their official pronouncements, now clearly affirm the crucial importance of Jews and Judaism for a true understanding of Christian faith. Indeed, most acknowledge that what God did in Christ is unintelligible apart from the story of Israel's election. Jesus was a Jew, as were his earliest followers. Neither their ministry nor the worship and thought of the early church can be understood apart from Jewish tradition, culture, and worship of the first century. A recent statement (1988) from the WCC's Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People summarizes Christian indebtedness this way:

> We give thanks to God for the spiritual treasures we share with the Jewish people: faith in the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; knowledge of the name of God and of the commandments; the prophetic proclamation of judgment and grace; the Hebrew scriptures; and the hope of the coming Kingdom. In all these we find common roots in biblical revelation and see spiritual ties that bind us to the Jewish people.[10]

4. Most of the statements claim that Jews and Christians bear a common responsibility as witnesses to God's righteousness and peace. Once again, the Presbyterian document puts the matter succinctly:

> Both Christians and Jews are called to wait and to hope in God. While we wait, Jews and Christians are called to the service of God in the world. However that service may differ, the vocation of each shares at least these elements: a striving to realize the word of the prophets, an attempt to remain sensitive to the dimension of the holy, an effort to encourage the life of the mind, and a ceaseless activity in the cause of justice and peace.[11]

5. The fifth theme we wish to lift up is both the most significant and the most problematic. The churches now generally affirm God's continuing covenantal relationship with the Jewish people and, correspondingly, repudiate the notion that the church has "replaced" or "superseded" Israel in God's favor. Since the Enlightenment, individual Christians have sought to protect the rights of individual Jews as members of democratic societies. But never before have the churches in official proclamations affirmed the continuing reality, theologically and sociologically, of the Jewish people.

The United Church of Christ makes this the single, bluntly stated focus of its 1987 resolution:

> We... affirm that Judaism has not been superseded by Christianity; that Christianity is not to be understood as the successor religion to Judaism. God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been abrogated.
>
> God has not rejected the Jewish people; God is faithful in keeping covenant.[12]

The Presbyterian statement is typical when it cites Paul's image of Christians as branches grafted onto the good olive tree of Israel (Romans 11:17–18). The issue for the early church concerned the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's saving work, not the exclusion of the Jews.

Debate has swirled within the UCC and the Presbyterian Church (USA), however, over the implications of these statements. What we have said, claimed some UCC leaders following the adoption of their resolution, is that it is no longer appropriate to attempt to convert Jews. Others denied that the action meant that at all. A follow-up study to the original Presbyterian statement similarly identified the following as issues requiring future work:

- Christology and questions concerning our understanding of Jesus Christ in a religiously pluralistic world;
- The content, forms, and style of evangelism to which we are called as we witness in religiously plural situations.

The questions go to the core of Christian faith: If God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been broken, then can we say that Christians have a mission to the Jews? If the new covenant in Christ did not supersede the covenant made with Israel, then how are we to understand the "fulfillment" to which Christianity gives witness? It appears that, while various churches have recognized the need to rethink Christian beliefs in light of the Holocaust, they are only now beginning to see the full complexity of this commitment. A UCC theological panel, appointed to study and interpret the resolution on Jewish-Christian relations, concludes that "our affirmation both of the continuing covenant of God with the Jewish people and of fulfillment of God's promises in Christ appears to be a paradox. Yet, through this double affirmation, we are invited into a deeper understanding of our faith."[13]

The statements we have been exploring do affirm (a) that Christians are called to witness to their faith in word and deed and (b) that coercive proselytism has no place in authentic Christian witness. The Presbyterian document seems to speak for most when it says that "dialogue is the appropriate form of faithful conversation between Christians and Jews. Dialogue is not a cover for proselytism. Rather, as trust is established, not only questions and concerns can be shared, but faith and commitments as well."[14]

6. All of the statements recognize that any comprehensive approach to Jewish-Christian relations cannot ignore the state of Israel; but there is continuing disagreement among Christians and between Christians and Jews over how the church should understand and respond to actions of the Israeli government or to theological claims made about this modern state. The UCC panel speaks of "God's concrete gift of land to one people [as] a symbol of God's grace in giving the earth to all people,"[15] while the Presbyterian statement refers to "land" as "a biblical metaphor for sustainable life, prosperity, peace and security."[16] But response to both texts indicates that this metaphorical approach is not entirely satisfactory.

Perhaps the most that can be said is that Christian concern for the State of Israel should, in no way, exclude or minimize Christian concern for the Palestinian people. The UCC panel goes further to argue that "in view of their complicity with past injustices to both people, Christians of the west bear a special responsibility to work for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue that assures the human rights and dignity of both peoples."[17]

We hope that two lessons shine through this brief survey. First, there is much Disciples can learn from their Christian ecumenical partners about how to relate to the Jewish community. Each of the statements referred to in this chapter contains insights that challenge Disciples to deepen and clarify our own understandings. Second, it should be clear that we live in a truly new era—one marked by Christian repentance for past persecution of the Jewish people, by growing appreciation for our common spiritual heritage, by interfaith cooperation in response to the needs of the world, and by mutual witness to what God has done and is doing in our lives.

At the same time, however, anti-Semitic acts persist in our society as do misunderstandings about Jews and Judaism on the part of Christians. While the new era is a cause for thanksgiving, the lingering patterns of anti-Jewish behavior are a reminder of the need for new educational efforts and continuing vigilance.

