

THE DIALOGUE EXPERIENCE: REFLECTIONS

by

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for:

From Encounter to Commitment:

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As I was preparing this paper I received an email from Yehuda Stolov, director of the Interfaith Encounter Association in Israel. It was headed 'Third encounter - Non-Violent Communication Interfaith Encounter group'. This is what it said:

18 people participated: 9 women and 9 men; 3 Israelis and 15 Palestinians.

Dates: 24-25 August 2012

Venue: West Bank .

This encounter was especially successful. We met on Friday at four thirty for a day and a half encounter. Our friends from the West Bank hosted us, as usual, in a warm and pleasant homely way.

This encounter aimed at focusing on Yoga classes for men and women in the community, who are interested to learn and be partners in the development of this area in their community.

During the encounter we were privileged to learn and teach 4 Yoga classes, an hour and a half each, two for men and two for women.

The advancement from last time was very visible, both from the physical perspective and from the perspective of the relations in the group.

This time we were able to widen the learning thanks to the new stripes and Yoga mattresses that we bought for the group.

Our time together and the joint learning strengthened us. New partners found interest in our activity and the old-timers had the chance to deepen their action.

This shows what can be achieved through interreligious dialogue. Interreligious, but not theological; the pursuit of Yoga was not intended from any theological perspective, just as an activity in which Israelis Jews and Palestinian Muslims could join together in their common humanity.

Now if Jews and Muslims, or Jews and Christians, can be persuaded to set aside their theological and political differences and come together as human beings, should we call this

interreligious dialogue? Anne Hensmann-Esser has taken as her theme, that *Echtes Gespräch von Juden und Christen gibt es nur in biblischer Radikalität*; if this is true, we should not sidestep, but rather address, and question, our theological roots and differences.

The *echtes Gespräch*, the authentic dialogue involving serious theological reflection, is both necessary and possible, but it is a specialized field in which only a minority can usefully engage. A less elevated form of dialogue, in which people of different faiths engage in common tasks in friendship and mutual respect, is no less vital; it is in the discovery of our common humanity, rather than in the rarefied domain of theological speculation, that the seeds of peace germinate and human well-being may flourish.

Today, however, I shall reflect on my experience of dialogue among the theologians, especially in the period from late 1983 until the mid-90's, when I was privileged to part in several major dialogue events, mostly between Christians and Jews, across the world. I shall put this experience in context and comment on controversial issues it raised.

In the aftermath of World War II, when the facts of the Shoah were revealed and the State of Israel established, Christians felt a need to reassess their relationships with Jews and Judaism, and at the very least to repudiate traditional antisemitism and the 'teaching of contempt'. This movement was expressed in Church documents, in theological writings, and in dialogue with Jews. By the time I got involved the main lines had been drawn; the mid-80's were essentially a period of consolidation, when educational initiatives were taken to ensure that the guidelines laid down by the higher echelons of Churches would be absorbed into teaching and preaching.

There were 'sticking points' in the dialogue, particularly around the questions of Mission and Proselytism, Israel and the Palestinians, and Christian responsibility in the Holocaust. Occasional incidents such as the furore which erupted in 1985 around the Carmelite Convent at Auschwitz, threatened to undermine progress; but the damage was successfully contained. It appeared that a plateau of stability had been reached. But great changes were shortly to erupt on the world scene.

High Level Dialogue - The Main Players and Their Games

What progress had been made in Christian-Jewish dialogue between the end of World War II and the 80's.?

The seminal 'Ten Points of Seelisberg', one of the first fruits of post-War dialogue, were issued not far from here in 1947 by the Christian participants as an independent group, not in the name of any official Church body. In 1948 proposals for an International Council of Christians and Jews met with indifference or hostility, and although ICCJ dates its inception from that time it was not until 1974 that it became fully operational under its present name.

As time went on the World Council of Churches began to feel the need for constructive dialogue with Jews, and after Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church came in from the cold and sought dialogue.

The recognition of the independence and integrity of Judaism created a curious problem for Christian bureaucracy. Are questions relating to Jews internal or external to Christianity? The Roman Curia treats them as internal; 'Religious Relations with the Jews' is handled by the Commission for Promoting Christian Unity. The World Council of Churches treats them as external; they are handled by the sub-unit that deals with dialogue with people of 'other faiths'. Fortunately, both organisations keep their wits about them; there is no tidy bureaucratic solution.

