

THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND PEACE

A lecture given for the
OXFORD PROJECT FOR PEACE STUDIES
on 4 MARCH 1987

by

Rabbi Dr Norman Solomon

Director

Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish/Christian Relations

Selly Oak Colleges Birmingham

First published in 1988 as 'The Jewish-Christian Dialogue and Peace', Oxford Project for Peace Studies No.8

INTRODUCTION

Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, it really is a pleasure to be here amongst you tonight and talking about that most important of all topics, namely peace.

My approach to peace must begin in Soviet Russia. My first and so far only visit - I do hope to go again sometime - took place with my wife about three or four years ago, when we spent a little less than a week in Leningrad. Anyone who has visited the USSR will recognize the feelings we had as we entered the country. There really is a feeling that a sort of curtain, an "Iron Curtain", descends, and you are cut off from outside. It's as if you are in a different civilisation, for your books and newspapers are taken away and information, when it comes to you, is heavily filtered.

Well, for the purpose of this visit I had just about mastered the Cyrillic alphabet and three or it may have been four words of simple Russian. That was enough to enable me, as I looked around at the hoardings, to make out that the word *Mir* - "peace" - was just about everywhere. Everything was "peace". That's what Russia saw itself as, the land of peace. This was a bit of a shock to the system, because on our side of the curtain I heard lots and lots of people telling me that Russia was "war", and yet there we were and everything was peace and peaceful people.

WORDS

So it set me thinking that people must be using words in different ways. There's no doubt that the translation was correct. The particular label "peace" which is used by English speaking people, or "mir" which is used by Russian speaking people, or for that matter "shalom" which is used by Hebrew speaking people - these are dictionary-equivalent labels and with a large measure of equivalence one can use them in their several different senses in any of those languages. It isn't a question of the word in Russian being different from the word in English, but of people of a

particular group tending to use it in a particular way with certain associations and in certain contexts which are different from those in which others may use it.

To put not too fine a point on the matter, when one looked into it deeper one found that the Soviet and, I suppose, the general Marxist way of understanding the word "peace", was with reference to a particular sort of social or political philosophy, or to a particular type of Utopia to which they look forward, and which gets the name "peace". Living in that sort of society you are living at "peace" and, therefore, the aim of the Soviet State is to promote "peace", which means to promote that type of society. From this certain conclusions follow, such as that there will inevitably be conflicts if there are these awful people outside who do not appreciate that this is the sort of life at which to aim, that this is the particular type of social system that they should strive for - that this is "the true meaning of" peace.

SHALOM

Now, I commenced with Russia not because I think that the Russians are particularly at fault in this matter but because it was there that it was brought home to me that people use words like "peace" in such different senses. I needn't have gone so far. I might have found it had I looked at my own traditional Jewish sources and discovered how *some* of them use a word like "shalom". I am going to do just that now. Maybe some people will not like it if I start by being a little critical of how Jewish sources have handled the concept, but there are many good things to balance against this and you will hear some of these as well.

I start with a little known rabbinic work which has the beautiful title *Perek ha-Shalom* (the Chapter on Peace). Let me give you a little of the historical background of this work. The second most important work in Judaism is the Mishnah, compiled under the direction of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch at the very beginning of the third century of this era. The Mishnah forms a classical statement of Jewish Law to this day,

so it is not surprising that there are many other, smaller works, not as comprehensive as the Mishnah, which have come to us from roughly the same period, up to maybe the fourth or fifth centuries - works written in similar style but often devoted to more specific topics. Amongst these are two short works which have the title "Derekh Eretz", which may be translated "ethics" or "moral principles"; like the betterknown "Ethics of the Fathers", these works are devoted to the exposition of ethical and moral principles rather than to law as such.

Tacked on to the end one of them is this final, beautiful chapter, *Perek ha-Shalom*. I am going to give you a few quotations from it to illustrate rabbinic thought on peace before I demonstrate my thesis on how the meaning of the word "shalom" can be subtly modified.

Shemo shel ha-Mashiach nikra shalom - "the name of the Messiah is 'peace'".