Questions for Discussion

1. What "signs of hope" do you see in your area with regard to Jewish-Christian relations? How have these relationships changed in your lifetime?

2. How do you respond to each of the six "common themes" summarized in this chapter? In particular, do you agree that "Jews and Christians bear

a common responsibility as witnesses to God's righteousness and peace"? If so, how might this shared responsibility be expressed in your community?

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Footnotes

1. The "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" can be found in any collection of the documents of Vatican II. This translation is from Austin P. Flannery, ed., *Documents of Vatican II.* Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 738-742.
2. This quotation is from a statement adopted by the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland in 1980. It can be found in *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People.* WCC Publications, 1988, p. 93.
3. From "A Message to the Churches" issued by the United Church of Christ Theological Panel on Jewish-Christian Relations in May, 1990. The "Message," along with other UCC materials on this topic, can be found in *New Conversations* (Summer 1990).
4. *Ibid.*
5. From "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews," adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1987. See *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, p. 105.
6. *Documents of Vatican II*, p. 744.
7. In *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People,* p. 115.
8. *Ibid.*
9. The document is entitled "Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue." It was produced by a working group of the WCC (the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People) and received by the Council's Executive Committee in 1982. See *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, pp. 36-37.
10. This is from "The Churches and the Jewish People: Towards a New Understanding" and published in *Current Dialogue*, 15 (December, 1988), p. 26.
11. *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, pp. 118-119.
12. The Resolution "Relationship Between the UCC and the Jewish Community" was adopted by the UCC General Synod in 1987. See *New Conversations* (Summer 1990).
13. "A Message to the Churches" in *Ibid.*
14. *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, p. 114.
15. "A Message to the Churches" in *New Conversations.*
16. *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, p. 117.
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Contemporary Relations Between Jews and African Americans

by Kenneth E. Henry

Relations between Jews and African Americans involve two distinct but inseparable areas, the religious/theological area and the racial/ethnic area. In the first area, African Americans share many of the views held by American Christians in general, positive and negative, reflecting great variety in their understanding and use of the biblical heritage. In the second area, African Americans regard Jews as belonging to the white majority rather than sharing the status of the racial/ethnic minorities. Contemporary relations frequently involve confusion between these areas as dramatic changes have occurred in economic, social, political, and educational conditions of Jews and African American Christians.

The dialogue between Christians and Jews has tended to employ categories inappropriate to African American/Jewish relations. It is nec-essary to review these relations from an African American perspective in order to understand the present complex picture.

The Religious/Theological Area

The Bible has played a dominant role in shaping the religious beliefs of African Americans. It was the first book introduced to Africans enslaved in America and provided the basic model for restructuring the family and social life of African Americans after emancipation from

slavery.[1] The heritage of African Traditional Religion was blended with the teaching of the biblical faith. The concept of the creator God of the Old Testament was especially appealing for it allowed the transference of the African concept of a supreme being related to all of life to the new and strange experience in America.[2]

For Africans, the story of Moses and the deliverance of the children of Israel from slavery fueled the fire of the hope of their own deliverance. Trapped in a condition of powerlessness, dependence upon the power of God and God's chosen leaders became basic to survival. One of the most popular Negro spirituals clearly reflects this theme.

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharaoh,
To let my people go.[3]

The tradition of the Old Testament prophets was the inspiration of black revolutionaries from Nat Turner and Harriet Tubman down to the present.[4] The sense that God wills justice for God's people, even against the privileged and powerful, was good news indeed.

Even today, Old Testament studies attract a large proportion of African Americans doing graduate work in biblical studies.[5] Books of sermons by African American preachers also reveal this love for the Old Testament. These religious beliefs are among those that have been the foundation and rallying points for cooperation between Jews and African Americans.

Justice not only for Israel but for all humankind has been a prominent view of the role of Israel among the nations of the world.[6]

African Americans have been less involved than Christians generally in condemnation of Jews on religious grounds. Historically, there have been persons of African ancestry who have identified with the religion of Judaism as early as the time of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba to the present. The Bible has many references to the presence of African people in relation to Judaism.[7]

Only in relatively recent years when African Americans have identified with the Muslim religion has there been conflict with Jews on religious grounds. Lewis Farrakhan has not generated great support among African Americans in his remarks critical of Judaism.

Ethnic/Racial Area

It is in the ethnic/racial area that most of the conflict has emerged that came to be considered religious conflict. As noted above, both Jews and Africans have been oppressed and tend to merge their sacred and secular history in giving account of their deliverance. What is less frequently noted is the fact that both have proud heritages of cultural and political development interrupted by periods of domination by other nations. Africa was prominent in biblical times and great African empires flourished at the time of the

medieval period in Europe.[8] Obviously, the history of Africa does not begin with the coming of Europeans during the time of enslavement.

On the American scene, the majority of Africans were brought here as slaves. The first Jews came to escape persecution by Portuguese in Brazil and earlier in Spain, Portugal, and elsewhere in Europe.[9] Very soon, English Protestants dominated the scene in the area that was to become the United States. While the Jews experienced some deprivations as non-Christians, the line was drawn most sharply between black and white.[10]

Prior to the Civil War Jews as an ethnic group did not champion the cause of emancipation of African Americans. Jews conformed to the prevailing patterns of the areas where they lived. There were individual abolitionists in the North and pro-slavery advocates in the South.[11] Jews were identifying with the dominant culture and moving upward socio-economically. Often they were the landlords, merchants, craftsmen, and professionals serving and benefiting from a system that prohibited the advancement of African Americans.

