A Time for Recommitment

BUILDING THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

International Council of Christians and Jews

An Educational Resource

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

CONTEXT

Two years after the end of the Second World War, 65 Jews and Christians gathered at Seelisberg in Switzerland (30 July-5 August, 1947) to express grief over the Holocaust, combat antisemitism and to foster stronger relationships between Jews and Christians. Out of their conversation came a 10-point document that addressed Christian churches in their desire to renew their understandings of Judaism.

62 years later (on 5 July 2009) in Berlin, the *International Council of Christians and Jews* (ICCJ) issued a new call to reflect on how this relationship could be deepened. A 12-point document emerged from this gathering that addresses Jews and Christians separately and then Jewish and Christian communities together. That document, "A Time for Recommitment: Building the New Relationship between Jews and Christians", offers a fresh invitation to deepen the understanding and cooperation between Christian and Jewish communities. At that time, the ICCJ also produced an educational guide to help deepen the understanding of these points.

The Theology Committee, a group of internationally recognized Jewish and Christian scholars of the ICCJ, reflected on the importance of "A Time for Recommitment". It discerned the need for a revised educational guide that would assist Jewish and Christian interlocutors reflecting the events and developments since the publication of the first guide.

This educational resource begins by setting out the 12 points of "A Time for Recommitment" in summary. These are categorized into three sections. The first four points address Christians; the second four,

Seelisberg: Hotel Sonnenberg, gathering place of first Jewish-Christian meeting after WWII

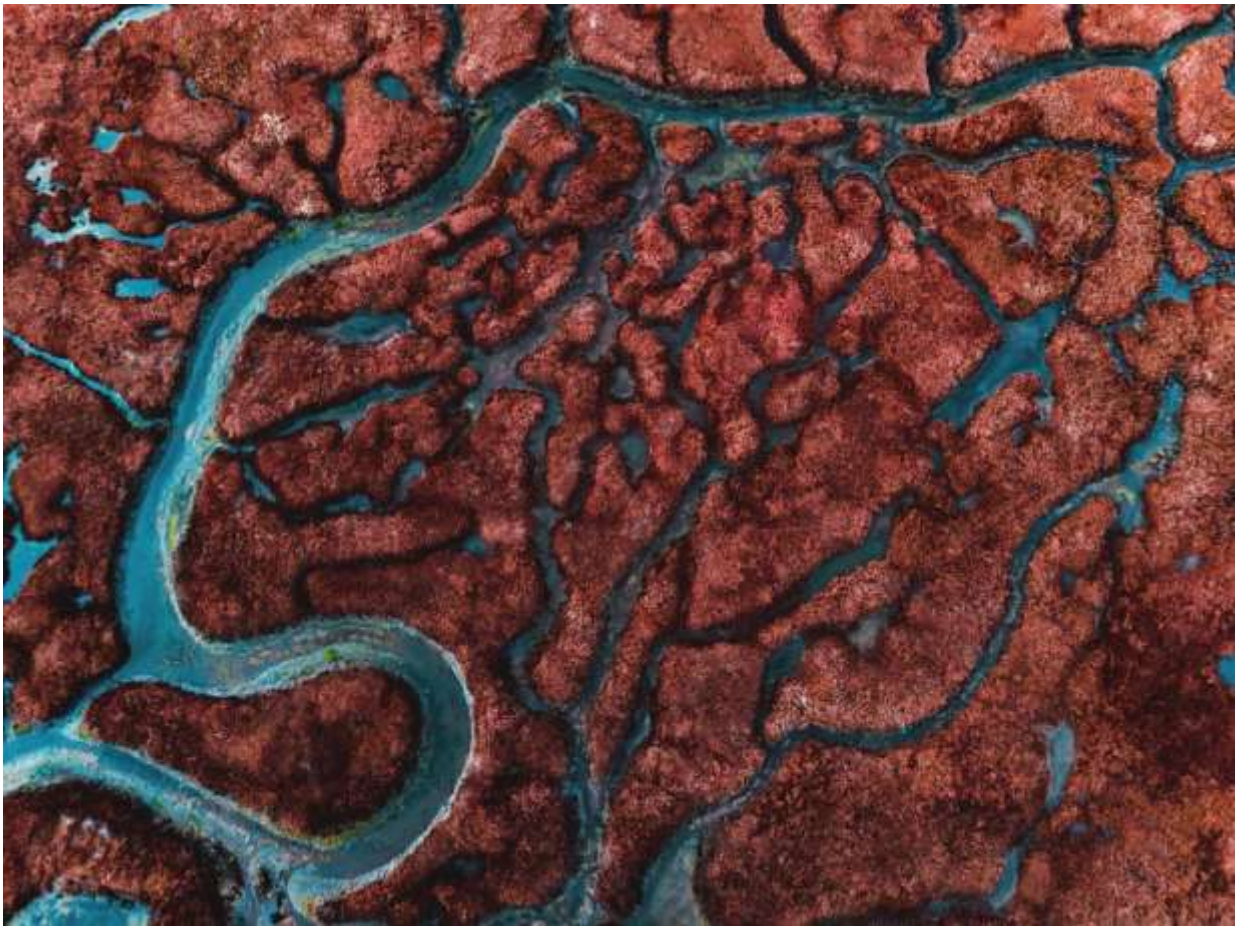
Jews; the final points of the document address Jews and Christians together highlighting issues of mutual concern and collaboration.

This resource will expand upon and explore each of the points in turn. It will suggest ways of deepening understanding and points of discussion. It is designed as a tool to enable grassroots communities to engage in interreligious reflection and discussion on the respective themes from “A Time for Recommitment.”

This guide provides background information on each of the twelve points. It also suggests relevant religious and secular resources for further study. Importantly, it offers sets of questions to stimulate deeper reflection so that faith communities can get meaningfully involved inter-religiously to address issues of common concern in today’s world.

It is our hope that this guide will provide resources for students and practitioners of Jewish-Christian dialogue, and, more generally, anyone committed to interreligious understanding and cooperation.

Martin Buber House, Heppenheim, Germany, Headquarters of the ICCJ

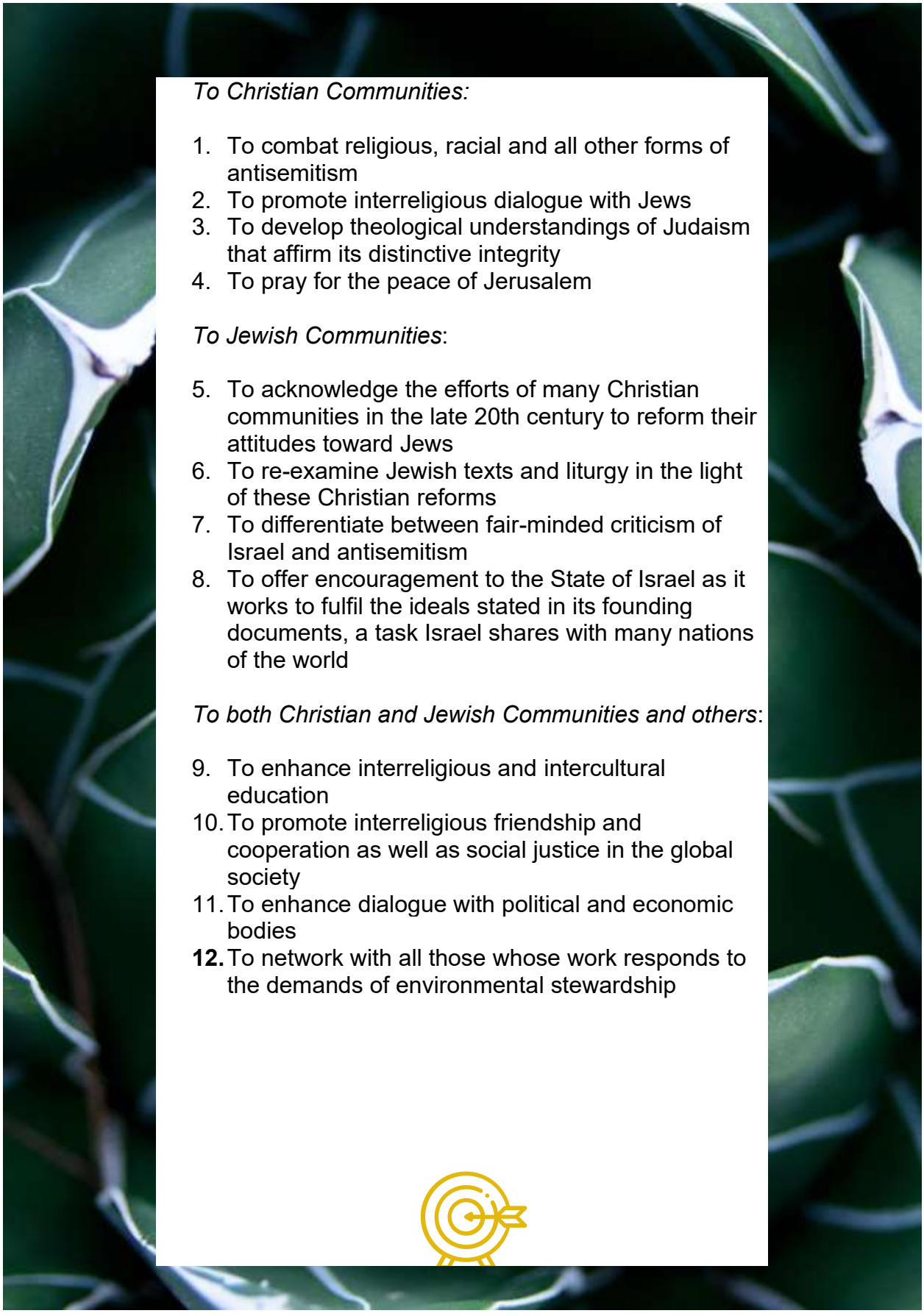


A Time for Recommitment:

The Twelve Points in Summary

The 12 Points of “The Time for Recommitment: Building the New Relationship between Jews and Christians” in summary now follow.

- The first four are addressed to Christians;
- The next four, to Jews;
- The final four to both Christians and Jews.



To Christian Communities:

1. To combat religious, racial and all other forms of antisemitism
2. To promote interreligious dialogue with Jews
3. To develop theological understandings of Judaism that affirm its distinctive integrity
4. To pray for the peace of Jerusalem

To Jewish Communities:

5. To acknowledge the efforts of many Christian communities in the late 20th century to reform their attitudes toward Jews
6. To re-examine Jewish texts and liturgy in the light of these Christian reforms
7. To differentiate between fair-minded criticism of Israel and antisemitism
8. To offer encouragement to the State of Israel as it works to fulfil the ideals stated in its founding documents, a task Israel shares with many nations of the world

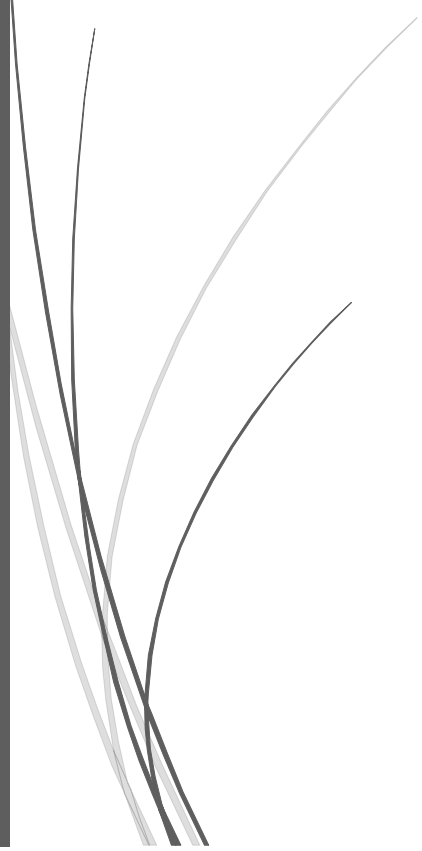
To both Christian and Jewish Communities and others:

9. To enhance interreligious and intercultural education
10. To promote interreligious friendship and cooperation as well as social justice in the global society
11. To enhance dialogue with political and economic bodies
12. To network with all those whose work responds to the demands of environmental stewardship

Points Addressing Christian Communities

POINT ONE

To combat religious, racial and all other forms of antisemitism



Point 1. To combat religious, racial and all other forms of antisemitism

Summary of Point One

The first part of Point 1 calls for Christians to struggle against all forms of antisemitism, focusing on biblical, liturgical and catechetical means as strategies in this work. These will be treated and expanded on in turn, with a focus on Bible, Liturgy and Catechesis. The points as found in the "Time for Recommitment" are set out below under each of the three sub-headings.

Expansion of Point 1

Biblically

- By recognizing Jesus' profound identity as a Jew of his day, and interpreting his teachings within the contextual framework of first century Judaism.

- By recognizing Paul's profound identity as a Jew of his day, and interpreting his writings within the contextual framework of first century Judaism.

- By emphasizing that recent scholarship on both the commonality and gradual separation of Christianity and Judaism is critical for our basic understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship.

- By presenting the two Testaments in the Christian Bible as complementary and mutually affirming rather than antagonistic or inferior/superior. Denominations that use lectionaries are encouraged to choose and link biblical texts that offer such an affirming theology.

- By speaking out against Christian misreadings of biblical texts regarding Jews and Judaism that can provoke caricatures or animosity.

Gutenberg Bible, first printed Bible, mid-15th Century CE

Liturgically

- By highlighting the connection between Jewish and Christian liturgy.
- By drawing upon the spiritual richness of Jewish interpretations of the scriptures.
- By cleansing Christian liturgies of anti-Jewish perspectives, particularly in preaching, prayers and hymns.

Bishop Celebrating Divine Liturgy, Prešov, Slovakia

Catechetically

- By presenting the Christian-Jewish relationship in positive tones in the education of Christians of all ages, underlining the Jewish foundations of Christian belief and accurately describing the ways Jews themselves understand their own traditions and practices. This includes the curricula of Christian schools, seminaries and adult education programs.
- By promoting awareness of the long-lived traditions of Christian anti-Judaism and providing models for renewing the unique Jewish-Christian relationship.
- By underscoring the immense religious wealth found in the Jewish tradition, especially by studying its authoritative texts.

Point 1: Bible

- Jewishness of Jesus
- Jewishness of Paul
- Commonality and Gradual Separation of Christianity and Judaism
- The Bible's Two Testaments as Complementary
- Christian misreadings of Biblical Texts

Point 1(A): The Jewishness of Jesus

The work of Jewish-Christian dialogue has shown the need for a reorientation of Christian thinking about Jesus.[1] Christian belief in Jesus "has often been marred by various forms of supersessionism."[2] Thus, Jesus was seldom, if ever, considered to be a Jew of his time, observing such halachic practices as Shabbat and kashrut, and living according to the ethical norms of Jewish traditions.[3]

For REFLECTION

- How do the Christians that you know understand Jesus?
- How much does Jesus' Jewish background influence their way of thinking?
- What are the popular images of Jesus? What do these say about the way the artist perceives him?

Most of what we know about the life, death and teaching of Jesus, is transmitted in the canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), as well as non-canonical texts such as the Gospel of Thomas. There are brief references in the Roman author Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44), as well as the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.63-64). The canonical gospels were redacted late in the first century or early in the second century, by people who had never met the historical Jesus and who directed their writing to the needs of specific communities.

Jesus lived in the eastern end of the Mediterranean, an area that was part of the Roman province of Syria. The period in which he lived was one of widespread poverty, absentee landlordism, heavy taxation, widespread natural disasters and occasional civil unrest. It was also a period of remarkable religious creativity.

Jesus was born into a laboring family from the Galilee. Mark 6:3 tells us that he was a carpenter.[4] Thus, Jesus was from the artisan class which would produce many members of the rabbinic movement. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and accepted his preaching of repentance. He exercised a ministry as teacher, healer and exorcist. In biblical and post-biblical Jewish literature, traditions of wonder-workers were already centuries old, as we see in the stories of Moses, Elijah and Elisha.[5] The miracles -- healings, feeding stories, exorcisms, nature miracles – served to legitimate Jesus as agent of God's work in the minds of his followers.

Jesus held much in common with other Jewish teachers, for example belief in the resurrection, use of parables, concern for the vulnerable and poor. Moreover, he upheld Torah and ritual practice such as Shabbat. New Testament sources do not indicate that

Jesus ever abrogated Torah. He is often portrayed in debate with "Pharisees," "Sadducees," and "Scribes."[6] The discussion was around the *how* of observance not *whether* Torah observance was to be maintained. Disputes about Torah interpretation were common among Jewish teachers, and should not be seen as leading to Jesus' eventual death; remarks such as that found in Mk 3:6 are highly editorial, echoing conflicts between groups of Jesus' followers and other Jewish teachers in later decades.

Sunset over the Sea of Galilee

Jesus' teaching contains wise sayings, legal pronouncements, commands and parables. He taught a prayer that resembles other Second Temple and early rabbinic prayers (Luke 11:2-4//Matt 6:9-13). Much of Jesus' teaching is apocalyptic in character. "Apocalyptic" implies revelatory knowledge, a heavenly world, judgement at the end-time, and a profound sense of "us" versus "them." Apocalyptic thinkers employ esoteric symbols, astrology, prophecy, and cosmology. Much of the extant Jewish literature of the Second Temple period is apocalyptic in nature. This is also true of Jesus' teaching, and that of his followers.

The most characteristic element in Jesus' teaching was the motif of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God ("Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew) bore a variety of meanings, in Jesus' thinking, as it did in the thinking of contemporary Judaism. It signified a transformed social and cosmic order, including eschatological judgment.

Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as present and hidden, yet growing towards future completion. That teaching described, in some places, a reversal of values, an apocalyptic overturning of the present social order. In the new order, the last would be first (Matt 20:1-16), and all would be granted access, including the wicked (Luke 15). Jesus, his followers and the early community referred to themselves as the "poor," the "meek," and the "little ones," much as did their contemporaries in other Jewish groups.

Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God is reflected in a number of actions such as the demonstration in the Temple (Mk 11:15-19 //); the sayings regarding the destruction of the Temple and the establishment of a new Temple (Mk 13:2//; Matt 26:60//); the choice of 12 disciples as judges of tribes of Israel in the "new age" (Matt 19:28//Luke 22:28-30).

"The Kingdom of God ("Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew) bore a variety of meanings, in Jesus' thinking, as it did in the thinking of contemporary Judaism. It signified a transformed social and cosmic order, including eschatological judgment."