There is no 'Universal Synagogue', so with whom could Christians collectively talk? Dr Gerhart Riegner of the World Jewish Congress, working from his office in Geneva, convened the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) in 1969, on the basis of an agreement between the World Jewish Congress and the Synagogue Council of America; the American Jewish Committee joined in 1970, followed by B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Council in Israel for Interreligious Relations. IJCIC includes religious leaders from Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism, who work together in the interests of interfaith understanding.

There is not true parity among the delegations at such Consultations. Partly, this is because Christians like to define themselves solely in religious terms (even if they acknowledge the significance of 'local theologies'), whereas Jewish self-understanding hinges not only on religious concepts but on a sense of Jewish 'nationhood'. Partly, it stems from differences in ecclesiastical structure. While the Roman Catholic Church is a hierarchical structure capable of issuing authoritative statements and guidelines, the World Council has to work on the basis of consensus amongst what it currently lists as '349 churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world'; this

daunting task has occasionally been achieved, as in its condemnations of antisemitism, or the commendation 'for study and action' of its Ecumenical Guidelines on Jewish-Christian Dialogue.

No document on religious matters issued by the World Jewish Congress would be regarded as authoritative by religious Jews, whether Orthodox or Reform; for that reason alone IJIC was right to resist the challenge to produce Jewish Guidelines on Dialogue comparable with those issued by some Church bodies. A document called *Dabru Emet*, first published on 10 September 2000 in the *New York Times*, does indeed articulate a Jewish view on Christian-Jewish relations; it was signed by over 220 rabbis and intellectuals from all branches of Judaism, but they signed as individuals and not as representing any organisation or stream of Judaism; I refused to join them as I found the document fundamentalist and simplistic in its attitude to Israel.

The Roman Catholic Church

The progressive articulation of a coherent Catholic standpoint can be discerned in the following documents, readily available online:

1. Ecumenical Council Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions* (28 October 1965): *Nostra Aetate* n.4
2. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate (no. 4)*, 1 December 1974.
3. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: *Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*, 24 June, 1985.

Popes John XXIII, Paul VI and John-Paul II consistently promoted the improvement of Catholic-Jewish relations; John-Paul II made several personal pronouncements, including a reference to 'the old covenant, never revoked by God' (Address to Jewish representatives at Mainz, 17 November 1980). The present Pope, Benedict XIII, who had advised John-Paul II, has maintained this approach.

The documents were produced in consultation, though not necessarily in full agreement, with Jewish partners. My own experience of the Vatican Liaison Committee meetings I attended (London 1981, Amsterdam 1984, Rome 1985, Prague 1990, Jerusalem 1994) was of an easing of tension and growth of understanding amongst the participants. Mutual

trust, however, must allow for the basic differences of interest between the Church and the Jewish representatives; the theologians involved developed a higher degree of mutual trust than the more 'politically' oriented delegates.

The Holy See's attitude to a Jewish State in the Land of Israel has ranged from the hostility experienced by Theodore Herzl at his meeting with Pope X in 1904, through Nahum Sokolow's more sympathetic hearing from Benedict XV in 1917, to apparent friendship. The 1985 *Notes for Preaching and Teaching* 'invited' Christians to understand the religious attachment of Jews to Israel, whilst remarking 'The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law.' I had always feared that the Roman Catholic Church, like so many fundamentalist sects, would impose its own theology on the relationship between the Jews and the Land of Israel; this would have meant that they recognized the return to Israel as a prelude to the Second Coming and to the conversion of the Jews. So I wrote, 'I am happy that the *Notes* take the 'recognition of the State of Israel' issue right out of the theological arena and into the more open one of international law.

In 1994, the Holy See established full diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. As a Jew, I rejoiced; Israel no longer had to submit to the insult of being treated as if it was somehow less of a nation than the hundred other states, many of them totalitarian and corrupt, with which the Holy See had full diplomatic relations. From the perspective of political philosophy, though, I find it anomalous that the Catholic Church, alone amongst religious bodies, engages in international diplomacy as a sovereign entity, if not quite on a par with the world's nations.