Jews tended to support civil rights for Negroes when it became apparent that all doors were not open to Jews.[12] Jewish philanthropy has been vital to many Negro causes from the Rosenwald schools to the NAACP and United Negro College Fund. They have provided organizational and scholarly leadership in many causes. The majority of African American leaders welcomed the support of Jews and admonished African Americans to emulate their industry, self-help, and development against the odds.[13] It was indeed an alliance of convenience that meant different things to different people. There were some voices among the African Americans who charged that Jewish prominence stifled African American development of leadership and resources.

Contemporary Challenges

Dramatic changes in the conditions of African Americans and Jews worldwide have contributed to the confusion of the two areas today. There has emerged a greater sense of the links between Africans in the homelands and Africans of the Diaspora. The same is true of Jews. Here are given some of the developments that set the context for contemporary relations of African Americans and Jews.

1. Prior to 1945, only Ethiopia and Liberia were fully independent African nations. Today, nearly all African nations are controlled by the African majority. This condition has cultivated and nourished greater pride in African ancestry on the part of African Americans. There is a new sense of revitalized Pan-Africanism.[14]

2. The experience of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel have not only challenged and invigorated the world Jewish community but also caused other nations, specifically Third World nations, and religious and ethnic groups to make a new assessment of their relation to Judaism.

3. Specifically in the United States, African Americans quickly assert the genocidal enslavement of Africans was no less inhumane than the Holocaust and neither should be forgotten or allowed to happen again.

4. The King era launched a new development in civil rights throughout the world. Cooperation between Jews and African Americans reached its height in the drive toward an open and just society. Racial integration was the most spectacular and effective instrumentality toward that end.

5. The dream was too long deferred. Immediate, complete and independent development became increasingly attractive as the option for African Americans. All opposition, the oppressive structures of society, would be met by black power.[15]

6. Within this volatile climate several actions occurred: affirmative action, intensified Zionism, black nationalism, religious conservatism, runaway inflation and the urban crisis, and a host of other events. The loss of the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and John F. Kennedy profoundly affected this period. Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney were martyrs of the movement.

While these events captured the headlines, others of a political, economic, and social nature were also occurring. African American Jewish relations experienced more subtle but equally profound changes such as the following:

1. Black biblical scholars and theologians introduced new theological perspectives for telling the ancient story. Liberation/black theology called Christianity to address issues of the day in fresh and relevant terms. The identity of Africans and Jews in the biblical account was finally freed of the shackles of Euro-American dominated hermeneutics.[16]

2. African Americans began to achieve new levels of economic and political control. While Jews still dominate professional, entrepreneurial, and educational functions far beyond their numerical strength,[17] African Americans became president of The American Express Consumer Card and Financial Services Group, chief executive officer of The TIAA/CREF and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs.[18] The largest personal gift to the Harvard Law School was made by Reginald F. Lewis, head of TLC Beatrice International.[19] Black philanthropy is coming into its own as African Americans take new pride in their heritage and institutions. White America is taking notice of the purchasing power of African Americans[20] and major cities are functioning effectively with African American political leaders.

3. All of the above suggest that African Americans do not come as beggars to the conference table with Jews. New patterns of cooperation and service must be forged. Systems that benefit whites and restrict blacks must be abandoned. Honesty must characterize the strategies, alignments,

and use of resources. Cultural pluralism must be taken seriously and not as a temporary diversion on the way to white domination.[21]

Mutual commitment to the goals of justice, peace, and love are as valid today as at any time in the history of humankind. The African and Jewish affirmation of wholeness and peace may yet hasten the day of the fuller realization of the kingdom of God.

Questions for Discussion

1. How realistic is the goal of a truly culturally pluralistic society?

2. What principles of Christianity and Judaism seem appropriate for the establishment of world peace?

3. What characteristics of African American Christianity do we learn from the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr.?

4. How should we expect our religion to influence our economic, social, and political life?

5. How similar is black nationalism to Zionism?

6. Evaluate the economic factor in the determination of Christian-Jewish relations in your community; of black-white relations.

7. Identify intercultural experiences that are regular components of your spiritual development.

For Further Reading

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2. Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*. Orbis, 1983, p. 11. Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*. New York: Oxford, 1978, p. 8.
3. James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamon Johnson, *American Negro Spirituals*. "Go Down Moses," Da Capo, 1989.
4. Wilmore, "Three Generals in the Lord's Army," pp. 53-73.
5. Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod*. Fortress, 1991, p. 1.
6. Rabbi Henry Cohen, *Justice, Justice*, revised edition. Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1969, p. 4.
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9. Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*, 2nd revised edition. University of Chicago, 1974, p. 12.
10. Lerone Bennett, *Before the Mayflower*, 5th edition. Penguin, 1984. Statutory recognition of slavery, Mass. 1641, p. 441.
11. Howard Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. William Morrow Company, 1967, p. 478.
12. Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance*. Scribners, 1988, pp. 27-29.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.
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18. Douglas C. Lyons, "The Other Side of the Male Crisis." *Ebony*, Vol. XLVI, No. 10 (August 1991), pp. 108-113.
19. Kathleen Teltsch, "Record Gift for Harvard Law Is Milestone for Blacks." *New York Times* (July 8, 1992).
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Practical Steps for Christians

by John Wade Payne

Christians and Jews alike are biblical people for whom the reading and studying of scripture is cherished. Scripture for both traditions is a major source of inspiration and teaching for their spiritual life and ethical moral decision making. Like Christians, Jews regard scripture as inspired by God, but that does not mean that it is to be interpreted literally. Since the return from Babylonian exile Jews have revered the teaching function of the rabbi as the interpreter and expositor of scripture. This is an important consideration for many Christians who tend to ignore the Old Testament and consider it of lesser significance than the New. When Christians read a verse such as Exodus 21:24, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth," they are tempted to see this as an example of Jewish primitive legalism and to ignore the great rabbinical tradition in which this verse was interpreted to require fair and equitable monetary compensation as requital for bodily injury.