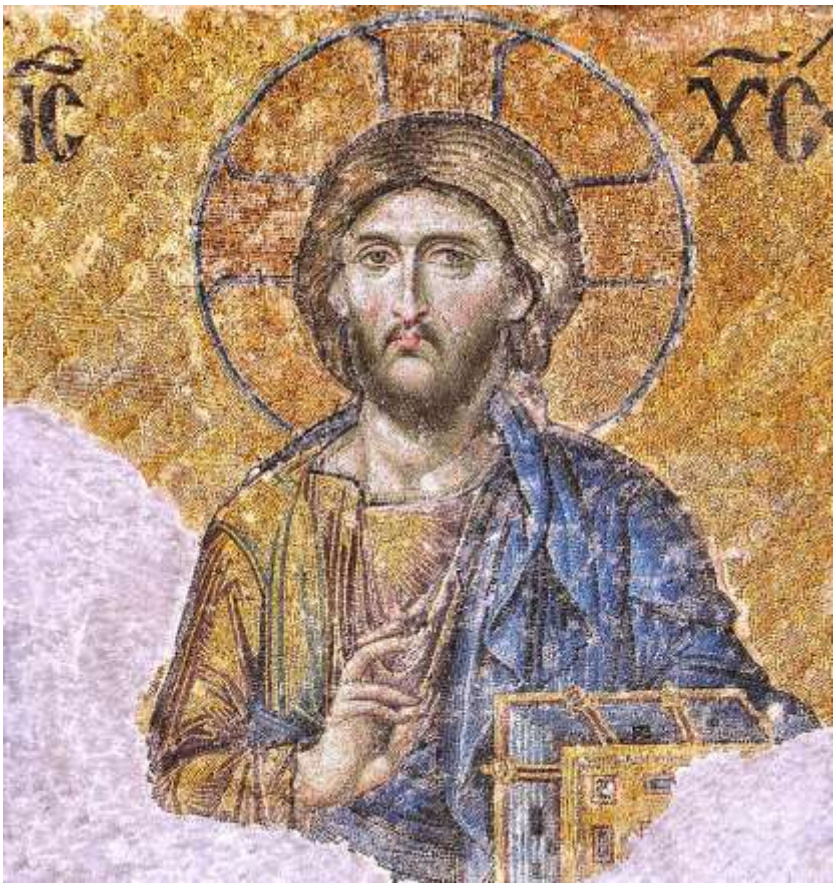
Qumran on the N-E Shores of the Dead Sea

Jesus was involved in a controversy around the Temple. He drove out those selling and buying sacrificial animals and overturned moneychangers' tables and the seats of pigeon sellers (Mk 11:15). It is reported that he said "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another not made with hands" (Mk 14:58). Jesus' symbolic action is <u>not</u> to be thought of as a critique of ritual and a call for purely interior worship. It might be understood as a critique of the priesthood in the fashion of the Dead Sea Scrolls or *1 Enoch* 89-90. It might also be understood in light of eschatological expectation of a new Temple and a new Jerusalem voiced in Isaiah and in Micah (Isa 49:5f; 56:1-8; 60:3-7, 10-14; 66:18-24), and then in Tobit 13:10-18; *1 Enoch* 25; 91:13; *Jubilees* 1:15-17.

Some Second Temple Jewish texts tell of the expectation of a Messiah who would be a warrior-king. Some texts also describe the Messiah in prophetic and priestly themes. The title "messiah" is associated with the defeat of the forces of oppression. The Messiah is often

associated with the overthrow of the Romans (Qumran, *Ps Sol 17*).[7] In *4 Q 246*, he is called "Son of God," and in *1 Enoch* 37-71 he is called "Son of Man." Despite the apocalyptic quality of Jesus' words and deeds, he nowhere claims to be Messiah apart from Mk 14:62, although he seems to have understood himself to have a special role in the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.[8]

Jesus does seem to have referred to himself as "Son of Man." Certainly, that title was used of him in the earliest layers of the gospel tradition, as was the title "Messiah (Christ)." "Son of Man" occasionally served as a euphemism for "I," thus reflecting Aramaic usage. Most often, in the gospels, however, it reflects the apocalyptic figure of a heavenly being/angel who represented the people Israel in their oppression, and who served as Anointed, Chosen, and eschatological judge.[9]



Jesus as Image of Wisdom in Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

And yet some of those around Jesus, including his closest followers likely called him "Messiah." This would not be surprising in the context of the times. Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God, the reputation gained by his miracles and deeds such as the fracas in the Temple would have provided ample ground for some to make messianic assertions about him. Moreover, it is possible that Jesus and his followers understood the Kingdom of God to stand over against the Roman Empire, the Kingdom of the Caesar.[10]

Certainly the Romans understood Jesus in messianic terms. With some form of collusion by the Temple high priesthood, the Romans crucified Jesus, using a form of punishment

reserved for slaves and insurgents.[11] And they did so under the sign "the King of the Jews" (Mk 15:26; Matt 27:37; Luke 23:38; Jn 19:19). Thus, Jesus was not executed for theological reasons, or for matters of dispute over Torah observance, but for political reasons, as a threat to the order of Roman rule in the province of Syria, of which Judea was a part.[12]

Christ on the Cross, Louvre Museum, Paris, first half of 12 cent CE

In the wake of those events, of the capture and execution of Jesus, his followers several days later, experienced him as living and present to them. That experience, reflected in early strata of the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3-11), became the foundation stone of the Jesus movement after his lifetime. As Jesus had taught in the framework of biblical and Second Temple Jewish tradition, so too did his followers continued to use that wellspring to interpret Jesus, life and teaching, his death and resurrection. Often they used those traditions to heighten the stories of conflict between Jesus and Jewish teachers and leaders, reflecting their own communities' experiences of tension in the process of self-definition and identity formation.

For Conversation:

What helpful insights about Christian understanding of Jesus emerges from the above?

How might this appreciation of Jesus' Jewish identity and context shape our understanding of Judaism?

***Resources*:**

For Reference:

Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Other helpful Resources:

Allen, Ronald J. and Clark M. Williamson. *Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews: a Lectionary Commentary*. Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Boyarin, Daniel. *The Jewish Gospels; the Story of the Jewish Christ*. New York City: The New Press, 2012.

Boys, Mary C. *Redeeming Our Sacred Story; the Death of Jesus and Relations between Jews and Christians*. New York City: Paulist Press, 2013.

Fredriksen, Paula. *Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews; a Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity*. New York City: Vintage Books, 1999.

Levine, Amy-Jill. *Short Stories by Jesus; the Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi.* New York: Harper, 2014.

____. *The Misunderstood Jew; the Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper, 2006.

Meyer, Barbara U., *Jesus the Jew in Christian Memory: Theological and Philosophical Explorations,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020

Sanders, E.P. *Jesus and Judaism*. London: SCM Press, 1985.

Vermes, Geza. *Jesus the Jew; a Historian's Reading of the Gospels*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1973.

Notes

1. From a vast literature, mention might be made of Sarah J. Tanzer, "The Historical Jesus," pp. 628-633, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, eds. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler 2nd ed.; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017; Barbara U. Meyer, *Jesus the Jew in Christian Memory: Theological and Philosophical Explorations,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

2. "Supersessionism" can be understood "as shorthand for a flawed Christian theology that denies the continuing place of Jewish people and of Judaism as a community of faith in the purposes of God" (*God's Unfailing Word*, p. 19)

3. "*Halakhah*" is a Hebrew word that means "the way of walking." "Halachic" is the adjective. *Halakhah* is the legal reference that governs Jewish life. It includes civil, religious and criminal law. It is grounded in the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, and developed in an ongoing stream of tradition that includes Mishnah, Talmud and the continuous development of rabbinic interpretation and decisions. Halacha: The Laws of Jewish Life | My Jewish Learning. See also this Wikipedia article.

4. As a carpenter, a *teknon,* Jesus would have built houses, various kinds of household furnishings, work implements, plows and yokes. See Richard A. Batey, "'Is Not This the Carpenter?'" (*New Testament Studies* 30.2[1984], 249-258).

6. For Moses, see Exod 4:1-9; 7:1-12:32; 14:1-31; 16:1-36; 17:1-7 (Num 20:2-13); for Elijah, see 1 K 17:7k-24; 19:1-9; for Elijah, see 2 K 2:19-22; 3:9-20; 4:1-7, 8-37, 38-44; 5:1-19.

7. The "Scribes" are an unspecified group of people in the gospels, often mentioned with the Pharisees and/or Sadducees in situations of debate or conflict. However, they are not always cast in a negative light, as we see in Mark 12:28-34 and Matthew 13:52. The term is generic, signifying someone who can copy texts and interpret them. For a description of a scribe, see Sirach 38:34b-39:11.

8. For an overview of understandings of the "Messiah" and of messianic movements, see David B. Levenson, "Messianic Movements," pp. 622-628 in *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (3rd ed.).

9. The parallels in Matt 26:64 and Luke 22:67-79 are equivocal and John 18:19, 24 omits any reference to a messianic claim.

10. The source most familiar to contemporary readers is Daniel 7, composed in the years 167-163 BCE, during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes.

11. Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*; *a Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1999), 210, 251-253.

12. See Roman Crucifixion Methods Reveal the History of Crucifixion - Biblical Archaeology Society ; for evidence of use of crucifixion under the Hasmoneans, as well as by the Romans, see James Tabor, The Jewish Roman World of Jesus | Josephus' References to Crucifixion (uncc.edu)

13. The Acts of the Apostles and Josephus recount the emergence of several leaders who appeared as insurgents during and shortly after the lifetime of Jesus. We read of Judas the Galilean who in 6 CE, incited revolt calling his compatriots "cowards for consenting to pay tribute to the Romans and tolerating mortal masters, after having God for their lord" (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.118; Acts 5:37). And Theudas, in the 40's, while not appearing to be inciting an uprising, called people to take their possessions and follow him to the Jordan, calling himself a prophet (prophetes/προφήτης) and saying "that at his command the river would be parted and would provide them an easy passage" (Acts 5:36; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.97-99). And then there was "the Egyptian," a "false prophet" (*pseudoprophetes*), who called people and proposed to force an entrance to Jerusalem whose walls would crumble at his command (*Jewish Wars* 2. 261). Judas and Theudas were executed, as were the followers of the anonymous "Egyptian," though the latter escaped.

Point 1(B): The Jewishness of Paul

Apostle Paul, Rembrandt (c1657).

1. Common Understandings of Paul

"Paul was the Founder of Christianity"
"Paul was converted from Judaism to Christianity"
"Paul was a misogynist"
"Paul always remained Jewish"
"Paul was Christianity's first theologian"
"Paul's Letters shaped the future of Christianity"

For REFLECTION

What do you think of these quotes about Paul?

What do you think of Paul and his writings?

Have you heard of other views about Paul?

What do the Christians you know think of Paul?

AN UNDERSTANDING OF PAUL AND HIS IMPORTANCE FOR JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE CENTERS ON *THIS* PIVOTAL QUESTION:

"DID PAUL THINK OF HIMSELF AS A FORMER JEW WHO BECAME 'CHRISTIAN' OR AS A JEW WHO HAD COME TO BELIEVE THAT THE MESSIANIC AGE WAS DAWNING?"

OUR RESPONSE TO THIS QUESTION WILL DETERMINE HOW WE UNDERSTAND PAUL'S WRITINGS.

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THIS QUESTION? WHY?

Paul describes himself as "circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; … as to righteousness under the Law, blameless" (Phil. 3:5,6b).

Over time his letters were predominantly read by Gentile (non-Jewish) Jesus followers. In their mind's eye, Paul was a ***Christian***, not a Jew. He lived as a Gentile and no longer followed the Jewish Torah. Their own experience of Christianity and Judaism as separate communities was anachronistically projected back onto Paul himself.

However, the fact that the words "Christian" or "Christianity" never appear in Paul's letters is an important signal to readers that Paul's religious world is quite different from that of the later all-Gentile church.

2. Paul's Artistic Portrait over the Centuries

Artists depict Paul in different ways. Spend time with these portraits of Paul by several artists from the centuries.

- *What do these images tell us about the artists' understanding of Paul?*

_____

Our response to the above question ("Did Paul think of himself as a former Jew who became a 'Christian' or as a Jew who had come to believe that the Messianic Age was dawning?") shapes our (mis)-understanding of Paul's writing. An example of this can be seen in how we understand an important text in one of Paul's letters, Galatians 2.16.

> The following typical translation of Pauline text demonstrates this: "... we know that a person is justified not by *the works of the law* but through *faith in* Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16, NRSV). However, the sentence could just as properly be rendered as: "we know that a person is justified not by *the workings of the Law* but through *the faithfulness of* Jesus Christ." This construal is based on the idea that the Torah affects people's standing before God in different ways. For Jews, Torah-observance is a mark of being in covenant with a saving God. The Torah's "workings" for Jews is to keep them focused on conforming to God's will as an elect people. But the Torah's "workings" for pagan Gentiles is to expose their sinfulness as damnable idolaters.
>
> The realization that Paul was writing mostly to Gentiles has led some modern scholars to observe that when Paul wrote about observance of the Torah, or even "the curse of the Law" (Gal. 3:10-13; referring to Dt. 27:26), he seems to be speaking more about the Law's significance for Gentiles-in-Christ and *not* about their meaning for Jews as later Christian readers assumed.

Mark Nanos, a Jewish scholar on Paul, discusses here (11 minutes) one of his books in which he presents the various presumptions about Paul and especially reflects on Paul's Jewish background that influences the way we can understand Paul's agenda.

3. The First-Century Context of Paul's Letters

Paul did not write for twenty-first century CE Christians of Western civilization. He wrote for Jesus-followers living in the first-century CE Mediterranean world.

For REFLECTION

What helpful insights does Anderson offer for understanding Paul?

How might these insights assist in appreciation Paul's Jewish background?

What contribution do these insights offer Jewish-Christian dialogue today?

Paul wrote to address specific situations in early local Jesus communities that cannot be reconstructed with certainty today. He often reacted to news or messages not in our possession, which makes it challenging to fully appreciate his replies. Since his were "occasional" letters, it is risky to construct a systematic "Pauline theology" based on them. Interpreters of later centuries also tended to discount the possibility that Paul may have developed his ideas from one letter to the next.

This 30-minute video presentation by Matthew Anderson from Concordia University (Montreal) and the University of Nottingham (UK) offers an overview of Paul, his letters and context.

Philip Cunningham, whose input has been very helpful in the formulation of Point 1 B, also offers an excellent summary on Paul's profound identity as a Jew of his day:

P. Cunningham on Paul.pdf

A late first-century Jesus follower commented on Paul's letters:

> "*There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures*…."
>
> (2 Peter 3:16)

It is clear from 2 Peter that towards the late first century CE, Paul's letters were being collected—and misunderstood!

4. Paul's Letters used to address later controversies

If Paul really wrote out of his Jewish heritage, he was easily misunderstood when his letters were eventually read by Gentiles unfamiliar with his Jewish context. This includes the pharisaic, mystical, and apocalyptic features of his thought.
The likelihood of misreading Paul was further increased by the practice of reading Paul to support later arguments, perhaps especially the use to which Paul was put during the debates between Roman Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation of the 16th-century and subsequently.

Martin Luther likened Judaism to Roman Catholicism as both being religions based on the futile effort to earn God's favor. On the other hand, his Reformed Christianity, like Paul, perceived the need to depend totally on God's mercy. Luther's Paul became the champion of "justification by faith" against all the rituals and practices of Roman Catholicism. Everything that Paul wrote was read as in opposition to Judaism and everything that Luther criticized about Roman Catholicism was projected onto Judaism: it was legalistic, loveless, filled with empty ritual, and corrupt.

All of these factors have come under close examination in the past few decades. A key move was the recognition that Judaism has never been a religion of "works righteousness," an effort to earn God's favor. More accurately, the Jewish tradition understands that Jews seek to follow the divine will as expressed in the Torah in gratitude for having been called into covenant with the One God.

This has led to renewed study of Paul as remaining Jewish, and possibly Torah-observant, all his life. In this new paradigm, his primary concern was the fate of Gentiles and their incorporation as Gentiles into full, equal membership in churches along with Jews. His difference with more mainstream Jews was his conviction that by raising Christ from the dead God had begun the time for the redemption of all things. He was baffled why his Jewish kinfolk didn't perceive this end-time framework, but at no point did he stop thinking of himself as Jewish. Nor did he entertain the possibility that God's promises to redeem all Israel would be in vain. Rather, he labored to have Gentiles cease their idolatry and so be judged righteous when the glorified Christ returned to complete his messianic mission.

For CONVERSATION

What contribution would these insights into Paul's Jewishness make to Christian understanding of Judaism today?

How might these fresh perspectives be shared amongst Christians?

Point 1(C): Traditions Emerge: Common Foundations and Gradual Separation

Decades of work by Jewish, Christian and unaffiliated scholars of late antiquity have brought new understanding of the complex ways in which Judaism and Christianity emerged late in the Second Temple period (200 BCE-70 CE) and the first centuries of the common era.

For REFLECTION

What is your understanding of the relationship between Jews and Jesus followers in the first century CE?

How do you understand the beginnings of Judaism and Christianity?

At what point do you think they separated?

Studying New Testament texts in the broader context of Second Temple and early rabbinic literature allows for a deeper understanding, not only of the teaching of Jesus and the texts that emerged from the communities of his followers. It also becomes evident that the New Testament authors were Jewish, with the possible exception of Luke. The followers of Jesus in the early decades were members of a Jewish "sect," Jews who believed that Jesus was Messiah. Understanding the New Testament texts as fundamentally Jewish then makes clear the degree to which they become part of the source material for studying Second Temple and early rabbinic Judaism.

For example, the evidence from *2 Enoch* and from the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12//Luke 6:20-23) indicate that the teaching attributed to Jesus in Matthew and Luke is part of a larger Jewish matrix. The sharp, hostile tones, with which Jewish groups debated one another provides context in which to understand Matthew 23, or the "anti-Judean" language that surfaces so often in John's gospel. Such rhetoric resembles that of the group at Qumran whose members called themselves "Sons of Light" and all other Jews "Sons of Darkness"!

Some of the New Testament texts might be understood to suggest that "Judaism" and "Christianity" had become separate and distinct "religions" in the first century. For example, Matthew's gospel includes references to "their synagogues", sometimes implying conflict (e.g., 10:17; 12:9; 23:34). This need not imply a new "religion, "but rather a community in opposition to Matthew's "synagogue." Similarly, John's references to expulsion from the synagogue does not imply a kind of excommunication from the Jewish people or the creation of a new "religion." Rather, it likely indicates the local conflicts between John's community and the parent synagogue from which John's community had been expelled. The so-called *birkat haminim* (curse against the sectarians) does not mention Christians in the earliest texts; the earliest evidence for a

curse against the Christians comes from Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* (16.4; 47.4; 96.2; 137.2) in the mid-second century CE.