Beautiful, but dangerously easy to say. What does it mean? How does one unpack such a statement, "the name of the Messiah is Peace"? "Messiah" stands for "hope" - the ultimate hope, the Kingdom of God on earth; so the statement promises us peace, peace for the future, a vision of peace. Can't go wrong there!

Let us look at another one. This is, in fact, a citation from the Ethics of the Fathers, and is attributed to the great Rabbi Simon the son of Gamaliel, that is, of Gamaliel I who lived at the end of the first century. Simon taught that the world stands upon three things - Truth, Justice and Peace. His teaching is cited here in the *Perek ha-Shalom* and developed in there in what appears to us a modern kind of way. *Perek ha-Shalom* tells us that peace cannot be detached from the concepts of truth and justice; only a just society can rightly be described as peaceful. So this thought is handled in the Chapter on Peace.

These are some of the sweets, but the next one may not taste equally sweet to all. We are told in the name of Joshua the son of Levi, a great third century rabbi, "Great is

Peace, for peace to the land is as yeast to the dough. If the Holy One, blessed be He, did not set peace in the land then the sword and the beast would render people childless"; there is some more in like vein, and it is quite likely correctly attributed to the saintly third century rabbi. But then we are told that the land means only Israel for, it is said, "all the nations will pronounce you happy - you will be the desired land" (Malachi 3:12). A strong song, and it develops even more strongly: "Kingdoms come and kingdoms go, empires come and empires go, but Israel remains forever." Peace, the universal concept, has become nationalism - no worse, to be sure, than any other nationalism before or since, and by no means excluding other nationalisms, but falling some way short of a world concept.

We see here this subtle process by which the concept of peace is subverted to a narrower end than the universal one which probably all of us here believe defines its fullest meaning.

This narrowing of perspective is part of a process which affected Judaism very strongly. It is a process of withdrawal rather than a process of antagonism towards the outside world, something which one recognises as happening in times of persecution, in times when people were made to turn inwards, to despair of seeing peace in the contemporary world, and to retain only the ultimate hope that one day the Messiah would come and there would be true peace, centred in the land of Israel, and then the nations would see that and perhaps then they would be alright. So there is, nevertheless, a slight subversion here of the concept of peace. This is something that we always have to be on our guard against whether in Russia, in the prophetic writings, or wherever; we must ensure that we do not subvert this fundamental universal notion into something which serves the ends of a particular nation or particular type of social structure, and we must strive to retain the openness to peoples and to social structures which I for one believe lies at the heart of it.

THE VESSEL OF PEACE

Before I pass on to the special applications I want to address tonight, I should like to add one more observation on the meaning of the word "peace". This observation derives from a well-known rabbinic source which echoed in my mind for a long time before I realised its significance. It is, indeed the final sentence and peroration of the Mishnah, that authoritative third century work to which I referred earlier.

The first part is attributed to the same Rabbi Joshua the son of Levi whose words were distorted in the "Chapter on Peace". "Rabbi Joshua the son of Levi said 'The Holy One, Blessed be he, will cause every Saint to inherit hereafter three hundred and ten worlds, as it is written, "I may cause those who love me to inherit these worlds that I may fill their treasures"'. "

Rabbi Simon the son of Halafta said 'The Holy One Blessed be He found no vessel to hold Israel's blessing excepting peace for it is written, "the Lord will give strength to his people, the Lord will bless his people with peace". "'

Now, the significant thing to my mind about this is the description of peace as a "vessel". In Hebrew *keli* is a vessel or instrument to achieve something, rather than something in itself. The view which is being expressed is that we have to regard the concept of peace or the state of living peacefully not so much as an *end in itself* as as a desirable *means* or *situation in which* other things can be achieved. The rabbi is speaking here of continuous spiritual progress. Peace is thus the vessel, the instrument of achievement; it is that which enables us to progress, rather than itself the object, the thing of progress.