Jewish reading of scripture, similar to traditions in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and others, emphasizes context, time, place, and author. Also, like Christians, Jewish interpreters take seriously the simple, surface meaning of the text, but usually in light of later scientific findings and other discoveries not understood in ancient times. For preaching, rabbis, like Christian clergy, explicate the text homiletically to derive a lesson for the congregation. Allegorical and mystical interpretations are rare. The large body of respected rabbinical interpretation is often used, somewhat like scripture, as authoritative in teaching and preaching.

Many Christian churches in their worship have begun to identify the first thirty-nine books of the Christian Bible as the "Hebrew Scriptures"

instead of the "Old Testament." The words "Old" and "New," while descriptive, connote a misleading "second-class" status to the Hebrew Scriptures that Christians sensitive to Jewish feelings may wish to avoid.

Both Christians and Jews follow an established lectionary of scripture readings throughout the year. The Jewish lectionary is, of course, limited to the Hebrew Scriptures. On each Sabbath a portion of the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) is read at the synagogue or temple service, thus completing the entire Pentateuch in the course of one year. A supplementary reading from one of the prophetic or historical books accompanies each of the Pentateuchal readings. The rabbi or preacher at the synagogue service may base his or her lecture (sermon) upon one or both scripture readings, but is not required to do so. Women serve as rabbis and prayer leaders in Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist congregations, though this is not permitted in Orthodoxy.

One long-standing Christian tradition, which should be given thoughtful consideration, is the practice in the Christian lectionary of choosing Hebrew Scriptures to complement the Gospel or other New Testament readings. From many of these readings one could get the impression that the events in the history of ancient Israel almost exclusively were written to foreshadow events in the life of Christ, or that the entire purpose of the previous history of Israel was to culminate in the coming of Christ. Of course, we Christians rightly read scripture through our understanding of Christ and see Christ as the ultimate self-expression of God in our lives, but we err when we think our approach to these readings creates a link between Christians and Jews who have studied their own scriptures. The messianic exposition of Hebrew Scriptures is very rare in Jewish interpretation, even in ancient times. Verses interpreted to be messianic prophecies by traditional Christian readings have been viewed by Jewish interpreters to refer to ancient Judean kings. Modern biblical scholarship affirms this understanding.

To offer an example, Christians through many centuries have often interpreted Isaiah 7:14 as foretelling a divine messiah who will be born of a virgin. The Jewish understanding of this verse is that it is a reference to a young woman living during the prophet's lifetime (eighth century B.C.E.) who, after the loss of her virginity, would bear a child and name him Immanuel (Meaning in Hebrew "God is with us," not "God with us"). This interpretation agrees with the historical context of the chapter.

Similarly, passages in Hebrew Scriptures applied by Christians to the sufferings of Christ were originally written to describe the sufferings of the people of Israel. Thus, Christians should not be surprised that Jewish interpretations of scripture sometimes differ from ours. For the enrichment of our own Christian religious heritage we should understand and appreciate how Jewish biblical interpretation can widen our knowledge and enhance our faith.

This does not imply that Christians should give up our Christ-centered interpretation of scripture, but that we recognize that the Hebrew Scrip-

tures belong to both our faith communities. It only serves to enhance our faith when we discover a broader understanding of any scripture. Neither Christians nor Jews should be expected to give up their own understandings. At best, each will attempt to appreciate the insights and faith commitments of the other.

A major emphasis in the preaching of the Christian faith is also a source of challenge to Jewish-Christian relationships. Since so much of the Hebrew Scripture has traditionally been interpreted as preparation for the coming of God's full salvation in the person of Christ—an interpretation not accepted by Judaism—it is possible that an anti-Jewish polemic can enter Christian preaching. Preachers who use the lectionary and who are dedicated to a full explication of biblical faith need to guard against this approach.

Christians should be reminded that the so-called "anti-Judaism" in the Gospels reflects an internal struggle among many Jewish sects of the first century. Christians today often forget that the early church began as one of these Jewish sects. Most early Christians worshiped in the synagogues through the decades of that century and thought of themselves as Jews to whom the expected messiah had come.

Each of these sects saw itself as the true religion of Israel; others were thought to be grounded in error, even wickedness. Only after the church had become a largely non-Jewish movement—the result, but not the intent, of Paul's missionary activity—did "the Jews" as a people come to be seen as the enemy, those who rejected the church's claim to be the "new Israel."

Tensions among the Jewish sects carried over into prejudice against and rejection of the Jews in later times. Through the centuries these attitudes hardened into separatist and ghetto mentalities. Such attitudes have no place in contemporary Christian faith. Jews and Christians are both a "people of God" sharing much in common even when all our differences are recognized. Within the Christian churches we have come to respect and accept numerous differences in faith, life, and practice. Acceptance and respect should be no less for our Jewish brothers and sisters, themselves part of God's family on earth.