Similarly, critical study of the New Testament texts makes clear the degree to which these Jewish texts provide evidence for the study of Second Temple and early rabbinic Judaism. Teaching attributed to Jesus (legal texts, wisdom sayings, parables, teaching about community life) can be seen as a resource for understanding the broader Jewish matrix in which all of these people lived and worked and struggled. It also allows us to understand the debates in which the teachers in all these groups engaged, and the tensions between parent groups and new groups of believers in Jesus.

Gradual Separation(s)

At what point did Judaism and Christianity separate? The research of recent decades, work shared by Jews, Christians, and unaffiliated scholars, suggests that the answer to that question is much more complex than previously thought. Earlier scholars spoke of a "council of Yavneh (Jamnia)" in the late first century CE. Those scholars believed that the recitation of the *Amidah,* benediction the Eighteen Benedictions, was settled at that point, and that the *birkat haminim,* the twelfth "benediction" was thus established as mandatory; this formulized and institutionalized the "curse" against the sectarians which included Christians. [1] This prayer, recited three times daily on weekdays, would have effectively excommunicated Christians still participating in synagogue life; they would have been unable to recite the prayer. However, as we noted, the earliest evidence for a curse against Christians comes from Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* (16.4; 47.4; 96.2; 137.2) in the mid-second century CE. The earliest reference to Christians in Jewish manuscripts of the *birkat haminim* dates from the ninth century.

Southern view of Modern Yavneh's Water Tower

New Testament texts, most of which were written in the first century, reflect varying relationships between Jews who believed in Jesus and those who did not about authority, ritual, Torah observance. They were written for specific communities in a

variety of geographical locations, some in the land of Israel, most in the diaspora. Matthew's community was predominantly ethnically Jewish and Torah observant. The communities to which Paul preached were mixed, with a dominantly Gentile membership. The issues of "separation," thus varied. Judith Lieu suggests the complexity of the question involved:

> "…we have to speak of partings of the ways, or to take particular texts or situations and plot them on a bigger map. John's Gospel belongs somewhere different from the Letter to the Hebrews, 1 Clement from Revelation, just to take four early Christian texts of the late first century, perhaps more or less contemporary with each other. If these differences are not of time, are they differences of place, or of people involved, of personal inclination, of the pressure of external circumstances? Moreover, what do we mean by "parting"? Is it when groups expressed beliefs that others found unacceptable, or when people no longer met together, or were no longer willing to eat together, or used different languages or patterns of ideas, or refused to allow their sons and daughters to marry one another? Yet such separations happen within as well as between groups. Was "the parting" in effect when people thought that they themselves were somehow different, did not belong, or was it when they thought that someone else did not belong? – which may not be the same thing at all."

The question of the separation of Christians and Jews is a complex one. By the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, Romans had begun to recognize the Christians as something "not Jewish." Localized persecutions targeted Christians but not Jews as early as Nero's persecution in 64 CE described by Tacitus in his *Annals* 44.2-5 c.116 CE. Pliny's letter to Trajan in 110 or 111 CE and Trajan's response speak of Christians, not Jews, as engaged in questionable practices and whether Pliny should execute them (*Letters* of Pliny the Younger X.96-97). About the same time, c. 116 CE Ignatius bishop of Antioch is martyred as a Christian, leaving behind a series of letters in which Ignatius exhorts his community against the errors of Jews as well as others. He uses the word "Judaism," as well as "Christianity," the first occurrences of the words, suggesting a recognition that the two groups of people have become distinct and separate from one another (*Magnesians* 8.11; 10:3; *Philadelphians* 6.1). On the "Parting of the Ways", Shaye Cohen is very helpful.

For CONVERSATION

What helpful insights about the separation of Christianity and Judaism have emerged from above?

How do these insights affect the way that we relate to one another today?

The two groups progressively went their own ways through the second through fourth centuries. Relations between adherents varied according to period and geographical location. Too often the dynamics were characterized by hostility, and by the "othering"

that so often occurs in the context of identity formation. The conflict became destructive, quite literally so, for Jews after the emergence of Christianity as the religion of the Empire. However, as Shaye Cohen points out, Jews and Christians continued to have contacts with one another in many parts of the Roman Empire and beyond. They discussed the interpretation of Scripture. Sometimes Christians went to synagogues to celebrate Shabbat and the major festivals, and invited rabbis to bless crops. Such close contacts suggest the complicated nature of these relationships. At the same time, the complexity serves as a caution against overly simplified assumptions about the "separation" of Judaism and Christianity.

Resources

Baron, Lori, Jill Hicks-Keeton, and Matthew Thiessen, *The Ways that Often Parted; Essays in Honor of Joel Marcus*. Atlanta GA: SBL Press, 2018.

Cohen, Shaye J.D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. 3rd edition. Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, esp. chapter 8, "Ways That Parted: Jews, Christians, Jewish-Christians (ca. 100-150).

Fredriksen, Paula. *When Christians Were Jews; the First Generation*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2018.

_____. "What 'Parting of the Ways'? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City." Pages 35-63 in *The Ways That Never Parted; Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.* Edited by Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed. Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2007.

Langer, Ruth. "*Birkhat Ha-Minim;* a Jewish Curse of Christians?" Pages 653-654 in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament.* 2nd edition. Edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Skarsaune, Oskar and Reidar Hvalvik, eds. *Jewish Believers in Jesus; the Early Centuries.* Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2007.

Notes

1. One version of the text reads: "For the informers and the heretics (*minim*), let there be no hope. And all the wicked, let them perish in an instant. And all Your enemies and all Your haters, may they quickly be terminated and as for a wicked government, may You uproot and smash and terminate and subdue them speedily in our days. Blessed are You, Lord, Who smashes the enemies and subdues the heretics." See "Birkat Ha-Minim".

Point 1(D): The Bible's Two Testaments as Complementary

For REFLECTION

- What do the Christians you know think of the Old Testament?
- How do they view its relationship to the New Testament?
- Do Christians read the Old Testament?

The complementary nature of the Old and New Testaments has been formally acknowledged by several Christian traditions.

In its 1980 Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, in "Towards the Renewal of the Relationship of Christians and Jews", confessed,

> thankfully the "Scriptures" (Luke 24:32-45; I Cor. 15:3f.), our Old Testament, to be the common foundation for the faith and work of Jews and Christians (cf. Thesis II).

The Synod also affirmed,

> the unbreakable connection of the New Testament with the Old Testament in a new way, and learn to understand the relationship of the "old" and "new" from the standpoint of the promise: in the framework of the given promise, the fulfilled promise and the confirmed promise. "New" means therefore no replacement of the "old".

The Church of England's *Faith and Order Commission* in its 2019 document, "God's Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations," wrote:

> [O]ne of the foundations for Christian–Jewish relations is the overlapping of our scriptural canons, underlined, for Christians, by the fact that Tanakh as it existed in first-century Palestine was the only Bible that our Lord Jesus Christ knew, the Scripture from which he taught and preached. It is therefore vital for Christian–Jewish relations today that the Old Testament in all its wonderful breadth and rich diversity is known and treasured by the Church, not least in its public worship and in its programmes of preaching and teaching. (p. 67)

Earlier, in his 2010 Apostolic Exhortation, "Verbum Domini", Pope Benedict also wrote:

> We also affirm that 'Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and the Holy Land is the motherland of the Church': the roots of Christianity are found in the Old Testament, and Christianity continually draws nourishment from these roots….the New Testament itself claims to be consistent with the Old and proclaims that in the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Christ the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people have found their perfect fulfilment. It must be observed, however, that the concept of the fulfilment of the Scriptures is a complex one, since it has three dimensions: a basic aspect of continuity with the Old Testament revelation, an aspect of discontinuity and an aspect of fulfilment and transcendence…we must not forget that the Old Testament retains its own inherent value as revelation. (#40-41)

- These statements, from the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, are representative of other Christian churches that affirm the Jewishness of Jesus, the inherent value and importance of the Old Testament, and a rejection of a notion that the New Testament superseded and replaced the Old Testament.

- Further Christianity must continuously draw nourishment from the Old Testament.

- For Christians, the Bible includes *both* Old *and* New Testaments. The Old Testament, the Scriptures for Jews, is considered by most Christians as authentically revealing God's revelation and salvific deeds for God's people. This conviction then inspires and educates Christian understanding of the revelation found in the story of Jesus in the Gospels, and the life of the Jesus movement reflected in the remaining writings of the New Testament.

Stained glass from the Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth

This recognition that the Old Testament "retains its own inherent value as revelation" requires Christians and preachers ensure that Old Testament passages which are proclaimed in worship are not seen as anticipations or "predictions" about Christ. They are Scripture in their own right and must be understood and reflected upon as such, especially dear to the Jewish people. This affirmation is especially brought out in Part I of the 2001 Vatican document, "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible."

For CONVERSATION

- Is this your experience and that of those you worship with, of "drawing nourishment" from the Old Testament?
- What is your experience of the way that the Old Testament is presented in preaching and worship?
- Do you reflect and pray with the Old Testament for your own devotion? What readings from the Old Testament do you find particularly meaningful?

Resources

Helpful resources that reflect on the place of Scripture and the importance of the Old Testament in Christian worship include:

- *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*, Vatican: Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews, 1985.
- *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, Vatican, Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2001.
- *Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth: Guidelines for Christian Clergy and Teachers in their use of the New Testament with reference to the New Testament's presentation of Jews and Judaism*, from the Council of Christians and Jews, Victoria, Australia, 1994.

Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marc Zvi Brettler. *The Bible with or Without Jesus : How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2020.

Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marc Zvi Brettler. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament : New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation* Second edition. Oxford, [England]: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Point 1(E): Christian Misreadings of Biblical Texts

Christian communities are encouraged to speak out against Christian misreadings of biblical texts regarding Jews and Judaism that can provoke caricatures or animosity.

This sub-point is in a sense a call to arms, a call to be ready to fight the errors which are discussed throughout Point One. Implicit in this exhortation is an understanding that right readings of the Bible correct wrong readings. In other words, the "antidote" to the "poison" need not come from modern liberal ideology (valid though such ideology may well be in wider discussions), but can come from better biblical exegesis, and recovery of forgotten biblical texts.

Here we offer but a suggestive sample. Some of the positions are more historical than current, or at least this can be our hope. Nevertheless, their "pedigree" among Christian writers and even "saints" is real and demonstrable.

- *"The Jews in the Bible consistently misunderstand God and true teaching. They miss the spiritual and prefer the carnal."* (For example, the first- or second-century *Epistle of Barnabas* said that the commandments within Torah were always meant to be allegorical; the writer of the second-century *Epistle to Diognetus* simply pretended the commands from God were not in his Bible, calling them the "silliness and deceit and fussiness and pride of the Jews".) This requires an eccentric reading of the Books of Moses. The text itself states that the "laws" come from God, via Moses. "The LORD said to Moses: 'Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering…'" (Ex 25.1 *et passim*).

- *"The Jews killed Christ."* Perhaps the most poisonous aspect of this manifoldly false claim has been that it has been held to apply to all Jews, throughout space and time (cf. *Peri Pascha*, by Melito of Sardis, 160-70 CE). The gospels do show that *some* Jewish leaders at *some* points in the story culminating in the crucifixion, had *some* influence over the process. However, even with all these qualifications, it remains untrue that the gospels teach that certain Jews killed Christ. It was the gentile Roman, Pontius Pilate who made the decision, and it was his gentile Roman soldiers who put it into action. Pilate may have "washed his hands" (Matt 27.24), or have found "no case against him" (Jn 18.38). But if he thought Jesus was innocent, or not to be tried, then both Roman and natural justice say he should be released without further delay. If Pilate nevertheless holds on to him, torturing him to play games with the Jewish crowd and/or leaders, then, wash his hands as he may, he is guilty of that gross injustice. (In saying this, we are aware of the readings of the gospels which see them as seeking to exonerate Pilate and the Romans, as a *realpoltical* move, to enable the emergent Church to survive in the Roman Empire. Our point is that any "exoneration" is partial, and stops some way short of saying that it was Jews - some few Jews - who killed Christ.)

- *"In John – the 'spiritual gospel' - the Jews are Jesus' implacable enemies."* This is a vast topic. It is beyond question that John's Gospel gives accounts of real and painful conflicts. (Again, many commentators see these as representing those in the Johannine community at the time the evangelist was writing, rather than reportage of what happened in Jesus' day.) Jesus' opponents in John are typically *hoi loudaioi*. But it is vital to remember that this can be translated as easily as "the Judeans" as "the Jews", and that this is, at times at least, the more natural translation, on linguistic grounds alone (not least in scenes where all the characters are Jews). And Jesus' own attitude to *hoi loudaioi* is not simple. Many *loudaioi* follow him (e.g. Jn 7.40-43; 11.31). And remember how he shares naturally with the Samaritan women: "… we [Jews] worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (Jn 4.22).

- *"Judaism, in both Testaments, is a cold, legalistic religion, about a distant God."* This relates to popular prejudice about the "Old Testament" and its portrayal of God. A Christian formed by catechesis in any mainstream tradition is mercifully unlikely to think that "the God of the Old Testament" is opposed to that of the New. Nevertheless, this claim may be seen as a modified version of that. In part this comes from the New Testament's frequent translation of *Torah* as *Nomos* (and, in Latin, *Lex*) – "Law". Torah has always meant more than Law, and refers to story and homiletic material, as much as commandments. A good corrective is for Christians to read and reflect on the exuberance towards Torah (and the commandments) of Psalm 119. Torah and the commandments, it might be said, have something of a sacramental quality: they make present - and encourage Jews to embody - the nearness of God.

  Blessed are you, O Lord;
  teach me your statutes.
  With my lips I declare
  all the ordinances of your mouth.
  I delight in the way of your decrees
  as much as in all riches.
  I will meditate on your precepts
  and fix my eyes on your ways.
  I will delight in your statutes;
  I will not forget your word.
  Deal bountifully with your servant,
  so that I may live and observe your word.
  Open my eyes, so that I may behold
  wondrous things out of your [Torah].
  Psalm 119.12-18 (NRSV)

  In the Hebrew Scripture as we have them, such love of Torah is wed to the message of the Prophets, both in their fierce and righteous anger, and also in the majesty of their vision of a world put right. In short, it is anything but cold.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle,
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.
Isaiah 55.10-13 (NRSV).

- *"The Pharisees (at least) were cold legalists, and the fiercest enemies of Christ."* Hopefully enough has been said elsewhere in this Point to encourage a more sympathetic reading of the Pharisees. To see them as the cold conservatives of their day is particularly wrong. They were, in Christian language, the energetic evangelists or reformers of their day, seeking, inter alia, to make Temple-based notions of "holiness" meaningful to ordinary Jews. Modern commentators are clear that the Pharisees were in many ways the group closest to Jesus' own movement. The picture in the gospels themselves is more complicated than has often been thought. The Pharisees fall out of the picture as the crucifixion comes into view. Some Pharisees are allies of Jesus, at least at times (Lk 13.31), willingly offering hospitality (Lk 14.1). The Pharisee Nicodemus is an especially intriguing character in John (Jn 3.1-21; 7.50f; 19.39-42) . If he is ambivalent towards Jesus rather than a committed disciple, this remains a long way from hostility.

- *"Jesus turned inward-looking Judaism into the outward-looking Christian movement, concerned for the whole world."* The merits or otherwise of Christian mission are another place. Here, the issue is that the Judaism of both Testaments was not "inward-looking", as the phrase is usually understood. We may think of the universal scope of many psalms. ("Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy. For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth." Psalm 47.1f NRSV.) We may reflect also on the righteous gentiles in the Hebrew Bible (Melchizedek, Job, the people of Nineveh on encountering Jonah). What is more, when the Christian community is described as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pt 2.9), this is quite simply a recapitulation of Israel's self-understanding under God: "Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for

me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." (Ex 195bf). This role vis-à-vis the whole world can be described in various ways (by no means mutually exclusive): vicarious; exemplary; mystical; prophetic; encouraging; didactic. Wherever the emphasis, it shows a covenant people relating intentionally to the wider world.

> And now the Lord says,
> who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
> to bring Jacob back to him,
> and that Israel might be gathered to him,
> for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,
> and my God has become my strength—
> he says,
> "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
> to raise up the tribes of Jacob
> and to restore the survivors of Israel;
> I will give you as a light to the nations,
> that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
> Isaiah 49.5f (NRSV).

For REFLECTION

- How have the reflections here contributed to your understanding of the presentation of Judaism or Jews in Christian writings?
- How might you address such misrepresentations or distortions?

Resources

Ford, David F, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2021.

- An example of how some "Christians" distort Jewish understanding and teaching in an antisemitic way can be seen here: https://judaism.is/torah.html#memes

Point 1: Liturgy

- The Connection between Jewish and Christian Liturgy
- The Spiritual Richness of Jewish Interpretations of Scriptures
- Cleansing Christian Liturgies of Anti-Jewish Perspectives

Point 1: Liturgical Considerations

Context

> "A Time for Recommitment" invites Christians to combat any form of antisemitism in liturgy by highlighting the connection between Jewish and Christian liturgy, drawing upon the spiritual richness of Jewish interpretations of the scriptures and cleansing Christian liturgies of anti-Jewish perspectives, particularly in preaching, prayers and hymns.

For REFLECTION

- What is your experience of Christian worship and prayer?
- How much attention is given to appreciation of the Jewish heritage in Christian worship and prayer?
- What is your experience of preaching and teaching by Christian leaders and the way they see Judaism?

Both Christian and Jewish communities share a wealth of liturgical history and tradition. Although both peoples have shaped their respective liturgical practices in distinctive trajectories, the original source of relationship remains as a potential source of unity, identity formation and reconciliation for the present.

Whether Jews and Christians share a common theological worldview (whether, for example, both may be called "monotheist") is much disputed. But it cannot be contested that a major connection between Jews and Christians is experienced in the reading of the Scriptures each week. Many historic Christian communities have continued the lectionary cycle that echoes Jewish practice. Therefore, many Christians globally have their first Jewish 'encounter' primarily through the sermon and the biblical context in which the sermon occurs. At times, Christian preachers use stereotypes such as the "legalistic Jewish Pharisees" as foil to a humanitarian Christian Jesus. This style of homiletic stereotyping is now seriously critiqued by many authoritative Church

documents. Examples of this critique and reorientation can be found in the statements and documents from the Roman Catholic Church.

