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# Looking Back over What the Churches Have Said and Considering the results

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1997 et.

Muhlenberg Coll.

Panel

10th anniversary of UCC statement on  
5-20-1987 - 1

### Looking Back Over What the Churches Have Said and Considering the Results

Alice L. Eckardt

11/17/97

1) For many (probably most) Jews the Holocaust has meant the end of one time and the beginning of another, for they see that a major disruption in history occurred. I believe that the Holocaust should mean that also for Christians though with many more challenges to their faith's teachings; but does it?

Speaking very generally the answer would be "no."

2) Speaking more selectively, the answer would be "partially." That is, there is recognition by a large portion of the churches, in at least what we call the western world, that Christianity and Christian civilization must bear the responsibility at the very least for having prepared the way over many centuries for hatred or fear of Jews and for the Nazi Holocaust, and then for not responding to the calls for help from this beleaguered people.

3) A still smaller body of Christians is prepared to go further and see the need for a totally new age for the church in which its relationship with the Jewish people would be totally different, with a totally new appreciation of the faith that has sustained Jews through so many evictions, persecution, and massacres. And such Christians would hold a newly-arrived-at conviction that it God's wish and intention that Jews should survive -- not just in order to convert to Christianity eventually, as numerous theologians and churches have perceived to be the purpose for their survival (such as it has been), but, much more positively, to testify and witness to the One God of all of us.

When one reads the church documents in the two volumes edited by Helga Croner and published in 1977 and 1985, plus a third volume of statements by the World Council of Churches and some of its member churches, and a fourth volume of key Lutheran statements,<sup>1</sup> one would assume that a real revolution -- or re-reformation -- in

<sup>1</sup> Some Eastern Orthodox churches have begun to show signs of movement. For example, some Greek Orthodox theologians are affirming the continued validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people despite their Easter liturgy which continues to blame Jews for killing Jesus. Also the Russian Orthodox Church is showing signs of new awareness, at least at the top level. The Russian Patriarch Aleksei II commissioned translation of a recent book about the emerging Jewish-Greek dialogue for the specific purpose of countering growing antisemitism within his church. That antisemitism is, of course, the other side of the coin however. (See Yossi Klein Halevi, "The Church Repents," The Jerusalem Report, Jan 11, 1996, p. 34.)

1987 original UCC statement

Christian relations with, and teachings about, Judaism and its people has occurred and must be well along the road to accomplishment.

Unfortunately, we would not be correct in making that assumption.

As we consider the statements we will find that most of them fit into the second category I mentioned, though a few, particularly the ~~most~~ recent ones not yet published in any book, come pretty close to moving into the third category. The critical difference is whether a church's statement (or papal document) simply decries antisemitism and other forms of anti-Jewish sentiments and actions or goes beyond that to reject the church's ages old assertion that salvation ultimately comes only through Jesus Christ, no matter how admirable another religion may be otherwise.

*that have been issued since those books were published*

Our gathering here at Muhlenberg, initiated by this being the 10th anniversary of the United Church of Christ's resolution on "The Relationship Between the United Church of Christ and the Jewish Community," is the occasion is not simply a celebratory one. It is also a chance to consider where this resolution fits into the actions of many churches in the years since the end of World War II, what the results of all of this may be, and, above all, what still needs to be done.

When on June 20, 1987 the resolution was quickly adopted at the annual convention, probably only a small number of those assembled -- or of the denomination at large -- had any real grasp of the fundamental significance of the resolution or of the rethinking and reworking of tradition that would be required once it was acted upon. In fact, the strong reaction of a number of the clergy after that action was taken was one of sharp protest and rebellion. A Theological Panel of some of the denomination's leading figures set up to spell out more fully the ramifications of the resolution also had to address this reaction. After a series of open regional meetings and much consultation, it issued a somewhat fuller "Message to the Churches" in 1990.<sup>2</sup> (In no way did it weaken or challenge the original statement of three years earlier.)

Both documents insist on the "two-fold word" that attests both to "the particular act of God in Christ" and to "God's unrescinded covenant with the Jewish people," and that the church must be "in solidarity with the Jews" while being "self-critical about our

<sup>2</sup> The Theological Panel also promised to prepare supportive materials that would help the churches implement the purpose of the resolution.

teaching and actions toward this covenant people."<sup>3</sup> By insisting on this double affirmation, these two UCC documents went beyond many other church statements, especially earlier ones.

A prime contrasting example from earlier documents is that of the World Council of Churches' First Assembly in 1948 (as well as several subsequent Assemblies) which insisted that its Lord's commission to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" required that the churches include the Jewish people in its mission.