The World Council of Churches

At its first General Assembly, held in Amsterdam in 1948, the WCC reflected on the hundreds of thousands of Jews who had been taken from that city to the Nazi death camps, and declared: 'to the Jews our God has bound us in a special solidarity linking our destinies together in His design'. Antisemitism was condemned as 'irreconcilable with the Christian faith ... sin against God and man'; this condemnation of antisemitism was vigorously reaffirmed at the Evanston (1954) and New Delhi (1961) Assemblies. Both the establishment of Israel and the nature of Judaism as living faith were noted. This gesture towards the Jewish people, however well-intentioned, was seriously undermined in Jewish

eyes when love for the Jews was expressed by redoubled call to mission! 'Hitler sought to destroy our bodies; these Christians seek to destroy our souls by weaning us away from our faith', was the more cynical Jewish reaction, though many Jews did recognize and welcome the Churches' genuine contrition.

Those early WCC pronouncements treated Jews as a theological object rather than as real people with whom one might engage in dialogue. Discussions with Jews about possible direct consultation commenced in 1962. The wheels turned slowly; at last, at Geneva on 16 July 1982, the Executive Committee of the WCC 'received and commended to the churches for study and action' the the *Ecumenical Guidelines on Jewish-Christian Dialogue*.

Further progress was made at the 'Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People' in Arnoldshain, West Germany 10-14 February 1986, but the most significant advance was the document formulated at the November 1988 meeting at Sigtuna, Sweden, of the WCC's Committee on the Church and the Jewish People. This document recognizes the lack of consensus among its members on mission and on the significance of the Land of Israel, but claims wide agreement for the following:

1. The covenant of God with the Jewish people remains valid.
2. Antisemitism and all forms of the teaching of contempt for Judaism are to be repudiated.
3. The living tradition of Judaism is a gift of God.
4. Coercive proselytism directed towards Jews is incompatible with Christian faith.
5. Jews and Christians bear a common responsibility as witnesses to God's righteousness and peace in the world.

In addition, it agreed nine affirmations, which recognized Israel's call, acknowledged the spiritual treasures shared by Jews and Christians, made clear that Jews should not be blamed for Jesus' passion, and expressed sorrow at the Christian share of responsibility for Jewish suffering, culminating in the Shoah.

I was at the Harvard 1984 and Geneva 1986 WCC/IJCIC meetings, which seemed constructive enough. Later on, however, the two organisations fell out over WCC Resolutions on Israel and subsequently over the appointment as head of the Secretariat of a converted Jew. Low key meetings continued between the top officials, and WCC sought dialogue with other Jewish organisations or individuals.

The World Council of Churches has taken several initiatives to broaden the scope of the dialogue. Together with IJIC, it conducted an African Christian-Jewish Consultation, in Nairobi, Kenya, from 10-13 November 1986; the emphasis here was on the shared concern of Jews and African Christians with tradition and its relationship with Scripture; story-telling in African tradition and in Jewish Midrash were compared.

In December 1993 the WCC convened a conference on Jewish-Christian Dialogue in the Light of Asian Cultures and Religions, at Cochin, South India. It was a novel experience to engage in dialogue in a situation where Christians were themselves a minority religion and where, though the Holocaust was a relevant issue, one did not feel that one was living constantly in its shadow.

One of the most fraught conferences I have ever attended was the International Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims on Jerusalem, convened by the WCC at Glion, overlooking Lake Geneva, in May 1993. Though Palestinian and Israeli delegates had come with diametrically opposed viewpoints and there was considerable posturing, an agreed joint statement was eventually formulated and forwarded to Washington, where we knew of official PLO/Israel talks which were apparently bogged down. Unknown to us, of course, the real dialogue was even then taking place in Norway, and would shortly lead to the Peace Accords.

Despite pressure from Christians in Arab countries and a grudging and often critical attitude towards the Jewish State, the WCC has frequently endorsed, in terms reminiscent of United Nations resolutions, the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure and recognized borders.

Anglican Church

Anglicans, habitually complacent, have found it difficult to recognize any problem in their relationship with Jews. Unlike those awful continentals they have not been responsible for pogroms and persecutions; if England was the home of the Blood Libel and the Expulsion that was centuries before the formation of the Anglican Church. This is naive, and more percipient Anglicans have realized that they are not immune from antisemitism, that they must take responsibility for the Christian heritage as a whole and deal with it appropriately, and that a constructive and non-patronising relationship with Jews and Judaism is essential not merely to the social order but to Christian self-understanding.

