
FROM

DARKNESS TO DAWN

RETHINKING CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS JEWS
AND JUDAISM IN THE LIGHT OF THE HOLOCAUST



The Anglican Church of Canada

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PREFACE

In 1989 the National Executive Council of the Anglican Church of Canada (the predecessor to the Council of General Synod) passed a resolution commending for use a newly produced resource called *From Darkness to Dawn*. Created by the Subcommittee on Jewish-Anglican Relations, the study program was in part a response to a resolution of the 1983 General Synod to “deplore recent expressions of anti-Semitism in Canada and call upon all the people of our church to reject the same.”

As the original introduction to *From Darkness to Dawn* indicates, the climate that prompted that resolution and this resource was one marked by a troubling resurgence in Canada of anti-Semitic acts, particularly the public denial by some of the reality of the Shoah, the systematic mass murder of six-million Jews during the Second World War.

Though more than 25 years have passed since the original release of *From Darkness to Dawn*, many of the issues it raises—and which prompted its creation—remain germane. This reality is reflected in another General Synod resolution, passed in 2013, which commits our church to “strengthen relationships with Canadian Jews and Muslims, to resolutely oppose anti-Semitism, anti-Arab sentiments and Islamophobia.”

This rerelease of *From Darkness to Dawn* represents a small gesture in a larger and ongoing effort to honour that commitment, to acknowledge anew the church’s historic complicity in the persecution of our Jewish sisters and brothers, and to continue to build a new and lasting relationship with them based on mutual regard and respect.

The reissuing of this resource also recognizes that its reception by our church more than 25 years ago was relatively limited, and that this significant work of our church merits presentation to a new generation. Though produced from a Canadian Anglican perspective, this resource can be of value to Christians of a diversity of traditions in a variety of contexts.

A conscious decision was made not to attempt to change or revise the content of this resource at this time, but rather to present *From Darkness to Dawn* as a kind of historical document of our church. This is why some of the references will seem dated and some contemporary issues will seem absent. However, the larger themes with which it deals are as timely and present as ever.

Feedback on this resource is welcome. Suggestions on how this good work of a generation ago can be improved and adapted for the current context would be especially welcome, as would indications of how and where this rerelease of *From Darkness to Dawn* is finding use. Comments can be directed to bmyers@national.anglican.ca.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1934 the General Synod of what was then called the Church of England in Canada, now the Anglican Church of Canada, adopted a resolution deploring the persecution of Jews in Germany and recognizing the contribution of Jews to human history. The next time General Synod adopted a resolution dealing with the Jews was almost a half-century later, in 1983. Between these two synods occurred one of the most shameful episodes in the dismal history of human inhumanity, the attempt by the National Socialists of Germany and their allies to exterminate European Jewry.

The resolution of 1983 affirmed the reality of what has come to be known as the Holocaust, in the face of its denial by such persons as James Keegstra, an Alberta school teacher, and Ernst Zundel, a Toronto publisher. The General Synod condemned racism and anti-Semitism and called upon the Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations Committee to produce materials to help Anglicans become more knowledgeable about anti-Semitism. A kit of six units, designed to be used during Lent or some other appropriate period is the result. It should be pointed out that both Jews and Christians have been involved in the production of this material, thus modelling the kind of relationship we desire for both our communities.

It was thought best to widen the scope of the study to consider both the Holocaust itself and the context in which such a tragedy could occur, and also to look at the Jewish people not simply as victims but as a community with a living heritage of faith and practice. Inevitably the contribution of Christian anti-Jewish teaching to the fostering of contempt for and persecution of the Jews will be covered, not to lay a burden of guilt upon contemporary Christians but to point out those areas in which change must occur if Christians and Jews are to build a relationship based on mutual regard and respect.

Unit 1 – Hebrew Scriptures/Christian Understanding discusses the differing ways in which the Old Testament is read and understood by each community. For many Jews the very term Old Testament is problematic. The unit tries to set out some of the issues at stake.

Unit 2 – Jesus and the Early Christian Community points out that Jesus and his followers considered themselves loyal Jews, and that the New Testament documents were written during a time of growing tension between Jews who saw Jesus as the Messiah and those who did not. There are suggestions that some New Testament writers believed that God had not abrogate the covenant with the Jews, but that coming of Jesus was to widen God's relationship with humanity to include the Gentiles.

Unit 3 – The Widening of the Breach shows how the rupture between church and synagogue became a yawning chasm, particularly with the adoption of Christianity by Constantine as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Christian anti-Jewish teaching during the Middle Ages was transmuted into secular anti-Semitism during the nineteenth century, laying the basis for the tragedy of the twentieth.

Unit 4 – The Holocaust Years: 1933-1945 covers a period of twelve years in which Jews, along with others whom Nazi leaders declared to be sub-human or undesirable, were slaughtered in their millions. The reactions of Christians in Germany and outside are discussed. While a few voices were raised, all too many remained silent.

Unit 5 – Judaism: A Celebration of Life. Notwithstanding the tragedies it has faced over the centuries the Jewish tradition is one which affirms life and hope. Some of the key concepts which help shape the Jewish approach to experience are outlined.

Unit 6 – Towards a Future Different from the Past. The Holocaust has caused many Christian thinkers to undertake an agonizing reappraisal of the church's teaching about and attitudes toward the Jews. A number of Christian attitudes toward Jews and Judaism which encourage contempt are laid bare, and suggestions are made about ways in which new attitudes and a new relationship can be fostered.

This study program focuses on Christian-Jewish relations. However, Christians might also look at their attitudes toward members of other faith communities. Are negative stereotypes fostered in Christian education material, sermon anecdotes and casual conversations about Sikhs, Hindus or Muslims? What are the churches doing to eliminate such images in the secular media and elsewhere in society, or are members of these groups left to wage the battle on their own? Stereotypes are evil because they are based on falsehood and half truth, they appeal to ignorance and fear, and they make us complacent about the persecution of others based on these negative images.

Hatred perpetrated in Christ's name is contrary to the Gospel. Christians ought to be among the first to challenge evil wherever it is found, even within the Church, and to join with all people of goodwill in the struggle against prejudice and bigotry.

***What does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?***

Micah 6:8 (RSV)

USING THIS KIT

The *From Darkness to Dawn* study program was designed as a six-week study of Christian-Jewish relations in the light of the Holocaust. However, congregations and other groups using the material should feel free to adapt the program to suit local circumstances. While produced for Anglican churches, most of the material is entirely suitable for use by other Christians, and in view of one of the aims of this kit—to promote understanding between Christians and Jews—it would also be appropriate to have Jewish participation in any study program.

Planning a Study Program

Timing

Lent would be a particularly suitable time of year to embark on a study of the Holocaust. In many Anglican congregations it is a traditional period for reflection on matters of faith and Christian living. What better time than a season when the church has in the past levelled charges of “deicide” against the Jews? As the Jewish community celebrates Passover about the same time as the Christian Easter, it may also provide an opportunity to learn something of the significance of that commemoration in Jewish life. However, the program has been consciously made flexible so that it can be used at any time of year which suits the prospective participants.

Location

This program need not be confined to the usual educational facilities of a congregation, whether the church basement, a classroom, or the rector’s study. Why not be imaginative? Participants might meet in various homes, taking turns providing refreshments. It may be possible to go to a synagogue to study units one and five, which deal with Judaism, or at least to arrange to visit a synagogue during the program. There may be a Holocaust remembrance centre or similar facility available to tour.

Elements of a program

Any given session will have four stages:

- 1. Getting Started:** Participants should be encouraged to read the appropriate unit ahead of time. This will make a lengthy exposition unnecessary and allow more time for questions and discussion. There are a number of ways in which the material can be presented: the group leader or one of the group members might do it; a speaker with some knowledge of the subject under discussion could be invited; or an audiovisual dealing with the subject matter might be used. In essence, this time will be spent in delineating the topic and identifying issues which need further discussion.
- 2. Exploring further:** At the end of each unit there are questions could be used to begin discussion. If a group has identified aspects which members would like to pursue, it should do so.

- 3. Looking ahead:** Each session should conclude with a glance at the next session's topic and encouraging people to read the unit ahead of time. Some may want to do additional reading. Many of the books suggested can be obtained at or through the local public library. At the final session some time could be spent in considering what to do to follow up on the discussion. It may be a further study of the subject or, better, it may result in some kind of action.

Resources

Several resources are provided to assist in a deeper understanding of the subject. Most of the units have a list of books for further reading and a more extensive bibliography has also been included. Audio-visuals are another learning tool, and information about what is available can be obtained from the addresses listed.

A sample Holocaust Remembrance Service is provided as a model for local groups which may wish to plan their own.

Finally, a list of addresses is appended of offices which can provide more information and advice about the promotion of Christian-Jewish cooperation, and be of assistance to local groups which are planning study or dialogue programs.



UNIT ONE

HEBREW SCRIPTURES/ CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING

Unit Summary

The Hebrew Bible or Old Testament is common to Jews and Christians. In the same way that for Christians the Old Testament does not stand alone, so also for Jews the written Hebrew Bible is complemented and interpreted by an oral tradition which was later recorded as the Talmud. The arrangement of the Hebrew Bible differs from Christian versions, consisting of the Books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings. The Christian arrangement places the Prophets last to emphasize the note of fulfilment.

In ancient and medieval times Jews were sometimes forced into public debates with Christians over the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Jewish exile and powerlessness, it was argued, was proof that God had abandoned them. Such disputations did little, however, to change anyone's mind. Since then Christians have come to understand that there is an asymmetry here. While Christianity needs the Old Testament, Judaism does not depend on the New. Today, confrontation is being replaced by dialogue in which each side interprets its own tradition. In dialogue both partners are enriched and can see the other, not as an opponent but as a friend who can contribute new insights into the God who is revealed in the scriptures.

Text and interpretation

Jewish people know their most basic scriptures as the **Tanakh** (or in English, the Hebrew Bible). When Christians call it the Old Testament they impose a Christian interpretation on the role and purpose of these scriptures. The term implies a contrast between the "Old" and "New" Testaments by suggesting that the "Old" is outdated and incomplete.

Jews do not consider the Hebrew scriptures, particularly the first five books, complete in and of themselves either. In addition to the written text there is an oral interpretation which completes the Hebrew Bible. This interpretation, which completes the text and applies its message to daily life, began at the same time as the written message. These oral interpretations are as valid as the written material, and both must be understood together. In effect, the oral and written traditions are one, but while Christians are aware of the written text they are largely ignorant about the oral tradition.

This complex of text and interpretation may be divided into two broad areas: legal material and moral directives. All this together is called **Torah**. The term Torah itself is most commonly understood in three ways: (1) the five Books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy, also called the **Pentateuch**; (2) the whole of the Hebrew Bible, with non-Pentateuchal scripture providing an understanding of the Pentateuch; and (3) the whole of the Hebrew Bible plus its practice-oriented interpretation. A religious Jew would choose the latter description.

In spite of their negative and often biased description in the New Testament, the Pharisees championed an ongoing and living relationship between text and interpretation and between the written tradition with God as its author, and the individual. They made it possible for all people, rich and poor, merchant and labourer, prince and priest, to become fully part of the tradition. In that spirit the Jewish tradition has always sought to make a relationship with God possible for every person, in every age and under any circumstances, whether at home or among Gentiles, in times of tolerance or of persecution.

The Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible has three major divisions: (1) the Books of Moses or Pentateuch, (2) the Prophets, and (3) the Writings. The five **Books of Moses** are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The division called the **Prophets** is itself divided into two main units, the Former and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets include the books of Joshua, Judges, I and 2 Samuel, and I and 2 Kings, which advance the covenantal story of the ancient Jewish community, begun in the Pentateuch. The Latter Prophets include the various books of prophecy of the Hebrew Bible. These are not presented in chronological sequence, but largely according to length, following the method of textual collection in the ancient world. These books are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the “Book of the Twelve Prophets” (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).

The **Writings** are a varied collection of materials. The Psalms, prayer poems written in the style of ancient Near Eastern religious poetry, address all aspects of human concern. The Proverbs deal with the human condition and the Book of Job is a lengthy reflection on the question of divine justice in our world. Following these three longer works are five “scrolls”: the Song of Songs, a love poem variously understood as describing passionate human love or God’s love for Israel; Ruth, a tale of human friendship set in the time of the Judges; Lamentations, a lament on the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 BCE (before the Common Era); Ecclesiastes, another reflection on the human condition; and Esther, a court tale describing the perilous circumstances in which the Jewish community found itself in foreign lands after the Babylonian defeat of the Kingdom. Next comes the Book of Daniel, a prophetic-type narrative also set in the period after 586 BCE; then the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and I and 2 Chronicles, which detail the story of the Jewish people through the Babylonian exile and into the period of the restoration of the community in its ancestral homeland under the Persians about the year 400 BCE.

Two different approaches

Christian and Jewish versions of the Bible differ in their arrangement of the books of the Hebrew scriptures, as can be see when the two are laid out beside each other:

JEWISH (TANAKH)

TORAH: THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

NEV'IM: THE PROPHETS

Joshua

Judges

1 Samuel

2 Samuel

1 Kings

2 Kings

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Ezekiel

THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

KETHUVIM: THE WRITINGS

Psalms

CHRISTIAN (OLD TESTAMENT)*

THE PENTATEUCH

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

Joshua

Judges

Ruth

1 Samuel

2 Samuel

1 Kings

2 Kings

1 Chronicles

2 Chronicles

Ezra

Nehemiah

Esther

THE POETICAL BOOKS

Job

Psalms

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

Song of Songs

THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Lamentations

Ezekiel

Daniel

Proverbs	Hosea
Job	Joel
Song of Songs	Amos
Ruth	Obadiah
Lamentations	Jonah
Ecclesiastes	Micah
Esther	Nahum
Daniel	Habakkuk
Ezra	Zephaniah
Nehemiah	Zechariah
1 Chronicles	Malachi
2 Chronicles	

**Christian Bibles may also contain the Apocrypha, books found in ancient Greek translations but not in the Hebrew text.*

As can be seen, the Hebrew Bible concludes with the Writings, while Christian versions of the same scriptures place the Latter Prophets after the Writings and just before the Gospels. The scriptures of the Hebrew Bible are arranged so that they teach lifestyle in the context of story (Genesis–II Kings), and then turn in the Latter Prophets to the operation of the covenant relationship. Finally, the Hebrew Bible closes with the Writings, texts of various sorts, not necessarily tied into specific aspects of the story or issues in prophecy, yet dealing with the believer’s relationship with and experience of God.