The patterns of separation continued as immigrants settled in American cities, groups often clustering in their own neighborhoods. Nowadays, Jews and Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, usually live in close proximity to one another, working together in the same offices and attending the same schools. Opportunities to know neighbors who follow different religious paths are greater than ever before. Many Jews are open and eager to learn about the religions of their neighbors. We Christians will enrich our lives by a similar approach as we learn more and more about Judaism.

One thing that unites nearly all Jews is their insistence that they not be pressed to "convert" or change their religion, even by friends and neighbors who have their eternal salvation at heart. Judaism teaches that Christians discover salvation (saving health and wholeness) through the

faith and practice of the church, and that Jews discover a similar salvation through the faith and practice of their ancestral tradition, Judaism. It is imperative that Christians and Jews respect the faith of each other.

This does not imply, however, that Jewish persons who come seeking to learn about and to accept Christianity should be turned away. These people are to be welcomed. But typical Jewish persons who are very much at home in their own religious tradition have no more desire to change their religious affiliation than the typical Christian.

The concern for conversion often underlies the tensions felt among families whose children are involved in interfaith marriages or partnerships. Interfaith marriage is a growing phenomenon in our society, even though relatively few rabbis will perform interfaith weddings unless the Christian partner converts to Judaism. Primarily, this is because Judaism is a minority in most societies and many Jewish leaders fear that it will be absorbed and lose its distinctive character as its people marry outside their culture and tradition. The Disciples and many Protestant denominations have no established barriers against interfaith marriage, although individual ministers may oppose such a union. This is also true of the Roman Catholic Church. One sad dilemma facing these couples is that in many cases their religious traditions, both of which make love and acceptance of others a basic tenet of their faith, put so many stumbling blocks in the way of their marriage.

This writer, living in a major metropolitan area where interfaith marriage is common, believes that only when one partner in a relationship is truly ready and wants to embrace the other's faith should conversion be considered. A positive and helpful approach encourages both spouses to understand and cherish the faith tradition of the other. Many husbands and wives in interfaith marriages point out that their spouse's concern for their own faith tradition has made them better Christians or Jews. Children born into the family should obviously be reared in a particular tradition. To remain neutral about religion denies the child a rich and meaningful heritage of faith. But the child should also be encouraged to participate in and learn about the faith tradition of the other parent. It can only enrich the experience of the child, reared Jewish or Christian, who grows up celebrating both Passover and Easter, Hanukkah and Christmas. This practice need not be confusing if parents, church, and synagogue work together toward a breadth of understanding rather than narrow separatist interpretations.

One of the best ways to bridge differences and remove prejudices occurs when Jews and Christians observe each others' worship and celebrations. Christians should feel no hesitation in asking their Jewish neighbors if they may accompany them to a synagogue or temple service. Jewish friends will be honored that you asked. Non-Jews are welcome to all synagogue services, provided that the traditions of a particular congregation are followed. In orthodox synagogues women are seated separately from men. In all synagogues, other than Reform, men are expected to wear the skull cap (yarmulke—nearly always provided), and in some places

married women are expected to cover their hair. The traditions of the cantor singing Psalmody and liturgy, intelligent preaching, and the dignity of synagogue worship provide a memorable experience.

Christians should feel free to invite Jews to their church services, especially after they have visited the synagogue or temple. When inviting Jews to visit Christian worship or church-related events, how the invitation is given and how one's Jewish friends are received are of great importance. Gracious hospitality is appreciated as much as respect of the other's tradition. Much in Christian worship has Jewish roots. Jews will often participate in most aspects of Christian worship except that they will not take communion.

Jewish friends and neighbors should, of course, be invited to Christian homes, but if food is to be served, inquiry should be made in advance about religious dietary restrictions. As good hosts today will ask about any of their guests' restrictions (such as cholesterol, salt, vegetarian preferences, etc.), so respectful Christians will inquire about religious dietary restrictions. Orthodox Jews would ordinarily not eat any food prepared in a non-kosher home (Jewish or Christian), and may want to restrict themselves to coffee or perhaps foods they have brought in themselves. Non-Orthodox Jews will probably eat anything put before them, though some may abstain from pork products and shellfish, while a smaller number would not wish to eat any meat that had not been slaughtered in the kosher manner. Jewish persons who observe the dietary restrictions would be very grateful to and favorably impressed by a Christian host who sought out a kosher butcher shop so as to provide meat that an observant Jew could eat.

Small neighborhood groups related to churches and synagogues can develop genuine friendships in interfaith dialogues. Informed ministers and rabbis will often be delighted to speak to and serve as resource persons for such groups. Any open-minded person interested in furthering interfaith dialogue can begin such a group. Almost every city has a chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The ministerial alliance and/or association in your town may be another resource. Ask them for suggestions and guidance.

Formal dialogues of an interreligious nature should ordinarily be sponsored by churches and synagogues acting together. Orthodox Jews do not approve of theological dialogue, though they are eager to participate in discussions of community problems. Non-Orthodox congregations will more likely develop dialogues and educational programs to discuss almost any issue, including theological ones. The goal of interfaith theological dialogue is not necessarily to seek agreement, but to come to an understanding of common ground where possible, and a mutual acceptance of differences. Often Bible study involving both a rabbi and a minister, usually centering on material from the Hebrew Scriptures, is very productive.