The first Anglican-Jewish Consultation took place at Andover from 26-28 November 1980 on the theme of 'Law and Religion in Contemporary Society'. I was co-convenor with Bishop Richard Harries of Oxford for the second, at Shallowford House, Staffordshire in 1987, and also for the third, at St George's, Windsor, in April 1992. Whereas the first two were intended as Consultations between IJCIC and the worldwide Anglican Communion, the St George's Consultation was designed as a meeting of British Jewish leaders and the Church of England, in the hope that this would promote effective working relationships locally.

After the Shallowford House consultation Bishop Harries was able to persuade the Anglican Church at the preparatory meeting in Singapore that it would be good to put a document on Jewish-Christians Relations before the Anglican Communion for consideration at the Lambeth Conference the following year (1988). I accepted his invitation to be Jewish Consultant to the drafting committee for this document. In the event, political sensitivities led the Bishops at Lambeth to doubt the wisdom of issuing guidelines on Christian-Jewish relations if they were not at the same time issuing comparable guidelines on Christian-Muslim relations. A new document on relations among the three faiths was hastily cobbled together from our draft and other submissions; it was unanimously commended for study, and Churches were encouraged 'to engage in dialogue with Jews and Muslims on the basis of understanding, affirmation and sharing illustrated in it.' The document, *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue*, is remarkable for its insistence on the 'common witness to God' of the three faiths; it neither obscures the differences between and within the faiths, nor compromises the uniqueness of the Christian-Jewish relationship.

Other consultations, and the Councils of Christians and Jews

Time does not permit a full listing of the Consultations that have taken place with other Church bodies around the globe, including the Lutheran Church, the Netherlands Reformed Church and the British United Reformed Church. The URC consultations differed from most others by involving not only scholars and religious leaders but lay members of communities.

Due tribute must also be paid to the International Council of Christians and Jews and its member Councils in over twenty countries; their impact both on the formation of opinion in the Churches and on the implementation of such guidelines as are produced is immense.

Recent Developments

From Balance of Terror to Environmental Apocalypse

Throughout the 60's and 70's the West was in the grip of the fear of nuclear annihilation. This fear (though perhaps not the danger itself) receded to be replaced by a new fear, that of destruction of the global environment. A common enemy brings people together. Since the seminal Interfaith Celebration of Nature which took place at Assisi in September 1986 to mark the 25th anniversary of the World Wildlife Fund, representatives of each faith have outdone one another in proclaiming their concern for the environment; Jews and Christians have reread their scriptures and learned that Genesis, far from calling for exploitation of the environment, charges Adam with the care of it, and stresses the goodness and perfection of the natural world.

The Opening Up of Eastern and Central Europe

From 1989 the communist governments of eastern and central Europe collapsed like a pack of cards. Already before 1989 delegates from 'Iron Curtain' countries had begun to participate in dialogue; some of the most notable contributions had come from Poland, where in 1987 in Cracow I took part in a memorable consultation with the Polish Bishops' Commission on the Jews and learned of the progress already made in a country where Catholic-Jewish relations have such mixed historical connotations.

An added dimension from this opening up has been the growth of serious dialogue with the Orthodox Churches. At a meeting in 1993 in Athens between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Churches and IJCIC, Orthodox Church leaders and theologians from several East European and Middle Eastern countries determined to embark on a programme of reassessment and re-education in Jewish Christian relations. Far-reaching resolutions were passed, but not a lot has happened since. Achievement in Christian Jewish Relations depends on general theological progress and the speed and extent with which the Orthodox Churches will accommodate themselves to modernity; the theology which is taught at the University of Athens is more sophisticated than that available in parts of the former Soviet Union or in the Middle East.

The Political Pendulum Swings to the Right

The collapse of communism has been accompanied by a swing to the right in Western politics, sometimes accompanied by a rise in crude nationalism, often xenophobic and overtly antisemitic. Churches have mostly ranged from cautious to forthright in denouncing antisemitism, unlike earlier times when they openly abetted it.