For Christians, the New Testament is the fulfillment of the “Old,” a new covenant for life, displacing (although not denying) the older covenant. The New Testament begins with the birth of the Messiah and his revelation after baptism by John who is identified with Elijah. This is the fulfillment of a promise in the prophecy of Malachi (Malachi 4:5), which for Christians ends the Old Testament. It would seem that the intent of the Christian order is to underline the direct relationship between promise in the Prophets and fulfillment in the Gospels.

Story and Covenant

The story of the Jewish people, contained in the Pentateuch and Former Prophets and extended in Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles is one of promise and fulfillment. It begins with Creation, moves on to reflect on human society as a whole, then on God’s special relationship with the Children of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This whole story is based on the notion of covenant, a contractual agreement between God and humanity. Covenant makes security available to believers, but at the same time, it imposes responsibility. Key elements in any such relationship are consistency and fidelity. Patient love is a hallmark of any long- standing contractual agreement freely entered into. God displays such constancy and love in this relationship with the chosen people, who have been singled out to be a model of holiness. God accepts human nature, and after every straying from the covenantal agreement, is ever ready to accommodate to the people God has created and loves.

Prophets are raised up by God to remind the people of their covenant obligations. Their calls for goodness, justice and righteousness are ordained by God, who will not punish without warning. In their chastisement, there is always an offer of security and restoration for the penitent, and in the most severe condemnation there is still hope. The Prophet Ezekiel even describes God as going into exile along with the people. After the Babylonian Exile, which the Prophets see as the result of numerous breaches in morality and ethics as well as ritual, God restores the people to their homeland, and the ancient Temple in Jerusalem is ultimately rebuilt.

Individual and Community in Covenant

In our society individual rights are prized and are carefully balanced against the rights of society. At least in theory, individuals stand or fall according to their own actions. Whereas our laws and moral injunctions address the individual, and only then the community as a whole, the Hebrew Bible addresses the nation first, and only secondarily the individuals who compose it. In the story of ancient Israel, few individuals are identified and whether they are singled out for good or bad, the entire people shares in their fate. Until the Babylonian Exile, the covenant operated within a system of community or corporate responsibility. When a prophet condemns a wrongdoing king, the condemnation affects the people as a whole and all share in the fate of the Kingdom.

The concept of the individual began to emerge at the time of the Babylonian Exile, when no doubt many a good person could not accept a sorry fate, brought on by the actions of a sinful king or corrupt leaders. But it was only in the Hellenistic period, some three hundred years later, that the individual fully emerged. By this time, the Pharisees were advancing the cause of the Torah by making it accessible to everyone.

Sin, Repentance, and the Messiah

One great difference between the Jewish and Christian views of humanity is that Judaism lacks any notion of a fall or an original sin which is passed on from one generation to the next. Christianity has traditionally seen the effect of Adam and Eve's sin as being passed down through the generations. It is a flaw in humanity, a distortion of the divine image in which human beings were created. Thus, the notion of Messiah differs for Christians and Jews. For Jews, no other can undo the sins of the individual, and the restoration of a proper relationship with God is in the individual's hands alone. The worship of the Temple may facilitate restoration or reconciliation, but nobody can come between God and the worshipper. No intermediary (priest) is necessary for forgiveness. God listens to the penitent and examines that person's actions for signs of sincerity or insincerity. There is always forgiveness for the truly penitent, the true test being the individual's subsequent behaviour.

Understanding this one may appreciate why for Judaism, the Torah is complete. The early Church evolved a different sense of the problem of ultimate forgiveness, saying that the individual can be reborn into a new life of righteousness through Jesus.

Jews of today, even as in ancient times, vary in their interpretation of the messianic idea. Some Jews see the Messiah as a Davidic king, fully human and beloved of God, who would act as a protector to all Jews, enabling them to lead a righteous life. There is in Judaism a conscious attempt to downplay the person of the Messiah. In the past, when Jewish communities have recognized someone as the Messiah it has brought tragedy, bloodshed and disappointed hope. Virulent anti-Semitism has often followed such messianic claims. Jewish ideas concerning the Messiah tend to be this-worldly and concrete, thus Jews ask, "If Jesus was the Messiah, how is it that nothing has changed?" To some

Jews, the Messiah may not be a person so much as a state of being, a time of worldwide peace and freedom, as in the Prophet Isaiah's vision of the lion and the lamb.

On the whole, while the messianic idea is present in Judaism today, it is human actions which are emphasized. Perhaps Christians have a similar attitude towards the Second Coming. The time is not known, such is only for speculation. It does, however, offer hope. The point is that, until the Second Coming, Christians have a mission and are also challenged to live out the Sermon on the Mount. Christians have also found that groups expecting an imminent return have sometimes caused great damage. Many have also found a direct relationship between a too lively and concrete Christian messianism and anti-Semitism.

From Disputation to Dialogue

In ancient and medieval times, disputations were held between Jews and Christians regarding the interpretation of scripture. Christians claimed the Hebrew scriptures as their own and saw them as fully connected to the New Testament. Indeed, Christianity sought from the outset to underline its deep roots in Judaism, even in its tracing of Jesus' Jewish lineage. By discovering references to Jesus and his messianic vocation in the Old Testament, Christianity not only advanced the appropriation of the Hebrew scriptures but gave the early Church the antiquity which any newly evolving religious tradition seeks to support its claims to legitimacy. For their part, Jewish people continued to live by Torah and by their actions validated their claim to its completeness.

It must be noted that these disputations often took place between unequal partners. All the power lay on the side of the Christians, and Jewish participants had to be careful that in making their case they did not bring down on themselves the wrath of their Christian opponents. Some Jews who engaged in these disputations regarding Scriptural understanding, sought to emphasize the absolute separation of Christianity from Judaism on various key questions of belief. In addition, they had to defeat the notion, often voiced by Christians, that Jewish exile and powerlessness were proof of their abandonment by God. As one might expect the advent of the Messiah, or lack thereof, was the major focus of the debate. The various phrases which follow were at the core of some famous "messianic" disputes:

- (a) The doctrine of the Trinity came under attack from Jews and from members of other religions as well. Christians responded by pointing to the statement by God (Genesis 1:26), "Let us make man in our image," and saw in the use of the plural, an implication that God had co-makers in creation. So too, the divine name **Elohim**, a noun whose form is in the plural, was used to prove the Trinity. Even the **Shema**, the Jewish credo, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4) was understood to refer to "three who make one" (Lord/Our God/Lord = One). Jewish interpretation of these same passages sees no references at all to a plurality. The plural usage in Genesis, it is argued, is a "royal we," the word **Elohim** means "mighty one" and is only one of God's names, while the **Shema** itself makes clear the absolute unity of God. It should be noted, however, that Christian tradition has seen the doctrine of the Trinity as a way of affirming God's unity and does not depend on the faulty scriptural exegesis described.
- (b) Various passages considered to contain a messianic kernel and to refer to Jesus are noteworthy for the debate they aroused. In one of them, (Genesis 49:10) Jacob blessed his children before he died, saying, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's

staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs [or, until Shiloh comes; or, until he comes to Shiloh]; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” Both Jewish and Christian scholars saw a messianic reference in this verse, but where Jews saw a reference to King David, God’s anointed (**Mashiach**), to a Davidic king or an unknown future Messiah from the Davidic line, Christians saw here a clear reference to Jesus, whose lineage is traced to David at the start of the Gospel according to Matthew.

In this same vein, the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 11 has been understood by Christians to refer to the emergence of Jesus, while in Judaism this chapter is one of hope for a future messianic era, with no fixed date. At the same time it is a hope, expressed in terms of prophetic hyperbole, for the emergence in the near future of a good king who would lead the people back to covenantal adherence.

The famous passage in Isaiah 7 which describes the “sign of Immanuel” is also a - source of radically differing Jewish and Christian interpretations. The particular focus is Isaiah 7:10-25, especially verse 14. In traditional Christian interpretation, the verse is translated: “Therefore the Lord will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (i.e. God is with us).” The evangelist Matthew sees the fulfillment of this verse in Jesus’ birth (Matthew: 1:18- 23).

Jewish tradition understands this prophecy as one of a number of symbolic -name prophecies in Isaiah which, although they have a “messianic” content, make no specific claims for messianic individuals other than that the person be from King David’s line, in accordance with God’s covenant with David. The Greek word *parthenos* which Matthew took from the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures is translated “virgin,” but the Hebrew original says **almah** which means “young woman.” **Immanuel** means “God is with us,” which is what the prophet wanted his generation to understand. Despite their breach of the covenant God is with the people and desires their repentant faithfulness.

The reference to a child in Isaiah 9: 6-7, which Christians have similarly understood to refer to Jesus, is seen by Jews as yet another hope-filled prophecy anticipating either a future “messianic era” of no fixed date or, in prophetic hyperbole, a grand restoration of the community in the near future if only the people would heed God’s warnings spoken by the prophet.

Examining the varying interpretations of the verses just considered demonstrates the essence of disputation. It has taken almost two thousand years for the two communities to move from disputation to dialogue. Through dialogue each seeks a better appreciation of the other’s interpretation of scripture. Christians have come to understand how they and the Christian scriptures have been grafted into the Jewish scriptural tradition. The World Council of Churches speaks of an asymmetry regarding these scriptures. While Christians need the Old Testament to understand the New, the Old Testament does not need the New Testament. Not only this, but the Jewish people, whose scripture Christians call the Old Testament, have developed a fruitful ethical and religious life without the New Testament. It is a special challenge for Christians, and for Jews as well, to understand what each appreciates in its own scriptural tradition and to see that although what constitutes scripture for the other group does differ, each is complete in its own right. Although methods of interpretation may not be identical both have as their goal the search for goodness and godliness in a troubled world.

In dialogue, as Jew and Christian listen to each other's interpretation of scripture, both parties can be enriched and begin to understand the other. Such a dialogue means change in the participants and hopefully each begins to see the other, not as an enemy who needs to be conquered, but as a friend who brings new insight from the God who is revealed in these scriptures.

For Further Reading

Brown, Raymond. *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977

Childs, Brevard. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979

Hillers, Delbert. *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*. Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1969

Parkes, James. *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism*. New York: Hermon Press, 1974

Wilson, R. *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980

Suggestions for Discussion

1. What do Jews find offensive about the phrase "Old Testament"? What alternatives are there?
2. What do you think of the discussion of the Hebrew and Christian arrangements of the books of the Bible?
3. Discuss the difference between dialogue and disputation. What are the advantages of dialogue?
4. This paper was written by a Jew and a Christian. How might it have been different had it been written by one or the other?



Unit Two

JESUS AND THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Unit Summary

Jesus was a devout Jew who worshipped regularly in the synagogue, and while he had conflicts with the Pharisees he also seems to have had supporters among them. It is not clear to what extent the Jewish hierarchy were involved in his crucifixion, but the Jewish people as a whole can certainly not be held guilty. A debate subsequently ensued between Jews who followed Jesus, and claimed that he rose from the dead, and those who did not. However, this was initially an internal Jewish debate. St. Paul and other Jewish Christians held what might be called "dual citizenship", following Christ but remaining loyal Jews.

St. Paul contended that the Jews are still loved by God. While hoping that his fellow Jews would eventually come to believe in Jesus, Paul was even more interested in bringing non-Jews into covenant relationship with God. Gentile Christians were not asked to observe the Torah; but did have to lead moral lives. With the growing influx of Gentiles into the Church, Christianity gradually took on a separate identity, and the rupture became complete after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70, and the moving of the centres of Christianity and Judaism from the Holy Land.

Jesus of Nazareth: Who was He?

Have you ever thought about who Jesus of Nazareth really was? Christians may assume they know all about him from reading the New Testament and from what they learned in Sunday School. His image confronting us in countless pictures and stained glass windows gives a sense of familiarity. What follows is a challenge to think again, to read the New Testament anew and discover that there is still more to be learned. Since many of the tensions and difficulties between Christians and Jews have had their origin in the interpretation of the New Testament, special stress will be laid on the

relationship of Jesus with the Jewish people. A task for Christians, in the light of the Holocaust, is to re- discover his Jewishness, which was vigorously and violently denied by Nazi ideology.

To begin, it is necessary to go beyond the simple statement in the creeds that Jesus was made a man. Jesus was not a man in general, neutral and colourless, without any racial features. He became a concrete human being, born and raised as a Jew. As a child he was brought up to go to the synagogue and the Temple, a practice that he followed throughout his life. He was known as the son of a carpenter, was esteemed as a learned man and therefore addressed as a teacher, he was extended and accepted dinner invitations into the homes of leading citizens. He often engaged in discussion with the Pharisees about the interpretation of Biblical passages. It is also certain that Jesus' concern for the lost and outcast often aroused protest and resulted in conflict.

The situation changed radically for the worse when Jesus came to Jerusalem on what was to be his last pilgrimage there. His popularity all over the country had won him a noisy welcome. Trouble began when he entered the Temple precincts and started to throw out the bankers and the dealers whom custom had long established there. When he made critical remarks about the Temple itself the hierarchy in charge of the worship and administration of the Temple began to question his authority. The sequence of events leading to the crucifixion is recorded by the writers of all four Gospels. A careful reading of these accounts seems to show that while the hierarchy did a great deal of the preparatory work they were not in the end a party to it. In fact they could not be, as capital punishment by crucifixion was not provided for in their law. Crucifixion was a traditional Roman form of executing political criminals.

Who was Responsible for the Crucifixion?

At a distance of some twenty centuries it is difficult to be certain of the extent to which the Jewish leadership was actually involved but some points should be made:

- (a) It is not likely that the whole of the Sanhedrin would assemble, as Mark suggests, in the official residence of the High Priest (Mark 14:53) rather than in the Judgement Hall or official courtroom. Matthew, Luke and John speak of a smaller meeting, perhaps something like an executive committee.
- (b) It is noteworthy that the Pharisees with whom from time to time Jesus had clashed in argument (but also remember that some Pharisees had attempted to save the life of Jesus, Luke 13:31) do not appear in the passion and crucifixion story at all. They were not responsible for the Temple and its ceremonies. Nor were the method and content of their teaching or their status in society endangered by the rabbi from Nazareth. In many ways Jesus teaching seemed to parallel theirs and to the outsider he might even have appeared to be one of them.¹
- (c) According to the Gospels the majority of the people were on the side of Jesus, they hung on his words. A riot in favour of Jesus was feared and the authorities had to get rid of him quickly. The hostile crowd that is described as present outside the Roman Governor's palace was in all likelihood no more than a rabble hired by the executive to assist in their cause.
- (d) One passage that has often been cited as evidence of Jewish guilt in Christ's death and to justify their punishment is Matthew 27:24-25.