The U.C.C.'s "Message" undergirded its statement by calling attention to the denomination's Constitution that calls the church "to make the faith its own in each new generation" and to let "new light and truth break from God's holy Word."

I have not found any evidence of how successful this effort has been, although I have some strong indications that the situation has not radically changed: that where pastors were alert to the need to make necessary changes in teaching materials and in the way that the gospel message is presented, it was already being done; and where pastors were either not interested or in active disagreement with such thinking, nothing was altered.

The United Church of Christ statement is only one of at least 90 produced since the end of World War II dealing with the relation of Christians and their churches to Jews and Judaism. As one of the approximately thirteen issued in the last decade (ten in this country), it is among the most forthright in its denial of the teaching that God rejected the Jewish people, and in its insistence that Christianity has not taken the place of Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Moreover,

between  
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97

<sup>3</sup> The panel specifically rejected the supersessionist view that God rescinded the covenant with Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Among the non-USA statements are to be found the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Jews' "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church" ('85), the Anglican Lambeth Conference's "Interfaith Dialogue: Jewish/Christian/Muslim" ('88), Pope John Paul II's encyclical "Redemptoris Missio" ('91), and German Roman Catholic Bishops' "Statement ... on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Extermination Camp of Auschwitz" ('95).

<sup>5</sup> The U.C.C. statement is a brief one pager, whereas many are much more detailed. While only one paragraph plus one or two other phrases deal with the history of the Christian Church's denial of the authenticity of Jewish faith and its mistreatment of and even

it recognizes that this new statement needs to be worked out not only in theology but also in liturgical materials and practices, hymnody, educational work, and its "witness before the world."

*Disciples*

One year later ('88) the Disciples of Christ/Christian Church statement pointed out that "each of Hitler's laws [against Jews] found its precedent in a law passed by earlier councils of the church." The Disciples repented of and disclaimed the "teaching of contempt" so long promulgated by Christianity. At the same time they went on to affirm positively that "the covenant established by God's grace with the Jewish people has not been abrogated but remains valid." "Both the church and the Jewish people are elected by God for witness to the world" and their relation to each other should be "grounded on God's gracious election of each." Believing that while "what God has done in Jesus Christ is a new event," this church saw this event as but part of "God's taking up the cause of both Israel and of all humanity."<sup>6</sup>

The Disciples' statement very specifically insists that "the Christian faith is not against Jewish people or Judaism as such," that "Christians cannot say that God's election of and covenant with Israel have been canceled," and that "anti-Jewish teaching and practices by Christians must be stopped and eradicated." Furthermore, it insists that "Christians must take seriously the meaning of [the] land to Jewish people and the relation of land to the contemporary state of Israel."

The most recent statement is that of the United Methodist Church, adopted by its General Conference in 1996. Its seven pages cover nine main points (eight of which I will simply enumerate briefly): God is the one God of both peoples; Jesus was a devout Jew; both Judaism and Christianity are living, dynamic, and evolving religious movements, bound to God through eternally valid biblical covenants; the church repents for Christian complicity in the long history of persecution of Jews, and recognizes the need to correct its historical and theological teachings; the church is called into dialogue with Jews; acknowledges the joint

violence toward Jews, some other church statements go into much more detail.

Only in its "Message" is there any reference to the issue of the State of Israel and there it admits that there is no consensus either in the Panel or in the United Church of Christ on the covenantal significance of the State. Nevertheless, it stated its appreciation for the compelling moral argument for the creation of modern Israel "as a vehicle for self-determination and as a haven for a victimized people" even while asserting the Palestinian-Arabs' need for self-determination as well.

<sup>6</sup> There is no mention of Islam here or in most of the documents. The reason may be practical and/or theological.

responsibility of both peoples to work for justice, compassion and peace in a world where nation, race, power, and money "clamor for ultimate allegiance." The eighth point refers to the "anguish and suffering that continue for many people who live in the Middle East region which includes modern Israel" and commits the church to work for justice and peace for all.

I have not yet mentioned the ninth assertion because I want to comment on it particularly. It says, "As Christians we are clearly called to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in every age and place. At the same time, we believe that God has continued, and continues today, to work through Judaism and the Jewish people." In the conviction of the call of universal mission we find the main stumbling block for almost all the churches of whatever confession. In drawing up a statement some have simply had to state that they could not come to agreement on this point; others have simply adhered to the conviction that the church has been ordered to preach its message to all peoples. The Methodists attempt to maintain that "the call to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ" applies to all people but they somewhat modify this assertion by admitting that they "can never presume to know the full extent of God's work in the world and . . . recognize the reality of God's activity outside the Christian Church." They further insist that "judgment as to the ultimate salvation of persons from any faith community, including Christianity and Judaism, belongs to God alone." They then go on to affirm their belief "that Jews and Christians are co-workers and companion pilgrims who have made the God of Israel known throughout the world," and that this very God calls them into closer relationship with each other.