In recent years, as Jewish-Christian understanding and openness have increased, a number of Christian churches have begun to hold Passover seder meals, based on the Jewish custom of recounting the Exodus story

around a table of family and friends. However, churches should avoid including within the Lord's Supper observance a seder meal, even though tradition tells us that Jesus' last supper was perhaps a seder meal and certainly had major links with the Passover celebration. The spirit of unrestrained joy of liberation of the Jewish Passover seder is so different from the mood of the Maundy Thursday last supper that both Jews and Christians will likely feel some measure of discomfort at an event that tries to combine both themes. Christians should keep in mind that Passover for Jews is an event of historic liberation somewhat analogous to Easter. The Maundy Thursday sacrificial meal is incongruent with the seder celebration. Churches that wish to commemorate both the Last Supper and the Passover should carefully evaluate their approach, and may find it more appropriate to schedule two separate events.

A church and a synagogue may wish to sponsor a seder event jointly. Because an event common to both traditions is commemorated, Jews and Christians can celebrate fully together without reservation. When an individual Christian congregation observes the seder meal, Jewish guests may certainly be invited. Churches often invite rabbis to lead their seders and all except some Orthodox rabbis would consider it an honor.

Recently some Jewish scholars have spoken out against Christian churches sponsoring Passover seders. They are concerned about "syncretism"—the seeming amalgamation of two independent religious traditions into something new and different—eventually eliminating both Judaism and Christianity as we have come to know them. To this writer and to rabbis with whom I have consulted, this seems a farfetched fear. The Hebrew Scriptures are as much the possession of the Christian church as they are of Judaism, and Christians need make no apology for celebrating Israel's exodus from bondage. It is a Christian story as well as Jewish. If a Christian group finds meaning in a Passover seder, either as an interfaith event or as a commemoration within its own community, then let it celebrate the seder as one more reminder of God's presence among us.

Many are the opportunities for Jews and Christians to share in affirming God's work in their midst. Children in our society develop close friendships regardless of their faith traditions. Inviting Jewish friends and families to Christian baptisms and confirmations celebrates both friendship and faith. In turn we can let our Jewish friends know that we are interested in their children's bar or bat mitzvahs, a major rite of passage in Jewish society. Gifts to Jewish youth are most appropriate on these occasions. Sending not only Christmas cards to Christian friends but appropriate greetings to Jewish friends during their high holy seasons is yet another way to build relationships and show honor and respect.

Our earth is too small a place for old and meaningless enmities to go unchallenged. People who affirm a Jewish Jesus surely will be the people who affirm and respect the Jewish people. For the great commandments Jesus reached deep into his Jewish heritage, commandments that concluded, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jews are our neighbors.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the issues in your community between Christians and Jews? What are the issues common to both faith traditions? Which issues reflect our distinct differences? Which have the possibility of being addressed through understandings common to both traditions? How can individuals and congregations be catalysts for mutual respect and understanding?

2. Using the Common Lectionary (the one used most in Disciples' congregations), read lessons recommended, for example, for Lent or Advent. Discuss the differences between a Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) lesson, especially as it relates to the Gospel lesson for that day. A good biblical commentary may help. A handy source for the lectionary readings is the *Annual Planning Guide and Calendar of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).* Note the relationship of the various sabbath readings in the Jewish lectionary. (See: *The New Union Prayerbook.*)

3. A young man or woman who grew up in your congregation brings his or her Jewish friend to church. It is obvious that they are not casual friends and that marriage is being seriously considered. How will you respond? If you were invited to the marriage ceremony, would your response change if the service was conducted in the friend's temple or synagogue rather than in your church?

For Further Reading

For general information and background, useful in every church library:

Rosenberg, Roy, *The Concise Guide to Judaism, History, Practice and Faith.* Mentor Books, 1991. (Dr. Rosenberg has been personally very helpful in the preparation of this chapter.)

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Donin, H., *To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life*. Basic Books, 1972.

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Appendix

Report from the Commission on Theology: A Statement on Relations Between Jews and Christians

Preface: The Enormity of the Problem

Why is it imperative that Christians in the late twentieth century take up the responsibility to rethink their understanding of the relation between the church and the Jewish people? Why is it urgent that Christians learn new ways of talking about and acting toward Jewish people? Answers to these questions will set the report from the Commission on Theology in context and enable Disciples to grasp the significance of the task which the General Assembly assigned to the Commission.

Since the first century, Jews and Christians have shared a common history. Jews know this history very well, Christians hardly at all. Although Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew among Jews, whose birth was proclaimed by Simeon as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32), within a century his followers had begun to distance themselves from the people of Israel and to define themselves as the "new Israel." As the "new Israel," they claimed to have displaced the Jewish people (the "old Israel") in the covenant with God. This language of an "old" and "new" Israel is not in the New Testament and has no biblical warrant. The church talked of the people Israel as a people that should not and would not exist save for the willful "blindness" and "obstinacy" by which Jews avoid disappearing. An unremitting parody of evil was projected upon the people Israel. They have been viewed as everything old, carnal, ethnocentric, and disobedient that the new, spiritual, universal, obedient Gentile church displaces, and Christians as everything good that Jews can never be.