Pontius Pilate is portrayed as washing his hands before the crowd and protesting his innocence of Jesus' blood, to which they respond, "His blood be on us and on our children!" It should be pointed out, however, that the washing of hands as a sign of innocence is a Jewish rather than a Roman practice (see Deuteronomy 21: 1-9) and Pilate is highly unlikely to have done it. In any event it is impossible to speak as though the whole Jewish people were implicated in the event when it is clear that those present were no more than an organized mob. A certain theological bent rather than historical fact lies behind these verses, and what unbelievable miseries have they been responsible for!

To sum up briefly: in no way can it be said that all "the Jews" of the New Testament generation were responsible for the crucifixion and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Nor is there, of course, the slightest justification for holding Jews of subsequent times responsible.

The Portrayal of the Jews in John's Gospel

A more hostile attitude towards the Jews seems to be taken in the Gospel according to John. In several places in the Gospel the adversaries of Jesus are simply named "the Jews." We should be aware, however, that this Gospel was most likely written at a relatively late date, after the breach between the Christian community and the synagogue had taken place. This is hinted at in John 9:22. By then it was in the interest of the Christian community to stress the differences between itself and the "Mother Church," the Synagogue. Outward events helped to accentuate the division, for example the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in the year 70, widely seen by Christians as an outward and visible sign that God's favour had shifted away from the Jews. To lay the blame for the crucifixion at the feet of the Jewish community was a consequence of this "displacement" theology.

Considering, as has already been seen, that by no means all of the people were actively engaged in the events leading up to the crucifixion, we need not see John's language as trying to correct the reports of the first three Gospels. Perhaps, instead of "the Jews" in the inclusive sense we might try to read "the other Jews" or "the adversaries of Jesus" or "the Jewish leaders." Sometimes the term simply means people from the province of Judea. When reading this gospel, then, we should take seriously the approach that is found in the rubrics for the Good Friday liturgy of the *Book of Alternative Services* which suggests that the term "the Jews" in St. John's Gospel applies to particular individuals and not to the whole Jewish people. Insofar as we ourselves turn against Christ, the note goes on to say, we are responsible for his death.²

In the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42) he made the statement that "salvation is from the Jews." The discussion between him, a Jew, and the Samaritan woman was about the place of worship, Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem. Jesus made the point that worship must take place in spirit and in truth regardless of location. He indicated that the Jewish place of worship was better or, rather, more appropriate. The Jews knew that salvation was from within their midst, the permanent prerogative of Israel out of whom the Messiah would come. Israel's special vocation is proclaimed and that in a supposedly anti-Judaic gospel!

Israel's Place in the History of Salvation

The debate about the spiritual or religious fate of "the Jews" must have started early in the Christian community, in fact soon after the crucifixion and well before any of the Gospels had been written. "The Jews," as represented by their leaders, were taken as responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth who had been widely acclaimed as the Messiah and acknowledged by the Father through

his being raised from the dead. The question now arose: what about the future of the Jews, of Israel? Are they lost and condemned for ever? Was killing Jesus committing deicide? Were they not the chosen people who had longed and hoped for the Messiah? Christians came to believe that those who rejected Jesus as Messiah had thereby forfeited their place in God's scheme of things and that the vacated position was occupied by those who did believe in Jesus. One must not forget, however, that at least in the beginning this was an internal debate between those Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah and those who did not. It was not yet a Gentile-Jewish or Christian-Jewish dispute in the way we might understand it today.

St. Paul and the Jews

St. Paul takes up the discussion. Listen to his testimony to the Christians of Rome: "In no way have the Jews lost their position in God's salvation history! I who was born a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, and highly educated in Jewish law and religion, am now a disciple and messenger of Jesus of Nazareth. I would like to remind you of a few facts. To the Jews (I am one of them, don't forget) 'belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants and the promises' (Romans 9:4-5). God who has chosen them simply because he loved, them loves them still, 'for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable' (Romans 11:29)."

Temporarily—and we should remember that the first generation of Christians expected the imminent return of Jesus and the ending of all history—some Jews did not believe in the Messiah Jesus, but Paul was confident that they all would (Romans 11:25f). Others did believe, like Paul, the apostles, the women in the Passion story, and many more. It is important to reiterate this point, that the original breach was not between Gentile and Jew or between Christian and Jew, but between Jew and Jew—"Christian" Jew and "Jewish" Jew.

Since the beginning of the second century those Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah have been called apostates by the Jewish community. In their own eyes, however, the followers of Jesus were the true Jews whereas, for the time being, the hearts of the others were felt to be hardened because of their refusal to recognize the Messianic event of Jesus' death and resurrection. Christian Jews were in their own understanding citizens with dual nationality, member of the Jewish people as well as of the congregation of Jesus Christ.³ While Paul, as a Jew, was deeply concerned about the present and future of Israel his main interest was with pagans and Gentiles. According to the decision of the first recorded Church Council (Acts 15:6-29) Gentile Christians did not have to observe the Torah. Their only pro-Jewish obligation was to remember the poor in the Jerusalem congregation. Jewish Christians on the other hand continue to worship in the Temple and were still bound to the Torah, the Law.⁴ Both groups, of course, had to live moral lives.

Christ and the Torah thus were not seen as cancelling each other out. Jesus was not the Law's historical end, as Paul's words seem to suggest. Jesus saw himself as re- interpreting but not doing away with the Law (see Matthew 5:17-20)⁵ and now his disciples and followers should go on joyfully being guided by it in their master's spirit. The coming of Jesus is not the end of the Jews (or the Torah) in God's plan. It is, rather the opening of doors to let the multitude of gentiles in. The drama goes on, the players remain on the stage, but their numbers have been increased.

Notes

1. The apparent hostility of Jesus to the Pharisees may well reflect a later development in the relationship between the early Christian community and the Pharisees as the leaders of the Jewish community after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70. The breach between the two groups was growing wider and on both sides attitudes became increasingly hostile.
2. *The Book of Alternative Services*, Good Friday liturgy, page 309.
3. For St. Paul, there are, in a certain sense, two Israels between now and the end. Not one true and the other false, but Israel as the holy remnant (Romans 11:5), the Christian Jews and the rest. This holy remnant should be seen as proof against the rejection or repudiation of the Jewish people. It is a kind of down payment on the salvation of the whole of Israel, its first fruits. Those Jews who did not accept the Gospel are still Israelites (Romans 9:4), God's people (Romans 11:1) or, together with Jewish Christians, "all Israel" (Romans 11:26). For Paul the term "Israel" cannot be applied to the Christian community unless it includes Christian Jews. It is not applicable to a purely Gentile Christian community or congregation. The Church as the "New Israel" does not seem to appear prior to Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century, and certainly not in the New Testament.
4. Probably the letter of James should be read with this in mind.
5. Notice, for example, how Matthew the evangelist purposefully wrote his gospel in five sections paralleling the Torah, the five Books of Moses.

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Suggestions for Discussion

1. Discuss the suggestion that Jesus may have been in the tradition of the Pharisees.
2. What are the implications of the fact that crucifixion was a Roman, not a Jewish form of execution?
3. Reread, and discuss, the Passion story according to John, but substitute for “the Jews” such expressions as “the adversaries of Jesus,” “other Jews,” or “the Jewish leaders.”
4. Consider the suggestion that God’s covenant with the Jews remains valid, even after the coming of Christ.



UNIT THREE

THE WIDENING OF THE BREACH

Unit Summary

When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century it was able to entrench its privileged position, with negative consequences for the Jews. Writers and preachers depicted them as wicked people, rejected by God. Relationships between Jews and Christians were increasingly restricted by law. In medieval Europe Jews lived in a precarious position, ghettos and distinctive clothing were introduced and they were accused of such crimes as the poisoning of wells and the ritual murder of Christian children. Pawnbroking and moneylending were among the few occupations open to Jews, which only added to their unpopularity.

The sixteenth century Reformation at first promised a new era, but the friendship of reformers like Martin Luther turned to hatred when the Jews proved no more amenable to Protestant teaching than they had been to that of the medieval Church. Jews were among the first to benefit from the new attitudes of the Enlightenment. However, with the emergence of racist theories anti-Semitism arose as a secular counterpart to religious anti-Judaism. Meanwhile, many Jews had adopted the lifestyle of their Gentile neighbours and made important contributions to the social and intellectual life of Europe in the years prior to the First World War.

The Rupture between the Church and the Jewish Community

It would be unfair and also incorrect to maintain that the roots of the Holocaust lie exclusively within the Christian Church. It cannot be denied, however, that parts of the New Testament appear to be strongly anti-Jewish, that some of the Church Fathers and later Christian leaders like Martin Luther were full of anti-Jewish bias and that the actions of many church councils were reprehensible. In enumerating the causes of the Holocaust mention must also be made of other than strictly religious ones, particularly political decisions and actions. Measures were sometimes

undertaken by the Church on order of the civil authorities but at other times it was the Church that provided inspiration, if not active encouragement. In view of the purpose for which this paper was written, major stress will be laid on developments within the Church and Christian theology that contributed to the Holocaust but it must be stressed that there have been other influences as well.

The destruction in the year 70 of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman army under Titus had several consequences. It brought the Jewish puppet government of the Sadducean regime to an end. For nineteen centuries, until the State of Israel was founded in 1948, Jews as a people were without a state or political responsibility for a territory. In Christian eyes, God's presence had departed from this people and divine favour had shifted from them. The fact that from now on the headquarters of the two communities were at different places did not foster good relationships. The Christians moved to Pella, east of the Jordan, and the Jews to Jabne-Jamnia, then to Babylon which had been the second Jewish centre since 556 BCE. Up until then Jewish Christians continued to worship in the synagogues. At this time they were declared a heretical sect and, to make it impossible for Christians to worship there any longer, a curse on them was inserted into the twelfth of the daily blessings (**Birkat-ha-minim**).¹ During this period the Jews also completed their organizational structure by firmly establishing the synagogue system worked out by the Pharisees, finalizing the canon of Jewish scripture and the calendar and by making the Rabbi a *de facto* leader of the community who played a multiple role as teacher, exegete, judge and arbitrator.

The breach became wider after 135 when a period of general unrest ended with the revolt and death of Simon Bar Kochba. In conflict with the Emperor Hadrian who intended to rebuild the city and temple of Jerusalem along Graeco-Roman lines, Bar Kochba had declared himself as the Messiah and received wide support. Obviously, there could not be two messiahs and each of the two groups, Christian and Jewish, in following their own could not but be hostile to the other.

The hostility increased when the Jewish Patriarch of Palestine sent letters to Jews outside of Palestine, not only to request money as a substitute for the old Temple tax but also to condemn and curse those who did not keep the Law and had accepted Jesus as Messiah. Jesus' teaching and his resurrection were formally condemned. On the other hand, Christians could not entirely do without Jewish protection. Judaism was still recognized as a *religio licita*, an officially recognized and permitted religion in the Roman Empire and Christians had lived as members of one of the sects of that religion. Being officially condemned by and excluded from the synagogue meant that Christians now had to justify their own existence.

They began to re-interpret the Hebrew scriptures, declaring them to be their Old Testament. The Jews were thus disinherited from their own sacred books. All that was promise and encouragement in the Hebrew Bible was said to have passed to the Christians. The Law and the Promises were said to point to Jesus as the Messiah and by rejecting him the Jews were believed to have lost their share in them. The history of Israel came to be interpreted as a history of decline and defection, its downward movement finally ending with the murder of God. Jewish suffering was said to be a punishment for their faithlessness.

While a break personal and took place on the level of leadership there are stories of professional friendships between Christian and Jewish theologians, of patient discussion between them, of Christians taking lessons in Hebrew, of daily contact between ordinary people both living in a pagan environment. Passover and Easter were often celebrated together until the fourth century. Nor was Jewish life as different then from life of Christians as it later became in the ghetto. In spite of such

friendly relations the consequences of the religious breach were unavoidable. From this time on Christianity had to make its own peace with Rome. It could not and did not want to be seen any longer as a subdivision of Judaism.

The Constantinian Settlement

The next turning point in the alienation between the two communities was reached in the fourth century when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine. It proved decisive for the future whether seen as the taking over of Christianity by the Emperor and its incorporation into the state or simply as its recognition as the most important religion. The consequences for other religious communities were grim, especially for Judaism. The good fortune of the Christians was soon turned into the misfortune of the Jews. The attitude of the Emperor was matched by the imperialism of the Church, the legislation of the one shaping the life of the other. Church laws and state laws became indistinguishable. The Christian hierarchy did everything in its power to enhance its position and diminish that of the Jewish community. By this time the majority of Christians were Gentile converts and when required to adopt Christianity they were more often than not only nominal adherents.

To most fourth century writers and preachers the Jew was not a contemporary human being at all but a theological abstraction or caricature. If contemporary Jews looked and behaved as normal human beings it was felt that they must have disguised themselves to deceive their neighbours! The special place of Israel in God's plan of salvation was not acknowledged by the Church Fathers. All the curses in the Old Testament were applied to one group, the Jews, and all the blessings to their heirs and successors, the Christians. This reading of Jewish history guided both official and popular Christian thinking for centuries to come, even into the present.

Sermons in those days fulfilled both ecclesiastical and political purposes. They were not only to guide and instruct the faithful but were also a means of publicizing laws and ordinances that either Church or state had introduced or intended introduce. Thus Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, spoke against synagogues as temples of impiety, the homes of devils and idolaters. They were worse than the circuses of the heathen and to enter them was an act of blasphemy. Anyone who celebrated the Jewish Passover with neighbours or friends was insulting Christ.

Perhaps the most violent anti-Jewish preacher was John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople. In his Eight Orations against the Jews he preached against synagogues, the Passover, the absence of a lawful Jewish ministry, Jewish failure to understand the scriptures properly, Jewish festivals, and Christians who had sympathy for Jews or fellowship with them.