The chairperson of the Methodist group drawing up this document, Hoyt Hickman, wrote to say that the Christian community must stop making its universalistic claims with "imperialistic interpretation." Instead the Christian community "is challenged to accept its status as one community among others and to develop what is best in its own particularity."

A 1980 document from the Synod of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland (Germany) dealt even more forthrightly with the question of Christian mission to Jews. It insisted that since "in their calling Jews and Christians are always witnesses of God in the presence of the world and before each other," they were "convinced that the church may not express its witness toward the Jewish

<sup>7</sup> In other actions the Methodists have incorporated into their Book of Worship's section of Christian liturgy the "Days of Remembrance of the Holocaust." Moreover, they have taken the "Reproaches" in the Good Friday liturgy which for centuries had been so terribly anti-Jewish and turned them around so that they are now unambiguously directed against Christians rather than against Jews.

people as it does its mission to the peoples of the world."<sup>8</sup>

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Two years later (1982) the Texas Conference of Churches approved unanimously a statement entitled "Dialogue: A Contemporary Alternative to Proselytization." In this most poetic and literary of all the documents these churches speak of "the Spirit of God" which is "once again moving over the waters" producing a "new awareness, a new consciousness, a new understanding between Jews and Christians." They asserted that this Spirit summoned them even beyond the search for greater church unity and ecumenism to a "renewed relationship with the Jewish people." They acknowledged "with both respect and reverence that Judaism is a living faith and that Israel's call and covenant are still valid and operative today." They rejected the view that the Jewish covenant was dissolved with the coming of Christ, and insisted that "the Jewish people today possess their own unique call and mission before God and their covenant . . . to witness to the world of the holiness of God's Name."<sup>9</sup>

So Bapt

In sharp contrast to these few avowedly anti-mission statements is the Southern Baptist Resolution of June 1996. While acknowledging their indebtedness to the Jewish people through whom Baptists (and all Christians) received the Scriptures and their "Savior, the Messiah of Israel," they openly reject claims that Jews do not need to come to "their Messiah Jesus" and that "Christians have neither right nor obligation to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish people." Citing "evidence of a growing responsiveness among the Jewish people" to the Christian message, they commit themselves to pray "especially for the salvation of the Jewish people" and to direct their energies and resources toward proclamation of the gospel to them. (They appointed a minister to train for this special mission.)

Bapt Alliance 15

Just the year before (1995) the liberal Baptist Alliance had taken quite a different stance, affirming that "the Christian Scriptures teach that God has not rejected the community of Israel, God's covenant people, since the 'gifts and calling of God are irrevocable'." (Romans 11:1-2 and 11:29 are cited.) These Baptists

<sup>8</sup> This Synod went on to point out that "this obliviousness to the permanent election of the Jewish people and its relegation to non-existence marked Christian theology, church preaching and church work ever and again right to the present day." In this way "we have also made ourselves guilty of the physical elimination of the Jewish people" (Helga Croner, More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations [New York: Stimulus Books/Paulist Press, 1985] p. 208).

<sup>9</sup> Croner, More Stepping Stones . . ., pp. 185, 186.

confessed that they had been transmitters of a theology that "valued conversion over dialogue, invective over understanding, and prejudice over knowledge; a theology which [did not] acknowledge the vibrancy, vitality, and efficacy of the Jewish faith."

*Evangelical*

Evangelical Christians are divided into two theological camps. One holds that the conversion of Jews is a prerequisite for the Second Coming of Christ with all which will follow from that. The other, whole hoping for Jews' ultimate acceptance of Jesus, leave that up to God and insist that their "mission" in our present world is to stand fast with Jews.