The Religious Right; the Growth of Irrationality and Fundamentalism

Many people have lost confidence in the ability of reason to provide certainties, particularly in moral and ethical questions. They turn elsewhere, often to fundamentalist forms of religion, oblivious to historical criticism and other critiques leveled against such religion in times gone by. Preferring a spurious claim of certainty over a frank admission of doubt, they become vulnerable to cultism and superstition, to astrology and New Ageism, to alternative 'life-styles' and forms of healing.

Mainstream religious leaders, even if personally of broader outlook, find it difficult to resist their own conservatives; often, they rely on conservative support to maintain their position. Precisely in the dialogue situation they discover the opportunity to express more tolerant and irenic views; dialogue becomes a platform from which 'fundamentalism' may be censured.

The World of Islam Noticed

The 80's witnessed increasing Christian focus on relationship with Islam.

Can the Jewish-Christian dialogue be 'expanded' to include Islam also? No. Tripartite dialogue, of Jews, Christians and Muslims, is important in its own right, but there remain distinct Jewish-Christian, Jewish-Muslim, and Christian-Muslim agendas. All are vital, but they must not be confused.

Israel Comes of Age. Peace in the Middle East?

Peace between Israel and surrounding nations seems as elusive as ever despite some progress in the 90's in the wake of the Oslo Accords. Religious extremism has increased on all sides, marginalizing those who seek dialogue. No-one knows where the 'Arab Spring' will lead, but it does not look as if it is heading to peace among Arabs, let alone with Israel; Israel itself is becoming increasingly polarized in religious as well as political terms.

The establishment of the State of Israel opened up a Pandora's box of problems for Jewish theologians. What, from a religious point of view, is the relationship between Land and People? Is the restoration of Jewish independence the beginning of the Messianic redemption process? What meaning can a secular State have for religious Jews? How can the values of rabbinic Judaism be reflected in the affairs of a modern State? How do we safeguard the rights of Christian, Muslim and other minorities? How do we now interpret traditional Jewish universalist teachings? What is the relationship between the 'diaspora' communities and Israel? Add to this all the agonising problems raised by a perceived need to defend one's new-found sovereignty by war. The lively discussion of such topics by contemporary Jewish thinkers makes a fascinating study, revealing vigorous debate and a wealth of opinions.

Scholars and Theologians

Advances in scholarship have affected theology generally and dialogue in particular. The 'Jewish' context of Jesus and his work have been further revealed through study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other contemporary material. Jewish scholarship has advanced so that we now longer have any excuse for 'reading back' later rabbinic texts to the first century. Both religions have had to come to terms with historical criticism of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Christian Holocaust theologians (Eckardt, Franklin Littell, John Pawlikowski, J-B Metz, Eberhard Bethge, Hans-Joachim Kraus) have agonised over the implications for Christian theology of the Shoah and come to accept that profound revisions are needed if Christianity is to retain any moral credibility; in particular, 'supersessionist' or 'replacement' theology has come under attack, for the idea that the Church has replaced the Jewish people in God's economy has been recognised as generating the 'teaching of contempt' and antisemitism.

In 1988 the required changes in theological perspective as seen within the World Council of Churches were summarized as follows¹:

- A. **Common Roots:** Call to Abraham; revelation of One God; giving of Torah
- B. **Parting of the Ways:** The first Christians were Jews; inclusion of gentiles into Church and distancing from Jewish people; separation of Church and Jews; different views of

¹This is based on Brockway *et alia*, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People* Section III pages 149-76. For a comparable Roman Catholic analysis see Fisher, Eugene J. *Seminary Education and Christian-Jewish Relations: A Curriculum and Resource Handbook* 2nd ed. Washington D.C: National Catholic Educational Association, 1988.

scripture, Jesus, messiah; empowerment of Christianity; recent awareness of guilt for 'teaching of contempt' which led to Shoah.