Councils of the Church tried to prevent Christians and Jews from mixing. Marriage between Jews and Christians was prohibited, as was the exchanging of gifts or the accepting of hospitality offered by Jews. Jews were forbidden to own slaves, and thus could no longer own and work land or operate industries. New synagogues could not be built and missionary activities were forbidden. Jews were excluded from the military, could not act as advocates in court or become civil servants. The question must be asked, however, whether these laws would have been necessary had such things not been part and parcel of ordinary social life and relationships?

In spite of the multitude of restrictive measures, Jews had spread across the Mediterranean world by the eighth century: to Spain, then into Frankish and Teutonic territory, and the valleys of the Rhine and the Moselle. In the West they could still engage in agriculture and commerce, and in the

Iberian Peninsula after the rise of Islam they often served as intermediaries between Christians and Muslims, as they were trusted by both sides. The two communities, Christian and Jewish, lived relatively peacefully side by side. There were, of course, local difficulties from time to time, such as the expulsion of the Jews from Mainz by the Emperor Henry II in 1012, but on the whole life was peaceful and the future looked bright.

The Crusades

Things changed with Pope Urban II's call in 1095 for the first Crusade which opened a period of persecution such as Jews had never before experienced. The largely undisciplined hordes of Crusaders began to argue, "why should we trek to the Holy Land to free Jerusalem from Christ's Muslim enemies while we have his Jewish enemies in our midst?" Apostasy or death were the options offered to the Jews especially those living along the Rhine valley and in France who, it should pointed out, were often protected by the local bishop or even the king.

Since the Jews were no longer needed as traders or middlemen, and their farms were destroyed they were forced into becoming moneylenders and pawnbrokers. They were accused of plotting against Christians, poisoning wells and the ritual murder of children. Ordered to wear distinctive badges or clothing they were often also made to live in special districts and by the time of the Reformation ghettos had become obligatory. These were enclosed districts or streets, closed at night. Their books were publicly burnt in Paris in 1242 and 1248. Pope Innocent III in the thirteenth century officially declared the Jews guilty of the Crucifixion, and for their guilt they were condemned like Cain to be wanderers and fugitives for ever. The Inquisition, established in 1233 against Christian heretics, was used in Spain in the fifteenth century to weed out Jews who had become nominal Christians but still practised their religion in secret.

In 1290 the Jews were expelled from England to France, a century later from France to Spain only to be thrown out again after another hundred years. On the other hand a voluntary migration took place towards the East, to Lithuania and Poland, which came to have the largest number of Jews in Europe.

The Influence of Luther

The next low point in the history of Christian-Jewish relations occurred in the days of Martin Luther (1483-1546). After 1517 Luther had become immensely popular and was perceived not only as a reformer of the Church but also as a national hero in Germany. Many common people and their leaders, including regional princes and electors, had begun to follow him. Luther had taken lessons in Hebrew from the famous humanist scholar Johannes Reuchlin. Reuchlin had recently come to the rescue of Jews in Frankfurt and Cologne where copies of the Talmud had been publicly burned by Pfefferkorn a violently anti-Jewish convert from Judaism. Luther was willing to follow Reuchlin's advice to study Jewish books rather than burn them. His lectures on the book of Genesis are proof of this. He saw the Jews as early protesters against the Church and was willing to assist them. In return, he seems to have expected a mass conversion toward the new Protestant movement. In a pamphlet entitled *Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* he declared that Jesus belonged more to the Jews than to German Gentiles and that they should be treated kindly and with Christian love rather than with the "law of the Pope." He wrote of the shameful way in which Jews had been treated by Christians throughout history, "as if they were dogs and not human beings."

However, in the course of time Luther was forced to recognize that the expected mass conversion of the Jews was not to be fulfilled. They appeared to be as little interested in his interpretation of the Gospel than they had been in that preached by the Church during the previous fifteen hundred years. He was bitterly disappointed and three years before his death in 1546 he wrote a pamphlet, *Of the Jews and their Lies*, the tone of which was so vile that it has hardly been surpassed since.² In fact, much that can be found elsewhere was taken straight from Luther. While a great deal of the anti-Semitism that was found in so many Lutheran churches had its origin in this pamphlet, it should also be pointed out that the Lutheran churches since then have strongly repudiated anti-Semitism.

Consequences of the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment, or Age of Reason as it has also been called, began as a trend of thinking at the end of the nineteenth century. The rationalism of Descartes, Newton's discovery of a fundamental universal order, and the empiricism of Francis Bacon were influences leading towards it. Its aim was the application of rational and scientific thought to social, political, economic and religious issues. An end was to be made of medieval (including of course Reformation) attitudes of religious intolerance and obscurantism, but also of the restrictions on trade and commercial enterprises. Freedom, reason and humanitarianism became the slogans by which people should live. The Rights of Man (today we might say human rights) were proclaimed not only by philosophers and essayists in England, France and Germany but also by the "enlightened despots," as they wanted to be known, in Russia, Prussia, Austria and Spain.

As the most despised section of society the Jews were to benefit most by the Enlightenment. It must not be forgotten, however, that human rights are not necessarily the same as civil rights and it took years for Jews to gain full recognition as citizens. France in 1791 was first, followed by Holland and Prussia in 1796 and 1812, respectively. Oddly enough, England officially followed very much later but by then the social integration of the Jews had been in effect for a long time.

It might well have appeared to the Jews that their troubles were almost over and that the persecution they had suffered for hundreds of years was about to end. Alas, this was not to be the case. Objections to their civil liberation came from the circles that had the most to fear for their property and privileges: the army, landowners, and the middle class which was becoming more affluent because of the Industrial Revolution.

The victories of Napoleon Bonaparte also influenced the thinking of the educated classes and of the general population. This enemy from outside who had to be defeated with the help of other nations left a lasting impression on professors, writers and journalists—those responsible for the mental development and education of their fellow citizens. The Napoleonic wars showed them that states came and went, their boundaries could be changed and bypassed. Something more permanent was needed to provide a firm foundation for both personal and political life. Thus was born the idea of the nation, or *volk*, natural in the sense of being God given and not man made and thus changeable.

Before all else, there was the nation. It had to be preserved in its purity at all costs. Foreigners could not be members of it, but were accommodated and looked down upon. The Jews, spread out among the nations, were seen as bent on destroying the unity of the nation and were therefore particularly unwelcome. Their influence must be held in check if it could not be destroyed. A good deal of the Nazi anti-Jewish ideology was born in the thinking of nineteenth century Germany. The anti-Semitic propaganda which appeared in the daily press was barely surpassed during the time of

the Nazis. Popular riots in cities like Hamburg and Frankfurt and in towns and villages like those of Badenia and Bavaria forced the authorities to call out the army to suppress them. While the lives of individual Jews might have been reasonably safe, their existence as an identifiable group was rather less so.

In all of Christian history, the conflict between Christians and Jews had been a religious one, a struggle between two different religious faiths. In the middle of the nineteenth century the perspective changed. Anti-Judaism, as it had been so far, changed into anti-Semitism (a term originally belonging to the science of languages) and the struggle was transferred into the field of race. Judaism as a religion became unimportant although Jews continued to be depicted as enemies of Christ, and anti-Jewish sermons and Church pronouncements were common. Judaism as a race became the enemy. Race was seen as something fixed and immutable, something that could never be changed. Because of race the Jew was seen as evil and unchangeable, baptism would make no difference. Joseph Arthur de Gobineau's essay on the *Inequality of the Human Races*, which appeared in 1855, provided a pseudo-scientific foundation for subsequent racial theories. These were followed in Germany by the writings of the anti-religious philosopher Eugen Dühring and by Richard Wagner's English son-in-law Houston Stewart Chamberlain. His *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, originally written in German (1899) became a textbook for Nazi ideologues with its glorification of Teutonic achievements and violently anti-Semitic views.

Two other events, important for their influence on future developments, must be mentioned. The Dreyfuss affair took place in France in 1894, when a Jewish army captain was convicted of high treason for selling military secrets to Germany. He was sentenced and banned for life to Devil's Island. Emile Zola's book, *J'accuse*, along with the voices of many French people, including that of the President of France helped bring him back to Paris after four years but the damage had been done. Anti-Semitism divided the French population and helped to increase the number of socialists. It also fostered the growth of the Zionist movement among the Jews of Western Europe.³

Mention has also to be made of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, first published in France with financial help from the imperial Russian secret police. They purported to be the minutes of secret meetings of an international Jewish high command whose intention was to conquer and rule the world. The pamphlet first appeared in Russia and was widely used after 1917 by the monarchists against the October Revolution, in which Jews were involved. It has since been translated into many languages. Hitler knew it well and made use of it in his book *Mein Kampf*. So did Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg (*The Myth of the Twentieth Century*). *The Protocols* would hardly have been such a success in Russia and in Poland had there not been wave after wave of Jewish persecutions and pogroms (especially in the 1880s) though these were never of the magnitude of the Holocaust.

As a result of the Enlightenment countless Jewish individuals and families abandoned Jewish ways and assimilated into the majority in Germany, England and other western countries. Their influence on cultural, economic and political life was great, and they occupied chairs at universities, became writers and publicists, doctors and lawyers. They felt themselves to be Germans, British and so on. Consequently when war broke out in 1914 many of them fought for their countries alongside their fellow citizens. However the ideological framework for the events of the Holocaust had been firmly laid throughout European history, not least in the nineteenth century. Only a spark was need to set the structure ablaze. The Second World War and its aftermath provided it.

Notes

1. Some scholars, Christian as well as Jewish, point out that this particular insertion was developed well before the Christian era, although it may subsequently have been used to exclude Jewish-Christian worshippers.
2. "What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? ... First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. ... Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed for they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues. ... Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings... be taken from them. ... Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. ... Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. ... Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited for them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for ... the following: Whenever a Jew is sincerely converted, he should be handed one hundred, two hundred or three hundred florins, as personal circumstances may suggest. With this he could set himself up in some occupation for the support of his poor wife and children and the maintenance of the old or feeble. ... Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an axe, a hoe a spade, a distaff or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread with the sweat of their brow, as was imposed on the children of Adam." (Martin Luther, *On the Jews and their Lies*, quoted by Gritsch and Tannenbaum)
3. Theodor Herzl, an Austrian journalist, became louder and louder in his insistence that, "We are a nation, a nation," and demanded a territory Jews could call their own. The first Zionist congress convened and organized by him took place in Basle in 1897.

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Suggestions for Discussion

1. Identify examples of positive relations between Christians and Jews in your community today.
2. Do you have any Jewish friends or neighbours? How should Christians look at Jews and other faith communities?
3. How would you respond to someone who expounded nineteenth century theories of race today?
4. Does the history of Christian-Jewish relations as outlined affect you? What does it teach you?



UNIT FOUR

THE HOLOCAUST YEARS: 1933–1945

Unit Summary

After Adolf Hitler assumed power in Germany in 1933 the persecution of the Jews began. Jewish businesses were boycotted and Jews were stripped of citizenship, excluded from certain occupations and forbidden to marry Aryans. With the outbreak of war atrocities began against the Jews of eastern Europe, increasing in 1942 after Nazi leadership resolved to exterminate the Jews. Some six-million perished, along with several million others considered undesirable by the Nazis.

Most people in Germany and the occupied countries turned a blind eye to this brutality and there was little outcry from the official churches. Some have described this as a time of “mass apostasy,” although courageous individuals, including church leaders and ordinary lay people, risked their lives to save Jews from death. Meanwhile abroad, many governments, including that of Canada, hesitated to allow the entry of Jewish refugees.

After the war, the reaction of the Jewish community was one of trauma and horror, followed by much questioning. It was almost twenty years before there was much written about the Holocaust. Even today there are those who claim that the task of this generation of Jews is to collect the facts, leaving it to a future generation to analyze and try to explain.

Prelude to Extermination

If there are days in human history out of which nothing but evil could come, January 30, 1933, must surely be one of them. This was the day on which Adolf Hitler, the leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party (the Nazi Party) was named Chancellor of Germany, legally and constitutionally though not without tradeoffs behind the scenes between the parties of the

political right. To clarify that situation, elections were held on March 5 which gave the party an overwhelming victory. Economic, political and social conditions in Germany throughout the 1920s cried out for a strong leader who could bring order out of the existing chaos and lead the country into a future of peace and security. Another reason for wanting a political saviour was the fear that Russian Communism, the "Bolshevist peril," would spread into Germany and the West while conditions were so unstable.

Unfortunately, many middle-class people were ill prepared for what was to follow. It had been beneath their dignity to acquaint themselves with the former Austrian corporal, a house painter, street fighter and beer cellar orator. He had even written a book, published in 1923, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), but why should one take it seriously? It was full of exaggerated and hyperbolic language about things that could never happen in Germany, such as "a citizen can only be one who is a member of the nation; a member of the nation can only be one who is of German blood regardless of religious confession; no Jew therefore can be a member of the nation." Why should one bother about such things? There were not that many Jews in the first place and paragraph 24 of the Party program of 1923 declared that "the party stood for positive Christianity without binding itself in the matter of creed to any particular confession." That was good enough as a guarantee of civilized Christian behaviour even if the next sentence in the program stated that "the Party combats the Jewish spirit of materialism within and without."

Things developed rapidly. On April 1, 1933, a boycott of Jewish owned stores all over the country was declared. Those who wanted to enter them were forcibly prevented from doing so or had their names noted by Nazi "Brownshirts" stationed outside. A few days later, on April 7, the first anti-Jewish law was passed, a *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service*, which excluded all Jews except those who had served in the First World War. The practice of Jewish lawyers was severely restricted as was that of physicians. Entry into schools and universities was denied to children and young people of Jewish and half-Jewish extraction (those with two Jewish grandparents), including those had been baptized as Christians.

Local incidents of an anti-Semitic nature were plentiful. The Nazi press directed articles and comments at the Jews, particularly district leader Streicher's *Der Stuermer* (The Stormtrooper), with its vile and deliberately dirty anti-Jewish articles and caricatures. In 1933 about 500,000 Jews lived in Germany. During subsequent years many who had the opportunity left the country, sometimes for a neighbouring state where, after the outbreak of war, the Nazis caught up with them.

The next milestone in anti-Jewish measures was reached in September 1935. During the annual Nazi Party rally at Nueremberg the strongest anti-Jewish laws so far were proclaimed. From now on only members of the nation, so-called Aryans, were to be considered citizens with full rights and privileges. Jews could only be citizens of the state with duties to fulfill but without any rights. Marriages between Jews and Aryans were no longer allowed, and those between Aryans and half-Jews needed special permission which took months and years to obtain (unless a substantial financial contribution were made to the party treasury). Sexual relations between Jews and Aryans were punishable, and no Aryan woman below the age of 45 was allowed to do domestic work in a Jewish household. Shortly after, the right to take part in parliamentary elections was taken away.