CHRISTIAN JEWISH RELATIONS

Now I turn to my own work, which at present is in the special field of Christian Jewish Relations, and you will see the concepts which I have mentioned emerging in this. I started this type of work believing that I had a particular problem on my hands in so far as for the last two thousand years Jews and Christians had not been very friendly with each other, to put it mildly. Since Jews have normally been the minority living amongst the majority who were Christians in Christian lands, it was the Jews who were the ones being persecuted. We have no idea what things would have been like had it been the other way around and it's useless to speculate. When one looks deeply into the causes for this one notices the particular formulations of religious faith, and in particular that Christianity has constantly defined itself *as against* Judaism or, which comes to much the same thing, as the "fulfilment" or "replacement" of Judaism. Whichever it is, the consequence has been a "putting down", a belittling or derogation of Jews and Judaism.¹

We can examine how this happened, we can discover in the sources particularly in the second and third centuries how Christians and Jews were reacting to each other, how they were beginning to define themselves, and what were the tensions which these processes of definition generated and which became enshrined in the rather static world of the Middle Ages, to remain unchallenged until the moral and intellectual upheavals of modern times. I naively thought, well, this is an isolated problem in which I happen to be interested and I can unravel some of it and, OK, then everything will be alright and my little problem will be solved. But as time went on it became evident that this was not so, that what had been uncovered in looking at this particular problem was something which applies to human relationships anywhere. It's an illustration,

¹The literature on the Christian sources of anti-semitism is vast. See for instance Rosemary R Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide. The Theological Roots of Anti-semitism* Seabury Press, New York 1974, and Jack T Sanders *The Jews in Luke and Acts* SCM Press, London 1987.

a paradigm of what can go sour in human relationships the world over, and it encapsulates the problems of peace. I still concentrate on my little patch, but I see it now within a universal context and so when I have described some of the work I shall bring out those elements which I think are of importance in the broader framework of work for peace.

THE FRAMEWORK

Item No. I - I have almost said it, but I must be even more explicit - is the question of the framework of understanding.

We have seen how the word "peace" itself can be subverted one way and another to serve a particular end. "Peace" is only one word and there are so many words which are used by people to express their profoundest beliefs, but which are used by them differently and which, therefore, cause misunderstanding.

Moreover, every word used by somebody finds something of its meaning in the context of the other words he uses. So in unravelling the relationship between Judaism and Christianity or between Jews and Christians the first problem is to find a framework, or rather to understand the frameworks, within which Jews and Christians are thinking, or even different types of Jews and different types of Christians are thinking, because they are not the same.

A very simple instance of this. How many times have I, like many other Jews, met Christians who were getting interested about Judaism, and then been asked, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, "Well, what do Jews think about Jesus?". It is, indeed, possible to answer the question directly. I can tell what I think about Jesus and other Jews can say what they think about Jesus (there is no "official" answer), but this isn't the point. The point is that in asking me that sort of question the

Christian is already imposing a particular framework of thought. Within my own framework of thought as a Jew, it is not a question that arises. Of course, I will listen politely as a good neighbour should. I live in a once Christian society and I find out about these things so I can talk about them, but it is not a matter which becomes part of my self-definition in the way that it does, and I understand it does, for a Christian.

Whether or not I have an effective punch-line in replying to the question depends on how it is put. The way I hope I will be asked is "Tell me, in the synagogue do you read the New Testament?" We don't. "Why don't you read the New Testament?"

I counter, "Tell me, in church how often do you read the Qur'an?". Usually this makes the point. Of course, nobody is thinking of *objecting* to reading the Qur'an; it simply doesn't come within the framework of thought of Christian self-understanding. There is no particular reason why it should. Likewise, the New Testament and Jesus are simply not within the framework of thought of Jewish self-understanding.

There is every reason why Christians or Jews should want to find out about Muslims, and people of all three faiths learn to understand each other better, but we must still realize that we each understand ourselves within different intellectual, cultural and social perspectives.

I have also devised an exercise which I sometimes use on classes, for instance classes of Christian student teachers. I first explain how we each see the world from within a particular perspective, and I then invite them to write down ten or maybe twelve key words which they would use to tell someone about their own beliefs, their Christianity. It's revealing to review these, and to see the rather different frameworks which even different sorts of Christians use to express their religion, whether they are Evangelicals, Roman Catholics or whatever. They have certain things in common but other things not. If you find somebody, for instance, putting down

words like "grace" and "works" in this short list, you sense the shade of Calvin hovering in the background; other Christians don't tend to latch onto those as the definitive words in their self-understanding. Then some will use theocentric words and concepts and will talk about God, others will talk about Christ, still others use a vocabulary which shows their central concern not with doctrine and belief but with the Church and with the social structures of religion, with fellowship or festivals. So all these different frameworks are available and are possible and the first step in dialogue is to realise this and to be able to listen and to put oneself within the alternative framework, the framework of the other.