- C. **Traditional Theological Issues:** Covenant and election - Israel's covenant never displaced (difficult theological consequences of this notion); Scripture - Judaism not to be equated with O.T. (Bristol 1967), but in what sense is NT 'fulfilment'? Torah and law - not legalism, but covenant - Jesus observed Torah law - oral Torah; Jewishness of Jesus and his thought - Christological implications - 'Christ has bound the church to the Jewish people' - difficulty (inappropriateness) of term 'Messiah'.
- D. **Contemporary Theological Issues:** Antisemitism and Shoah, variants of anti-Judaism - early Christian anti-Judaism continues pre-Christian prejudice and adds Christian input - history of pogroms and persecution; modern religious freedom saw secular anti-Jewish movement adopt Christian prejudices - contemporary Christian penitence; Israel - revival of state baffles church - recognition of state as safeguarding existence of the people - the tie between people and land 'remains by the grace of God' (Netherlands Reformed Church 1970) - aspect of continuing covenant, but not 'theological validation'; Mission - change of emphasis from mission to dialogue - rejection of 'proselytization'; common responsibility of Jews and Christians towards world - justice and righteousness - wait and hope in God.

The Context of Dialogue

New Theologies

The predominant mode of Jewish thought in the 1980's was Holocaust theology; in the 1990's this yielded to Covenant Theology. Feminist, liberation and 'creation' theologies have made their mark, too. All this, with postmodernist overtones, has impacted on dialogue, as Christian and Jewish thinkers have come to realize that they are dealing with much the same basic issues.

The Shoah

Undoubtedly Christian soul-searching after the Holocaust, together with the renaissance of Jewish presence and independence in the Holy Land, served to stimulate and focus the rapid development of the Jewish/Christian dialogue in the years following WW2. But let us be clear. No healthy and enduring relationship between people is built on guilt. Any future relationship must be founded on understanding, mutual love and respect, and a firm

apprehension of our common mission. The sense of guilt is transient, not inherited by the next generation; moreover, it is unstable, inherently prone to sudden and drastic reversal.

To those who think the Holocaust is the foundation of dialogue I would pose the following question. The Destruction of the Temple in 70, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, were not significantly less traumatic than the Holocaust. But they were not followed by contrition, beating of the breast and a desire for constructive dialogue on the part of the dominant faith. Why did that happen this time? The answer is to be found in the overarching context of dialogue, which reaches way back beyond the events of our century, and into the very foundations of the modern world.

The modern way of looking at things tends to place less emphasis on doctrinal matters, and to see rather that which religions have in common. The Hermetic Tradition, developed by Renaissance humanists such as Erasmus, made possible the move to Christian ecumenism, whence it is a short step to an ecumenism of world faiths, Judaism included. Such an attitude presupposes a degree of scepticism and tends also to cultural relativism. When God speaks to people He has perforce to use human language, and human language incorporates human culture. The same ultimate truth may be conveyed in different ways.

Improved communications and transport have made people much more aware of different cultures and religions. We discover that no culture has a monopoly in ethics, morality or spirituality. Our culture is open to all that has come before or that currently exists in any part of the world, east or west, north or south. Dialogue becomes both possible and necessary.

We differ radically and irreversibly from our predecessors in our view of the universe and our place in it. The human species has evolved over millions of years; our possibly superior descendants may continue for billions more. Can salvation really hinge upon some minute formulation of doctrine or on the total fidelity to this or that individual sage or savior?

Modern critical study of the Bible and other religious texts has affected theology. The historical Jesus, as Wellhausen pointed out, was a Jew, not a Christian. Throughout his life he preached only to his fellow-Jews. The anti-Jewish stance of the Greek Scriptures does not derive from the teaching of Jesus. Was Rosemary Ruether right in seeing anti-Judaism as part of the very fabric of early Christianity, or were her critics right who explained New

Testament hostility to Jews and Judaism as a by-product of the polemical situation in which the early Christians found themselves?

Rabbinic Judaism, the antecedent of modern Judaism, was not formed until well after Jesus' time. It was never the same as first-century Pharisaism, and its growth continues even now. Church documents have recognized the reality of Judaism independently of its history as the cradle of Christianity. Perhaps the first of such documents was that published on 16 April 1973 by the French Bishops' Commission on the attitude of Christians towards Judaism:

For Christians the Covenant was renewed in Jesus Christ, but they should nevertheless regard Judaism as a reality not only social and historical, but above all religious; not only as a relic of a venerable and closed past, but as a reality living on through time.