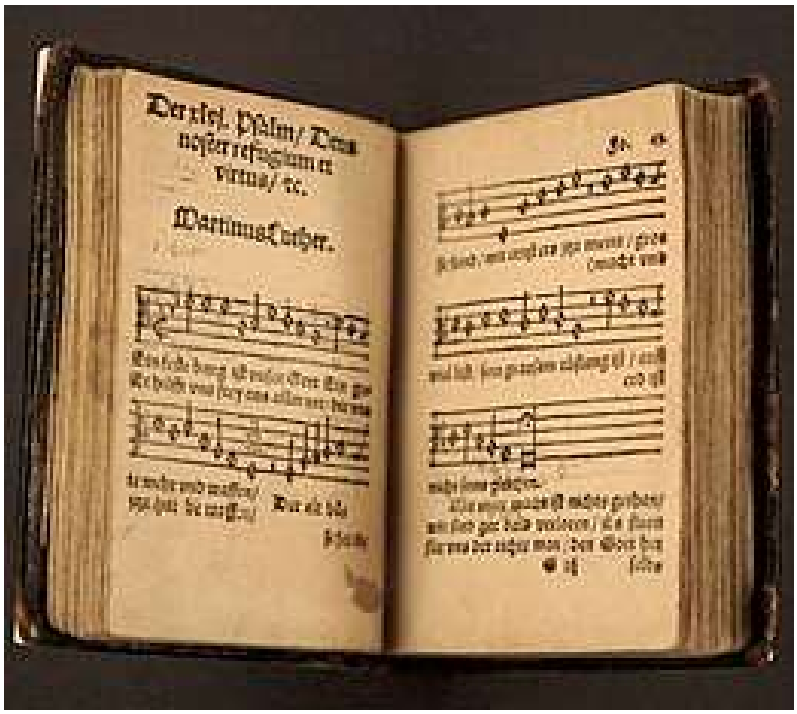
Christian Preacher, 1968

Along with the cleansing of ideological rhetoric from weekly sermons, much attention has been given to the liturgical placement and hermeneutic of the Christian reading of Hebrew Scripture. The traditional schema for the reading of the Old Testament within Christianity might be seen to be one of secondary emphasis, inferiority and Christocentric fulfillment. This might be said to be a natural temptation, given that (say) the widely used Roman Catholic Lectionary selects its Old Testament readings on Sundays in the light of the Gospel of the day. This arguably encourages preachers to see in the Old Testament passage a promise or prophecy of Christ, or a typological foreshadowing finding its fulfilment of the Gospel reading. There need be nothing dishonorable in such a reading – providing it is not held to come anywhere near exhausting the meaning of the original passage.

Moreover, in an attempt to reform this practice and hermeneutic, the *Revised Common Lectionary* now gives a "non-typological/independent" Old Testament reading for each Sunday in the great period of Ordinary Time after Trinity Sunday. This allows for a semi-continuous reading of (sections of) Old Testament books. Those who draw strength from this argue that it implies that, just as an Old Testament (Hebrew) Lesson may be read independently of a Gospel reading, so the Jewish people also may continue to exist and thrive, next to a Christian community and independent from it. It is an attempt at an "open" reading of a shared Scripture.

Hand in hand with a sacred lectionary cycle is the theological "narrative" in which it is placed. The traditional salvation history for which Christian lectionaries have been constructed has been the themes of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation. It has long been noticed that this theological history gives little theological weight to most of the Old Testament and makes the Jewish background of Jesus at best irrelevant and at worst eliminated. In 2015 the Presbyterian Church PCUSA published a new edition of its liturgical source for congregational use, *Glory to God*. Along with many more recent liturgical resources included was a new categorization of the Christian salvation history . Whereas in the past the hymns/songs were laid within the salvation schema of Creation, Advent, Life of Christ, Easter etc., the new edition added the new historical/theological marker of "God's Covenant with Israel."

The move to include the life of Jewish Israel within Hymnody was an attempt to give a fuller account of the particular roots of God's relation with humanity as mediated by a particular people and through a particular person; Jesus of Nazareth/Israel. Because of this, the term *Israel* was included to give voice to that spiritual and theological truth. Although concern over confusion in regards to the current State of Israel and her policies was raised, the danger of erasing a continued bond with the modern-day *people Israel* was deemed a greater danger in regards to Christian history and practice.



An early printing of Martin Luther's hymn
"Ein feste Burg its unser Gott"
("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God")

The major grassroots conversation regarding liturgical identity between Jewish and Christian communities continues to be the presence of "Christian Seders." For many Christians, Christian seders is an acknowledgement of the reclamation of the "Jewishness" of Jesus, and therefore his (theoretical) practice. The last supper, which for Christians has been associated (although historically contested) with a Jewish Seder, continues to be practiced in our day with the overtones of Jesus' messiahship inserted. For Jewish communities, this has been seen as a blurring of boundaries at best and an act of Christian supersessionism (and ahistoricism) at worst.

There is an effort to make clear boundaries regarding the Christian historical marker of the liturgical commemoration of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, and the Jewish historical marker on the other (the Passover Seder). Celebrating a Seder as Jesus' last supper is deeply ahistorical because it doesn't convey how Jesus celebrated Pesach. In his lifetime the Temple with its animal sacrifice has been the focus of the Pesach festivities while the liturgy of the Seder has evolved over many centuries, got its overall

shape in the medieval and reflects experience from Jewish history which are not shared and should not be appropriated by Christians.

The liturgical celebration of Holy Week and specifically Good Friday remains a time where historical and rhetorical studies have been very helpful. Continued understanding and reconstructing of scenes contributing to classic anti-Judaic teaching of the "Christ Killer" myth and Jewish culpability continue to be reformulated and restored. The role of Roman authority, intra-Jewish conflict, each Gospel's distinct literary creation of the Passion, and the underlying appropriation of Hebrew Scripture as guidance for narrative (rather than historical memory) have all influenced and sought to expunge the story of Jesus' death of intended/unintended lessons contributing to harm of Jewish communities historically and in our present day. This work has been shared across confessional lines between Jews and Christians, and has been a sign of reconciliation in our day.

Finally, in an age of genocide amnesia can be the greatest threat. To "remember" the past is essential so as not to repeat it. There are examples of such "remembrance": The liturgical observance of Holocaust Memorial Day continues to gain observance and discussion within the major branches of Christendom. The date itself is marked upon liturgical calendars and publications, with observances many times accompanied by joint Jewish/Christian events of conversation and renewed commitment to a better future with remembrance of a tragic past. In Europe a "Judaism Day" is often commemorated by Christian Churches to remember their Jewish roots and their participation in a history which led to the Holocaust.

For CONVERSATION

- How might the above reflection on preaching and the Christian use of the Bible influence prayer, worship and hymn selections in your Church?
- What difference does this fresh understanding make to your appreciation of Judaism?

Resources:

Sandmel, David "Philosemitism and 'Judaizing' in the Contemporary Church", in *Transforming Relations: Essays on Jews and Christians throughout History in Honor of Michael A. Signer*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010

Sean, Frank “Should Christians Celebrate the Passover?” in *Passover and Easter*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999.

Tracy, Liam “The affirmation of Jewish covenantal vitality and the Church's liturgical life” in *Christ and the Jewish People Today*. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 2001.

Van Buren, Paul. *According to the Scriptures.* Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1998.

http://jfrankhenderson.com/pdf/goodfridaypassion.pdf

https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/latest-news/holocaust-memorial-day-2020/

Old woman praying by Théophile Lybaert

Point 1: Catechetics

Point 1: Catechetics

Because of Christianity's long history of anti-Judaism and the teaching of contempt, we know that catechesis has at times perpetuated unhelpful stereotypes of Jews and outdated theology about the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Therefore, specific guidelines for teaching and lesson planning for combatting antisemitism in catechesis are useful.

Various portraits of Jesus
influenced by Christian catechesis ("teaching")

Since true transformation requires "self-critical examination of our texts and traditions," the first group of reflections below address the Christianity's history towards Jews and Judaism. The second group focuses on guidelines that translate a "serious commitment to dialogue" into topics for the classroom, and the third group offers suggestions for lessons aimed at "joint study and action for justice". [1]

Self-critical Examination of our Texts and Traditions

- **Teach the Church's historical attitude towards outsiders** – This can be in the form of a brief overview of Church history informing or reminding learners that Christianity began in the 1st c. in Israel-Palestine and then spread throughout the Mediterranean world. It gradually split from Judaism and at the same time it became more aligned with the state apparatus of the Roman Empire, it became more concerned with defining "orthodoxy" over against "heresy." As Christianity became a dominant force in Western culture, it shaped politics, the arts, the rise of universities, and even legal and economic policy.[2] This influence was felt differently by insiders and outsiders to the Church and, at times, this power had a very real and negative effect on Jews, Muslims, indigenous people and "non-believers." For much of its history, the institutional Church has viewed outsiders as threatening or valuable only as potential converts.

- **Teach the Church's "bad theology" about Jews and Judaism** – This includes the teaching of contempt and its recurring tropes of supersessionism and replacement theology, the charge of deicide and the curse of Cain, the false charge of blood libel and any other insidious Jewish stereotypes. Catechesis in this area must clearly condemn such teaching. In the spirit of inviting the learner to come to the conclusion authentically, the goal is to explain the thinking behind the "bad theology", so that the learner clearly understands why it is wrong theologically and does not just walk away with the impression that such ideas are taboo or impolite, or, perhaps even worse, that the whole matter is the result of a "political correctness" run amok. A helpful resource is the ICCJ's 1985 *Guidelines on the Teaching of History and Particularly the Place of Jewish History in the Teaching of General History.*

- **Teach the documents** – Statements and teaching documents from the different Christian traditions, especially in recent decades, provide a steadying force in the sometimes difficult-to-navigate terrain of catechesis around interreligious dialogue, in general, and Christian-Jewish relations, in particular. Within the Roman Catholicism, the 1965 declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, was groundbreaking. It reversed centuries of Catholic teaching antithetical to Judaism. Other churches have also issued authoritative statements. These include the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Lutheran World Federation, the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Church of Sweden, and the Reformed Church of the Netherlands.

  In our present context, where data shows antisemitism is on the rise and there is a widening cultural gap between fundamentalist and progressive interpretations from Christian churches, a clear and contextualized presentation of what Christians now believe about Jewish-Christian relations is important. (This link connects to the major statements by the Christian churches on Jewish-Christian relations and related matters. It is a valuable resource.)

- **Teach *how* the shift in thinking about Jews and Judaism came about** – There were *avant-garde* theologians and church leaders who took up nearly every component of the teaching of contempt and reinterpreted Scripture and Tradition to bring about a gradual shift from the Christian teaching of contempt to a teaching of respect.[3] Teaching *that* this shift occurred gives an authentic picture of how the Christian teaching evolves in its application of core teachings to reflect deeper understanding of the truth; teaching *how* it occurred provides a potential blueprint for similar shifts in thinking needed in other areas of theology.[4]

Serious Commitment to Dialogue with Jews and Judaism

- **Teach Jewish interpretations of Tanakh** –While Christianity necessarily includes interpretations of the Hebrew Bible that make possible the definitive revelation through Christ, Christians acknowledge that they do not have a monopoly on biblical interpretation and understanding, especially when it comes to the Hebrew Bible. There is much for the Christian exegete to learn from the centuries of Jewish biblical interpretation and commentary that predated Christianity and flourished through rabbinic, medieval and modern Judaism. Again, the ICCJ's 1985 Guidelines is most helpful on this point.

- **Teach about Jesus in his first century Jewish context** – This can be as simple as informing or reminding students that Jesus, his family and all of his closest friends and followers were Jewish. He was born into a Jewish culture, practiced Jewish customs, celebrated Jewish holidays and when he read and quoted Scripture, it was the Hebrew Bible. While the impact of his life and teachings does not stay contained within this Jewish context, knowing these facts and knowing something about this context, helps us understand who the historical Jesus was. It also helps make sense of the some of the more challenging texts of the New Testament. When understood within the culture of Jewish debate and interpretation, some of the "confrontations" between Jesus and his followers, on the one hand, and "the Jews" or "the Pharisees," on the other are less likely to serve as prooftexts for ongoing animosity towards Jews and Judaism.

- **Teach post-biblical Judaism –** For Christians, knowledge about Judaism is almost always through the lens of Christianity. Learning about Jewish practices while studying the Old Testament or learning about Jewish rituals as background to Christian liturgy and sacraments can be a useful starting point. But it is not a sufficient end goal. Christian catechesis that combats antisemitism should also deliberately focus on aspects of Judaism like Rabbinic literature and Jewish spirituality, that do not merely provide background for understanding Christianity.

- **Provide opportunities to learn from and with Jewish people** – Allowing Jews and Judaism to speak for themselves is another way to move beyond a "Christianity-centered" understanding of Judaism. Inviting Jewish speakers and teachers, organizing days of dialogue with Jewish peers and visiting Jewish synagogues are good "in person" options. In addition to "live learning," learning from and with Jewish people can mean reading Jewish authors and choosing media that foregrounds Jewish voices and perspectives.[5]

For REFLECTION

- These "self-critical reflections" give us pause to think about Christian teaching and catechesis. What is your experience?
- What insights from the above do you think are most important?

- **Engage a diverse set of Jewish voices** – Understanding Jews and Judaism means understanding the historical factors that have shaped the community.[6] Basic knowledge of the spectrum of Jewish denominations helps students navigate some of the internal Jewish debates and differences they might encounter in day-to-day life. Secondarily, understanding how Judaism navigates the differences between more traditional and more progressive approaches to Torah interpretation can be helpful in understanding those currents within Christianity.

Joint Study and Action for Justice

- **Teach Judaism that goes beyond Jewish trauma** – The real pain of Christian anti-Judaism must be part of a catechesis towards a culture of respect for Jews and Judaism. The Shoah is an important touchstone in Jewish memory and identity and should especially be mentioned in the trajectory of the teaching of contempt, as an example of the real harm that comes to Jewish bodies as a result of anti-Jewish theology and antisemitic rhetoric and policy. But Christians teaching about Jews and Judaism must also foreground topics that celebrate Jewish community, vitality and celebration, like holidays, Sabbath observance and Jewish commitment to repairing the world (*tikkun olam*).

- **Tackle challenging topics your students are likely to encounter** – It is very practical to meet students in the worlds they inhabit, both online and in person, and anticipate or respond to challenging topics related to Jews and Judaism they might encounter on their own. This is catechesis for the real world that helps

them respond from a place of knowledge and conviction about what their own Christian tradition would teach as acceptable or ethical. Whether it is antisemitic tropes in political discourse, vandalism against Jewish places and symbols, or workplace debates about shared or divergent calendars and holiday observances, they can unequivocally respond with support for Jews and Judaism, and know that this is supported and mandated by Christian theology and ethics.

- **Situate Christian-Jewish relations in a broader context of theology and ethics for a more just and anti-racist society** – "The history, the challenges, and the accomplishments of [Christian-Jewish] dialogue are relevant for all those who are dealing with intergroup and interreligious conflicts."[7] As Christian-Jewish relations have sought to address the "original sin" of Christian anti-Judaism, to the extent that it has been successful, it must also engage other forms of bias and oppression rooted in white supremacy, xenophobia, classism, misogyny, and homophobia that continue to impact the Church and its members.

For CONVERSATION

- How can we develop a "culture of respect" for our Jewish brothers and sisters?
- What needs to be encouraged in this respect, in our churches, conversations and studies?

Resources:

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Cornille, Catherine. *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue.* Pearl River, N: Herder & Herder /Crossroad, 2008).

Cunningham, Philip and John J. Michalczyk, Gilbert S. Rosenthal, *Walking God's Paths: Christians and Jews in Candid Conversation*. "*Walking God's Paths* is a six-session process to stimulate candid conversation between Jewish and Christian congregations. Produced by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College on behalf and with the oversight of the National Council of Synagogues and the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, it is now made available online through special arrangement with the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations."

God on Trial (PBS, 2009)

Harrington, Daniel. *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free: Preaching without Anti-Judaism*. NY: Paulist Press, 2009.

Kessler, Edward. *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

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Levine, Amy-Jill. *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus.* San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007.

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Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly. "Nostra Aetate 50th Anniversary," Oct. 26, 2015 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LCYRRR7Lfc&feature=emb_title)

Skolnik, Fred, and Michael Berenbaum. *Encyclopaedia Judaica.* Second edition. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA in association with the Keter Publishing House, 2007.

https://www.myjewishlearning.com/

https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/

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[1] All citations from *A Time for Recommitment*.

[2] One's local context shapes how history and inter-faith relations are understood. Any emphasis would need to consider other cultural and historical contexts which influence Christian-Jewish relations besides Western perspectives.

[3] *Nostra Aetate* and the documents in its trajectory incorporate their work into the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. As indicated in this Resource, Protestant and Orthodox denominations have undergone their own processes. Catholic theologians often relied on early pioneering work by Protestants and because of the ecumenical nature of the Christian participation in the dialogue with Jews and Judaism, these processes are not altogether separate.

[4]Both give hope to generations of Catholics and Catholic-adjacent people who are troubled by old interpretations of the gospel and Church teaching they see as inauthentic expressions of Jesus' own message and that run perpendicular to their own lived experience of diversity, inclusivity and appreciation for difference.

[5]We have more tools as educators to do this than ever before. While in person learning and collaboration brings a unique opportunity for connection and transformation, the shift to virtual platforms as a result of Covid-19 has made more people more willing to engage in virtual learning opportunities. This releases the teachers and student from the confines of geographical proximity, as well as the cost and logistics of travel.

[6] Christian denominational diversity and the diversity found within Judaism also includes gender, age, geographic, ethnic and other forms of diversity, which must also be considered when choosing who or which voices to engage within Judaism. It is also important to keep in mind that no one person or text represents an entire tradition.

[7] *A Time for Recommitment*.

POINT TWO

To promote interreligious dialogue with Jews

Point 2 invites Christians to promote interreligious dialogue with Jews. It suggests two steps in promoting such dialogue:

1. By understanding dialogue as requiring trust and equality among all participants and rejecting any notion of convincing others to accept one's own beliefs.
2. By appreciating that dialogue encourages participants to examine critically their own perceptions of both their own tradition and that of their dialogue partners in the light of a genuine engagement with the other.

For REFLECTION

- What do you understand about "interreligious dialogue"?
- Have you an experience of being in conversation with another that has been heart-warming?
- Have you experienced a negative engagement, when the parties do not listen or are seeking to score points?

In recent decades Christians have come to realize the critical importance of engaging in respectful and trusting conversations with others who do not share the same faith-tradition. This moves away from convincing the other of one's truth claims, but opening oneself in genuine engagement to understand and respect the religious traditions and practices of the other.

In 1982 the Texas Conference of Churches affirmed that dialogue was the contemporary alternative to proselytization. "In response to the movement of the Holy Spirit today," the Conference acknowledged,

> we believe that the desired and most appropriate posture between Christians and Jews today is one of dialogue. Dialogue is the road to understanding between the two faiths and leads us to enlightenment and enrichment. We believe that dialogue will reduce misunderstanding and prejudice (on both sides).

Dialogue, as respectful engagement leads to friendship. It also leads to a deeper appreciation of one's own truth claims that comes from sensing the truth claims of the other interlocutor. This is the "enlightenment" and "enrichment" attested to by the Texas Conference.