During the Olympic Games in 1936 anti-Jewish signs and placards and other indications of official anti-Semitism were carefully removed to make a good impression on visiting foreigners and to tell them that what they had read in the press at home was not true or was at least grossly exaggerated.

A few token Jews were even encouraged to participate in the Winter Games at Garmisch-Partenkirchen and in the Summer Games at Berlin.

By November 1937 the privilege of obtaining passports to travel abroad was taken away, except in special cases like emigration. In July of the following year the right to certain jobs was cancelled and the order was issued that from next January first Jews had to carry special identity cards. From July 1938 Jewish physicians could only practice as “medical attendants” and in August of that year all Jews were required to add either Israel or Sarah to their first names if they were not already recognizably Jewish. Beginning that October Jewish passports had to be stamped with a large *J*.

In October 1938 large scale deportations of Jews began. Fifteen thousand Jews who had been declared stateless were sent to Poland, which was quite unwilling to receive them. They had to spend months in the region between the two countries, hungry and suffering appalling physical and sanitary conditions. Among them were the parents of a young Jew living at that time in Paris. In his despair he tried to assassinate a counsellor at the German Embassy who died two days after the attempt. On the urging of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, several days of anti-Jewish rioting followed, culminating in the “Crystal Night” (November 8, 1938), during which streets, public places and backyards were littered with glass from the shattered windows of synagogues, stores and Jewish homes.

As “reparation” for the assassination in Paris, a levy of one-billion marks was demanded from the entire Jewish community and the Jews were ordered to repair the damage of the Crystal Night at their own expense. As a further consequence, Jews could no longer own businesses and were forbidden to attend concerts, theatres or other cultural events. Shortly afterwards all Jewish business establishments were closed down and taken over by Nazis. Some districts were closed to Jews during certain hours of the day and local authorities were permitted to bar Jews from the streets on Nazi festivals and holidays. Universities were closed to them by the end of 1938. Real estate, securities and jewellery had to be handed over to the authorities. By the spring of 1939 the number of Jews in Germany had shrunk to 215,000.

The War Years

At the beginning of the war in September, a curfew was instituted and Jews had to hand over their radios. At once atrocities began against the Jews in Poland, carried out by the invading German army and by special detachments of the Nazi security forces. Jews from Austria began to be deported to Poland where all Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David.

With the invasion of Russia in June 1941 the last phase in dealing with “Jewish Question” began. A decree in that same month required all Jews to designate themselves as “unbelievers.” Jews in Germany henceforth also had to wear the Star of David and they could no longer leave their places of residence without the permission of the police. Jews were no longer to have any social contact with Germans, nor were they allowed to use public telephones. In October, large scale deportations of Jews to concentration camps began. By January 1942 their numbers in Germany had decreased to 130,000.

A conference was held on January 20, 1942, at Wannsee, a few kilometers outside Berlin, to come up with plans for the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” both in Germany and throughout occupied Europe. The conference, which was attended by high-ranking officials of various German ministries, the party and the special security services, was dominated by Reinhard Heydrich, who had been

appointed to execute Nazi plans for the fate of the Jews. Emigration and concentration camps had proved insufficient so a new solution had to be found. A few months earlier, in the autumn of 1941, the experimental gassing took place of inmates at camps near Posen and in Auschwitz. Now an all-out effort was called for. The labour required to build the extermination camps was to be provided by the Jews themselves. Those who were physically strong could be worked until they collapsed and died of exhaustion or were shot.

Jews were gathered from all over Europe and evacuated to camps in eastern Europe. Those transported to the east were told that they would have to work for the war effort. The ultimate reason for their journey would be kept secret from them and from the German population. All told, six extermination camps were built. These were different from ordinary concentration camps which, at the beginning of the Nazi period were advertised as “protection camps” in which the prisoners were supposedly being protected for their own good from the fury of the population. They were also termed “re-education camps.”

Many of the measures taken by Hitler against the Jews had been used before in history: ghettos, special dress, the yellow star, curfews, travel restrictions, supervision by police and neighbours.¹ What was new was the mass scale and the systematic application of modern technology. The pursuit of the war became less important than the destruction of the Jews in Germany and all over occupied Europe. Trains were diverted, new railway lines built and staffed, thousands of freight cars commandeered into which Jewish men, women and children were crowded. Units of the armed forces and the Nazi security guards were ordered to extermination camps in Poland and elsewhere. Engineers, chemists and physicists were directed away from the war effort to invent and supervise the means of destruction of millions of people. Ideology had to win at all costs! In order to create the heaven on earth that was to last for a thousand years, a hell had to be created first.

A Horror Beyond Imagining

Only after the war was the full extent of the genocide made known to most Germans and the world at large. More than six-million Jews, along with millions of Roma, Poles and other “undesirables” who stood in the way of the pure Aryan race the Nazis dreamed of, were cruelly murdered. Many questions are raised by this tragedy. How was it possible for the Nazis to divert so much of their effort from the war and pursue, against all strategic considerations, the attempt to rid the world of the Jews? Why did the Allies not interfere, but rather keep largely silent? Why just in Germany and by Germans when anti-Semitism had been much worse in the past in France and Russia? Why was there no active resistance to anti-Semitic laws and the deportation of the Jews from Germany and countries occupied by Germany?

To those who liberated the concentration camps in the spring of 1945 it must have seemed unbelievable, inhuman, godless. The full extent of the genocide might have been unknown to people in Germany and occupied Europe, but it would have been hard for them not to have had suspicions as the persecution of Jews and “non-Aryans” grew more open and “legal.” People had relatives coming home from eastern Europe where the extermination camps were located, soldiers and SS personnel directly involved in the atrocities. They must have talked to their wives, doctors, or pastors but they must also have said, “Keep quiet. Don’t mention it to anyone or you and I will pay for it with our lives or be sent to a re-education camp.” In the general atmosphere of terror and lack of freedom in which people lived, it worked. Many kept silent.

There were those who did help Jews avoid persecution and death. Throughout Europe many thousands were prepared to risk their own lives and safety by hiding Jews or smuggling them

across borders into neutral countries like Sweden and Switzerland, but these were exceptions in an otherwise bleak picture. The fact is that the Nazis could not have carried out their massive operation of combing Europe for Jews and transporting them to death camps without the willing cooperation of many people from high government officials to ordinary men and women.

While governments in Moscow, London, and Washington were aware of the plight of the Jews, political, military and strategic considerations kept them from doing very much. Even when it was possible for Jews to escape Nazi persecution they had difficulty finding a country that would receive them. The United States was unwilling to change its quota system to let in more persecuted Jews. At the beginning of the war Great Britain sheltered a mere 70,000 “refugees from Nazi oppression.” Australia admitted only a few thousand, South Africa allowed 26,000 into its territory, Argentina and Brazil each admitted something like 64,000. Canada, on the advice of the director of the Immigration Branch, Frederick Charles Blair, acted on the principle that “none is too many,” with the exception of several hundred who were mistakenly shipped to Canada as prisoners of war. The only country willing to receive Jews in large numbers was Palestine, but it was prevented from doing so by the mandatory power, Great Britain. A White Paper in 1939 fixed the number of Jews to be admitted per year at 15,000 and in fear of Arab reaction that figure was not to be changed under any circumstances.

A Time of Wholesale Apostasy

Considering that most of those who worked in the extermination camps had probably been baptized and the silence of both the churches and the population in general, it is surely no exaggeration on the part of Franklin H. Littell to speak of “wholesale apostasy” and of the “apostasy of the millions who collaborated.”² Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote against the persecution of the Jews and helped many to escape the country. In reaction to the Nazi treatment of the Jews he joined the underground movement against Hitler and was hanged a week before the war officially ended. The Church’s attitude towards the Jewish question, he wrote, will determine whether or not it is still Christian. The expulsion of the Jews from the West would necessarily bring with it the expulsion of Christ, for Christ was a Jew,³ but “the people of Israel will remain in eternity the people of God, the only people that will not pass away for God has become its Lord. God has taken residence in it and built his house.”⁴

The churches opposed Hitler but often only in reaction to attacks on its institutional life or its teachings, rather than to the persecution of the Jews. The Lutheran churches were badly divided. As early as 1932, the year before Hitler assumed power, the “German Christian” party was formed. It supported Nazi ideology, including the unification of the Church under one *Reichsbishop* and the purging from it of all converted Jews. Opposing them was the “Confessing Church,” formed in 1934 by those who were convinced that no compromise was possible with the Nazis. Eventually many of the leaders of this Confessing Church were arrested. Neither party ever received widespread support, however, and the majority of pastors and laity remained uncommitted.

Two Lutheran pastors, Grueber in Berlin and Maas in Heidelberg, were among those helping Jews and non-Aryan Christians to hide in Germany or to emigrate but they acted in an individual capacity out of their own Christian principles rather than obeying any official directive from their church. Traditions of anti-Jewish teaching and of subservience to the state proved too strong for most German Protestants to shake off. In occupied countries the situation was often quite different, and particular note should be made of the Protestant churches in Denmark, Norway, Holland and France, which objected publicly when deportations of Jews began.

Prominent Roman Catholics like Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich and Archbishop von Galen of Muenster also denounced Nazism and its anti-Semitic policies. Likewise, numerous clergy and lay people resisted persecution of the Jews. Particular mention should be made of Bernhard Lichtenberg, the courageous Roman Catholic Dean of Berlin who frequently protested in his parish magazine and died while being taken to a concentration camp. In occupied countries the pattern varied widely. Some, like the Dutch bishops, vigorously denounced the deportation of Jews to concentration camps or like the papal nuncio in Turkey, Mgr. Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII), were active in saving Jewish lives. Others, especially in countries with a strong anti-Semitic tradition, did very little.

Pope Pius XII's policy of neutrality toward the opposing powers has been the subject of considerable controversy. While he could not have helped knowing about atrocities against the Jews, his statements about Nazi race policies were guarded and ambiguous. However it must also be kept in mind that the Vatican, located in Axis territory, was extremely vulnerable and that despite this thousands of Jews were concealed in Roman Catholic institutions with the knowledge and consent of the Pope. He may also have feared that a strong statement would be ignored by those of his flock, and they were many, who supported the actions taken against the Jews.

Churches outside of Germany were well aware of the sufferings of the Jews. As early as September 1934 the General Synod of the Church of England in Canada (as it then was) had adopted a resolution deprecating as "a denial of the principles of Christianity, and therefore abhorrent to Christian people, the ill treatment of Jews or any other people by nations, communities or individuals, on account of their race or religion."⁵ When Nazi plans to exterminate the Jews became known in 1942, Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple denounced it as "a horror beyond what imagination can grasp"⁶ and along with George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, tried to persuade the British government to provide asylum to those able to escape from Nazi control. Willem Visser't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, then in the process of formation, joined with Gerhart Reigner of the World Jewish Congress in alerting the world to the slaughter and pleading on behalf of refugees.

In Canada, Canon W.W. Judd of the Anglican Church, the Rev. Claris Silcox of the United Church, and Raymond Booth of the Quakers participated actively, along with representatives of the Canadian Jewish Congress, in the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution. With Senator Cairine Wilson as president and Constance Hayward as general secretary, this committee fought unsuccessfully to persuade the Canadian government to take more Jewish refugees into the country.

What was the practical result of the actions of Church leaders and individual Christians on behalf of the Jews? It must, first, be admitted that they represented only a small minority and were outnumbered by those who were unable or unwilling to alleviate the sufferings of the Jews. Second, it must be recognized that centuries of Christian anti-Jewish teaching had helped create a climate in which people could participate in or remain indifferent to the fate of European Jewry. When they did speak out, the churches helped break the conspiracy of silence surrounding Nazi atrocities and, in countries under German control, encouraged individuals to help Jews escape death or at least refuse to cooperate in carrying out Hitler's race policies.

Jewish Reflections to the Holocaust

How did the Jewish community react to the devastation visited upon them? A very brief and incomplete answer shall be attempted here. After the first stunned silence various responses came out into the open. On the extreme Hasidic European right—what was left of it—a few spoke in terms of the Deuteronomic Law of sin and punishment. While one cannot but be impressed by such a biblically orthodox view even when facing the unbelievable evil of the Holocaust, one should not forget that the majority of European thinkers were closer in their appraisal to those of North America. In the United States, Richard Rubinstein in his book *After Auschwitz* maintained in effect that God was dead. Only on such an assumption could Auschwitz be grasped. Emil Fackenheim answers No! To assume that God is dead is tantamount to giving Hitler a posthumous victory by destroying the Jewish soul after the body had been gassed in the camps. He saw it as the 614th of the Jewish laws not to allow this to happen.

Elie Wiesel was silent for a long time. As a survivor he could not and did not want to speak, especially as God himself had so obviously remained silent. Why? Does and did God not care? Is God indifferent to the suffering of God's people? Is God mad? Can anyone argue with such a God? In general there is agreement that to be able to understand Auschwitz would be worse than not to understand it at all. It would mean the end of one's religious world view.

The rabbi towards the end of Wiesel's *The Gates of the Forest* says, "How can you not believe in God after what has happened?"⁷ Jews after Auschwitz feel, of course, justified in maintaining that the Messiah has not yet come and after the misery and evil of Auschwitz they are bound to ask more urgently than before, "When will he come?" Christians on the other hand, who maintain that he has come, are also faced with the question: why is there still so much evil in the world? This questioning about the Messiah unites Christians and Jews as much as it separates them. It is something that must be on the agenda of any current or future dialogue between the two faith communities.