MORE WORDS

We then come up against another trouble, danger, misunderstanding, also to do with the use of words. We have acknowledged that there are different systems, different sets of words with which we operate, different emphasis that we give even to the same words. And that we find that after all we do use some common words, for instance "salvation", or "Messiah", and that we both think they are fairly important words. Encouraging. But then we start to talk and find we don't after all mean the same thing at all, not one little bit. Take the word "Messiah". I suppose that to most people who think of themselves as Christians this term has reference to the Kingdom of God on Earth, but then it also has the associations of Incarnation, of saving the world from sin, original sin. All these further associations are somehow carried by Christians into the concept but they are absent from the Jewish concept of Messiah and in deed flatly contradictory to Jewish teaching about God.

"Salvation" is used in more closely overlapping situations and it would be difficult to pinpoint the precise difference in usage. I have heard some people say "salvation" in

Jewish sources is used in a very concrete sense about saving people out of difficult circumstances like getting them out of Egypt, political redemption, that sort of thing. However, this is patently *not* the whole truth. Often enough the word *is* so used, but already in the Psalms there is a more spiritual use of "redemption" and "salvation" with reference to the processes of bringing people away from sin, from alienation back towards God. So there isn't a hard and fast dividing line there.

Possibly one could produce a dividing line of Christian relationship of original sin - if not for the fact that on deeper investigation of Christian Theology and the Jewish Theology one finds that that there are Christians, especially in early and Eastern churches, whose notion of original sin is sufficiently attenuated to be quite possible within Jewish theology; on the other hand, there are statements about sin, about the flaw in the universe and its inhabitants, for instance in cabbalistic writing, that would pass muster quite easily as Christian statements on original sin. So there are very few hard and fast dividing lines and, therefore, far more care is necessary when conversing with one another and trying to understand.²

SELF DEFINITION

All this may sound very theological. Yet even though expressed in theological terms it originates in social realities and is certainly easier for us to grasp now sociologically, in terms of human relationships. Judaism and Christianity went their separate ways not because of abstract ideas but because of the human realities that underlay those ideas. So let us take another look at our origins see what happened in the early period of separation between Judaism and Christianity. In essence, it was a

²A useful introduction to the broad differences between Jewish and Christian use of key terms is *A Dictionary of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, edited by L Klenicki and Geoffrey Wigoder, Paulist Press, Ramsey, New Jersey 1984.

process of mutually exclusive self-definition.³ Defining oneself as not being the other means projecting all that which one doesn't like in oneself, one's "shadow" or dark side, from one's own subconscious onto the other person. The other person becomes the devil, the source of evil, the shadow, or however else it might be expressed.

We have to come to terms with this process to know that this has happened and to be able to be able to handle it in the present, because we still use the same sources as we used before, the same scriptures, the same holy writings which have the same words in them. It demands a tremendous historical effort to read old texts and to be able to distinguish between the essential message that their writers are passing on to us (or what any one of us thinks is their essential message), and the trappings of their contemporary society, the efforts which they were making, consciously or not, to distinguish themselves from the other, and thereby defining themselves and their doctrines.

Often, you will hear Jewish theologians saying that the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is asymmetrical because whereas Judaism, being the older religion, was established without any basis in Christianity, Christianity had to establish itself on the basis of Judaism. Christianity must, therefore, have some sort of theology of Judaism, and it turned out to be basically hostile - traditionally, Christians see themselves as superseding or displacing Judaism, and this leads them to have a condescending attitude towards it. The other way around you wouldn't expect this to happen.