Beginning in the fourth century, the church passed laws defining relations between Christians and Jews, and ensuring that the situation of Jews in the society and economy mirrored the image of them in Christian rhetoric. Each of Hitler's laws found its precedent in a law passed by councils of the church. For example, the requirement that all Jews wear the Star of David found its antecedent in a law passed by an ecumenical council of the church in 1215 requiring all Jews to wear distinctive dress. Jews were barred from any significant role in the society, economy, government, and military,

forced into making a living by selling old clothes and lending money (illegal for Christians). Church and later state laws forced Jews to live in ghettoes. Regularly, Jews were offered a choice of baptism or forced expulsion from the country. All Jews were expelled from England in 1290, France in 1394, Spain in 1492, Portugal in 1497, Brazil in 1654 (when the first Jews came to America). Beginning in the 11th century, we witness the outbreaks of incidents of mob violence and mass murder committed against Jews. These grew in magnitude, becoming ever more destructive, with Hitler's so-called "final solution" the most recent and deadly. One scholar estimates that of all the people who might be alive today as Jews, only about 20% are living; another says that about half the Jews born into the world in the last 800 years have been killed.[1]

Since the second Vatican Council issued its statement on relations between the church and the Jewish people in the 1960s, the Holy Spirit has been leading the churches to a new understanding of themselves in relation to the Jewish people. We thank God for the new spirit of repentance and self-criticism among Christians. Because of the history of Christian mistreatment of Jews, because anti-Jewish acts continue and again seem to be on the increase, because the church can only understand its own central affirmations properly if it understands Judaism and the Jewish people in the purpose of God, we offer the following theological remarks.

Statement of Theological Foundations of Jewish/Christian Relations

(1) At the heart of the faith of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is the confession that God has acted and revealed God's self in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of the world. We confess that the God who was present in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to God in none other than the God of Israel, maker of heaven and earth, and known through the law and the prophets.

(2) While this confession has often been used as a pretext for Christians to contend that God has rejected Israel, canceled God's covenant with Israel, and replaced Israel with the church, it is clear that these past emphases and their practical, historical consequences of encouraging persecution of Jews by Christians, represent a profound misunderstanding of God and Jesus Christ, Israel and the church. We confess and repent of the church's long and deep collusion in the spread of anti-Jewish attitudes and actions through its "teaching of contempt" for Jews and Judaism. We disclaim such teaching and the acts and attitudes which it reflects and reinforces.

(3) God's presence in Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world is rooted in God's call and election of Israel. Thus, to affirm that presence is to join with Judaism in affirming God's election of Israel and God's purpose to

bring blessing to all the families of the earth through Abraham (Gen. 12:3). We confess that both the church and the Jewish people are elected by God for witness to the world and that the relation of the church and the Jewish people to each other is grounded on God's gracious election of each.

(4) It is indispensable to an adequate and truthful understanding of God's action in Jesus Christ that it be seen in continuity with God's unsearchable and particular election and covenant with Israel. God is faithful to that covenant in the historical life of Israel, whether or not Israel is itself faithful, just as God is faithful to the church in spite of its sin and rebellion. The God who calls Israel and acts in Israel's life is the God who creates all things and has acted in Jesus Christ.

(5) The distinctive work of God in Jesus Christ, which often has been seen by Christians as a sign of God's *rejection* of the Jews, is rather a sign of the continuing *affirmation* of God's election of Israel and the Jewish people. We confess that the covenant established by God's grace with the Jewish people has not been abrogated but remains valid, precisely because "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

(6) The Jewishness of Jesus ties Christians to Jews both historically and theologically. Jesus was shaped by and lived in the midst of Jewish traditions and culture, and understood his life and ministry to be, at the least, for and with the Jews. A "non-Jewish Jesus," or even an indifferently Jewish Jesus, is one of the most unhistorical and corrupting myths which later church theology and practice have perpetrated. The Jewishness of Jesus deepens the tragedy of Christian mistreatment of the Jewish people. In this regard, the church has historically blamed the Jewish people for the crime of "deicide" (the killing of God) in the crucifixion of Jesus. This we now declare to be a theological and historical error. Although the historical details surrounding Jesus' death are not fully clear, it is evident that Jesus died as a result of the Roman imperial system and with the collusion of some of his fellow Jews. At the same time, we must understand that the crucifying actions of Jesus' contemporaries are representative of humanity as such, and are not peculiarly Jewish or Roman. Certainly history has witnessed the same crucifying actions by Christians toward Jews. The primary point of the Christian understanding of Jesus' crucifixion is the acknowledgment of God's unsearchably loving presence and action in Jesus' death and thereby God's final redemptive presence in any human situation.

(7) Still, in the heart of the Christian confession is a profound sense that what God has done in Jesus Christ is a new event, unintelligible apart from Israel's story, but not merely a repetition of that story. Christians affirm that this new event is the Good News of God's taking up the cause both of Israel and of all humanity, and fulfilling Israel's and humanity's call to

love and do justice before God and neighbor. This God in Jesus Christ has radically declared an unfathomable grace and love for Israel and for all humanity, grace and love moving God's creative work and hope toward which all creation moves. This new event in Jesus of Nazareth does not cancel or reject Israel, even if most Jews then and now were either indifferent to Jesus or rejected tthe affirmations of lordship and divinity about Jesus.

(8) Jews and Christians share a history, a body of scripture, a communal and ethical tradition, and a treasury of prayers, although each has its own distinctive literature—the New Testament for Christians, the Talmud and midrash for Jews. And for both, history under God continues, requiring a continuing reclaiming of the truth and power of God's revelation in every generation. Thus, the unending task of interpretation requires Christians to be attentive to God's ongoing work of redemption among Jews as well as Christians.