So far I have touched only on some Protestant church documents, with the exception of the Texas Council of Churches which represents a number of denominations. Yet in general we usually hear much more about what the Roman Catholic Church has been doing both at the top level in Rome and in various national bishops' conferences. The Vatican II Nostra Aetate is undoubtedly the one document most frequently cited and referred to, and it is usually given credit for having started the whole movement of reconciliation with the Jewish people in the churches. This is simply not the case since the first statements came from a post-war international ecumenical and interfaith conference held at Seeligsberg in 1947, from the World Council of Churches in 1948, and two others emanating from the Evangelical Church of Germany in '48 and '50. *→ cite Rottenberg in this as well, 2005.*

*Amsterdam*

However, we must grant that Nostra Aetate<sup>11</sup> certainly added

<sup>10</sup> The first post-war/post-Holocaust German church statement, in 1945, by the Evangelical Church meeting at Stuttgart, never once mentioned Jews as such but only spoke of German sins "toward Poles, Danes, Frenchmen, etc." / However the 1948 "Message . . ." issued from Darmstadt was specifically addressed to "the Jewish question," and another in 1950 ("Message of Guilt Toward Israel") spoke of the need of all Christians to rid themselves of all antisemitism, to resist it, and to meet Jews and Jewish Christians "in a brotherly spirit" (Alice L. Eckardt, "Christian Responses to the Holocaust," in Issues in Teaching the Holocaust: A Guide, eds. Robert S. Hirt and Thomas Kessner [New York: Yeshiva University, 1981]: 86).

<sup>11</sup> The "people of the New Covenant" are tied spiritually to Abraham's stock"; the Church "cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God . . . concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor . . . that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which has been grafted the wild shoot, the Gentiles." Although "Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation, nor did the Jews, in large number, accept the Gospel [and } "not a few opposed its spreading," "Nevertheless God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers." Even though "the Church is the new

*Nostra Aetate*



much impetus to the rethinking effort though in itself, as the French Roman Catholic Bishops pointed out in their 1973 statement, "should be considered a beginning rather than a final achievement."<sup>12</sup> Thus the French Church's statement points out that "though in Jesus Christ the Covenant was renewed for Christendom, the Jewish people [are] a reality alive through the ages," maintaining "collective faithfulness to the One God." Hence it "is most urgent that Christians cease to represent the Jews according to clichés forged by the hostility of centuries." The French Bishops insist that the "First [or Jewish] Covenant was not made invalid by the Second [or Christian one]," and that Jesus "accomplished His ministry within the pale of the Covenant people." In closing the Bishops insist that, "Far from envisaging the disappearance of the Jewish community, the Church is in search of a living bond with it."

Furthermore, the Bishops utilize four fairly lengthy paragraphs to consider the historical dispersion of the Jewish people and the 20th century return to their land, despite Jews' long-held positive meaning assigned to Diaspora Jewish life. While not proclaiming any hard and fast judgment on the establishment of the State of Israel and the problems that have arisen from it, the Bishops hold that "the world community cannot refuse the Jewish people . . . the right and means for a political existence among the nations."

It should also be noted that in September of this year [1997] the French Catholic Bishops publicly repented for the French church's failure "in its mission to educate [its own peoples'] consciences and thus bears the responsibility of not having offered help immediately [to its Jewish neighbors in the years 1940 to 1942] when protest and protection were possible and necessary."<sup>13</sup>

Following the Vatican's 1985 Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic Bishops of the U.S. issued followup Guidelines (1988). They quoted the Notes' caution against

people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God." Moreover, the Church decries, out of the "Gospel's spiritual love," "hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews."

<sup>12</sup> For the French Bishops' statement, see Croner, ed., Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations, pp. 60-65.

<sup>13</sup> We should note that little has been said by American churches about their own failures toward European Jews in the years of the Hitler regime, especially before our country's direct engagement in the war when action could have helped.

a "simplistic framing" of the relationship of Christianity and Judaism as "two parallel ways of salvation." Yet they also speak of the unique aspects of each of the faiths and their relationship to each other. A few paragraphs earlier the Bishops said that "the Church proclaims the universal salvific significance of the Christ-event and looks forward to the day when 'there shall be one flock and one shepherd' (Jn 10:16)." They also say that the "saving deeds of the One God through Jesus" stand in solidarity with the "continuing Jewish witness in affirming the One God as Lord of history."<sup>14</sup> (As I read over these various statements I have the feeling of going around on an 8-shaped track, for there is a kind of entwined movement back and forth without a clear-cut beginning or end. And ambiguity or trying to have it both ways seems to me to be present.)