There are three areas of dialogue: dialogue with states, dialogue with society – including dialogue with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other people of religious traditions different from one's own. (Evangelii Gaudium, section 238).

In his 2007 address to the plenary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, said:

> …if we desire to move toward the knowledge of truth, which liberates the person from the chains of prejudices and of every kind of deception, we ought to use the God-given present of the word with a pure and selfless intention. The word, as an expression and as a justification of our convictions, when exchanged with those we speak with, becomes a Dialogue. And it is absolutely necessary, for it marks the very existence of a human being as a personal being. There are many creatures in nature that have been endowed with the ability to receive messages from their environment, and to react to these messages, but it is only the human being from all the earthly creatures that can converse with words with his or her fellow human beings.

Pope Francis, in a similar vein and as a practitioner of dialogue, wrote:

> Dialogue is much more than the communication of a truth. It arises from the enjoyment of speaking and it enriches those who express their love for one another through the medium of words. This is an enrichment which does not consist in objects but in persons who share themselves in dialogue.
>
> (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 142)

There are several other comments and reflections which Pope Francis has offered about dialogue and interreligious relations:

Francis on Dialogue and Intereligious Rela

In the light of this history of Jewish-Christian relationship over the centuries, and Christian developed understanding of the importance of inter-religious dialogue, several insights can be explicated concerning the nature of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

1. *Dialogue is interpersonal*.

It is the based on respectful relationship between the dialogue partners in their quest for truth and mutual insight. Dialogue is not about "winning over" or "converting" the other to a point of view. It is about the journey of discovery of what is essential for religious truth and conviction.

2. *Dialogue is an expression of love*.

As Pope Francis indicated, dialogue can be enjoyable and an expression of love "through the medium of words." This appreciation moves dialogue beyond an intellectual pursuit, but a true encounter with the other person in a way that reveals deep love.

3. *Dialogue is listening*.

This is the primary and essential component in inter-religious dialogue. It is not about telling or explaining, but an open heart that respects the dialogue partner and listens to understand the truth revealed in words.

"Dialogue is much more than the communication of a truth. It arises from the enjoyment of speaking and it enriches those who express their love for one another through the medium of words. This is an enrichment which does not consist in objects but in persons who share themselves in dialogue."

Pope Francis

4. *Dialogue has social consequences*.

Conversation between friends leads to the pursuit of goodness and its expression with the cultural and social structures that frame the conversation. Dialogue is not for the mutual satisfaction or enjoyment of the interlocutors. Its fruit is social harmony, peace and the common good. It has a social dimension.

5. *Dialogue is truthful*.

Authentic dialogue does not shy away from what one believes or "gloss over" the differences that interlocutors perceive. In the act of truth-telling, each comes through respectful listening to understand the position or truth of the other without reservation or correction.

6. *Dialogue brings communion*.

As the inter-religious conversation emerges and each of the parties listens deeply to the other, to the depths of their heartfelt convictions of the religious truths out of which they live, a deep sense of communion unfolds. This comes about in the listener who recognizes in the other, granting the religious differences that exist between them, that the ultimate depth of truth which is expressed concerns the "Other". This "Other" is the expression of the divine presence, of God. The experience of communion is the encounter with God.

7. *Dialogue can bring "holy envy" and "holy enjoyment".*

The theologian and Lutheran Bishop of Stockholm Krister Stendahl made popular the phrase "holy envy". By this expression he identified the experience one has in the encounter of the richness and goodness of another's religious tradition. The experience of "holy envy" allows us to see the beauty in traditions and practices of others, while also recognizing the distortions and deficiencies in our own traditions.

Stendahl further considered that the experience of "holy envy" leads to *three rules* for interreligious understanding. These confirm elements of Jewish-Christian dialogue enunciated above:

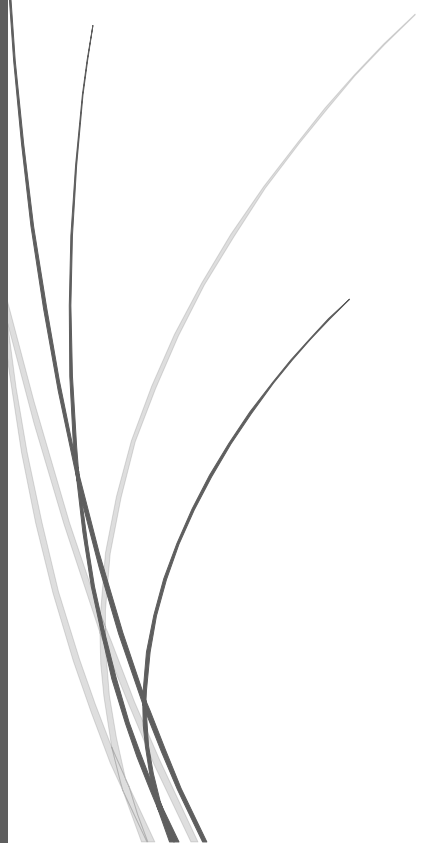
- Let the other define herself ("Don't think you know the other without listening");
- Compare equal to equal (not my positive qualities to the negative ones of the other);
- Find beauty in the other so as to develop "holy envy".

For REFLECTION

- What insights emerge from this reflection on the nature of dialogue?
- What are some of the challenges of such dialogue?

POINT THREE

To develop theological understandings of Judaism that affirm its distinctive integrity



Point 3 invites Christians to develop theological understandings of Judaism that affirm its distinctive integrity. The “Time for Recommitment” expands on this Point with five sub-points. It suggests::

“
- eliminating any teachings that Christians have replaced Jews as a people in covenant with God.
- emphasizing the common mission of Jews and Christians in preparing the world for the kingdom of God or the Age to Come.
- establishing equal, reciprocal working relationships with Jewish religious and civic organizations.
- ensuring that emerging theological movements from Asia, Africa and Latin America, and feminist, liberationist or other approaches integrate an accurate understanding of Judaism and Christian-Jewish relations into their theological formulations.
- opposing organized efforts at the conversion of Jews.

”

A note on the fourth sub-point here. We can say that this is unhappily phrased. Already in 2009 it was scarcely acceptable to describe theological movements from Asia, Africa and Latin America as “emerging” without qualification or elaboration. Many significant such theological trends were clear in the 1970s.

Moreover, today we would express the need for conversation with emerging theologies, so that those processes might integrate the insights of Jewish-Christian and interreligious understanding, and that the thinking of those involved in Jewish-Christian and interreligious dialogue might likewise be informed by the insights of emerging theologies.

We have seen (in Points 1 and 2) that the Jewish-Christian encounter compels Christians to think again about the historical Jesus, about the New Testament, about how Scripture is re-presented in worship and teaching. This compulsion doesn’t come from a will to be nice, or diplomatic, or even simply remorseful. It comes about because the dialogue has shown things that are false in the standard Christian portrayal of Christ and the Gospel. It cannot stop there.

Point 3 invites Christians to begin to ask: What follows?

Supersessionism refers to that family of Christian thinking in which the Church is held to supersede the People of Israel of the Hebrew Bible. To supersede is literally to “sit upon” and if we infer some violence in that action, we will be close to the heart of the idea. Supersessionism is a system, in which all the criticisms and condemnations of the people of the covenant remain on Israel (“the Jews”), and all the grace, forgiveness, blessing and promise is transferred wholesale to the Church. It is thus also called “replacement theology”.

It may seem and be easy to condemn this approach. Harder is to say what follows precisely for the “covenant(s)” as they are understood in both Testaments.

First, we need to be clear that people understand different things by covenant. Is there one covenant, renewed at different times (in Noah, with Abram/Abraham, at Sinai, with King David… and then we might add in Christ)? Or does God produce different covenants, as many as the need arises? We must remember also that "salvation from spiritual damnation" is not a dominant theme in the Hebrew Bible. More simply put: at no point do the Hebrew Scriptures say that "you have to be in the covenant to be saved".

Noah releasing the dove from the ark (Gen 8:8-12). 12th Cent CE mosaic, Venice

How Christians view the biblical covenant(s) before or outside of Christ has been much discussed within and around the dialogue. Many have come to see a spectrum: at the one end are those who insist there are simply two covenants – the Jewish one and the Christian one; at the other are those who are as clear that the one covenant has its own fulfilment-completion in Christ, but God does not abandon those who do not yet see it. There is plenty of room in the middle. For example, some say that Jesus is already the definitive beginning of the fulfilment of the covenant, but that Jews take a very godly – necessary - position in saying "No" to that. Christians must face up to the fact that there is nothing evident about the messianic age beginning. This pain and this tension might provoke us both to more-focused holiness in our suffering world.

Modern theology has shown us that the mistakes the ancients made can, alas, be renewed in each generation. If the Church Fathers taught (as they very much tended to) that God had abandoned "the Jews" for their disobedience, so theologies under the heading of "feminist" and "liberationist" (and so on) can replicate that assumption, if more subtly. Jesus is a radical feminist, *if* his co-religionists were relentless misogynists. Jesus liberates from oppressive power structures *if* support for oppression is where the Judaism of his day was. But these assumptions have been thoroughly rebuffed. There is no (or virtually no) suggestion here of intended antisemitism. It seems there is just a way of dividing the sheep from the goats (as it were), in which the Jewish community is always portrayed as the failing party.

For REFLECTION

- If Jesus isn't the simple revolutionary or lone hero that Christians have thought he was, how do we understand his Church?
- Do we see the Church as just one religious body, alongside the Jewish community and others? Is that humility?
- Are we called to discern/speak more theologically about Judaism, or abandon the enterprise once and for all?

Questions of what mission is, and what part if any attempts to get others to change their religious self-understanding and become Christian are vast. Most even among those who would see some place for "invitation" as an honored part of Christian mission, would insist that all approaches must be without any coercion, manipulation, lack of candor, or insensitivity. It is hard to see – on the simplest psychological or historical grounds, let alone anything more formally theological – how this would allow for a "Christian mission to convert the Jews". Our point here simply says as much. This does not of course mean that Christians must always and everywhere say an absolute No to any Jew who does in their deepest conscience feel drawn to the Church.

As with all Points, the text here is not offered as Holy Writ. Maybe you would put things in different language. Perhaps it is just too simple to speak of a "common mission of Jews and Christians" in anything at all. If our understandings of the world are different (if we mean different things by salvation and sanctification and redemption and Messiah) will not our vision of the good life also differ?
Another point: to speak of the family of liberationist theologies as "emerging" may be an unhappy anachronism – although the warning will also apply to those theologies which truly are emerging in our days.

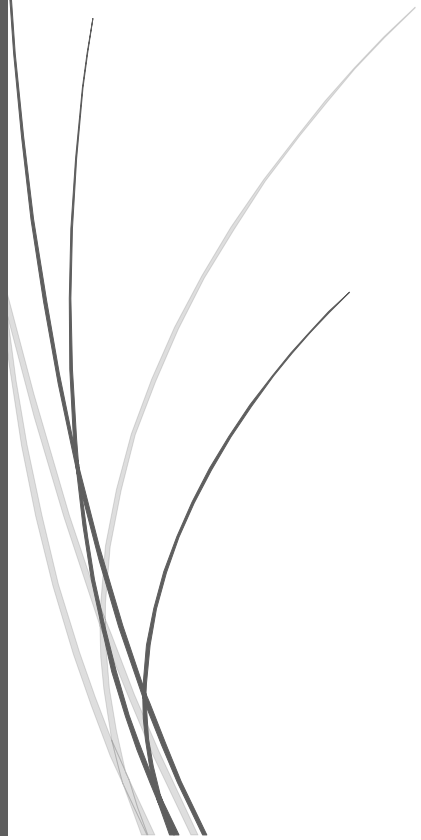
For CONVERSATION

- Does it make sense to think of Jesus as "the definitive beginning of the fulfilment of the Hebraic promises"? If not, does it claim too little, or too much?
- A mission to the Jews?
- A common mission of Jews and Christians to the world?
- A mutual mission between Jews and Christians?
- Which (if any) of these appeal, and what do you notice about why that approach appeals to you?

Moses breaking the tablets of the Law, Rembrandt (1659)

POINT FOUR

To pray for the peace of Jerusalem



Point 4 encourages Christians to pray for the peace of Jerusalem by,

- promoting the belief in an inherent connectedness between Christians and Jews.
- understanding more fully Judaism's deep attachment to the Land of Israel as a fundamental religious perspective and many Jewish people's connection with the State of Israel as a matter of physical and cultural survival.
- reflecting on ways that the Bible's spiritual understanding of the land can be better incorporated into Christian faith perspectives.
- critiquing the policies of Israeli and Palestinian governmental and social institutions when such criticism is morally warranted, at the same time acknowledging both communities' deep attachment to the land.
- critiquing attacks on Zionism when they become expressions of antisemitism.
- joining with Jewish, Christian and Muslim peace workers, with Israelis and Palestinians, to build trust and peace in a Middle East where all can live secure in independent, viable states rooted in international law and guaranteed human rights.
- enhancing the security and prosperity of Christian communities both in Israel and Palestine.
- working for improved relations among Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and the rest of the world.

It would be helpful to see that Point 4 can also be linked to Points 7 and 8. All three relate to Zionism and the State of Israel.

Jerusalem, from the Mt of Olives

For REFLECTION

- What do Christians you know think or say about Israel?
- What is your perception of the Land of Israel and its people?
- What is your perception of the Government?

The ICCJ has, in recent years, produced two resources which should be very helpful as companions to these points.

First is the 2013 statement by the ICCJ Executive Board: 'As long as you believe in a living God, you must have hope': *Reflections on the Role of Religious and Interreligious Groups in Promoting Reconciliation about and in the Troubled Middle East*.

Second is the 2020 volume of essays and educational materials that emerged from an ongoing research project called *Promise, Land and Hope*, spearheaded by Philip Cunningham with contributions by many scholars. The volume includes an educational tool for understanding different religious and ideological positions regarding the land of Israel. Its title is *Enabling Dialogue about the Land: A Resource Book for Jews and Christians*, published by the Paulist Press.

A third helpful resource is by Eugene Korn, *The Jewish Connection to Israel, the Promised Land: A Brief Introduction for Christians*. This was published by Jewish Lights in 2008.

View over Tel Aviv

The Land of Israel, the State of Israel, and the government of Israel

We may distinguish among *three* entities: the Land of Israel, the State of Israel, and the government of Israel.

1. The Land of Israel is central to Judaism and particularly to the Hebrew Bible. With the exception of some of the Wisdom Literature, the Land figures centrally in the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. See: Eliezer Schweid, *The Land of Israel: National Home or Land of Destiny*, Associated University Presses, 1985.

   A general exposition of the Jewish calendar can be found in Leviticus 23. Here we can see that there are essentially two units of festivals in the early Jewish calendar. The first unit, verses 5-22, from *Pesach* to the festival known as *Shavuot,* represents the end of the rainy season in the Land and the beginning of the dry season. The second unit, verses 24-44, from what came to be known as *Rosh Hashanah,* to the end of the festival of *Sukkot-Sh'mini Atzeret*, represents the end of the dry season and the beginning of the rainy season. (Click here for chart of Jewish festivals.) Traditional Jewish liturgy reflects these facts in the prayers for rain in the winter and dew in the summer. To this day, Jews throughout the Diaspora base their prayers and festivals around the cycle of rain and dryness in the Land of Israel.

   The Land of Israel has been central to the Jewish narrative for several thousand years. It infuses the *Mishnah* and *Talmud,* the *Midrash,* Jewish law, liturgy and philosophy throughout the centuries. Jews pray, not only facing Jerusalem, but focusing on it and praying for it. The Jewish view of redemption involves the Ingathering of the Exiles and the Return to the Land.

First Zionist Congress (1897) in Basel Switzerland

2. The modern State of Israel is central to the self-understanding of many, if not most, contemporary Jews. Since 70 CE, with the destruction of the 2nd Temple, Jews lived mostly in the Diaspora. There were some periods of peaceful co-existence between the majorities and the Jewish minorities; there were also times of great persecution. In the 19th century, the Zionist movement arose, trying to translate ancient dreams of return to the homeland into a modern political movement. Many Zionists were motivated by the growing phenomenon of European antisemitism, which had become racist; others, by the post-

Enlightenment situation of Jews, struggling to maintain their minority identity in an assimilationist environment. Religious and secular, liberal and conservative, socialist and capitalist—the Zionist movement was, and still is, pluralistic.

The Holocaust made most Jews, including those who had been indifferent or even opposed, join the Zionist endeavor. The State of Israel, established partly as a response to the Holocaust, was the most important collective project of the Jewish people in modern times.

Janusz Korczak and the children (Boris Saktsier),
Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, Jerusalem

The State of Israel can represent any of the following: an ethnic second home, where Jews can "feel at home." As American poet Robert Frost wrote, "Home is where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in," so it is also a refuge in case of danger; the promise of Jewish survival and Hebrew cultural creativity; a "living laboratory" for Jewish values; a spiritual center; a fascinatingly multicultural society where Jews from a hundred different Diasporas now live. Perhaps the most rudimentary form of Jewish identity is a sense of connection between the Jewish past, present and future; nowhere is that connection more palpable than in Israel, the only Jewish community in the world with a positive birth rate. All of those images can have religious implications; they need not.

3. But the government of Israel, as any democratically elected government, is open to criticism and to change. One can criticize the government of Israel and its

policies while affirming Israel's right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state. "Jewish state" does not necessarily imply a religious state; it implies a homeland for the Jewish people. Several years ago, a popular bumper sticker in the US tried to express this point of view, "Wherever I stand, I stand with Israel." Jews could expect their Christian friends to support Israel's right to exist without necessarily defending all of its actions and policies.

David Ben-Gurion proclaiming Israeli Declaration of Independence, 14 May 1948

The range of opinions within Israel is often much greater than within Jewish communities in the Diaspora. The more people abroad are knowledgeable about what is actually going on in Israel and the more they are connected with various groups in Israel, the more complex and sophisticated will be their awareness of the issues:

- By critiquing attacks on Zionism when they become expressions of antisemitism.
- By joining with Jewish, Christian and Muslim peace workers, with Israelis and Palestinians, to build trust and peace in a Middle East where all can live secure in independent, viable states rooted in international law and guaranteed human rights.
- By enhancing the security and prosperity of Christian communities both in Israel and Palestine. (This 9.5 min "Times of Israel" video offers a summary of the state of the Christian presence in Jerusalem)

- By working for improved relations among Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and the rest of the world.

Antisemitism?

It now time to ask what we mean by antisemitism. How can we distinguish between critiques of Zionism and Israel's policies, on the one hand, and antisemitism on the other?