Well, it is a nice story and I wish that it were true - it would make me feel good, even superior. However, it is not true, for Judaism - as I understand the term, viz the Judaism of the rabbis, not that of the "Old Testament" - was defining itself at just the same time as Christianity. Jewish self-definition in the Talmud, though concerned to

³A fine collection of studies on self-definition in the early centuries may be found in the three volumes *Jewish and Christian*

establish many boundaries other than that with Christianity, certainly took place in the knowledge of what Christians were saying and of what Christians were claiming, and there was the need to distance themselves from such claims, to define themselves in such a way that Christian claims would be undermined, though rarely in the form of a head-on explicit attack on a particular Christian claim.

Psychologically, I find it extremely interesting how this process went on, and really scholars are only now beginning to unravel the process. Reading between the lines of many of the early Jewish texts one of the interesting things about it is the way in which Jewish teaching itself became distorted (some people would prefer the neutral term "adapted") as part of the process of self-definition. Let me illustrate one important instance of this by referring again to the subversion of the word "Shalom".

I would say that the principal way in which Judaism harmed itself in its fight against Christianity was that it saw Christianity as stressing the universalist aspect of biblical religion, and instead of saying fine, that's the right thing to do, let's all join in, it defined itself against that and became much more inward looking and isolationist, ruling too many things "outside", beyond the Jewish boundary.

Now, Judaism could never, and can never, become completely isolationist, completely (through lack of a better word) nationalist or tribal. It can't do that, for the Hebrew scriptures with a strong universalist tradition restrain it. This same universalist strain runs through our liturgy side by side with the "chosen people" refrain. One has only to turn to the liturgy of the New Year and the Day of Atonement to see how these prayers are angled towards the time when the whole world and all its people will be united in the service of God.

To sense the strong presence of the universalist roots within Judaism one only has to reflect how in modern times, when new Jewish movements and sects have appeared, it

Self-Definition edited by E P Sanders, SCM Press, 1980 onwards.

has been easy and natural for those who are reforming Jewish attitudes to draw out and invoke the universalist strains.⁴ Even amongst the most diehard orthodox the idea of proselytization has remained and whatever the difficulties proselytes have been accepted, so that Judaism has remained in both practice and principle open to people wherever they come from, whatever their origin.

So, yes, universalism lies at the heart of Judaism. It is too strong a tendency to be lost, but it tends to be submerged. I think that this tendency was intensified through the attempt to define the boundaries of Judaism as against Christianity, though undoubtedly it was further exacerbated at a later stage by reaction to persecution.

THE CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUE

Let me move on to give you an account of some of the dialogues currently taking place and which aren't as well known as they deserve to be. Of dialogue on the level of most of us humble people, teachers, professionals, working people and so on, there is plenty; people are talking to each other and their way is the way of listening and understanding, each discerning the framework of the other. It is the task of the Council of Christians and Jews, and other member organisations of the International Council of Christians and Jews, through their branches throughout the world, to encourage and support this kind of dialogue.

Less well known are the extraordinary advances in dialogue which have been taking place at the more rarified level of world Church and Jewish bodies coming together, talking in a way never before known in their whole history; this process is essentially a post war development.

⁴The "enlightenment" tradition from Mendelssohn through Hermann Cohen, and incorporating the Reform movement, illustrates this well; amongst the orthodox, Rav Kook most strongly exemplifies the universalist trend.

Let me briefly sketch the history of the international Christian/Jewish dialogue. In 1946, just over forty years ago, the first attempt was made to convene some sort of International Council of Christians and Jews. This came hard on the heels of the Holocaust. People had begun to realize the suffering of the Jews during the war; Christian Churches became terribly guilt-ridden about this and something had to be said and had to be done. A conference was convened in Oxford in 1946, and there it there two decisions were reached; a further conference was to be held to focus on antisemitism, and an International Council of Christians and Jews was to be set up.

Accordingly, in August 1947, at Seelisberg, a little Swiss village above Lake Lucerne, a smaller meeting took place. From here the "Ten Points of Seelisberg" issued forth, in a declaration which is seen by many as the foundation of the major move forward in dialogue between Jews and Christians in the post war years.