Clearer still is the Vatican's 1985 *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism*:

The history of Israel did not end in 70 A.D. It continued, especially in a numerous Diaspora which allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness - often heroic - of its fidelity to the one God ... We must remind ourselves how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times (VI, 25)

Common Tasks: Limits to Cooperation

There are several areas in which Jews, Christians and indeed Muslims can together take initiatives to enhance the spiritual quality of life in our society. Conservation, business ethics, religious pluralism and peace all afford opportunities for co-operation but also areas of divergence, just as much within faiths as between them.

Family structures, and the sexual morals which allegedly safeguard them, seem to offer a promising field in which Christians and Jews may join forces in battle against the laxity of the generation. I shall take this topic as an illustration of what actually happens when we descend from the high ground of pious generalisations and examine whether there really is anything we can accomplish together.² Before rushing headlong into the fray we should be quite clear what it is that we wish to promote, and what it is that we are objecting to in current secular lifestyles.

²The material, and most of the text, in this chapter, are excerpted from my paper 'Forward Together' read at the ICCJ Colloquium in Eisenach, Germany, in July 1992. The full paper and conference proceedings are contained in *From the Martin Buber House* No. 20, Winter 1992/3, published by the International Council of Christians and Jews, Heppenheim, edited by J. Schoneveld.

All main groups of Christians and Jews in the past have agreed on the following, subject to differences in detailed definition:

- a. The prohibitions of adultery and incest.
- b. The prohibition of polyandry.
- c. Degrees of forbidden propinquity.
- d. Prohibitions of male homosexual acts, and of sexual acts performed with animals.
- e. The prohibition of male masturbation (Onanism).
- f. The recognition of natural parenthood, both through a call to children to honour and respect parents, and through responsibilities of parents towards their children. This is the basis of the 'nuclear' family.

On the other hand, they have disagreed on the following:

- a. Divorce, prohibited by many Churches, always accepted by Jews.
- b. Polygamy, where a variable attitude has existed amongst both Jews and Christians in different parts of the world.
- c. Attitudes towards human sexuality have ranged widely within each faith; not all Christianity is Augustinian. Jewish apologists over-simplify in contrasting Jewish (positive) attitudes with Christian (hostile).
- d. The virtue of celibacy, at least for members of religious orders.
- e. The handling of the menstrual cycle.
- f. Female masturbation and homosexual acts (it is unclear whether these were permitted or merely ignored by authorities who do not record a prohibition).
- g. Contraception - a range of views in each faith.
- h. Abortion - a range of views in each faith.

Although it is widely assumed that religions favour the family, it simply is not the case that the main sources of Judaism and Christianity share the romantic, idealised attitude to the family which is often preached today. Rather, they accepted and regulated an existing social institution, to which in any case there did not appear to be a viable alternative. Sometimes they are critical. Thus Trito Isaiah (56:3) - 'Let not the eunuch say, 'I am nothing but a barren tree'' - preaches against the marginalisation of those lacking 'family connections'; Elisha (1 Kings 19:20-21) takes leave of his family to become the devoted disciple of Elijah. The ideal

family may well provide a stable emotional background and enable the development of favoured moral attitudes, but few families are ideal, and instability and even tyranny within the family are common. When Jews and Christians together declare for the family and its values they must be aware of the downside, and be ready to champion the rights of the individual against the family in many instances.

Likewise, when Jews and Christians together call for higher standards of sexual morality some caution is needed. Does the sexual repression encouraged by some religious authorities represent a higher or a lower moral standard than a more permissive attitude? Even if the biblical 'rule book' is taken as the standard, is our attitude to non-compliance to be condemnatory or compassionate? To what extent should we aim to have such standards incorporated in public law? When do we reach a point where blind application of the 'rule book' (whichever of the conflicting ones we adopt) clashes with our deep moral convictions, and what should we do then? We can at least agree with contemporary secular morality that stable and loving relationships are of the essence of sexual morality, even if we disagree as to the acceptability of 'alternative lifestyles'.

Jewish and Christian ideas on human sexuality and the family draw on a common religious basis, but the extent to which nowadays this basis supports a common programme, even amongst all Jews or all Christians, is limited. Nevertheless, to a significant degree we all seek a deepening of human relationships, and a sense of holiness in our lives.