First, it is important to note the accepted spelling of antisemitism, with a lower-case "s." Since there is no such thing as "Semitism," there is no such thing as "anti-Semitism". The lower-case "s" has become accepted in the last few years and certainly within ICCJ circles. Please note that we have chosen to spell the word thus: "antisemitism" and not as is sometimes common: "anti-Semitism" Your computer spell-check may not approve, but is there really such a thing as "Semitism?" Antisemitism is a hostile and denigrating approach to Jews, akin to Islamophobia, white supremacy, xenophobia and other forms of racism.

> Lord Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, offered a keynote lecture on antisemitism. He spoke of it as "the world's oldest hatred" and described its "mutation".
>
> The IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance), a representative body of 34 countries founded in 1998, offers a definition of antisemitism, adopted by its Plenary in Budapest in 2016. The definition is available here.

Further, Rabbi Sacks published *Future Tense* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2009). We highly recommend it, especially chapters 7 and 8 that deal, respectively, with Israel and Zionism. He writes,

> A set of criteria distinguishing antisemitism from criticism of Israel was set out by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (now the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.) It includes the following: denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor; applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation; using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis; drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis; or holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel (*Future Tense*, p. 98).

For CONVERSATION

- Do you have examples of criticism of Israel?
- How do these fit into the criteria that Jonathan Sacks offers?

"The State of Israel…is a refuge in case of danger; the promise of Jewish survival and Hebrew cultural creativity; a 'living laboratory' for Jewish values; a spiritual center; a fascinatingly multicultural society where Jews from a hundred different Diasporas now live. Perhaps the most rudimentary form of Jewish identity is a sense of connection between the Jewish past, present and future…"

Points Addressing Jewish Communities

POINT FIVE

To acknowledge the efforts of many Christian communities in the late 20th century to reform their attitudes toward Jews

Point 5 encourages Jews to acknowledge the efforts of many Christian communities in the late 20th century to reform their attitude to Jews. It suggests that this can happen by:

- learning about these reforms through more intensive dialogue with Christians.
- discussing the implications of changes in Christian churches regarding Jews and their understandings of Judaism.
- teaching Jews of all ages about these changes, both in the context of the history of Jewish-Christian relations and according to the appropriate stage of education for each group.
- including basic and accurate background information about Christianity in the curricula of Jewish schools, rabbinic seminaries and adult education programs.
- studying the New Testament both as Christianity's sacred text and as literature written to a large degree by Jews in an historical-cultural context similar to early Rabbinic literature, thereby offering insight into the development of Judaism in the early centuries of the Common Era.

Many Jews, justifiably or not, have yet to embrace or heartily acknowledge the significant and positive change that has been made, particularly by the Vatican, over the last fifty years. There are a number of reasons to explain this reticence in Jewish affirmation of Christian efforts:

For REFLECTION

- Can Jews rely on declarations made by churches and individual Christians not to missionize them anymore?
- How does being a tiny religious minority vis-à-vis an overly dominating majority of Christians inform Jewish reticence?
- Can Christians understand why Jews are reluctant to study Christian sacred texts?

Many Jews view the foundational texts of Christianity, and in particular, the four Gospels (especially John's Gospel), as inescapably and essentially anti-Jewish. Accusations, for example, of "the Jews" as Jesus' killers and as cursed for all time are seen as perhaps the oldest forms of Christian Jew-hatred. Therefore, many Jews see it as incompatible for contemporary Christians to consider these texts holy writ while denouncing Jew-hatred.

The dramatic *teshuvah* (lit. “return” or “repentance”) among many Christians in their relation to Judaism and the Jewish people comes too late in Christianity’s two millennial history of vilification and persecution of the Jews ---

The dramatic changes that have occurred among so many Christians since the Holocaust, and especially since the Second Vatican Council, has nonetheless come recently in the life of the Church's two millennia of existence.

Additionally, while certain major Christian groups, such as the Catholic Church, have carried out tremendous soul-searching and theological emendation, many Christian groups have yet to do so. One example of this is in the American Evangelical context, in which no “Vatican II” ever took place. In a Pew Research Study of worldwide Evangelical Leaders (2011), “The survey nearly unanimous agreement among the global evangelical leaders on some key beliefs, such as that Christianity is the one, true faith leading to eternal life.”

For CONVERSATION

- Which kind of approach would you wish to encounter?
- How can synagogue, Jewish institutions and individual Jews create opportunities for encounter?

POINT SIX

To re-examine Jewish texts and liturgy in the light of these Christian reforms

Point 6 invites a re-examination of Jewish texts and liturgy in the light of Christian reforms. It suggests accomplishing this by:

- grappling with Jewish texts that appear xenophobic or racist, realizing that many religious traditions have uplifting, inspirational texts as well as problematic ones. The emphasis for all religious traditions should be on texts that promote tolerance and openness.
- placing problematic texts within their historical context, in particular writings from the times when Jews were a powerless, persecuted and humiliated minority.
- addressing the possible re-interpretation, change or omission of parts of Jewish liturgy that treat others in problematic ways.

———

As we explore Point 6, we will look at each its sub-points in turn: (a) an honest appraisal of difficult texts, (b) contextualizing difficult texts in history, and (c) considering alteration or omission of worst texts.

———

Point 6 (A) Honest Appraisal of Difficult Texts

Judaism and Christianity share the same texts which Jews canonized as Tanakh and Christians as “The Old Testament”. By their nature as commonly shared texts, written long before the emergence of Christianity, there is no problem with the texts themselves but with their interpretation and with the order and theological understanding of those same biblical books. Later writings, interpretation and historical experience shaped the different readings of the same texts.

Rabbinic literature and Jewish liturgy developed in a time when also Christianity emerged and the churches rose to power. While Jewish identity, text interpretation and synagogal life haven’t been a product of rejecting Christian theology, writings and liturgy, the experience of confrontation and persecution did have an influence on Jewish expressions of faith. Therefore, it is no surprise that Jewish literature rabbinic writings as well as liturgical poems or folk songs - do contain anti-Christian notions.

In very rare cases there is explicit polemics, e.g., derogative mentioning of Jesus and his mother Mary in rabbinic literature. There is a lengthy discussion among specialists of rabbinic literature whether those references refer to them at all or to namesakes but the knowledge of these texts is in general limited to scholars, the average Jewish audience is not familiar with them.

Beyond that there is only scarce evidence of open polemics against Christianity, the church, or the Christian belief system. The *Birkat Ha-Minim* (mentioned above in 1.B.3) was not specifically directed against Christians but against all sorts of groups which were perceived as deviant. A few prayers, or rather a few lines in them, emphasize the

superiority of Jewish belief and practice, like the words that were added into the *Aleynu* prayer in the medieval age describing other peoples as bowing down to vanity and void.

Monument in memory of Rashi in Troyes, France (Sculptor: Raymond Moretti, 1992)

Polemical speech in coded form can rather be found in commentaries where rabbis try to defend Jewish belief and practice, and describe other claims to religious truth as less valuable. Especially medieval commentaries, like the one from Rashi (1040-1105 CE), have been shaped by the experience of the murderous crusades and their destruction of Jewish communities in Central Europe.

For REFLECTION

- Do you think the Tanakh can be read as anti-Christian?
- What do you know of rabbinic (Jewish post-biblical) literature?
- How do our own experiences in life influence our reading of biblical texts?

Point 6(b): Contextualizing Difficult Texts in History

Understanding the historical background of texts is indispensable to understanding polemical texts and to deciphering them. Often they contain a sort of Jewish-Christian dialogue, which is, alas, an indirect conversation aimed at rejecting the other side. Since Christianity rose to power, Jews living under Christian dominion have been exposed to manifold attempts to convert them to Christianity, or else to expel or even to kill them.

There was no way for Jews to defend themselves in an open, even, or just way against forced disputations, sermons, anti-Jewish incitement. It is no wonder that under such circumstances, Jewish religious instruction aimed at strengthening the conviction of belonging to a worthy belief system and nation. Christian censorship of Jewish writings and self-censorship of authors and copiers ensured that writings drew back to metaphors to fight against Christian theology and mission.

Jacob and Esau: Difficult Relations

The biblical narrative of the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, depicts a relationship full of tensions due to the rivalry around the right of the first-born, the final blessing of their father and which of them had been chosen by God, the Divine father. This imagery is reflected in the biblical writings of Obadiah, Malachi 1, or Psalm 137, where their offspring, the nations of Israel and Edom, are described as hostile political entities. Their enmity is explained with being rooted in the sibling story of Genesis.

Isaac blessing Jacob by Gerrit Willemsz Horst (c1612-1652)

When the kingdom of Edom stopped being an adversary and merged with the kingdom of Judah, the concept of Edom being an enemy of Israel had already been well established and was in subsequent centuries transferred to Rome, the occupying power in the Land of Israel. With the decline of the Roman Empire and the ascent of the church to the official state religion, Jews used the metaphor of "Edom" to describe Christianity and represent the church. Repression and persecution didn't allow for an open confrontation, let alone what we would call dialogue today, therefore Jews emphasized the sibling image, saw themselves as the chosen child.

This metaphoric fight about which of the brothers is the chosen one, the firstborn or the younger, is also reflected in the New Testament, in the Epistle to the Romans 9:10-12. Christians employed the metaphor of the Jacob and Esau to determine that the Jewish people be identified with the elder brother Esau, while the church had become the true Israel, the younger, chosen brother. For almost 2,000 years this metaphor has become a code for the rivalry between Judaism and Christianity.

In Jewish texts Edom has become a code for the Church, the institutional expression of Christendom. In Jewish liturgy, it plays out in the *Haftarot*, the synagogal readings from the Prophets, which accompany the weekly Torah portion. We don't know exactly when and by whom this cycle of readings had been allocated; it was a process of many centuries, but certainly in post-talmudic times and with the historical background of Jews living under Christian dominion.

When Jews read the Torah portions of *Toldot* and *Vayishlach* which tell the story of the sibling rivalry (Gen 25-27) but also of their reconciliation (Gen 32-33), the readings of Mal 1-2 and Obadiah, harshly criticizing Esau/Edom and reiterating God's decision in favor of Jacob/Israel have been chosen as the accompanying *Haftarot*.

For REFLECTION

- Have you heard of the Jacob/Esau-story as a metaphor for the relationship between Judaism and Christianity before?
- Why was such a coded language used?
- Is it possible to ignore the historical background of biblical texts and find timeless meaning in them?

Point 6 (c): Considering Alteration or Omission of Worst Texts

It is a sign of sovereignty to be able to leave polemics behind. When Jews encounter Christians, their institutions and theology feel safe enough, meaning not exposed to any endeavor of being missionized or degraded, they will become able to deal with polemical parts in their own tradition, too. If other religions are perceived as friendly and dialogue-oriented, without suffocating embraces, liturgical lines like the one in the *Aleynu* prayer lose their meaning. Prayer book reform is a slow and complex process but it has been taking place over the past 2,000 years.

A debasement of others can be replaced by reiterations of Jewish pride being chosen to the Torah way of doing God's will. And to clarify an often-asserted misunderstanding: The issue of chosenness of the Jewish people doesn't contain a proper hostile note toward other religions and nations. It comes to speak of a unique covenantal relationship between God and Israel which shall not be perceived as an exclusive relationship.

Though focusing on the becoming of Israel and its way through history, the Tanakh makes clear from its first chapter that all of the symbolic Seventy Nations are subject to God's creation and attention. The Book of Jonah is a wonderful depiction of God caring about all of humans and animals as well (Jon 3:8). Almost every Jewish blessing (of which, according to tradition, at least one hundred shall be said every day) addresses God as the Sovereign of the World, thus acknowledging that God relates to everything and everybody in the universe in a specific way.

Jonah being swallowed by the fish, the Kennicott Bible, the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

But there is a question whether texts like Malachi 1 and Obadiah which historically speak of the Edomites share in the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in the 6th century BCE should be continuously read as referring to Christianity. One could argue that this understanding of those texts is entirely unknown to most Jews but the liturgy still preserves this interpretation. Assigned as Haftarot to the biblical narrative of Jacob and Esau, they narrow our perspective on their relationship. It does contain hate, hostility, and fear but also rapprochement, reconciliation and the ability of living alongside with each other – united in honoring of their father (Isaac will be buried by Jacob and Esau together, Gen 35:29). Some synagogues might choose other Haftarot for the Shabbatot Toldot and Vayishlach, others might want to adhere to the traditional readings but in

sermons and text study we should stress the aspect of the two being twin brothers, thus sharing the greatest extent of commonality in upbringing and surrounding as humanly possible.

The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau,
Peter Paul Rubens, 1624

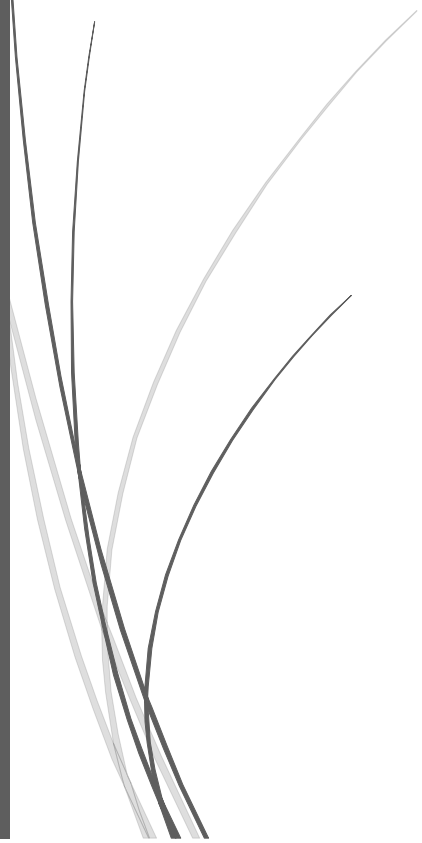
Text interpretation, the Siddur (prayer book) and liturgical forms have always served as expressions of pain and suffering but also of joyful life experiences. Since tradition is a treasure that grew over centuries and thousands of years, it is not going to be changed within a few decades. Some synagogues and prayer books have already introduced changes in textual readings; others might prefer a slower process. But always these variations will be a result of experiencing a different relationship than the historical, one of respect, openness, and sustainable trust.

For CONVERSATION

- What does it take to change liturgical practices?
- Which parts of our traditions are indispensable?
- How can we perceive each other as siblings rather than as rivals?

POINT SEVEN

To differentiate between fair-minded criticism of Israel and antisemitism



Point 7 asks Jews to differentiate between fair minded criticism of Israel and antisemitism. This can happen by:

- understanding and promoting biblical examples of just criticism as expressions of loyalty and love.
- helping Christians appreciate that communal identity and interconnectedness are intrinsic to Jewish self-understanding, in addition to religious faith and practice, therefore making the commitment to the survival and security of the State of Israel of great importance to most Jews.

As noted earlier, this Point links to insights raised in Point 4 and connects to the next Point 8. All three relate to Zionism and the State of Israel.

For REFLECTION

- Have you ever visited Israel? What were your strongest impressions?
- What do you know about the life of Christians in the State of Israel and in the Palestinian Territories?
- How do you feel about the image of Israel? Why does it seem to be such a controversial issue?
- Do you think it's appropriate for people outside of Israel to criticize its policies and actions?

The biblical models referred to include Abraham in Genesis 18:25, the same individual whom God calls "Abraham, My friend," in Isaiah 41:8. Also, note Proverbs 12:1, and Ecclesiastes 7:5. You may want to look these up, using different translations, and discuss them as part of a study session. These passages all give legitimacy to loyal, loving critiques, even from God.

As mentioned in Point 4, we may distinguish among three entities: the Land of Israel, the State of Israel, and the government of Israel.

As also stated in Point 4 we hope that Christians will "understand more fully Judaism's deep attachment to the Land of Israel as a fundamental religious perspective and many

Jewish people's connection with the State of Israel as a matter of physical and cultural survival."

Similarly, the document calls upon to Jews to "help Christians appreciate that communal identity and interconnectedness are intrinsic to Jewish self-understanding, in addition to religious faith and practice, therefore making the commitment to the survival and security of the State of Israel of great importance to most Jews."

The Sea of Galilee, looking from East to the West

One of the challenges in interreligious dialogue is that while Christian identity is almost exclusively a religious identity (with the exception of some of the Eastern Churches, such as the Armenians), Jewish identity is often and perhaps primarily an ethnic-cultural identity. That accounts for the possibility of very secular movements within Judaism. Most of the leaders of the modern State of Israel—presidents and prime ministers, for example—have been self-defined secular Jews. But even secular Jews can feel a strong historical connection with the Land of Israel.

An ongoing debate within the Zionist movement since its inception in the 19th century and one that characterizes the Israeli public sphere today is the question of what, if any, role Jewish religious law should play within the Jewish State. Thus, the equivalent of a "Jewish state" or, the "state of the Jewish people" wouldn't be a "Christian state" or a "Muslim state." It would, rather, be a nation-state for the Japanese people, or the Mexicans, or, perhaps, the Palestinians.

The Land of Israel is central to Judaism, and the State of Israel is central to the self-understanding of many, if not most, contemporary Jews. But the government, as any democratically elected government, is open to criticism and to change. One can criticize the government of Israel and its policies while affirming Israel's right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state. In the last few years—especially since the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995—Jews in Israel and abroad have become increasingly polarized on the topic of Israeli politics.

Rabin shaking hands with new Russian immigrants on their flight to Israel in 1994

The question of the appropriate channels for expression of criticism may be debatable. But Jews and non-Jews ought to be able to freely criticize the government of Israel and its policies, without being accused of antisemitism or anti-Zionism. On the other hand, when the criticism holds Israel up to standards never demanded of any other nation, or when antisemitic stereotypes and canards are used, as in for example on this website, Jewish ears become sensitive to the criticism in the wrong way.

Several years ago, a popular bumper sticker in the US tried to express this point of view, "Wherever I stand, I stand with Israel." Jews could expect their Christian friends to support Israel's right to exist without necessarily defending all of its actions and policies. The range of opinions within Israel is often much greater than within Jewish communities in the Diaspora. The more people abroad are knowledgeable about what is

For CONVERSATION

- Do you have different attitudes towards the Land and the State of Israel?
- If criticism is appropriate, should it be restricted to certain groups or channels?
- How can Christian solidarity with Palestinian churches and Christians be expressed without being felt partisan or intrusive by Jews?
- How can Jews reach out for alleviating the conflict beyond the framework of the official Israeli politics?

For REFLECTION

Some of our members objected to the wording of this call. Instead of “fair-minded criticism of Israel,” they prefer “of Israel’s policies.” They are worried that “criticism of Israel” may be misinterpreted as “questioning Israel’s right to exist.”

- What do you think of their criticism?

actually going on in Israel and the more they are connected with various groups in Israel, the more complex and sophisticated will be their awareness of the issues.