(9) Christians must acknowledge that the language of invective, condemnation, and rejection against Jews, vexing and difficult as it is to understand, is present in the New Testament and throughout most traditions of the church. This language has all too often gone hand in hand with actions undertaken by Christians against Jews. The church has repeatedly forgot-ten that the grace and love of God evident in Jesus Christ is *for* Israel and all Jews and is not a blessing dependent for its ultimate efficacy on how righteous or faithful or "Christian" one might be. God does not bestow God's grace and love on the church because the church is righteous and faithful. Both Jews and Christians have standing before God because and only because of the grace of the God who ever justifies the *unrighteous*.

(10) Although we do not want to say Judaism is for Jews and the church for Gentiles, we must acknowledge that the continued existence of Jewish people who do not confess the lordship of Jesus Christ and who see their Jewishness as incompatible with this confession is, as Paul the apostle declares, a mystery and witness to the church: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Romans 11:33)! The church must receive this mystery and witness as essential to its own identity and destiny.

(11) While we want to propose more vigorous study and conversation between Christians and Jews, it is necessary to declare now, in the light of what we have affirmed above, that:

a. the Christian faith is not against Jewish people or Judaism as such;

b. anti-Jewish teaching and practices by Christians must be stopped and eradicated;

c. however much Christians may want to point to what God has done in Jesus Christ for Israel and all humanity, they cannot appropriately say that God's election of and covenant with Israel have been canceled;

d. Christians today have an urgent responsibility to converse and cooperate with, and to affirm Jewish people as the special kindred of Christians [before God];

e. in acknowledging God's covenant with Israel, Christians today must take seriously the meaning of land to Jewish people and the relation of land to the contemporary state of Israel. [*The Church and the Jewish People: A Study Guide for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* devotes a chapter to the question of the State of Israel and Jewish/Christian relations. It points out that in the Bible God is always giving the land "to Israel in trust. Israel is to live upon the land responsibly, practicing justice, caring for the land, seeing to the needs of the poor and the stranger, while also enjoying its fruits and benefits." The gift and obligation of land pertain equally today to relations between Israel and the Palestinian people. In the past the General Assembly has passed four resolutions, numbered 7377, 8133, 8325, and 8934, on the situation in the Middle East. Each of these resolutions advocates peace and justice for all parties in the region and addresses such matters as arms limitations and recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization. This statement from the Theology Commission is a theological statement on Jewish-Christian relationships and to be taken in the context of the General Assembly's moral concern for justice and peace in the Middle East].

Practical/Pastoral Dimensions of Jewish/Christian Relations

There are also pastoral and practical considerations on the relations of Jews and Christians, and there are practical steps that need to be taken at this time.

(1) The Bible has on occasion been read as a story of Israel's failure and of God's turning to the church and away from the synagogue. Such a reading is wrong and reflects the church's traditional anti-Jewish exegesis described in chapter four of *The Church and the Jewish People: A Study Guide for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. The Bible's central testimony never allows human failure or faithlessness to "nullify the faithfulness of God" (Romans 3:3).

(2) Study of Jewish history and thought should not stop with the first century. All Christians need to have some introduction of the great rabbinical heritage, to Jewish history and religion up to the present time, and to the story of Christian persecution of the Jews. Such an introduction

provides the groundwork for better relations with contemporary Jews in all their diversity. It enables Christians to express genuine sorrow for past actions and to be attentive to the danger of repeating those actions.

(3) Study of the Holocaust and regular participation in acts of remembrance enable Christians to hold before the world and before themselves the culminating horror and tragedy of the persecution of the Jews.

(4) Common witness, worship, and service are always appropriate. Interfaith occasions, Bible study by clergy and rabbis, and sessions on Jewish/Christian relations all help to promote understanding and genuine conversation.

A Call for Further Study

Both because of what is essential to Christian faith and to the church's proper self-understanding and because of the indefensibly cruel treatment of Jewish people by Christians, it is important for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to pray, study, and engage in conversations with its Jewish neighbors. This dialogue will enable Christians and Jews to understand their own continuities and discontinuities with each other and ancient Israel. For its well-being the church must recover its rootage in Israel, repent of its grievous sins against Jewish people in the past and present, and acknowledge its own dependence on the unmerited grace of the God who creates all things, called Israel into covenant, and acted in Jesus Christ for the redemption of the whole world.

This study and conversation should be:

a. undertaken in earnest by all manifestations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ);

b. given oversight coordination, and focus by the Council on Christian Unity;

c. further stimulated, nurtured, and perpetuated by a study guide, *The Church and the Jewish People* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1993), from the Commission on Theology, that would elaborate a wide range of theological issues and historical knowledge about relations between Christians and Jews, and provide practical guidance for the church's conduct in relation to Jewish people.

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1. See respectively Arthur Gilbert, *The Vatican Council and the Jews* (New York: World Publications, 1968), p. 51 and Irvin J. Borowsky, "Forward," in *Jews and Christians*, ed. by J. H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 9.

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Christianity grew from Jewish roots, but what is the relationship between Christianity and Judaism? What can we learn from Judaism? And how should we relate to our Jewish neighbors?

How we Christians understand Jews and Judaism is crucial to how we understand our own identity and to how we understand God and Jesus Christ.

In this study, eight scholars look at the issues surrounding this topic, giving us historical and theological overviews and practical applications. Study groups in local congregations will find solid food for thought, challenging ideas, and provocative questions for discussion.

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