I had an interesting experience with these "Ten Points" just a few months ago. William (previously the Rev.) W Simpson, happily still engaged in the dialogue was, as an enthusiastic young man, deeply involved in Oxford and Seelisberg; he battled very hard and got something done. For the fortieth anniversary of Seelisberg I invited him to write an account, for my newsletter *ENDS & ODDS*, of those stirring events.⁵ He kindly obliged, and on the front of the newsletter I listed the "Ten Points" as originally formulated. They consist of matters which today many of us consider "old hat", such as the need to remember that Jesus was a Jew, and that Jews are our brothers and God has not rejected them, and other nice things of that kind.

To my amusement, within a short space of time I received two contrasting about this. One, verging on the irate, came from a Jewish friend, an academic in Lancaster, who in effect asked: "Why are you publishing this sort of antiquated rubbish? We left this point long ago, we have advanced far beyond this." I replied that indeed this was

the whole point of the exercise, to show how far we had advanced in the forty years since Seelisberg. The other was a letter from a Roman Catholic Bishop active in the field of Jewish-Christian relations in this country. His comment was, "How very wonderful this is! I wish I had know these Ten Points years ago! All Catholics should be taught them!"

There you see the unevenness of the way in which these things become known, the marketing weakness of the dialogue movement.

In fact, though the Roman Catholic Church, since Vatican II in 1965, has taken a notable part in interfaith dialogue and especially in Jewish-Christian dialogue, it was conspicuously absent from 1949 onwards, when the Holy Office issued a directive to the Catholic hierarchy warning them against association with the International Council of Christians and Jews (and by implication with the national bodies) out of fear of "religious indifferentism".

But let our story continue. The World Council of Churches met in Amsterdam in 1948 very conscious of what had been achieved at Seelisberg, very conscious that it was meeting the city from which hundreds of thousands of Jews, including Anne Frank, had been deported and sent to their deaths. "What a terrible and most awful thing to happen we love the Jews and express our sympathy with them we totally condemn antisemitism and now what shall we do for these poor old Jews that have escaped the Holocaust? Out of kindness towards them, out of true Christian love, we must redouble our efforts to evangelize them"

Forgive me if I caricature slightly, but indeed there is no caricature in reporting that the two salient points of the document "The Christian Approach to the Jews" are the condemnation of antisemitism and the call to evangelize the Jews. I was not old

⁵The account is published as *ENDS & ODDS* No.30, October 1986, obtainable from the Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish/Christian Relations, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham B29 6LQ.

enough at the time to be sitting up and taking notice so I don't know how I would have reacted. The Jews of the time, surfacing from the nightmare of the Holocaust, would have heard, with some scepticism, Christians condemning antisemitism and proposing to be nice to Jews, and if they said anything publicly it would have been a polite "thank you very much". As for the other bit about the Evangelism bit, I think it was like water off a duck's back - they had heard that sort of talk so many times it made little impact. But doubtless there were those who groaned "Hitler tried to destroy our bodies; these people are trying to destroy our souls", which may be putting it a little strongly because after all the Christians probably meant well, even if they were misguided.

Primitive beginnings. A few years after that things started to move rapidly and it wasn't just Vatican II (1965). The Vatican II documents were themselves only the end result of a long and well-documented process. It occurred to some Christian bodies, by which I mean first the World Council of Churches and later the Vatican, that it wasn't enough to condemn antisemitism, but that they should get together and talk —about~ the Jews, and learn how to decontaminate themselves from anti-semitism and how in future to avoid disasters like the Holocaust. So they started doing that, having meetings to define their attitudes towards Jews and Judaism, and developing along a pattern which I must call the "dialogue syndrome", and which has been several times repeated, as for instance with the Church of Scotland in the 1980's. You get shocked by the Holocaust (it took place in Christian lands) and condemn antisemitism. Then you have to decide how to relate yourself to Jews and Judaism, so you hold a meeting with other other Christians of your same persuasion and simply talk —about~ Jews. You do this two or three times and somebody eventually says, well wouldn't it be a good idea if we actually got one or two Jews along. The first Jews to be invited are not real Jews but converts to Christianity, sometimes calling themselves "Jewish

Christians"; frequently these "Jewish Christians" act as counsel for and a bridge to mainstream Jews, who nevertheless regard them with suspicion.