Notes

1. See the informative table of comparisons between Christian and Nazi anti-Jewish measures in Eugene Fisher, *Homework for Christians*, p. 27.
2. Franklin Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, pp. 1-4, et al.
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p.70.
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Bible Study on King David*, 1935, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 310 (author's translation).
5. "That, the Upper House concurring, the General Synod of the Church of England in Canada extends to the Jewish people throughout the world its profound sympathy in view of the present world situation respecting that ancient race. That the General Synod has an adequate sense of the great debt that the world owes to the Jewish people for their contribution to human knowledge in the realms of Science, Literature and Religion. Above all, it would acknowledge with deep thankfulness that great treasury of revealed truth, the Old Testament Scriptures, was given and preserved through the instrumentality of the Jewish people; and it is ever mindful of the profound significance of the fact that Jesus Christ, our acknowledged Lord and Saviour, was, after the flesh, the son of David. It

deprecates, as being a denial of the principles of Christianity, and therefore abhorrent to Christian people, the ill- treatment of Jews or any other people by nations, communities or individuals, on account of their race or religion.” (*Proceedings of the General Synod of the Church of England in Canada, 1934*)

6. Martin Gilbert. *Auschwitz and the Allies*, page 100.
7. Elie Wiesel. *The Gates of the Forest*. p. 192.

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Suggestions for Discussion

1. How could an event like the Holocaust happen in a Christian society?
2. Where should one draw the line between obeying the law and obeying one's conscience?
3. How should we respond to a situation which occurred forty years ago? What answer would you give to someone who says it is better to focus on the future rather than dwell on the past?
4. What does the Holocaust have to say regarding our attitude toward repressive regimes or our acceptance of refugees into Canada today?



UNIT FIVE

JUDAISM: A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

Unit Summary

Jews today can look back on more than 3,000 years of continuous history. Despite suffering and persecution they have persisted as an ongoing viable community which maintains a positive approach to life and a positive view of the individual human being. The will to live of the community was reflected in the dream of rebuilding their homeland, which came to fulfillment with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

More than anything else Judaism is a way of life. Like any living thing the community is always changing and adapting in response both to its own inner needs and to external events. This response is guided by tradition, which from generation to generation involves the interplay of certain key concepts. These are: God, the individual human being, the community, the Land, and Torah, which includes both divine revelation and its human elaboration.

The vast array of human relationships is directed by three kinds of commandments, or mitzvot: between a human and God, between a human and other humans, and between a human and the self. It is the interplay of key concepts, internal development and external interaction, history and mitzvot that, consciously or often unconsciously, informs a Jew's existence at every moment.

A Celebration of Life

Despite the extreme hardships faced by Jews throughout the last 3,000 years Judaism is a celebration of life. In the face of the catastrophe of the Holocaust, itself an event of great pain which claimed the lives of one out of every three of the world's Jewish community, the tradition has maintained a positive approach to life and a positive view of the individual human being. It has continued to emphasize the importance of the experience in this world of the ordinary person at any given moment of existence.

God, Humanity and Covenant

The names by which God has been traditionally known give expression to the ways in which God has been understood in the Jewish tradition. The ancient Biblical name **YHWH**, or **Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh**, i.e. “I am what I am,” or “I shall be what I shall be,” suggests God’s timeless existence, while the biblical name **Elohim** suggests strength to be applied in a constructive sense; and the title **Adonai** indicates the lordship which derives from God’s being Creator. In the Judaism of the Graeco- Roman period, other names became current: **hassem**, “the name,” suggests the creative power of God, who brings both animate and inanimate objects into being and imparts identity through speech (e.g. “Let there be light...”), while **hamakom**, “the place,” suggests omnipresence, God is the place to be.

The epitome of God’s creation is the human. Judaism sees the reference to humanity’s being created in God’s image more as a challenge than as a simple statement of fact. Ancient Near Eastern people worshipped idols—forms. The theory underlying the use of the form was that it would be placed in the midst of the human community, in a special house (temple) designed for its comfort. If the form were a perfect fit, the god would indwell it, in-form it, and thereby dwell in the midst of the human community, which would benefit from the god’s presence. In the Jewish tradition the individual human, created in God’s image, is the form to be in-formed by God. Humans are, therefore, challenged to act accordingly. Judaism places a great emphasis on the worth of the ordinary individual. We lead our lives as partners with God in the ongoing creation of our world.

In the incident of the Garden of Eden, Judaism sees no “fall from grace.” Rather it is seen as representing a move toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose in creating us. The knowledge gained from the Tree of Knowledge is knowledge arising from an act of human free will and which in itself is liberating. It is variously understood as sexual knowledge, the key to procreation; the knowledge of the certainty of death, which ought to be a major stimulus for productive activity at every moment; or the general knowledge which permits us as testing, inquisitive and creative beings to apply the fruits of our testing and enquiry to the improvement of the human environment, the world in which God places us.

For all its delight, the Garden of Genesis 3 is far too limiting a place for human expression. This world—our world—is our garden. We enjoy its fruit because we have invested in its production. The woman of Genesis 3 is said to be “cursed” with pain in childbirth. The pain is indeed great, but the joy is great as well, as is the awareness of the great potential which each new human life holds. The birth experience itself—the forceful expulsion of the infant from the womb—shocks the new human being into a consciousness of life. This consciousness will develop and grow and will make great deeds possible. The expulsion from Eden may be understood in a similar manner. It was the stimulus necessary to set humanity on God’s intended course.

The relationship between the human and God, between one person and another, and the range of personal experience and feelings in response to the total environment is described most essentially by the concept of covenant which is the essence of Torah.

This notion of covenant—an arrangement, agreement or treaty which describes the relationships mentioned above—is modeled after the covenants which existed in the political world of the Ancient Near East. In its revolutionary transfer of this idea from the political realm to the arena of human-divine relations, Judaism freed the world from the ultimately limiting experience of the ancient world, with its many capricious gods and their conflicting interests, each demanding human allegiance. In Torah, God’s will is revealed and God’s expectations of humanity are stated. The great

scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel describes our God as a “God in search of man.” God’s first question to the human in Genesis 3 is, “Where are you?” God is asking, “Where are you in your relationship with me, given the actions which you have taken?” Human actions are significant in God’s eyes, and responsibility is a key element in human existence. God loves humanity, created in God’s own image, and through the biblical story God shows a readiness to accommodate to the human creature.

The covenants of promise with Noah (that the world would never again suffer global destruction) and with David (that the Davidic line will always be the source of the ultimate human leadership) gives a sense of security and confidence to the human community. The covenant at Sinai, in which God’s design for a productive and forward-moving human community is described, is the basis for the human challenge to make our world a place in which both humanity and nature experience the greatest pleasure and joy. The ritual and ethical expectations of the covenant complement each other, and serve the purpose of a celebration of life.

The Torah as revealed to the Jewish people is the blueprint for a model community. Torah is not at all static, but evolves in harmony with changing human experience. It is intended for everyday use, for every person. Deuteronomy says, “It is not in heaven,” that is, it is not distant or out of reach. It is a realistic plan, and poses realistic challenges. In particular, it recognizes that the greatest human achievements will occur when humans work together, in community, to make their world a more wonderful place. The productive expression of any contemporary community is the accumulated expression of the decisions made by of the historical community, of all who have gone before. There is a deep sense in Judaism of the attachment simultaneously of one Jew to all contemporary Jews and to all Jews who have ever lived. Thus, Jews identify with the joy and the pain of Jewish existence through the ages.

The Special Place of the Land of Israel

Although Judaism is not predominantly occupied with consideration of space or place, God being the key space (*makon*) as noted above, the Land of Israel is a most special place, for it is there that the model community described by Torah found its first expression. As the home of the model community, the Land is to be a model land. Its varied landscape and its central location in the ancient world suggest that it is to be the real-world reflection of the Garden of Genesis 3. This Land is the Garden in which through human knowledge, guided by covenant and articulated in communal action, the people is able to achieve greatness to be shared and enjoyed by all humanity. The end, in 1948, of the long separation of the majority of Jews from this special land, is seen by many Jews as the beginning of a process which will lead to the most productive expression of all the ideals which have been discussed.

Since its creation the State of Israel has progressively become a significant element of the religious, spiritual and moral life of Jews everywhere. This has been especially so since June 1967 when Jerusalem came under Israeli control during the Six- Day War.

The war had been preceded by weeks of terror in which Jews heard the threats and saw the preparations to push all Israeli Jews into the sea. The swift, dramatic, decisive and wholly unanticipated escape from disaster and the return to Jerusalem became a turning point for most Jews. They now identified with Israel as their reborn spiritual heritage, and as a wholly fresh and new venture for modern Jewish life. They came to appreciate that the rebirth of Israel represents a commitment to survival by the Jewish nation, the determination to rebuild itself after the onslaught of the Holocaust. After 2,000 years of being unable to defend themselves Jews would now have the

power to protect themselves and, more significantly, chart their destiny as a modern people with ancient roots.

Learning to use this power to create a new nation has been a source of constant challenges for the new state. These include ingathering vast numbers of Jewish refugees from Europe and Arab lands, building a modern and democratic society and creating a spiritual centre for world Jewry while attempting to defend itself and find a peaceful way to live with its neighbours. Jews are highly proud of its accomplishments while being acutely aware of the many problems that Israel faces. Indeed, Jews throughout the world try to act as responsible partners in the development of Israeli life. They are highly sensitive to issues that relate to the security, stability and morale of its citizens. Many Jewish communal activities in the Diaspora relate to Israel: lectures by prominent Israeli scholars or leaders, fundraising for educational and humanitarian purposes, and encouragement of economic investment. Visits to Israel are frequent and many youths pursue some part of their education there. All these activities give individual Jews and Jewish communities a meaningful sense of participation with Israeli Jews in the building of the nation.

All of this has led to a vital sense of Jewish communal and national identity which includes efforts to maintain well-served Diaspora communities with much attention given to aid for Jews in distressed circumstances such as in Russia, Syria and Ethiopia. Thus, the rebirth of the State of Israel in its ancestral covenanted land has signaled a renewed commitment to Jewish peoplehood, which has always been a significant element of the Jewish religious consciousness. In that perspective, the survival of the people through history is itself a sacred phenomenon, inspiring many Jews today—committed Jews as well as those somewhat alienated from the tradition to strengthen their Jewish attachments and even deepen their understanding of the religious, spiritual and moral teachings that constitute their heritage.

Living Out the Covenant

While the concepts which have been described—God, the individual, Torah and community, and the Land—interact and, in so doing inform all of Jewish existence, most Jews experience these concepts in an indirect way. Jewish life is in the living out of the interplay of these often subconscious concepts. While certainly appreciating the significance of contemplation, the Jewish tradition is primarily focused on action. Human interactions, with one another, within the self, and with the cosmos, are directed by Torah and, specifically, by commandments or directives (*mitzvot*) based on the ancient Jewish scriptures and elaborated upon each generation and in each place where Jews live. This elaboration is part and parcel of the tradition itself. It responds to the new challenges of time and place and benefits from the accumulated experience of the worldwide Jewish community, as well as the worldwide community of all peoples, Jews having lived among many peoples and having benefited from their insights as well.

For a Jew, living a Jewish life is living a life of service to God. In a sense, every act is liturgical and every action one of prayer or praise. At the same time, various *mitzvot*, particularly in the area of ritual, are specific as to time: the hour of the day for daily prayers, or the season of the year for seasonal festivals; or place: the synagogue for communal prayer and study (although any place where a group of 10 gathers is suitable), or the home for the many home-based rituals. As Jews do *mitzvot* they act on the terms of their covenant with God, and address the challenge of being created in God's image. Human beings complete that image through their actions, and in so doing serve the goal of *tikkun olam*, drawing out the unity and wholeness of our world.

Jewish tradition identifies three types of commandments or *mitzvot*, which cover the range of human experience. Not all Jews, as they lead their lives and interact with other people or the natural environment, are conscious of the specific *mitzvot* involved. While the tradition appreciates the importance of the conscious carrying out of obligations to God and others what is ultimately important is the action, not the conscious awareness of its fit in the system.

Three types of *mitzvot* can be identified: (1) *bein adam Lamakom*, i.e. between a human being and God; (2) *bein adam lechavero*, i.e. between a human being and other humans; and (3) *bein adam l'atzmo*, i.e. between a human being and the self—within one's self.

The category ***bein adam Lamakom*** includes the vast bulk of ritual law, including the marking of special days (such as festivals or the Sabbath), the dietary rules, and rules in harmony with the cycles of nature. It deals with areas of life which have cosmic as well as communal aspects. The festival cycle makes Jews sensitive to time. Dietary rules—what can and cannot be eaten, the circumstances and manner in which an animal's life may be taken for the purpose of food, and which mixtures of food types are permitted and which not—serve to sensitize Jewish people to the life of non-human creations and to ecological interaction. Rules which call attention to relations within natural cycles of human existence specifically, the menstrual cycle, seek to make Jews aware of the special nature of human procreation, and the ability to repeat in every generation God's own creative act.

Processes and related acts which mark key moments in the life cycle are ***bein adam lechavero***, especially those acts by which an individual moves into new phases of personal and community involvement. These include rites of passage such as birth, circumcision, Bar/Bat Mitzvah (the time of achieving the age of majority and responsibility), marriage, childbearing, aging, and death, as well as education in the moral and ethical life. This category may be seen as addressing both communal and individual concerns, and especially the life of the individual in community.

Individual and personal concerns are the focus of the category ***bein adam l'atzmo***. This includes a commitment to reflection and critical self-evaluation and personal development through study and prayer.

A key message through the entire course of Jewish life is that knowledge is precious and education is thus absolutely essential. Educational pursuits are worthy and enquiry valuable. Humanity is intended to aspire to greater and greater knowledge and to make use of its fruits, in the realm of technology as much as in the realm of spirituality. Actions flowing from knowledge, taken responsibly and mindful of the range of the possible result of any human action, is what permits the world to advance, to become a better place. Critical self-evaluation, by an individual as well as by a society, is essential so that the human community might stay “on track” towards its ultimate goals. Freedom is crucial for the maximum benefit of all, and individual freedom is to be limited only to ensure that one person's expression of freedom does not deprive another of the same.

Jewish Life in Society and in History

Jewish tradition has a deep historical and social consciousness. For some contemporary Jews their identification with the Jewish people may be largely through their commitment to social action. Others may express their identification more through connection with Jewish history (“fate”) than with Jewish ritual practice or spiritual reflection (“faith”). Whatever the particular emphases of individual Jews or Jewish communities from time to time and from place to place, the entire

complex of Judaism—key concepts, *mitzvot*, and the history of internal development and external interactions—informs a Jew’s existence at every moment. A Jew experiences Jewish history as a balancing of joy and pain, of both acceptance and rejection by others. The Holocaust looms large as the catastrophically horrifying and ultimately disappointing example of such rejection. It is horrifying in its pain and in its destruction of a way of life. It is disappointing in that it subverted and, for many Jews, continues to subvert, faith in the essential goodness of others. It is a fact that the churches remained essentially silent during the destruction of one of every three Jews and that the Nazis proudly pointed to two millennia of Christian history for precedent in enacting increasingly hostile measures. It is deeply disappointing that in a time of such great need, so few hands that had taken Holy Communion were outstretched to offer life. There is no easy recovery from such physical and emotional scars as those the Holocaust inflicted. In many ways, there is no recovery at all. The great challenge is to not let those scars be incapacitating.