Pope John Paul II has consistently expressed deep sorrow for Jewish suffering during those years, and most recently (Oct. 31 of this year 1997) blamed centuries of anti-Jewish prejudice for "deadening" Christian resistance to the Nazi persecution of Jews. Nevertheless, he has consistently steered clear of blaming the church itself. In fact, in the October talk he specifically said he was not speaking of the church when he referred to "the Christian world's erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament relative to the Jewish people and their presumed guilt." Rather it was wrong interpretations that had created "hostility" to Jews in the Christian world and led to this result.<sup>15</sup>

We must remember that the Roman Catholic Church is theologically committed to the belief that the Church is above sin or error because it is God's creation, as is evident in the Pope's eighth encyclical "Redemptoris Missio" of 1991. In this eighth encyclical, issued in 1991, he remained convinced that "for all people salvation can only come from Jesus Christ. . . . [Consequently] the church calls all people to conversion." The New York Times reporter noted that the Pope was "sharply critical of church-workers and theologians who in his eyes have gone too far in their sympathy for other religions while making no attempt to convert 'their' members. This tolerance has led to widespread indifference among Christians."<sup>16</sup> The Pope said such thinking "is based on incorrect theological perspectives and is characterized by a religious relativism that 'one religion is as good as another.'" "The church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and

<sup>14</sup> As stated in the 1974 Guidelines.

<sup>15</sup> "The Roots of Anti-Judaism," in Origins: CNS Documentary Service 27, 22 (Nov. 13, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> The New York Times, Jan. 22, 1991.

Pope  
John Paul II

\*

engaging in inter-religious dialogue."<sup>17</sup>

Obviously we cannot even begin to touch on the many other documents or on what numerous theologians and other scholars have been writing on this subject, and yet I feel compelled to mention briefly two of them (both Protestants as it happens). On this subject of Christian mission, our fellow countryman Dr. Robert Willis argues that if, after the death camps Christians "still cling to the pretension that their story undergirds a responsibility for the conversion of Jews, then it is questionable whether we can learn anything from the events of history."<sup>18</sup>

*Cerve /* A Dutch churchman Dr. "Coos" Schoneveld has argued that it is time we see Jewish survival over so many dire centuries in the light of a new understanding of what the Resurrection affirmed: namely, that in the Resurrection God affirmed the Torah which Jesus upheld, the people of Israel of which Jesus was one, and Jewish existence as such (not a new people or a new faith!). Schoneveld sees Jesus as having been vindicated as a Jew (not a Christian) who underwent martyrdom as so many Jews have done -- for the justification of God's name (kiddush ha-Shem).<sup>19</sup> (What would be the effect if this were to become the central message of Christian preaching in Holy Week and on Easter?)

Having touched on just a handful of the church documents (but mostly the most recent ones), let us now turn back to the question of what the effect of the many statements has been in local church preaching and services, in educational materials, etc. As I observed earlier, the effect has been very limited, at least in Protestant churches. (Dr. Franklin Littell, a Methodist clergyman, said that while he found the Southern Baptist statement to be "insensitive and pretentious," he wondered whether most American Christian would disapprove of it.<sup>20</sup>)

The real problem is that the statements -- even that of one's own denomination -- are virtually unknown in the congregations; and often even to the parish ministers. (Probably this is less true of parish priests since the Catholic Church is more highly organized and has somewhat better lines of communication.) Those in training

<sup>17</sup> See Excerpt from Pope John Paul II's encyclical in the New York Times Jan. 23, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Robert E. Willis, "Auschwitz and the Nurturing of Conscience," Religion in Life XLIV, 4 (1975): 438.

<sup>19</sup> J. Schoneveld "The Jewish 'No' to Jesus and the Christian 'Yes' to Jews," Quarterly Review: A Scholarly Journal for Reflection on Ministry, 4, 4 (Winter 1984): 60.

<sup>20</sup> Littell in The Morning Call (Allentown, PA), June 15, 1996.

for the ministry are equally uninformed. What can be done about this?

Well, obviously the statements should be incorporated into the courses of all seminary students. This requires that the schools take action. Dr. Beverly Asbury did a study of about 20 major theological schools, mostly Protestant ones, just a few years ago<sup>21</sup> only to find that there was almost no required study even of Judaism (other than via the Hebrew Scriptures, or the "Old Testament" as most schools identified it), no less the more recent rethinking about the church's relationship to Judaism and Jewish people. In the course of interviewing candidates for the chaplaincy positions at his university he found them not only abysmally ignorant of Judaism but quite astonished to have their assumptions of Christian "exclusivity, supersessionism, and triumphalism" questioned. They are almost totally unaware of the post-Holocaust ferment in theological thinking that has been going, as most of the theological faculty Asbury asked admitted. (More undergraduates in universities where some of these theological schools are situated were found to have taken a course in Holocaust studies than the ministerial students.) Moreover, he found that "as matters now stand, students in America's Protestant theological schools are unlikely to be aware [even] of Nostra Aetate or of positions taken by their own denominations." (This is not to say that the situation is necessarily better in Catholic seminaries; I simply can't say.)