Resources

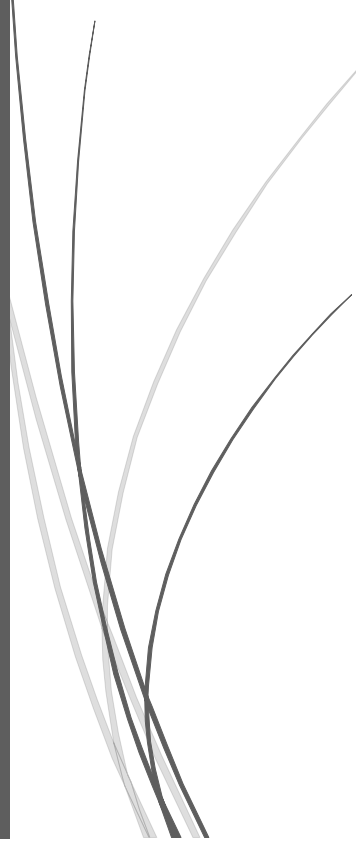
- One of the ways of finding out more is by being in contact with our member organizations in Israel, the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue and the Israel Interfaith Association. Probably the best way is to organize a visit to the region, in conjunction with the Rossing Center's program, ADAShA: The Jerusalem Center for Interreligious Encounter.

- In addition to the resources mentioned above, we would like to recommend a book called "*In This Place Together: "A Palestinian Journey to Collective Liberation,* by Penina Eilberg-Schwartz and Sulaiman Khatib, Beacon Press, 2021. That book contains additional lists of resources for reading and watching films.

- Two organizations you should know about are the Rabbis for Human Rights (which transcends the Jewish denominational lines) and the Bereaved Families Forum.

POINT EIGHT

To offer encouragement to the State of Israel as it works to fulfil the ideals stated in its founding documents, a task Israel shares with many nations of the world



Point 8 encourages Jewish communities to offer encouragement to the State of Israel as it works to fulfill the ideals stated in its founding documents, as task Israel shares with many nations of the world.

This Point can be expanded upon:

- By ensuring equal rights for religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians, living within the Jewish state.
- By achieving a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Point 8 stresses the challenge of encouraging the State of Israel to be true to its own stated ideals. These can be found in the 1948 *Israeli Declaration of Independence*.

The first response evoked by rereading the Declaration is a sense of the unlikelihood of its being passed today. Israelis seem so much more divided on the core issues that it would be difficult to imagine a document of this nature being adopted by such a wall-to-wall (ultra-Orthodox to the Communists!) coalition. This may give rise, for some, to a feeling of the miraculous character of the establishment of the State of Israel.

For REFLECTION

- What were the initial goals and ideals of setting up the State of Israel?
- Do you think that these goals have been fulfilled?

But apart from that, and from a strictly rational perspective, we can point to at least three problematic areas that have developed in the ensuing decades:

1) The United States, rapidly after issuing its declaration of independence, produced a **constitution**, with a bill of rights. The State of Israel came into being without a constitution. Ben-Gurion was afraid of a struggle with the Orthodox parties, who he was sure would insist that the Jewish people already had an adequate constitution in the Torah. Besides, it

could be argued, one of the world's admirable democracies—Great Britain—had existed for centuries without a constitution.

However, what was ignored in this approach is that Britain had, over the centuries, developed strong traditions and stable institutions, safeguarding its democracy. Many in Israel feel that although its democracy has managed to weather deep crises and threats of an existential nature—in terms of security, politics, the economy and a multicultural society—they do need a stronger legal bulwark to continue as a Jewish and democratic state.

2) After the first nineteen years of its existence, the State of Israel faced the challenge of the **territories** acquired (captured? conquered? liberated?) during the Six-Days War. The situation now challenges the commitment of the Declaration to the values of "…freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel..."

The majority of Israelis have given up on any dream of the greater Israel, although the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, with its dismantling of settlements, gave a mixed message. It showed that Israel was capable of withdrawal from settled territory, but brought in its wake an intolerable situation of constant rocket fire on the northern Negev. Another attempt at unilateral withdrawal, the infamous security barrier/fence/wall, may have lowered the incidence of terrorism, but it has also trampled Palestinian rights and further worsened Israel's image in the world.

The security barrier/fence/wall in Bethlehem

3) The most egregious contradiction to the Declaration lies in the second-class status of Israel's **Arab citizens**. The Declaration had promised them "full and equal citizenship and due representation." These have yet to be achieved. Although Arab Israelis compare favorably with the populations of all the countries in the Arab world, a fairer comparison would be with Jewish Israelis, and there, they lag behind. The poorest communities in Israel, with the highest unemployment rates, are in the Arab sector. The percentages of pupils matriculating in high schools or finishing university degrees are much lower than in Jewish communities. Government budgets are not always distributed proportionally.

One of the most painful, and, unfortunately, growing phenomena in Israel is Jewish racism, directed against Arabs. These questions will have to be addressed if Israel is to live up to the ideals articulated in its Declaration of Independence.

For CONVERSATION

- Can non-Jews achieve full equality within a Jewish state?
- How can people outside of Israel influence its development?

Resources

Rabbi Ben Hollander, *To Be Continued: Teachings on Parshat HaShavua*,Rabbis for Human Rights, 2017.

Avraham Infeld, *A Passion for a People*. Jerusalem/New York: Gefen Publishing House, 2018.

Gil Troy, *The Zionist Ideas: Visions for the Jewish Homeland—Then, Now, Tomorrow*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2018.

Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.

Gershom Gorenberg,*The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977.* Times Press, 2006.

David Hartman, *Conflicting Visions: Spiritual Possibilities of Modern Israel.* New York: Schocken Books,1990.

Arthur Hertzberg, *(*editor), *The Zionist Idea,* Second Edition. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997.

Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Israel: An Echo of Eternity,* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967

Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Highly recommended is a documentary called *Encounter Point (2006)*. It tells the very moving story of the Israeli and Palestinian Bereaved Families Circle. Two other documentaries you may want to use are *The Gatekeepers* (2012) and The Oslo Diaries (2017). A 43 min overview of the *Oslo Diaries* can be seen here.

Points Addressing Christian and Jewish Communities

And All People of Good Will

POINT NINE

To enhance interreligious and intercultural education

Point 9 encourages Christians and Jews to be involved with interreligious and cultural education. This can happen by:

- combating negative images of others, teaching the foundational truth that each human being is created in the image of God.
- making the removal of prejudices against the other a high priority in the educational process.
- encouraging mutual study of religious texts, so that Jews, Christians, Muslims and members of other religious groups can learn both from and with each other.
- supporting common social action in the pursuit of common values.

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1. *Combatting Negative Images*

The work of combatting negative images of others (all "others") is a collaborative exercise, involving the whole of society. It is the work of parents, bringing up children, of schools in their task of socializing pupils, of all places of study and work, with workers charged with the task of collegiality, and leaders and employers with the task of regulating behavior. It is also the work of governments, charged with regulating behavior at societal and national level. This means laws, but more. "Nudge Theory" [Hyperlink to: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nudge_theory] suggests that indirect practices can powerfully influence behavior. The way that the media and all influencers speak of human rights as universal has the role of enforcement; when that message is compromised or absent, concern is rational.

*"And God said: 'Let us make the earthling in our image, according to our likeness…**And** God created the earthling in God's image; in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them."*

- Gen 1.26f.

How people in faith communities will relate to this range of tasks will differ from place to place, and time to time. Naturally, we are people of faith and also parents, teachers, workers, employers, citizens and politicians, and our faiths have much to teach – to command even – on how to be diligent in all these roles.

Jews and Christians will also draw upon their own traditions for resources. It is indeed often said that it is foundational for both faiths that *each human being is created in the image of God***.** However much of a cliché it is, it has real substance. It is a key message of the first ("headline") chapter of the Scriptures which unite-and-divide us: the penultimate climax of the first story of creation:

"*Vayomer Elohim na'aseh adam betzalmenu kidmutenu…*

Vayivra' Elohim et-ha-adam betzalmo; betzelem Elohim bara' oto; zakhar u-neqevah bara' otam."

"And God said: 'Let us make the earthling in our image, according to our likeness…And God created the earthling in God's image; in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them." (Gen 1:26f.)

These are rich and evocative words, and have been pored over throughout the centuries. Noteworthy of our purposes is the insistence that the human being created directly by God (*ha-adam* is well translated "the human being" or even the "groundling"/"earthling", taken, according to the later story, Gen 2, from *ha-adamah*, the ground) is both *male and female*. At the core of our faiths is the insistence that boys and men and girls and women are of equal dignity and standing before God, and so in essence.

A 1768 parchment copying the 1675 Ten Commandments at the Amsterdam Esnoga synagogue

We might further note that the actual climax of the "headline" creation story is God sanctifying the *Sabbath*. Human beings' first day is full of the liberty and joy of rest and recreation. When the Sabbath is commanded within the *Ten Words* ("Ten Commandments"), different rationales are given in each rendition: Exodus 20 looks back to Genesis and God's sanctification; Deuteronomy 5 however refers solely to the human story.

"Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm."(Deut 5.15)

Sabbath is the antithesis of slavery, of all that enslaves.

Christians link (but do not limit) the Hebrew understanding to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is understood to restore the *Imago Dei* (literally, "God's image") in humankind. While sometimes this is understood to be a privilege for Christians only (either in time or at the end of time), this is but one reading. John's Gospel is the one which makes the greatest claims about Jesus and his uniqueness, as very Word of God, and also insists that the Word who becomes Jesus is the one "through whom all things were made and without whom was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3)

It is worth saying that the notion that all persons are equally made in the image of God is not a self-evident truth. Time and again, in human history, it has been denied. Often only an elite is held to be in the image of God, or only an in-group, whether of gender or ethnic group. Our Scriptures offer clear resistance to this idea, wherever it arises, explicitly or implicitly.

(Left) The 13th Cent BCE Merneptah Stele with earliest mention of "Israel", Egyptian Museum, Cairo

As already indicated, the doctrine of the image of God in humankind does not stand alone. It can be closely related to the insistence that the very NAME of God is bound up with human freedom. The personal name of God is revealed to Moses at the time he is given his vocation to lead the liberation of the Israelite slaves from their bondage (Ex 3). This too reoccurs in either the First Word (according to traditional Jewish numbering), or the introduction to the Ten Commandments (according the Christian ordering):

> "*Anochi YHWH Elohekha asher hotsetikha me-eretz Mitzraim, mib-bet avadim*"
> "I myself am YHWH your God, the one who brought you out from the land of Egypt [or Straights/Distress], from the house of slaves, " (Deut 5.6).

Similarly, it is often remarked that the command to love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt, is often repeated in Torah.

While it is in the story of the Exodus in Torah, and in the fierce warnings of the Prophets, that we find God's revolutionary care of all and each, and thus most

obviously for those pushed out and forgotten, made powerless, the shared Wisdom tradition also offers resources. Revolution is scarcely a theme of the Wisdom literature, but its emphases bring something different. It calls for careful attention to our internal attitudes, and to the kinds of behaviors we are cultivating through apparently mundane actions. This may well be a large part of how we come to promote equality and equity, consistently. In other words, "virtue ethics" also has merit as a school to help us properly and fairly attend to all.

Even the Psalms – where others are indeed often condemned, dismissed and even hated – can be an invaluable resource. This would be on the grounds that prayer is a "safe space" for us to express our negativity, to work it through. We can ask God to kill off our enemies, confident that God will feel under no obligation to do so!

*"We can ask God to kill off our enemies, **confident** that God will feel under no obligation to do so!"*

2. *Removing Prejudices*

Human groupings at all levels prioritize what they choose to prioritize. Often there is plenty of rhetoric against prejudice, and for tolerance and understanding. Concrete action and real changes of behavior and disposition are often harder. This difficulty can expose the different levels at which our thinking can operate. It is not always avoidance to say the matters are complex.

There is of course a volume of work by educationalists about how overt curricula and hidden curricula can work for understanding and against prejudice. Debbie Weissman has helpfully outlined an aspect of the educational theory of American social psychologist Gordon W. Allport (1897-1967) in *The Nature of Prejudice.* Allport notes what we should surely not deny, namely that religious commitment can be allied both with greater prejudice and with greater openness. He goes on to distinguish between *institutionalized* and *interiorized* religious outlooks. Religious persons always face a "two-way pull". Allport sees hope for greater tolerance lying firmly in the move to privilege the interior religious expression.

Weissman on Allport and Rosenak.pdf

Weissman[1] criticizes this position as betraying liberal Protestant Christian roots, which tradition has long separated internal faith from all external or ritual or communal practice, and all religious organization (hierarchical or otherwise), in ways that make little sense in other

[1] Debbie Weissman, "How Can We Be 'Both Loyal and Open?' Some Thoughts on Religious Education and Prejudice", in Jesper Svartvik and Jakob Wirén (eds.), *Religious Stereotyping and Interreligious Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

contexts, be they Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam or whatsoever. As a corrective, she brings in Michael Rosenak (b. Germany 1932—d. Jerusalem 2013), who, in his *Commandments and Concerns: Jewish Religious Education in the Secular Society* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987) makes a distinction between ”normative-ideational” and ”deliberative-inductive” religious practice and commitment. While at first glance this seems a similar contrast, it is vital to note that for Rosenak the two must be held in creative tension, ongoing. If exaggerating the ”normative-ideational” makes for a rigid, formal and hierarchical religion, it is equally the case that emphasising the ”deliberative-inductive” can make for religion that is vapid, mood-led and of no earthly use.

This discussion is but one way of raising a broader point which is often overlooked. This is that there is no automatic or necessary logical connection between a religious person’s or community’s theology of the other (understanding the term ”theology” here in its narrower sense), and their treatment of the other, in deed and interaction.

It is possible (which is not to say easy) to believe that only one’s own faith group is the recipient of God’s definitive Revelation, and even that as such only they will enjoy the fulness of consummation, whether in heaven or on earth, and at the same time believe that the content of that Revelation is that one categorically must treat all people equally, fairly and generously, or one is lost. It is possible (which is not to say inevitable) to believe with all conviction that ”all faiths are equal in all regards” and at the same time have nothing short of dehumanizing contempt for those who believe something different, dismissing them as conservative and reactionary. Naturally it may well be that a pull to exclusivity in one part of one’s thinking (the location of revelation and salvation) also encourages a pull to the same exclusivity in another part (the dignity and rights of the others). One believing thus is surely obligated to say how the other (held to be outside of revelation and salvation) is nevertheless fully human and loved by God. But such accounts are possible, and to be found.

“…the task of removal of prejudice is not reducible to a slogan, or an afternoon session of “training”, or an ideology, or theological trend. It is and will remain work-in-progress.”

Joshua Koffman, "Synagoga and Ecclesia in our Time", St Joseph's University, Philadelphia, USA, symbolizing Jews and Christians studying each other's religious texts. This contrasts with the Gothic sculptures of "Ecclesia" and "Synagoga" from the 13th Century CE Strasbourg Cathedral (below) showing "Ecclesia" enlightened and confident and "Synagoga" bowed, broken and blind.

In short, the task of removal of prejudice is not reducible to a slogan, or an afternoon session of "training", or an ideology, or theological trend. It is and will remain work-in-progress. This is because the issues are typically entangled (the dignity of all persons does not mean the rightness of all truth-claims), and also because of the complexity of our psychological make-up. (Prejudice may serve an evolutionary purpose, remember.)

3. Encouraging Mutual Study of each other's Religious Texts

We can rejoice that we live in a time where Jews and Christians are studying shared and separate texts like never before. In the Academy, it is a commonplace for Christians to study Jewish interpretations of the text. And Jewish studies are flourishing in at least parts of the West like never before. And of course the flourishing Israeli Academy brings in its own excellence. Notably, in Israel, the New Testament is studied as central literature of late Second Temple Judaism.

Ecclesia *and* Synagoga*, 13th Century CE Strasbourg Cathedral, France*

Nor is this only a matter for Higher Education. "Scriptural Reasoning" is now recognized as an important strand of interfaith relations. It typically includes (at least) the principal "Abrahamic faiths" and involves a Jew discussing a text from Tanakh, a Christian discussing a text from the New Testament, and a Muslim discussing a text from the Qur'an, all relating to a set theme, which may indeed be equality, care of the other, handling difference, and similar. This practice can of course be criticized on a number of grounds. Should the Jewish texts be limited to Tanakh, excluding Mishnah, Talmud and midrash? Should the Christian texts be limited to the New Testament, excluding (most obviously) their First or Old Testament? Should there be a base-line of scholarly competence? None of these matters are settled. And indeed Scriptural Reasoning is not always limited to the "Abrahamic faiths. This is a movement *in via*. It intentionally straddles the Academy and the communities of faith, encouraging serious-and-engaged readings.

In all attention to our shared and our respective texts, at whatever level, it is important that, at least once trust has been established between the persons involved, difficult texts are also examined. For surely each faith – each world-view – has some of these. Jews, Christians, Muslims and others might usefully challenge and be challenged on what our Scriptures and traditions teach about God's own attitudes to violence, militarism, and war and physical force as a good solution, and means of ending conflict through triumph - To name but the most obvious example: did God really will the sevenfold genocide God seems to command as the means to take the Land (Deut 7)? Or similarly: are all our efforts of loving and serving those in need really building up to the bloodthirsty cataclysm set out in the Book of Revelation?

4. Common social action in the pursuit of common values

Just as shared and mutual reading of Scriptures is one established strand of interfaith dialogue, much the same can be said of an enthusiasm for coming together for work for the common good. In the UK setting, for example, Mitzvah Day growing out of Jewish roots, is now an interfaith affair. It also now has a sibling program, the Muslim-led Sedaqah Day.

The pioneering Council of Christians and Jews, that of the United Kingdom, has always had as one of its goals the promotion of common or shared values. It might usefully be asked to what extent these values are particular to Judaism and Christianity, and to what extent these are values shared with many others.

In favor of particularity, it can be said that our respective teachings stem from our shared-if-disputed Revelation. Moreover, the many ways in which we develop and

make concrete the content of that Revelation can be said to have taken place within a dialogue. Often, one faith has looked to the other, whether in admiration, envy, support, opposition (will for clear differentiation), or fear. This can be said in particular of what are the formative centuries for both, the first five of the Common Era, during which the great Ecumenical Councils drew up canon and creeds, and during which the Babylonian Talmud was being compiled.

In favor of generality, one prominent strand within Christianity insists that all human beings can have a sense of the natural law, in other words, can search their own (informed) consciences, to see what is the common good. Judaism may be said to have an equivalent teaching, in its understanding of non-Jews who are persons of good will, who have all they need to follow the seven Commandments of Noah. Teasing out how we (severally and together) reach our sense of the common good might be a useful task for the ongoing dialogue.