The next stage is that some actual, committed "real" Jews are asked to a "Consultation". I have been involved in some dialogues at this nervous initial stage. You go in and you meet people and they are all rather wary of each other, but still the "peace and reconciliation" process has at least begun for there you are, all of you, come together to talk. First you talk *at* rather than *to* each other. One says, slightly stiffly, defensively, "It is written in the Holy Book so-and-so", and the other one says "It is so-and-so in the Holy Book". Then you begin to listen and it's amazing how quickly the barriers are, in fact, broken down. It doesn't seem to take more than one meeting of this nature to break down the barriers, to develop some sort of trust and understanding, and to speak openly instead of constantly sheltering beneath official statements and positions.

This has happened both at World Council of Churches through its sub-Unit on Mission and Dialogue (the name changes now and then), and with the Vatican through its Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. At the present time there is an approximately annual dialogue between an international Jewish body and on the one hand the World Council of Churches and on the other hand the Vatican through their appropriate units.

The Jewish dialogue body had to be specially created for the purpose. In 1967 the "Bristol" document, produced by the Faith and Order Commission and the WCC Committee on the Church and the Jewish People, called for "ongoing encounter" - ie, to move from talking *about* Jews to "studying, witnessing and working" *with* them. It was largely in response to this that the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) was formed, out of an agreement reached in 1969 between the World Jewish Congress and the Synagogue Council of America. The

American Jewish Committee joined in March 1970, and the B'nai Brith Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Council in Israel for Interreligious Relations became members in 1973.⁶

I want to note an extraordinary experience I have had at several of these international Consultations, since I was first involved in 1980. You get together a gathering like this which is to last perhaps three or four days and you think that after a day or two you will have the Jews on one side and the Christians on the other, but this is not at all what happens. The split is across, not along, the faith boundary. It is between the liberals, Jewish or Christian, on one side, and the traditionalists, Jewish or Christian, on the other side.

One is constantly learning not only about our divisions, and there are many, but about the tremendous amount which is shared. I believe one learns also something beyond the particularity of the Christian/Jewish dialogue, and that is the ultimate aim - Peace. We learn that we are here now, we are sharing this planet, and we are in a very different situation and with different understandings of the world from our predecessors in the first five Christian (and rabbinic Jewish) centuries. Our forbears of that epoch, rabbis and Church Fathers, whom else we admire, were constantly concerned just in defining who they were and what they stood for, as *against* each other and the other groups who with them constituted the world of late antiquity; their insistence on boundaries and definitions and on the absolute correctness of their views (ascribed, of course, to God), threw the world into the chaos and oppression of the Middle Ages. In our times, there is a radical change of perspective. Improved technology and communications have made it too easy for us to inflict great damage

⁶The process is described in the Dr Riegner's introduction to *JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE* World Council of Churches, Geneva 1975 (this volume contains the texts and summaries of papers of the 1972 Consultation). Not many collections of proceedings of these dialogues have been published. The papers of the Consultation at Harvard, November 1984, appeared recently as *THE MEANING AND LIMITS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE WORLD TODAY* Ed. Allan R Brockway and Jean Halpérin IJCIC/WCC Geneva 1987. Many papers of other dialogues have been appeared over the years in the quarterly journal *Christian Jewish Relations*, published in London by the Institute for Jewish Affairs.

on each other and to destroy our whole world. Our first responsibility now is not how to define boundaries but how to share in caring for the world and its people. We may feel puny, that there is little we can do to change things. In the world bodies we get frustrated at our seeming inability to do much, but at least in working with people from all so many countries and seeing how small the world is you begin to think of your responsibilities, not in terms of a duty to promulgate this that or the other doctrine, but as first and foremost a responsibility to look after the planet on which we live, and which we must share peacefully if we are to survive.