On the evidence of the many Christians -- some at the professional level, some scholars, and many interfaith dialogue participants -- who "have affirmed the integrity of Judaism as a mandate of Christian doctrine, it appears that a new state of relationships has become possible. But that possibility has been largely blocked by the steadfast position of the schools that educate clergy." As a result much of the clergy and laity have not been reached.

In sharp contrast, Dr. Asbury noted that issues of sexism, racism, and even, in some cases, homosexuality, have elicited an immediate response among theological schools as well as churches nationwide even when there is open resistance among church members. Prompt actions have been taken to make changes in "consciousness, beliefs, language, and institutional practices."

One person's observation that the "troubling story of the Jewish-Christian encounter is perhaps the most vexing and enduring

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<sup>21</sup> The quotations to follow are to be found in Asbury's "The Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations: Is It To Be Found in Christian Theological Seminaries? A Preliminary Study," Theological Education XXVIII, 2 (1992).

problem in western history"<sup>22</sup> seems to be true.

Now let me go beyond the matter of theological education and be more radical.

The church statements we have been reviewing need to be read as part of the texts of the day, and then be made the subject of sermons. For they need to become the initial portion of a new "testament" for they are our century's counterparts to the epistles or letters to the churches in the New Testament. (Incidentally, they are also parallels to much of the post-first century writings that compose the Talmud). After all, the collection of church statements are the carefully spelled out thinking of some of the clergy and laity of various denominations, and of collective church groups, undertaken after much study and thought at a critical time in history, and approved by vote of representative bodies. They are rejoinders by people of faith to an evil whose roots had been nourished by churches over the many centuries. They are responses to the discovery (we could even say revelation) of the wonder that can be uncovered in the process of building new relationships with God's people Israel, in learning of riches within that faith community, as well as in the rereading of the books of Scripture in this light. They can be spiritually liberating and genuinely redemptive. While some of the documents may lack the literary and even poetic quality of the epistles of the Apostolic Writings (New Testament), almost all of them have a sense of immediacy as great as that felt by the disciples and apostles, and an urgency that calls for response from fellow believers. \*

So we must not ignore them, but must study and teach them, and make them a permanent part of the church's foundational resources as we seek to understand our role in God's creation. Let us not lose sight of these hopeful signs or the opportunities they offer.

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Obrecht, in Explorations 11, 1 (November 1997): 5.

Complex of 7 issues I discerned as being considered in the documents of 1965-83:

1. Christian identity -- almost inevitably defined in terms over against and in contrast to Jews and Judaism;
2. Christian theological claims --and whether it is possible to proclaim the Christian confession of faith without denigrating other religions, but especially that of Jews;
3. the question of interpretation of the Scripture shared with Jews -- traditionally done to "prove" the authenticity of the church and the inauthenticity of the synagogue or other forms of Jewish existence;
4. the way in which the Christian "New Testament" is used (directly or indirectly) to confirm the church's negative presentation of Jews and Judaism and to undergird the traditional teaching that Christians have replaced Israel as God's people;
5. the question of what the mission or calling of Christianity is - - overwhelmingly understood as the responsibility to bring all others to confess Christ as Lord;
6. the question of God's role in history -- traditionally interpreted as having been definitive and all but final in Jesus the Christ;
7. the historical record with respect to Christian responsibility for initiating hostility, legislative discrimination, oppression, and various forms of violence against Jews long before Adolf Hitler.

NOTES

1. I refuse to concede that the word "antisemitism" only belongs to the 19th and 20th century form of hostility to, and hatred of, Jews. We must see the deep-lying psychological and sociological roots of this mass hatred instead of seeing it purely as religious in nature. We must recognize the continuity of hostility and fear that wedded religious teachings to prejudice and hate. Moreover, we must recognize and acknowledge that religious and secular leaders were themselves caught in that web, rather than being free of its entanglements. See William Nicholls on Voltaire



in this regard: *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1993).

2. Alice L. Eckardt, "A Christian Problem: Review of Protestant Documents," pp. 16-17.

3. See T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin*, p. 146; Luther, "An Admonition Against the Jews," in Heiko A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism*, p. 121. Luther warned the authorities, do "not make yourselves party to the sins of others" and incur God's wrath on account of the presence of Jews in your midst. If the Jews refuse to convert, "neither tolerate nor suffer their presence" (15 February 1546).