As a tradition which loves life, loves all people and aspires to the betterment of our world, Jewish daily life is a balancing of tradition and change, as well as interaction with all people and the natural world. For Judaism, the challenges and exciting potentials of existence are the essentials of life, and the path to such positive challenges, attachment to the tradition, is a social obligation to pass on. Deuteronomy calls out: “Therefore, choose life.” Jews choose life! And their involvement in life, as individuals and in community, is cause for celebration.

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Suggestions for Discussion

1. This unit does not present a list of distinctive Jewish religious teachings, customs and holidays but attempts to show the underlying concepts which shape Jewish life. In what ways is this helpful, and in what ways is it not?
2. What are the implications for an understanding of human life and salvation of the absence in Judaism of a notion of a “fall from grace”?
3. Do you understand how some Jews can say that it is theoretically possible to be a good Jew, and a good human being, but not think very often of God? How does this compare with Christian self-understanding?
4. Does this exposition help you understand how Jews have adapted to life in many settings throughout the Diaspora? What misunderstandings regarding the Jewish community have arisen in this regard?



unit SIX

TOWARD A FUTURE DIFFERENT FROM THE PAST

Unit Summary

*The Holocaust has stimulated a revision of Christian attitudes toward the Jews. A landmark in this regard was the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council, which repudiated anti-Jewish teaching in the Roman Catholic Church. The World Council of Churches and many churches, including the Anglican Church of Canada, have issued similar statements.*

There are many signs of this renewed relationship, including the production of worship and educational materials which attempt to promote positive attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. There has also been collaboration between the churches and the Jewish community on contemporary social issues.

One issue which needs particular attention is the differing Christian and Jewish perspectives on Israel. The rebirth of Israel was of tremendous significance to Jews but Christians have attitudes that have sometimes been ambivalent. While one may criticize the policies of a particular Israeli government, as do many Jews, Christians who seek understanding and reconciliation must recognize the importance of the Land of Israel in the Jewish consciousness.

Dialogue, which involves mutual acceptance and respect, is required as a means of building and sustaining the trust necessary for Christians and Jews to work together on behalf of the unity and wholeness of the world.

What Hope for the Future?

Let us begin with a passage from Andre Schwartz-Bart's novel, *The Last of the Just*, set in Nazi-occupied Paris. The characters concerned are two young Jews:

*He (Jesus) was really a good Jew, you know—a merciful man, and gentle. The Christians say they love him, but I think they hate him without knowing it. So they take the cross by the other end and make a sword of it and strike us with it. You understand, Golda ... they take the cross and they turn it around, they turn it round, my God! ... Poor Jesus, if he came back to earth and saw that the pagans had made a sword out of him and used it against his sisters and brothers, he'd be sad. He'd grieve forever. And maybe he does see it!*¹

The novelist poignantly summarizes what has been a common pattern in the Christian world's attitude and behaviour toward Jews and Judaism for nearly 20 centuries. What of the future Christian-Jewish relationships? In light of the truly dreadful past, is there any realistic hope for a radically different future? On what basis must such a future be built, and is there both the knowledge and the will to do so?

These questions are prompted by both the past history of Christian-Jewish relationships and presently available knowledge which, if taken seriously, must lead to a radical rethinking of self-understanding among the followers of the faithful Jew, Jesus. Among the many interrelated factors which have led Christian thinkers, as well as ordinary lay folk, to engage in such a task, few are as significant as the horror known as the Holocaust or the rebirth in modern times of the State of Israel. To these two events should be added the discovery of the Qumran documents and developments in biblical scholarship.

Two points must be kept in mind at the outset. First, anti-Semitism as an historical phenomenon predates the advent of Christianity on the world scene. Secondly, Christian anti-Semitism has proved far more lasting and widespread than anything known in "pagan" (especially Graeco-Roman) history. The latter is hardly surprising when one considers the potential of a theologically-based prejudice. What could be worse than to invest a human tendency to fear, and hence to hate, "the other" with a supposedly divine sanction? The example of so-called "religious wars" - such as the Crusades, the Thirty-Years War and more recent conflicts in Northern Ireland, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East are well known. The mix of human competitiveness and theological rationalization in the Church's relationship to the Jews proved disastrous for the latter.

Theological Distortions

If such tragic attitudes and behaviour are never to recur, then Christians must be aware, and rid themselves, of several distorted theological rationalizations:

1. There is the charge—perhaps historically the most pernicious—that the Jewish people, both of Jesus' time and ever since, were collectively guilty of his death. As Jesus is, according to orthodox Christian belief, the incarnation of God, the charge became not mere homicide but "deicide." From a strictly historical perspective this charge is ludicrous and baseless. Most Jews of Jesus' time in Palestine, as well as the vast majority of Jews dispersed throughout the Graeco-Roman world, knew nothing of Jesus. The assertion of collective guilt is also untenable in the light of the developed ethics of both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament itself.
2. It has been alleged that the historic misfortunes of the Jewish people particularly their dispersion throughout the world were the fitting penalty for their act of "deicide." This accusation is likewise, in historical perspective, groundless. The Jewish Diaspora long predates the advent of Christianity and occurred in a major way approximately 500 years

before the birth of Jesus. As the majority of Jews were already resident outside of Palestine during Jesus' ministry, it is difficult to see how this can honestly be enlisted in aid of a bankrupt theological theory.

3. Another weapon in the Christian polemical arsenal has been the charge of "displacement" or "supersession," according to which God's covenant with the people of Israel was seen as cancelled because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus as Messiah, and a "New Covenant" instituted with the Christians, who displaced or superseded the Jews as the People of God. It is this type of thinking which produced the term "Old Testament" as an inherently pejorative description of the Hebrew scriptures. The scriptural invalidity of the "displacement theory" will be mentioned further on.
4. It became common Christian practice, found as early as the New Testament itself, to indulge in a narrow and malicious interpretation of the prophetic literature in the Bible. Negative criticisms made by the prophets out of love and concern for their fellow Jews were seized upon by Christians, most of whom were Gentile in origin, as weapons with which to beat the Jews. In contrast the positive messages of the prophets, with their promises of hope and redemption, were applied by Christians to the Church, the "New Israel," which was said to have replaced the "Old Israel." This same selective interpretation may be seen in the use of Jesus' criticisms of his religious contemporaries. His statements, again motivated by a genuine concern for and love of his own people, were later converted into a polemical device. What was originally an internal (Jewish) self-criticism was later used to make it look as though Jesus himself were not a Jew.
5. It has been alleged that the Judaism of Jesus' day had become corrupt and lifeless, its most notable feature being a barren and cruel "legalism." This viewpoint is seen in the almost uniformly negative depiction of the Pharisees both in the New Testament and in later Christian teaching. This charge has happily fallen victim to historical facts, theological sanity and sheer common sense. It is now known that the Judaism of Jesus' day was, in fact, a rich and lively mixture of diverse schools of thought, as shown by: (a) the varied canonical and extra-canonical literature dating from about 200 BCE to Jesus' time, (b) the Qumran documents discovered in the late 1940s and popularly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, and (c) the vastly improved picture which we now have of the Pharisees from other sources. The "rehabilitation" of the latter over the past few decades has been remarkable, as has been the effect of the Qumran discoveries in revolutionizing our knowledge of both pre-Christian Judaism and early Christianity itself.

To a significant degree the anti-Jewish polemic just outlined may be found in the New Testament itself. This fact, while acknowledged by many competent and respected Christian theologians, is nevertheless unknown to, or ignored by, large numbers of Christians who have yet to come to terms with its implications for the Church and the world. Even certain New Testament passages which, when historically understood, may be less negative toward the Jews than they appear at first are often misunderstood and misapplied, while passages of potentially great value in restoring a proper Christian respect for Jews and Judaism, have until relatively recently received inadequate attention from Christian biblical scholars, to say nothing of the average lay person.

Correcting the Errors of the Past

What, then, has been done to date, to correct the errors of the past and what remains to be done? If forced to select one event which offers hope for a future Christian-Jewish relationship radically different from the past, many would cite the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, usually known from its opening Latin words, *Nostra Aetate*. Section 4 which deals specifically with the Church's relationship to the Jews and Judaism was officially promulgated on October 28, 1965. Behind this relatively brief passage lies a long and, at points controversial, history but the fact that it was promulgated at all is owed in large part to the persistent and irenic efforts of the French Jewish scholar Jules Isaac. His research on the history of Christianity's "teaching of contempt" toward the Jews and Judaism had a significant impact on the resolve of Pope John XXIII to see this declaration passed by the Council.² Several important sentences deal with two of the most pernicious charges summarized above, namely the "deicide" charge and the "displacement theory."

Nostra Aetate states:

According to the Apostle (Paul), the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues (cf. Romans 11: 28- 29).

These words, if taken at their full value, remove any grounds for saying that Christians have displaced or superseded the Jews as the People of God. In fact, they call for a significant rethinking by Christians of the place and role of Jews and Judaism in the redemption of the world in the context of an ongoing, valid covenant between God and the Jewish people.

Equally significant is the explicit denial of the "deicide" charge:

What happened in His (Jesus') passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today. ... The Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the Holy Scriptures.

It is also noteworthy that this section of *Nostra Aetate* recognizes the great importance of correct preaching and biblical exegesis as a sound basis for religious instruction. Such careful, scholarly exegesis can provide the means to demolish once and for all the myth of the Diaspora as punishment, as well as the treatment of the Hebrew scriptures as a mere "preparation" for the Christian Gospel. Such scholarly inquiries can also put paid to the notion that Judaism at the time of Jesus was in a state of decline.

Subsequent guidelines issued both by the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Bishops of the U.S.A. regarding the implementation of *Nostra Aetate* have made even more explicit and precise the implementation of this pivotal document for liturgy, preaching and teaching.³

Owing to the Roman Catholic Church's size and historic place within Christianity, any such steps towards the improvement of the past tragic relationship between Christians and Jews must be of deep significance for all Christians. In this connection, one should also be aware that the World Council of Churches as well as many of the major Protestant and Anglican churches have made similarly explicit statements on the historical roots of Christian anti-Semitism (including its theological formulation as anti-Judaism).⁴

The Anglican Church of Canada has, for several years, had a Subcommittee on Jewish- Anglican Relations. This subcommittee, in ongoing consultation with colleagues from the Canadian Jewish Congress, has been actively at work in fostering mutual understanding and respect between the two communities in Canada. The Subcommittee's parent body, the Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations Committee, has produced a very useful statement outlining the theological basis for Anglican involvement in interfaith encounter and providing a series of practical guidelines for promoting such dialogue.

On the ecumenical level the Canadian Christian-Jewish Consultation brings together representatives of the member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, and the Canadian Jewish Congress for dialogue and consultation on matters of mutual concern.

Another indication of heightened Christian awareness is the now well-established series of Christian services in memory of the Holocaust which now take place annually in several major Canadian cities such as Montreal and Toronto. These services of worship are a moving act of witness by Christians who, in remembering their slaughtered Jewish brothers and sisters, refuse to ignore or deny the tragic past. The services also serve as a public act of Christian solidarity with the Jewish community, as they commit themselves to ensuring that a horror like the Holocaust will never happen again.

Much, of course, remains to be done. It has been recognized for some time that liturgy is perhaps the Church's most effective means of teaching, and it is therefore vital to ensure that what is expressed in public worship is consistent with what is believed to be theologically true. Hence, for example, when a given Sunday's scripture readings are open to an anti- Semitic interpretation, it is all the more important that such passages be put into their proper perspective. One means of so doing is the use of brief, summary introductions to the readings. This method has proved to be of special importance during the climatic events of Holy Week, which has been filled in the past with dire consequences for Jewish people resident in Christian societies.

Mention should be made of the *Book of Alternative Services* of the Anglican Church of Canada, whose Good Friday liturgy (a) specifically points out that "the term 'the Jews' in St. John's Gospel applies to particular individuals and not the whole Jewish people," (b) contains a "Meditation on the Cross of Jesus," one of whose paragraphs pointedly acknowledges that "I grafted you into the tree of my chosen Israel, and you turned on them with persecution and mass murder. I made you joint heirs with them of my covenants, but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt," and (c) significantly omits the notorious Third Collect for Good Friday, as found in the 1962 *Book of Common Prayer*. In 1965 the House of Bishops directed that this prayer not be used, and in the June of 1989 General Synod began the process of having it deleted from future reprintings of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Concrete steps such as these can be of great value in seeking to ensure that the liturgy will never again be a means of "bearing false witness" against Jewish brothers and sisters.

Crucial also is the role of the preacher, who can perhaps be of most service, not by continually harping on the dangers of anti-Semitism, but rather by being sufficiently sensitized and knowledgeable as to express clearly, where appropriate, the positive values of the Jewish inheritance upon which Christians draw. Teaching likewise needs to be based upon materials, at whatever level, without the anti-Jewish elements of the past and reflecting current understanding of the value and validity of the Jewish roots of Christianity. The development and continued vitality of post-Biblical Judaism needs to be stressed, both to dispel any lingering remnants of the

“displacement” and “degeneration” myths and to serve as a rich source of insight and hope in the ongoing pilgrimage of the spiritual descendants of Abraham, the common ancestor in faith of both Jews and Christians.

Such reassessments of liturgy, preaching and teaching imply the continuing need, especially at the scholarly level, for a developed and positive theology of Judaism and a rethinking of the traditional understanding of Christ, such that the Church and the people of Israel may be seen as standing, not over against one another, but beside the other as each seeks to be faithful to its covenant with the one God whom each acknowledges and seeks to serve.

Mending the World

There remain many areas in which committed Christians and Jews can combine their efforts honestly and without compromise in the pursuit of the goal of *tikkun olam* (mending the world). It is here that common ethical values can be expressed as both seek in solidarity to grapple with serious problems of social justice in our world.