Kennicott Bible, a 1476 Spanish Tanakh

POINT TEN

To promote interreligious friendship and cooperation as well as social justice in the global society

Point 10 asks Christians and Jews to promote interreligious friendship and cooperation as well as social justice in the global society. Such attitudes and actions can be enhanced by:

- By rejoicing in the uniqueness of each person, and promoting everyone's political, economic and social well-being.
- By recognizing as equal citizens members of faith traditions who have migrated to new homelands where they may have become part of a religious minority.
- By striving for equal rights for all people, regardless of their religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- By recognizing and grappling with the fact that feelings of religious superiority – and an accompanying sense that other religions are inferior – are present in each tradition, including one's own.

On many aspects, as we shall see, Point 10 links with Point 9.

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1. *The uniqueness of each person and their well-being*

   Jews and Christians have a high regard for human persons as embodied, as bodies, even, and so take good care of the bodies of others (of others as embodied). This touches on the importance of the economic and cultural context of all people to promote their well-being. This links, too, to what we believe.

   For further reflection on this see Point 9 and the section "Combatting Negative Images "and its exploration of the image of God. To repeat a key insight:

   > … the notion that all persons are equally made in the image of God is not a self-evident truth. Time and again, in human history, it has been denied. Often only an elite is held to be in the image of God, or only an in-group, whether of gender or ethnic group. Our Scriptures offer clear resistance to this idea, wherever it arises, explicitly or implicitly.

   .

2. *About those who have migrated to new homelands*

   Both Tanakh and NT are stories of journeys, often compelled, and including economic migration and asylum seeking. Self-care through such methods is never criticized. Care of those who are "strangers" is also affirmed. Although some Jews use rabbinic interpretations of relevant biblical verses to distinguish among different categories of Gentiles, it would appear that the simple meaning of the biblical texts would be "strangers," as in the idea that the Israelites were strangers in Egypt.

3. *Striving for equal rights*

Point 10 is about the dignity and rights of all and the respect for the primacy of conscience. For people of religion, it is important to reflect on what equal rights might mean in light of and relation to their religious self-understanding. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) represents a helpful reference point here.

For REFLECTION

- Consider the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR)
  - In what respects do its emphases and tenets relate to your religious conviction and your understanding of your religious tradition?
  - In what respects does it differ from your religious conviction?
- What use could the document such as the UDHR have for your religious life?
- Does the document such as the UDHR have a potential to be a resource in interreligious dialogue and cooperation?
  - If so, how?
  - If not, why?

4. *Religious superiority and inferiority*

The fourth sub-point of Point 10 invites us to recognize and grapple with "the fact that feelings of religious superiority – and an accompanying sense that other religions are inferior – are present in each tradition, including one's own."

Think about how you would like people of other religions see your own religious tradition. Try to express it "in a nutshell" and present it to your discussion partners.

For CONVERSATION

- As you ponder your own religious tradition:
  - How would you like those from another religious tradition to see it?
  - In a "nutshell" how would you express your religious tradition?

  - As you reflect with others on your religious tradition, let them ask questions to clarify and go deeper on what has been presented.
  - Now it will be the time for those "religious others" to reflect on and try to formulate how this image of the religious tradition they have just heard might differ from what their understanding of that tradition was before.

- Think of what you value most about/in your religious tradition.
  - Reflect critically how these things might become a reason for the feelings of religious superiority.
  - Share your reflections with your discussion partners.
  - Think together about how those feelings of superiority might be avoided and turned into something positive.

A note about dialogue

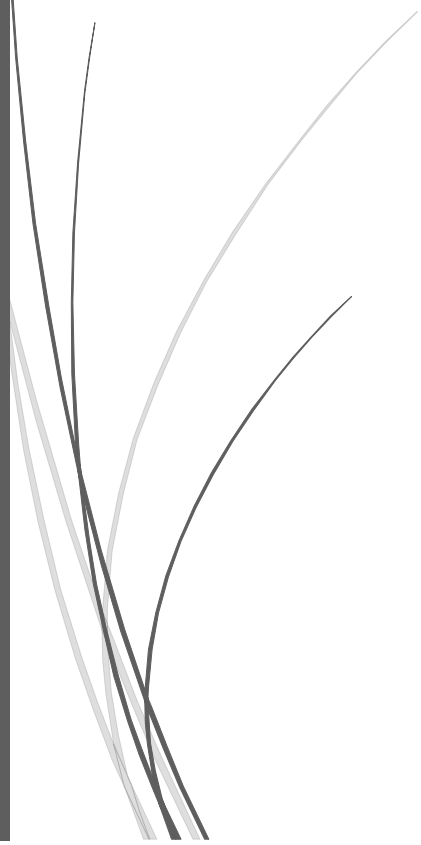
As we converse with each other about our respective religious traditions, we are invited to believe we are all equal and equivalent in every respect as persons. This becomes the opening criterion for dialogue. This does not mean that that we need or even should work on the basis that each belief is of equal value. Here we are commending equality of persons.

We are allowed our own preferences, and indeed our own framing of matters. But whatever "advantage" we may still find we think we have is a privilege we are called to make the most of. Both faiths teach that "judgement begins with the household of God".

We might dare to say we "know" God in the sense of "are acquainted with God", but we can never say we "know" God in the sense of "comprehend God / have the measure of God". So, whatever our theologies, it is also possible that the next person we meet, in all their difference, has something vital to teach us. This requires humility and openness to respectful listening and dialogue.

POINT ELEVEN

To enhance dialogue with political and economic bodies



In Point 11, Christians and Jews are encouraged to enhance dialogue with political and economic bodies. Such dialogue can be deepened by,

- collaborating with political and economic bodies whenever possible to promote interreligious understanding.
- benefiting from political and economic groups' growing interest in interreligious relations.
- initiating discussion with political and economic bodies around the urgent need for justice in the global community.

———

Like Points 9, 10, and 12 of "A Time for Recommitment", Point 11 is also addressed to both Christian and Jewish communities – and others. The issues dealt with in this Point concern individuals; they also have *communal* significance. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, they are a concern for the *whole of humanity*.

Point 11 emphasizes the interconnectedness of various dimensions of human life, including politics, economics, and religion. Moreover, it highlights dialogue and collaboration as a preferred way to respond to the needs and issues that involve the global community. Point 11 emphasizes the interconnectedness of various dimensions of human life, including politics, economics, and religion. Moreover, it highlights dialogue and collaboration as a preferred way to respond to the needs and issues that involve the global community.

We examine, first, the meaning of "community" as expressed in our Jewish and Christian traditions. Then we explore how we understand "politics", "populism" and "economy". All these—community, politics, populism and economy—influence our appreciation of the world in which we live with its economic and political dimensions and how we might engage in conversation with those concerned about politics and the economy.

As you will see, each of these areas raises several opportunities for inter-faith conversation.

———

1. *Community*: Qahal *and* Ecclesia*: some notes on etymology and meaning*

   Important background to undergird any discussion on the interconnectedness within the human and Earth community, and the need to be engaged with deeper conversation with those involved with politics and economics is our understanding, from our respective Jewish and Christian traditions, of *Qahal* and *Ecclesia*.

   - The Hebrew word *qahal* comes from a root meaning a "convoked group." In the Hebrew Bible this term is used to refer to a "theocratic organizational structure" in ancient Israelite society.

- The Septuagint usually uses the Koine Greek term *ekklesia* to translate *qahal*.

- Although the term *ekklesia* originally meant "those who are called out," it eventually came to allude to an assembly in the political sense. This already was the case in the period of the early church when the followers of Jesus started to use it to refer to their congregations.

- Note: The theocratic nature of the term *qahal* in the Bible is to be understood differently than theocracy in the modern usage. Although (or perhaps, because) the accent is on the confession that "there is no master but the Lord," the Torah is given to the people as a whole (see also Augustine, *City of God* 10.7). As such, God's rule is not heteronomous but involves dialogue between God and the people. It is worth noticing that God's command comes an assembly (see, e.g., Deut. 4:10; 9:10; 9:16; 31:10-13; 31:30; Josh. 8:30-35). (On this issue cf. also Bretherton, 2019: 406-408).

For CONVERSATION

- Do you think the above insights from Jewish and Christian traditions are helpful to the contemporary political discussion?
  - If so, how?
  - If not, why?
- Can there be such a thing as a theocracy in democratic terms?
- Can scriptural and theological concepts with political implications help promote interreligious understanding? How?

2. *Politics*

All of us are political beings. We live in community, touch into the fabric of a wider society. We are political, we are influenced by what happens around us in the "polis" (Gk. "city").

- Consider the following definitions of the term "politics" from Cambridge Dictionary:

  - "the activities of the government, members of law-making organizations, or people who try to influence the way a country is governed"
  - "the job of holding a position of power in the government"
  - "the study of the ways in which a country is governed"

- “someone’s opinions about how a country should be governed”
- “the relationships within a group or organization that allow particular people to have power over others”

For CONVERSATION

- What meanings of the term “politics” feature in the definitions above?
- What is their relevance for religious communities and interreligious understanding?

Consider this proposal for understanding politics by Anglican theologian Luke Bretherton (cited from Bretherton, 2019: 2):

> Politics is about forming, norming, and sustaining a common life between those who are the same and those who are different (however conceived), as configurations of power shape the conditions of life together at various scales from the local to the global. A common life with and for others (including nonhuman life) is a prerequisite for human flourishing: the good or flourishing life cannot be reduced to individual happiness as we are not atomized monads but mutually vulnerable, interdependent creatures whose flourishing depends on being embedded in just and loving forms of common life.

Bretherton suggests here,

- Political life is, first and foremost, a common life with others;
- These others include non-human others;
- The aim of politics is human (and non-human) flourishing.

For CONVERSATION

- Compare and contrast the definitions from the *Cambridge Dictionary* and Bretherton.
- What is the place and relevance of religious communities participating in the collaboration with "professional" political bodies and in political life as common life with and for others?

3. .*Populism*

- View this short video (3:33) explaining the phenomenon of populism
- For more details particularly on theological reflection of populism, see these two recent (Christian) resources:
  - *Resisting Exclusion: Global Theological Responses to Populism* (Lutheran World Federation, 2019) – full-text available online
  - *Is God a Populist? Christianity, Populism and the Future of Europe* (Frekk Forlag, 2019)

For CONVERSATION

- The term "populism" has by and large a negative connotation. Can it be understood in a positive sense? Is there anything we can learn from "the populists" to promote interreligious understanding and cooperation?
- How can religion become prey to populism?
- What resources do our respective religious traditions offer to counter populist thinking?

4. *Economy*

- The word “economy” comes from Greek words *oikos* = “household” and *nemomai* = “manage”.
    - Note: Like “economy” and “economics,” the term “ecology” also has its origin with Greek *oikos*. As such, it highlights a close relationship between human economic production and environmental stewardship (see also Point 12 in this present *Educational Resource* guide).

- Consider the following definitions of the term “economy” from the Cambridge Dictionary:
    - “the system of trade and industry by which the wealth of a country is made and used”
    - “the intentional saving of money or, less commonly, the saving of time, energy, words, etc.”
    - “the system of making money and producing and distributing goods and services within a country or region”
    - “the fact of not spending more money, using more resources, etc. than you need to”

For CONVERSATION

- How can these definitions on “economy” be interpreted and/or critiqued considering our respective religious traditions?
- How might inter-religious understanding and cooperation offer a further point of view on these definitions?

- Consider the following quotes:

    - “There is no alternative” (TINA) – referring to the market economy/globalized capitalism

    - “There are alternatives to globalization” (as expressed in 2000)

For CONVERSATION

The first economic position was held by Margaret Thatcher; the second expressed by the World Council of Churches.Do you resonate with either of these two positions? [Note to Patrick]

- What particular contributions can our religious traditions make to the discussion on the viability of certain economic models?
- How can collaboration with economic bodies stimulate interreligious understanding?

- In political and economic debates, one can sometimes hear the claim that a society can be either just or free (i.e., that freedom and justice cannot coexist).

- Consider the UN "17 Goals to Transform Our World"

For CONVERSATION

- Which of these 17 goals of the UN can be affirmed by Jews and Christians?
- What can Jewish and Christian communities particularly do to partner with political and economic bodies and NGOs to pursue these goals?

The United Nations Office, Geneva, Switzerland

Resources:

As we reflect on ourselves as beings in the world, with an interconnection in politics and economics, the following ICCJ documents are important:

- *A Time for Recommitment* (2009)
- *Let Us Have Mercy Upon Words* (2010)
- *"As Long as You Believe in a Living God, You Must Have Hope"* (2013)
- *"You Shall Love the Stranger as Yourself" (Lev 19:34): A Statement on Migration and Refugees in Europe* (2015)
- *A Statement on the Global Ecological Crisis* (2019)
- *The Demands of Our Time: A Statement on Antisemitism* (2019)

POINT TWELVE

To network with all those whose work responds to the demands of environmental stewardship

Point 12 encourages us to turn our attention in our work of inter-religious dialogue and action to the Earth, to network with all those whose work responds to the demands of environmental stewardship. We can do this by,

- fostering commitment to the belief that every human being is entrusted with the care of the Earth.
- recognizing the shared Jewish and Christian biblical duty toward creation, and the responsibility to bring it to bear in public discourse and action.

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Point 12 of the Berlin Document invites Jews and Christians to join each other in caring for the planet. This entails reflecting upon the environmental state of Earth and to offer a response that fosters environmental stewardship confirmed by our theological and biblical traditions. It also encourages collaboration to ensure that these insights help shape the thinking and response in the wider civic community.

Three aspects are important to enable such action to take place:

(1) recognition of the present state of the Earth's environment supported by scientific data;

(2) theological and biblical insights gleaned from our respective Jewish and Christian traditions;

(3) suggestions for action encouraged by examples of collaborative environmental cooperation.

For REFLECTION

- What is your experience of the climate in which you live?
- Have you noticed changes or incidents that reflect on the state of the natural environment in which you live?
- What have others noticed? What are your concerns about the climate?

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For REFLECTION

What do you think of this information about climate change and environmental sustainability from various sources?

What impact does it have?

1. The present ecological state of our planet

- The United Nations *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) offers a sobering picture of the environmental state of our planet. Its regular reports (found here) provide a global snapshot. In its 2018 *Report on Global Warming* the Panel concluded:

> - Human activities are estimated to have caused approximately 1.0°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels and, if not checked, likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052.
> - Warming from anthropogenic emissions from the pre-industrial period to the present will persist for centuries to millennia and will continue to cause further long-term changes in the climate system, such as sea level rise, with associated impacts…
>
> 2018 IPCC Report on Global Warming

- This 5 min video summarizes the 2019 UN Climate Conference in Madrid, with interviews with some of its participants and the politics behind environmental action.

- Other videos offer a view of the environmental state of the planet:
    - The World Meteorological Organization sums up the Earth's ecological health in this 1 min video.
    - DW News summarizes the regional impact of climate change around the globe with this 2.25 min video.
    - A 15 min report from 60 Minutes (Australia) showing the impact of global warming;
    - Al Jazeera provides a 2.5 min video of the melting Alaskan glaciers.

- "Bitesize," the BBC's educational website offers a further overview concerned with environmental sustainability and unsustainability.

2. *Jewish and Christian biblical and theological Insights*

   The ICCJ educational guide to Point 12 in "A Time for Recommitment" offers some important resources and links to religious leaders and their reflections on the environment and sustainability.

   Jews and Christians are imbued with a deep sense of ecological reverence and environmental asceticism. These have emerged from pondering biblical texts and theological insights over centuries and generations.

> "JUST AS WE SHOULD CULTIVATE PEACEFUL RELATIONS WITH OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS, WE SHOULD ALSO EXTEND THAT SAME KIND OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT… ULTIMATELY THE DECISION TO SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT MUST COME FROM THE HUMAN HEART. THE KEY POINT IS A CALL FOR A GENUINE SENSE OF UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY THAT IS BASED ON LOVE, COMPASSION AND CLEAR AWARENESS"
>
> His Holiness, the Dalai Lama

The first book of the Torah, the *Book of Genesis*, begins with two complementary stories about Creation (Gen 1:1-2:4a; 2:4b-25). They affirm the goodness of the natural world and that creation is God's act. They become foundational for the way creation is perceived throughout the Tanakh. They form part of Jesus' religious inheritance and contribute to the appreciation of creation amongst the earliest generations of Jesus followers that find their expression in the writings of the New Testament.

Jesus acted and spoke in ways that celebrated the Creator God acting in all earth's creatures, humans and non-humans. He was an observer of the environment. The natural world helped him shape his teaching. Creation—seeds, birds, animals, grass, trees, water—gave him insight into how God acts. Later Jesus followers, like Paul (in Romans 8), affirmed the role of creation for human salvation.

- Further convictions about the environment and its care are offered by Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Jewish representatives in the 1986 *Assisi Declarations* from Assisi, Italy.
- Jewish environmental websites, such as *ReformJewish.org*, *ecosynagogue.org*, and the Jewish Centre of Public Affairs offer other helpful ecological references and teachings.
- Pope Francis advocates for an integral ecological spirituality in his 2015 Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si* and his 2020 post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazon*.

"WE KNOW THE GREAT TASK BEFORE US. WE NEED ALL HANDS ON DECK. WE NEED TO MOVE TOGETHER, LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND. LET US SEIZE THE MOMENTUM FROM THIS [SDG] SUMMIT…TO MOVE FASTER AND FARTHER TO REACH OUR DESTINATION FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET"

Antonio Guterres

3. *Jewish-Christian Collaboration*

The United Nations' (UN) 17 sustainable development goals

> are a call for action by all countries – poor, rich and middle-income – to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

All the UN sustainable development goals are interconnected. They impact on the way that the environment is cared for. Goal 13 speaks directly for the need to 'urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts."

Ponder these representative Bible texts: Gen 1.1-2.4a; Isaiah 43.1-4; Psalm 29; 65; 98.4-8; 148; Proverbs 8.22-30; Mark 4.1-8, 26-34; 6.45-42; 16.15; Romans 8.19-23

In this 2019 speech, the UN General Secretary, Antonio Guterres, calls on all sectors of society to mobilize for urgent action at a global and local level. From a Jewish-Christian perspective, all these goals have theological and religious implications. Jewish and Christian collaboration can offer a deeper level of engagement.

Resources

For REFLECTION

- **W**hat is happening where you live to support ecological sustainability?
- **D**o you know of Jewish-Christian groups or other interfaith and interreligious groups collaborating on earth-sustaining projects?
- **I**n the light of the above resources, what might be helpful to assist deepen inter-religious understanding of the environment and act for change?

Several organizations offer concerted examples of ecological and environmental collaboration. Some include:

- The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life;
- *Hazon*, a non-profit environmentally oriented educational organization;
- *Catholic Earthcare Australia*, the environmental agency of the Australian Catholic Church;
- *Evangelical Climate Initiative*, a coalition of church leaders seeking to mitigate global warming;
- *Restoring Eden*.

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