4. Cited in Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, XIII, p. 218, italics added. This view is repeated in various forms in many of Luther's writings, since it was so central to his theology and ecclesiology.

5. Baron, XIII p. 219.

6. Oberman, p. 113.

7. Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, pp. 288-89.

8. *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, in *Luther's Works* (hereafter, *LW*), 45, pp. 229, 200, 229, 201, 198, 201, 229. The first half is a reply to accusations made by his opponents that he was teaching that Jesus was conceived by Joseph, that Mary was not a virgin, and that she had many sons after Christ.

9. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism*, pp. 111, 46. Heinrich Bornkamm goes even further by finding that Luther asserted that the old covenant did *not* prepare for the new covenant but was its absolute antithesis: "Law and gospel [Old and New Testament] are deadly enemies;" so much so that a believer in the Old Testament "must beat Moses to death" in order to accept the new covenant. Bornkamm concludes that Luther demolished the whole scheme of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) as the early church interpreted it (*Luther and the Old Testament*, pp. 146, 254, and citing Luther's *Table Talk*, 1532).

10. Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes," pp. 166-67.

11. Baron, XIII, p. 115: "Luther doubtless collaborated." H. H. Ben-Sasson reports that Josel of Rosheim accused Luther of responsibility for the order of expulsion (*A History of the Jewish People*, p. 651).



12. John W. Kleiner, *The Attitudes of the Strasbourg Reformers Toward Jews and Judaism*, p. 67. See more on Capito later in these pages.
13. Oberman, p. 120, citing Luther's letter to Josel dated 11 June 1537.
14. Oberman, pp. 118-19, 133-34 n. 88.
15. Jerome Friedman advises this course in *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 204.
16. *LW*, 47, p. 264.
17. "... the Jews would like to entice us Christians to their faith and they do this whenever they can" (Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 204; see also *On the Jews and Their Lies*, *LW*, 47, p. 149).
18. *LW*, 47, pp. 268-270, 285-88ff, 292.
19. Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 249.
20. He was convinced that Jews were causing his ill health as well as perverting Christianity and world order (letter to his wife, 2 January 1546, in Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, pp. 203, 210 n.1; and *LW*, 50, p. 290).
21. Gordon Rupp, "In the Context of His Life and Times," p. 9.
22. Sermon published as "An Admonition Against the Jews," cited in Rupp, p. 10 (*italics added*).
23. Oberman, pp. 113-117.
24. Baron, XIII, pp. 228, 231, 232; Oberman, pp. 10, 47. Philip Melancthon, Luther's devoted disciple but also a seeker after harmony among the various reformers, kept knowledge of Osiander's letter from Luther out of fear of how the latter would react. However, Melancthon sent a copy of *On the Jews and Their Lies* to Philip of Hesse with a comment about the useful lessons to be found in it (Baron, XIII, p. 231).
25. What is more interesting, however, is the apparent lack of popular response to these later writings; a much smaller number of them were purchased. Salo Baron believes the public was resentful of the uncouthness of these anti-Jewish tracts, even though it normally enjoyed the mutual recriminations of the theological opponents (Baron, XIII, p. 228). Alternatively, could it be that there was so much of this type of literature available that it simply did not create the same interest as Luther's earlier writings, which had a spiritual force to them despite the invective

that was so endemic?

26. Betsy Halpern Amaru, "Martin Luther and Jewish Mirrors," p. 96; Oberman, p. 49 (full quote on p. 137, n. 64).

27. "Many [Christian] Hebraists are more rabbinical than Christian" (Baron, XIII, p. 229; Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 204).

28. Sholom Singer, *Jews, Luther and the Reformation*, p. 11.

29. Baron, XIII p. 222. See S. Bernhard Erling, "Martin Luther and the Jews in the Light of His Lectures on Genesis," pp. 64-78.

30. *LW*, 47, p. 280.

31. See discussion of Calvin's distinction between the suffering of the "impious" and of the "pious," p. 12 below.

32. Oberman, pp. 49, 64 n. 137, citing *Weimarer Ausgabe, Abteilung Werke*, 50:323, 324, 8.

33. Ben-Sasson, pp. 650-51. Osiander earned the fury of Johannes Eck who hated the reformers and who produced a vicious counterattack, *Against the Defense of the Jews* (1541), (Oberman, pp. 36-37). See p. 7 herein for an earlier comment about Osiander.

34. Oberman, pp. 35-36.

35. Rupp, p. 6; Oberman, pp. 47-49.

36. Selma Stern, *Josel of Rosheim*, cited by Jerome Friedman, "The Reformation in Alien Eyes," p. 35.

37. Friedman, *ibid.*, p. 36.

38. Jack Hughes Robinson, *John Calvin and the Jews*, p. 31; and John Kleiner, *The Attitudes of the Strasbourg Reformers*, pp. 242, 245, 251, 252, 227.