The Duke of Edinburgh took a great step forward for interfaith dialogue a few months ago. The World Wildlife Fund, of which he is President, was to celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary and the Duke, perhaps basically rather fed up with the way religions still continually fight amongst themselves whilst at the same time they preach peace amongst the faithful, evidently resolved that they should do better. Perhaps they could be persuaded to testify jointly to the concern they profess severally for Conservation, for the preservation of life on earth which is what the World Wildlife Fund stands for. And so in Assisi last October representatives of all major religions turned up and prayed and said their set pieces and produced a very nice brochure with lots of Greek and Hebrew and Arabic and various Indian languages splashed impressively across it. I confess to some scepticism about the exercise. There was a lot of talk, smooth talk, and a lot of show. It is so easy for everyone to get together and shout for peace or virginity or whatever else they want us to believe in, without any awareness of what their demands mean in practice, or of the fact that they are simultaneously calling for other things, for instance commitment to traditional doctrines, which undermine whole-hearted co-operation with those with whom they currently share a platform. I think it is going to take a very long time indeed until the —iactual~ spiritual leaders, who are rarely identical with the public spokesmen of the major religions, are going to feel sufficiently in tune with one another to work

together in this way; still, a beginning has been made and even though there are many diehards who will not join in there are not so many who would openly condemn such co-operation.

A VISION

Finally, I want to describe a vision that I once had - in the Holy City of Jerusalem, for where else does one have visions? A beautiful place, the Old City, with its white stone, limestone from local hills, an enchantment of light cascading from its walls and buildings. My wife was with me and one of my sons, who was at that time rather small. We entered by the Jaffa gate, next to which is something which is called the Tower or the Citadel of David but probably isn't. We ascended the tower and looked out across the city towards a rising mound actually a bit lower than ourselves, capped by the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of Omar, the place where the Temple stood. We could see the "quarters" into which the city is divided - Jewish, Armenian, Christian, Muslim.

Then the vision came upon me and it was like this~:

People were scurrying along the street, nuns in habits, priests Latin, Orthodox and other in their distinctive garb, rabbis and pious young —iyeshiva~ students, Imams - yes, all facets of religion, and you could see them all, everyone scurrying about like busy ants. But all with that singular Jerusalem intensity, that conviction of having a 'hot line' to God, that each of them claims to the exclusion of the other.

At the same time the other aspect of it pressed upon my mind they were all quarreling with each other, totally failing to see each other as they were, seeking for God. Indeed they do quarrel terribly, without love. I don't mean particularly Jews with Muslims. I mean also Christians with Christians, Armenians with Armenians, Jews with Jews and so

on. And the quarrels - such as about who washes the steps in the Holy Sepulchre - are of sickening irrelevance to the world's real needs. It looks as if no two of these people can fit together, and yet on the other hand they are there seeking one thing, closeness to the same unique God.

And the vision expressed itself to me in the terms of an old rabbinic tradition⁷ - it is paralleled in the New Testament⁸ - about the New Temple to be built by God Himself, not by the hand of man. And it came to me in words, and the words were: "The Temple is there as soon as people see it." This is why it rises "without hands", for it does not need to be built, it is there already, but people just refuse to see it. As soon as this veil which divides each one from the other is removed, it will be seen to have been there all the time, and it will not need to be built.

This is my vision of Peace. It is a matter of being able to free ourselves from the veil, from these images, stereotypes and sources of fear, hate and conflict in whose grip we are, and which we so often absorb from the religious/cultural matrix within which reside also the spiritual values that give us strength. It is a matter of achieving the sense of living on, and being responsible for, our planet, of accepting beauty, holiness, goodness, as gifts we share.

I don't know if this sort of state can ever actually be reached. One of the most dangerous myths of man is the simplistic messianic myth that at some point in time something falls out of the sky and everything is alright forever after.

I think there is a process, a constant process, something which is part of our nature. Our nature as human beings is not a static one. It is dynamic, and progress is something which continues forever moving towards an ideal. Peace is, as the rabbis

⁷There are many versions. *Exodus Rabbah* 15:2 reads "The Holy One, Blessed be He, is 'first', and He will come and build the Temple, which is 'first' ...". *Pesikta Rabbati* has "O Jerusalem! Flesh and blood built you, flesh and blood overthrew you. But in the Time to Come I Myself shall build you"

⁸Mark 14:58. 2 Cor 5:1.

would have it, the greatest vehicle that could be given to us by God for constant movement towards the ideal.