The following general observations should be kept in sight whenever co-operation between faiths is proposed:

Though there is much common ground, the differences to be found not only between Judaism and Christianity but within each faith are too great to be ignored. For instance, we all seek to raise standards of sexual morality within society, but have different attitudes on abortion, birth control, and homosexuality. No joint programme should commit any of the participants to a point of view which they do not share, but outside the joint programme each party should be free to pursue its own convictions.

It is usually better for Jews and Christians to participate in welfare activities and the like as private citizens, giving witness to their faith, rather than as religious organisations. I strongly question the wisdom of setting up organisations such as 'Christian Aid' or CAFOD. Where is the end of such a fragmentation of public effort? Is every faith, indeed every sect

and denomination, to run aid agencies in competition with every other? Is aid intended to help the victims or to promote the image of the Church? There is a danger that help for the needy becomes subordinated to the quest for power and influence for the Church.

Likewise, in suggesting common commitments of Jew and Christians, we are not proposing that they separate themselves from the rest - the 'unholy' - part of society. Rather, individual Jews and Christians, through their personal contributions, should bring the resources of their faith to bear as they participate in public endeavours together with their fellow citizens of other faiths or none.

One of the strongest binding factors between Jews and Christians is the shared confidence in the coming of the 'kingdom of God on earth'. Though this cannot and should not be given a precise meaning, the hope, reassurance and sense of direction it gives for a better, not merely more prosperous, world, is a precious gift we can jointly offer to all who will listen.

The Professionalisation of Dialogue

Christian/Jewish relations must be defined as an academic discipline in its own right. Still today most people who get involved are non-specialists. Some are biblical or New Testament scholars, some are systematic theologians, some are specialists in antisemitism, or Holocaust Studies, or Israel, or comparative religion, whilst some are clergy with pastoral responsibilities. Whilst the contributions of all of them enrich dialogue, it must be demonstrated that the field is coherent, demanding special skills of its own. No major university as yet has a chair of Christian Jewish Relations.

Dialogue at the Cutting Edge of Theology

When I first committed myself to Christian/Jewish dialogue I was unsure of its significance. Was it, as most people seemed to think, a marginal issue, part of Jewish public relations or of Christian atonement for past guilt?

I now know that far from being a marginal issue it lies at the centre of both Jewish and Christian self-understanding, at the heart of both theologies. Only in dialogue are you forced to address the most contentious areas of your own theology. It is easy for a Jewish theologian complacently to restate the old doctrines of chosenness, of authentic rabbinic exposition of scriptures, of the permanence of halakha, of the Messiah who is yet to come,

provided he/she meets only with other Jewish theologians. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same is true for Christian theologians.

Dialogue shatters self-indulgence. You are forced to ask radical questions of your own theology. How, for instance, is 'chosenness' to be interpreted when others plausibly see themselves as in a covenantal relationship with God? Why should privileged status be accorded to rabbinic interpretation of scripture as against other available hermeneutics? In the debate with Christians, can there be a creative dialectic between Christian witness that the Messiah is here and Jewish witness that the Messiah is not here?

The dialogue is not merely of Jews and Christians, for one walks beside unseen. There is always a third partner to the dialogue. That partner is modernity. Dialogue has become possible because we are able to mediate our Hebrew and Greek traditions through a common language - usually English - and a common culture, that of modernity. But this shared culture, with its historical critical approach and secular humanism, is not a neutral medium. Rather, it is an active 'third presence' in the dialogue, a presence whose profound influence (as Aristotle said of the 'music of the spheres') is so all-pervasive that it is in danger of not being noticed. The third presence is itself a powerful movement of the human spirit that challenges traditional doctrinal formulation, whether Christian or Jewish.

It is not of course the first time that Jews and Christians have developed their faiths interactively. We have done that ever since Christianity and rabbinic Judaism first defined themselves out of the maelstrom of first century Judaism. The difference is that nowadays we can engage in the process openly, consciously, and with mutual regard and friendship. That is why we who are engaged in dialogue stand at the cutting edge of theology; for we are not afraid to ask radical questions of our own traditions, and to refine and advance them within the context of the contemporary world. We are no longer infants struggling against each other to establish identities. We established our identities long ago, with bloodshed and hatred. Now we labour together, firm in our individual and collective identities, but united in aspiring towards God's kingdom of peace on earth.