In the recent past, the Anglican Church of Canada has both bilaterally and as part of larger coalitions, joined forces with the organized Jewish community in approaching government on such issues as capital punishment, poverty, the concerns of refugees and the homeless, the pursuit of Nazi war criminals resident in Canada, Soviet Jewry and the battle against anti-Semitism. Regarding the latter, it is important to avoid either exaggerating the presence of anti-Semitism in a democratic society such as Canada, or ignoring its limited—but nonetheless real—existence. History has repeatedly shown that those who ignore anti-Semitism do so at their own peril, a peril whose effects cannot be complacently limited to the Jewish community. In very recent times there have been blatant attempts to peddle neo-Nazi, “revisionist” denials of the Holocaust, and the emergence of extreme rightist and anti-Semitic groups.

While Christians and Jews differ from one another as to the identity and advent of the Messiah, in both traditions people will not so much be judged on the correctness of their opinions as on the deeds of love and mercy they are found doing when the Messiah comes. Each must confess that the world, in its present state, is far removed from the vision of redemption which is their shared hope for humanity. It is this hope and courageous vision which must sustain Jews and Christians as they work together for the betterment of the global community.

There remains one final area which must be appreciated by Christians if they truly wish to understand and respect their Jewish sisters and brothers, that is the significance of the State of Israel for the Jewish people as a whole. Since Israel’s rebirth in 1948, the Christian world’s assessment of this event has often been ambivalent. No doubt the reasons for this are complex, but it may not be far-fetched to suggest that part of that ambivalence is due, even at the unconscious level, to the persistence of the idea among many Christians that God is punishing the Jews for killing Christ. A serious rethinking of this untenable theological assumption, together with a much greater realization of the sense of peoplehood among Jews and their attachment to the Land of Israel, will go a long way to enabling Christians to deal more fairly and positively with the fact of modern Israel.

Christians may not agree with the policies of a particular Israeli government. They will naturally be concerned to see the various Christian (and other minority) groups treated justly within Israel and in the territories under Israeli control. A diversity of views on these matters is found in the Jewish

community as well. However, Christians must also affirm an unequivocal acceptance of Israel's right to live in peace and justice with her neighbours. The lack of such acceptance would make effective dialogue between Christians and Jews impossible.

Dialogue must be based on mutual acceptance and respect. Such respect will entail the willingness to allow each party to define itself in its own terms, free of prejudicial stereotypes. Such dialogue will never be used as a means of forcing or deceiving people into converting to another religion but will rather be the basis for developing and sustaining that trust which is so necessary for the carrying out of the shared task of *tikkun olam*. Such dialogue must therefore become a reality at the local, congregational level, if there are to be any lasting changes of attitude and behaviour in an inextricably tied relationship.

Let us therefore end this chapter, as we began, with a story meant to convey that sort of realistically cautious optimism with which Jews and Christians may face a common future:

There was a man who had two sons, his well-beloved firstborn and, years later a second whom he also loved and who learned almost all he knew from his elder brother. One day the younger son said to his elder brother, "It is with us as with Jacob and Esau; it is I who have become the preferred one." They quarreled, and the younger son gathered all he could lay his hands on and took his journey into a far country. There he gave himself out as the only son of a rich man and ran up a staggering debt. The elder son, hearing of this and wishing to protect his father's good name, laboured hard and suffered grievously in an attempt to lessen the indebtedness. Finally, his credit rating slipping, the younger son came to himself and resolved to return and repair the damage he had done, saying, "My father and my brother, I have sinned against heaven and before you both, and am no longer worthy to be called your son and brother. Let me become your agent to restore your fortune, your health and your noble name throughout the world..."

I have heard it said that the tale concludes with the younger son carrying out his resolution, but I cannot vouch for the authenticity of that ending.⁵

May Christians strive to ensure the authenticity of that ending as they move into the future in company with their Jewish sisters and brothers.

Notes

1. Andre Schwartz- Bart, *The Last of the Just*, pp. 365- 367.
2. All quotations are from Walter Abott and Joseph Gallagher, *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 663-667
3. Valuable suggestions on the practical implementation of the **Nostra Aetate**, are contained Dr. in Prejudice, pp. 141 - 168.
4. For an excellent collection of such statements by the World Council of Churches and some of its member churches see Allan Brockway, et. al., *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*.
5. Paul M. Van Buren, *The Burden of Freedom*.

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Suggestions for Discussion

1. How well do you know the statements of the Churches regarding Judaism? What can be done to make them better known and understood?
2. What attitudes are Christians asked by Jews to take toward the State of Israel today? How does this relate to an appreciation of the rights and concerns of Palestinian Arabs, some of whom are Christian?
3. What hopes and concerns do Jews and Christians respectively bring into dialogue?

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Please also refer to the bibliographies at the end of particular units.

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APPENDIX

EIGHTH ANNUAL CHRISTIAN SERVICE IN MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

***Deer Park United Church
Toronto, Ontario
Sunday, April 24, 1988***

This service was shown on the CBC Television program
Meeting Place on Sunday, May 1, 1988.

THEME: A HIGHWAY TO HOPE

While the congregation stands the procession enters in silence.

I. CONVOCATION

- Leader:* In silence let us seek God's presence. (*pause*)
- In silence let us remember the dark night of the Holocaust. (*pause*)
- In silence let us pay homage to all who died. (*pause*)
- In silence let us face the darkness,
in ourselves and in our churches,
in our community and in our country. (*pause*)
- In this act of silent remembrance, let us resolve
that never again shall we remain silent
in the face of darkness. (*pause*)
- All:* Teach us your way, O Lord,
and lead us in the right paths,
For your Name's sake. Amen.

II. OPENING HYMN

“O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

III. LITURGY OF WORD AND SILENCE

The congregation is seated.

I. Introduction and reading from Isaiah 35

Introduction:

This oracle of hope anticipates far more than the return of Jewish exiles.
It is a dream of homecoming for all dispossessed wanderers.
It is a song in the night for pilgrims,
journeying through the desert,
on their way to the land of promise.

Text:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, fear not!”

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame leap like a hart,
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy,

The waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not pass over it, and fools shall not err therein.

No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and singing shall flee away.

2. Responsive reading in remembrance of Jewish suffering

The congregation is invited to stand.

Reader 1: Many peoples of the world have suffered cruelty, and our hearts go out to them. But this day we think especially of the pain suffered by the House of Israel. Exile and oppression, expulsion and ghettos, pogroms and death camps; the agony of the Jewish people numbs the mind.

We can only wonder at the fortitude of those who said, not once but many times: "Though you slay me, yet will I trust in you." And we can only pray to be blessed with a measure of the faith that enabled them to remain true to God and His Torah, even when God seemed remote from them and life itself might have lost all meaning.

Reader 2: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping! (*Jeremiah 31:15*)

Congregation: Rachel is weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for them, for they are no more.

Reader 1: Is it nothing to you, all you who pass along the road? (*Lamentations 1:12*)

Congregation: Look and see: is there any pain like that which has befallen me?

Reader 2: To what shall I liken you, how comfort you, O innocent daughter of Zion? Truly your ruin is vast as the sea! Who can heal you? (*Lamentations 2:13*)

Congregation: How long, O Lord? Will we be forgotten forever? How long will your face be hidden from us? (*Psalms 13:1*)

Reader 1: All this has befallen us, yet we have not forgotten You, nor been false to your covenant. (*Psalms 44:17*)

Congregation: It is for Your sake that we have been slain all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (*Psalms 44:22*)

Reader 2: And there was silence! How many stood aside, mute and unconcerned, forgetting the divine command: "You shall not stand by idly while your neighbour's blood is shed." (*Leviticus 19:16*)

Congregation: For the sin of silence,
For the sin of indifference,
For the secret complicity of the neutral.
For the closing of borders,
For the washing of hands,
For the crime of indifference.
For the sin of silence,
For the closing of borders... (*pause*)

Reader 1: Lord, You see it; You see that none comes to help, none to intervene. On high there is astonishment and anger. And down below, the winds carry dust to the earth's four corners, the dust of six-million Jews.

Silence

The congregation is seated.

3. **Anthem:** "A Hymn to God" (*Words: John Donne, 1571-1631; Music: John Schiavone*)
4. **Introduction and reading from Mark 1: 1-8**

Introduction:

John the Baptizer blazed a trail of hope through the wilderness of his time, preparing a highway for the coming of Jesus.

Text:

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,
Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. And John preached, saying, "After me comes he who is worthier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The congregation is invited to stand.

5. **Hymn: “There’s a Voice in the Wilderness Calling”**
6. **Excerpt from a message by Elie Yiesel to the 10th National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations, held in Minneapolis, November 9-11, 1987.**

Violence, brutality and terror are part of the modern world. Kidnapping, hijacking, political assassination—bizarre, unholy ties exist among the terrorists and murderers who wage war on the innocent and unsuspecting. All around us is evidence to suggest that the work of peacemaking is an exercise in futility. And yet, we cannot allow ourselves to be overcome by despair. We must make our work for peace in this world an Act of Faith—in the future, in humankind, in God himself.

Today Jewish history and world history are one and inseparable. Thirty-nine years ago, Jews were targets; today everyone is a target. Thirty-nine years ago, people closed their hearts to the suffering of others and, thus, added to that suffering. I have said it so often, and I shall say it again: Indifference always helps the murderer, never the victim.

And what about today? How shall we work for peace in a world that is fascinated with violence and brutality, with terrorism and war? How shall we work for peace in a world where people are often overwhelmed by every day terror? How shall we work for peace in a world that seems exhausted by the many demands made by so many victims?

There is only one way: together. Only if we stand together, against death and for life, against war and for peace, shall we be able to work for peace in our world. We Jews and Christians must find ways to work for, educate for and to stand together for peace. Together we may defeat despair. Together we may achieve peace. And save lives.

Silence is kept for reflection.

IV. SERMON

V. THE SUMMONS TO REHEKBER

The congregation is invited to stand.

I. Introduction:

We gather together today to light six candles in memory of the six-million Jews—men, women, and children—who were systematically murdered in the heart of our so-called civilized Christian world.

Our remembrance is a profound form of resistance and a radical act of solidarity. We resist the forces of forgetfulness and denial. In remembering our Jewish brothers and sisters, we keep alive within ourselves the spark of our humanity, we rekindle the flame of human solidarity, and we reaffirm the light of our faith in one another.

Let us remember in sorrow and solidarity.

While the memorial candles are lit by six different individuals, “Lu Yehi/May it Be” is sung in Hebrew, followed by El Male Rachamim.

May it Be

There is still a white sail on the horizon,
Against the darkest cloud.
All that we ask
 May it be!!!
And if in the window the light of the
 Festival still flickers
All that we ask—May it be.
May it be—May it be
O please—May it be
All that we ask
May it be.

If suddenly from darkness, there would
shine above us a star
All that we ask—May it be.
Then grant tranquillity and strength
to those that we love
All that we ask—May it be.

El Mal Rachamim

O God full of compassion, Eternal Spirit of the Universe, grant perfect rest under the wings of Your Presence to our loved ones who have entered eternity. Ruler of Mercy, let them find refuge for ever in the shadow of Your wings, and let their souls be bound up in the bond of eternal life. The Eternal God is their inheritance. May they rest in peace, and let us say: Amen.

The Mourner's Kaddish

Let the glory of God be extolled, let God's great name be hallowed,
In a world whose creation God willed.
May God's eternal kingdom soon prevail, in our own day, our own lives,
and the life of all Israel,
and let us say: Amen.

Let God's great name be blessed for ever and ever.
Let the name of the Holy One, blessed is God, be glorified, exalted, and honoured,
though God is beyond all the praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter,
and let us say: Amen.

For us and for all Israel,
may the blessings for peace and the promise of life come true,
and let us say: Amen.

May God who causes peace to reign in the high heavens,
let peace descend on us, on all Israel and all the world,
and let us say: Amen.

VI. OUR RESOLVE AND OUR RESPONSE

I. Prayer of petition (*said in unison*)

God, just and merciful, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow; have mercy upon our humanity in its blindness, its bitterness, and its confusion. You who have granted to our age to discover such wonders of your mind and such mysteries of your works as to give us vast powers for good or evil, teach us not to use your wondrous power for cruel and unworthy ends, but to serve your holy will.

Deliver us, O Lord, from lust for power, from vanity of spirit, from envy, apathy, and ill will. Fill our minds with wisdom from above which is pure, peace loving and full of mercy. Touch our hearts with light, that having a right understanding, we may have courage, compassion and patience, working with your help for the better order of the ages.

Bring all people and each of us as individuals to a sound mind and a loving heart. Restore among us good will and mutual trust. Lead us in the ways of justice and honour, truth and uprightness; until we are delivered from the bondage of hate and fear into the light of love and goodwill.

All of this we Christians ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation.
But deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

3. Choosing the light

Reader 1: Mindful of our Jewish brothers and sisters, mindful of the time of testing which our churches faced not long ago, let us choose to light our candles of human solidarity. Let us choose the light and stand together in these times against the dark powers of hatred and fear within ourselves, within our churches, and within our world.

The congregation may be seated. Six people will take the light from the memorial candles and pass it on to those assembled until all the tapers in the congregation are lit. While the tapers are being lit there will be an organ interlude. The congregation is then invited to stand.

Reader 2: There were some Christians, the Righteous Gentiles, who chose the light in the darkest of times, and they became the remnant of the flickering flame of humanity. At the risk of their own lives they sheltered and saved their Jewish brothers and sisters. In their mercy these Gentiles saved some Jews. But these few could not save all. Their exceptional lives stand in contrast to the faith of many Christians who were tested and found wanting.

Let us Christians resolve to become more truly Christian. Let us resolve to choose a future that is different from our past.

Reader 3: Do you commit yourselves to the light of the Covenant?

Congregation: We do, God being our Helper.

Reader 1: Do you choose love instead of fear, responsibility instead of indifference?

Congregation: We do, God being our Helper.

Reader 2: Will you act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God?

Congregation: We will, God being our Helper.

Reader 3: Will you work for a world in which the human rights of all are guaranteed?

Congregation: We will, God being our Helper.

Reader 1: Will you work to prevent the annihilation of all humanity in this nuclear age?

Congregation: We will, God being our helper.

Reader 2: God of Abraham and Sarah, of Moses and Miriam, of Job and Judith, of Joseph and Mary, bless us all and be with us always, for this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Congregation: Amen.

VII. RECESSIONAL HYMN

“For the Healing of the Nations”

The congregation, holding lighted tapers throughout the singing of the hymn, will follow the procession to the church hall, where lighted candles will be placed in receptacles. You are invited to stay for refreshments. There will be a kosher table.