39. Kleiner, pp. 266, 265; Baron, XIII, p. 241.

40. Baron, XIII, p. 236.

41. Baron, XIII, p. 238.

42. In 1632, in Geneva, a pastor was strangled for apostasy and conversion to Judaism (Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 249).

43. Parker, *Jean Calvin*, pp. 44-45, 46; see also Jack Hughes Robinson, *John Calvin and the Jews*, pp. 184ff.

44. Calvin was responding to the Jewish challenger's use of Matthew 5:17: "I am come not to destroy but to fulfill [the Law]" (Mary Sweetland Laver, *Calvin, Jews, and Intra-Christian Polemics*, pp. 232-33; Baron XIII, p. 290). The full document, *Ad Quaestiones et Obiecta Iudaci Cuiusdam Responsio Io. Calvini* ("Response to Questions and Objections of a Certain Jew") is translated and produced in Laver's volume, pp. 229-61.

45. Baron, XIII, pp. 291, 148-49.

46. Robinson, p. 186.

47. Baron, XIII, pp. 287-88.

48. Baron, XIII, p. 287; Oberman, p. 108; and many passages in Luther's writings.

49. Question VIII and Calvin's response, in Laver, pp. 239-41; and Calvin, *Opera*, IX, pp. 653-746.

50. Mordechai S. Chertoff, "Jerusalem in Song and Psalm," in Alice L. Eckardt, ed., *Jerusalem: City of the Ages* (Washington, D.C., 1986), p. 226.

51. Oberman, pp. 141, 144 n6 (sermons, 8 July 1549, 6 September 1550). Translation provided by Dr. Edna de Angeli.

52. Laver, *Calvin, Jews, and Intra-Christian Polemics*, pp. 204-206, 201-202, 203. All of chapter IV is pertinent to this point.

53. Significant among these recent studies are those by Mary Sweetland Laver and Jack Hughes Robinson, cited herein.

54. Baron, XIII, pp. 291, 462 n100; and "John Calvin and the Jews," p. 159.

55. Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525-1531*, pp. 40, 44, 49-50, 159, 176, 178, 179-80. Such a belief in divine-human cooperation shares an affinity with Judaism.

56. Baron, XIII, p. 244.

57. Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, pp. 5, 260, 261, 244, 214, 100, 116, 115.

58. Through the fifteenth century and up until 1519 urban expulsions in the German Empire were extensive. After 1520 they

were relatively few (Rupp, p. 4; Oberman, p. 93).

59. Ben-Sasson, "The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes," pp. 244, 263 n78, 277, 283.

60. Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 257; Ben-Sasson, "The Reformation . . .," pp. 315, 258-59.

61. Friedman, "The Reformation in Alien Eyes," p. 32. Halevi saw all the good things he wanted to see in Luther's *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*: that Jews had rightly resisted Catholicism; that to be a good Christian one had almost to become Jew; that Catholics could call him (Luther) a Jew if they tired of calling him a heretic.

62. Gershom Scholem, cited in Ben-Sasson, "The Reformation in . . .," p. 264. The view of Luther as anti-Christian was based on his iconoclasticism and detestation of priests (266-67).

63. A negative association was made even when Protestants had not been around at the time of expulsion. We must realize that there was only a very small German Jewish population then -- probably only a few hundred in all Germany, Frankfurt being the largest with about 78 (Kleiner, pp. 43-44).

64. Ben-Sasson, "The Reformation in . . .," pp. 287-88.

65. Kenneth R. Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy 1555-1593* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Ktav, 1977); Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, pp.243-44. Paul IV's successor, Pope Paul V, was "even fiercer," expelled Jewish communities which had existed since antiquity (Johnson, *ibid.*, p. 245).

66. Not all rabbis reached this conclusion. Rabbi Hayyim ben Bazalel believed that the reformers' search for truth might make a rapprochement with Judaism possible, whereas Catholicism's asceticism was totally un-Jewish (Ben-Sasson, "The Reformation in . . .," p. 298).

67. Among some twentieth century evangelical Protestants -- not to mention some in mainline denominations -- this appreciation would go much further and even eliminate the conversionist emphasis.

68. D. Clair Davis, "The Reformed Church of Germany," p. 83.

69. See Helga Croner, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations and More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations*; Harold Ditmanson, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Luther Relationships*; and *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and*

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