

# Anti-Semitism as Christian Legacy: The Origin and Nature of our Estrangement from the Jews

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Anti-Semitism is Christianity's most disturbing legacy to the Western world. That judgment suggests the depth of our estrangement and of our guilt, and it underscores the high priority of all efforts that enable Christians and Jews to live together in love. Hatred for the Jews has many parents. To understand it and to rid ourselves of it require knowledge of this ancestry. It is shocking expressions like "the *theological* roots of anti-Semitism" or "Christian anti-Semitism" that make the church's reconciliation with Jewish people an inevitable part of the Christian agenda.

The term anti-Semitism itself is only a little over a century old. Drafted by anti-Semites themselves to give their prejudice a pseudo-scientific facade, the term might be replaced by "hatred for the Jews" or "fear of the Jews" or "prejudice toward the Jews." In doing so we might try to rid ourselves of the ideas the term presupposes, namely, that Jews are a separate race, that one race is superior or inferior to another, or even that all Jews are Semites and all Semites Jews. Still, for better or worse, the name is here to stay. Anti-Semitism is a pernicious example of prejudice, that "avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to that group" (Allport in Morais, 1976:11). To under-

stand anti-Semitism, we need to review when it has occurred, what caused it, and what forms it has taken. Only then will we be prepared to suggest how we might eradicate it forever from our lives, and how Christians and Jews might instead live in reconciliation with each other.

## Ancient, non-Christian Anti-Semitism

In an attempt to make Jews guilty for their own persecution, some people point to the hostility toward Jews in Hellenistic and Roman times and allege that later anti-Semitism merely continues this attitude. The causes for the ancient antipathy are multiple. Some hostile treatment arose because of political manipulation by insecure potentates who tried to gain the loyalty and gratitude of some of their subjects by depriving the Jews of privileges, encouraging agitation against them, or legitimating the taking of their property. In part, hostility toward the Jews in antiquity was also reciprocation for Jewish contempt for heathenism. The strong Jewish sense of election and monotheism led them to avoid table, marriage, and cult fellowship (*amixia*). Observance of the Sabbath and the practice of circumcision are two examples of religiously-sanctioned exclusiveness among Jews. They refused gifts to pagan temples or to the cult of the emperor. They considered

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the sensual rites of others as the behavior of people who were spiritually blind. Such Jewish exclusiveness was sometimes treated as misanthropy; their refusal to worship the emperor as disloyalty.

Anti Jewish polemic or calumny could be intense in ancient times. Apion (1st century C.E.) claimed that Antiochus had found a golden head of an ass in the Holy of Holies, and he accused the Jews of cannibalistic rites. Manetho, an Egyptian historian from the third century B.C.E. and Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman historian, born in the first century C.E., recount a scurrilous account of the Exodus: Pharaoh allegedly drove the Jews from Egypt because they had leprosy and other diseases which made them impure. Ringing defenses of the Jews were written by Josephus (*Contra Apionem*) and Philo of Alexandria (*In Flaccum*).

It needs to be kept in mind that the first Jews Romans encountered were slaves, beggars, and street sellers, and the usual disdain for a poor minority by a more well-to-do majority played a role. Moreover, this ancient anti-Semitism was at most a marginal item in society. Often Jews lived quite at peace. The two things that most irritated the Romans were Jewish monotheism and the resultant exclusivism, on the one hand, and Jewish rebellion against the harsh Roman rule. Interestingly, neither of these factors would have been a problem for Christians. Christians, too, are montheistic (in a Trinitarian mode), and surely Christians have no difficulty understanding

that a religious community is particularistic and exclusive. Secondly, after the second revolt, in 132-135 C.E., the Jews were without a home base in Palestine and revolts became a thing of the past.

Ancient hatred toward the Jews, therefore, offers little or nothing to explain the later hostility to the Jews among Christians, nor, of course, does it justify such hostility (for a full treatment, see Gager [1983]).

**Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?**

Although this is the title of a book by the late Samuel Sandmel, it is both anachronistic and misleading, as Sandmel himself admitted. He merely hoped to show where the biblical authors had purposely sketched Jews or Judaism in an unfavorable light. In a more controversial vein, Christian theologian Rosemary Ruether wrote *Faith and Fratricide*, an exploration of the theological roots of anti-Semitism. Ruether believes that anti Judaism is the left hand of Christology and that Christians have never been able to say Yes to Jesus without saying No to the Jews. She argues that as long as the Jewish religious tradition itself failed to concede that the Christ is the divinely intended fulfillment of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, the validity of the Christian view was in question. Hence in the New Testament and in subsequent Christian



theology there is an attempt to get the Jews to admit that the Christian interpretation is right. Since they refused, the church labelled them as the enemies of God.

While there is much embarrassing truth in the exegesis of the New Testament offered by Sandmel and Ruether, I believe that a more helpful approach is offered in recent studies by Daniel Harrington, John Koenig, and Krister Stendahl (among others). These scholars all concede that hostility to the Jews is shown in some New Testament passages, especially as these passages have been understood in the history of Christian exegesis, but they also argue, in somewhat divergent fashions, that a historical-critical reading of the New Testament, attempting to understand it within the thought world and controversies of the first century, eliminates a good deal of its anti Judaic character and may even provide help for improved Jewish-Christian relationships today. Koenig, for example, sums up his own hypothesis in these words: "The New Testament as a whole, when understood historically, offers more resources than obstacles to those who value Jewish-Christian dialogue to-day" (1979:137).

#### Romans 9-11

Three sections of the New Testament have been predominant in recent discussions. The first is Romans 9-11, now often viewed as the theological climax of

this great letter. Here Paul expresses regret that not all Israel has accepted Christ, but he insists that great privileges were granted to them and are retained by them (9:1-5). The church, now the bearer of God's promise (9:6-13) and made up of Jews and Gentiles, is God's beloved people (vv. 24-29). The Israelites, who so vigorously pursued a right relationship with God through the Law, failed to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah (9:30-33). For Paul, acceptance of the Christian gospel, rather than observance of the Law, is the way of salvation (10:5-13). Israel's refusal, however, is not total since a remnant, among whom is Paul, *has* accepted Christ. Because of the present stumbling, the majority of Israel has been hardened (11:1-10), and the blessings reserved for God's chosen people were made available to the nations (11:11-12). Gentile Christians have been grafted into the olive tree, which stands for God's plan of salvation, while the Jews have been broken off. Someday God will again graft the broken off branches (= the Jews) back into the tree. Paul envisages a three-stage program: the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God, the hardening of a portion of Israel, and the future salvation of all of Israel. In the end God will have mercy on all his people.

This is not the final word in Jewish-Christian relationships, but Paul does say that Jews who keep the Law, but presently reject the messiahship of Jesus, will

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not suffer eternal separation from God's mercy. Thus Israel's disbelief is a temporary phase in the unfolding will of God. The schism between those who believe and those who do not is temporary and providential. Jewish failure gives the Gentiles a change for inclusion; and the faith of the Gentiles will eventually provoke jealousy among the Jews and their reincorporation into the people of God.

Some participants in the Jewish-Christian dialogue have argued that Paul proposes nothing more than an eventual conversion of the Jews, and that this conversionistic understanding is a rejection of Judaism. Ruether, for example, remarks: "The purpose of Paul's 'mystery' is not to concede any ongoing validity to Judaism, but rather to assure the ultimate vindication of the church" (1974:107). I believe her objection misses the significance of this passage. We may want to recognize the ongoing validity of Judaism and to renounce any attempt to convert the Jews (see below). Paul, on the other hand, seems to have believed that sometime, either individually or by God's eschatological act, the Jews would accept Jesus as messiah. But he did not here presume that Jews who did not accept Christ would be damned. Israel's rejection makes possible Gentile incorporation; Gentile acceptance of Christ will make unbelieving Israel turn to the Gospel. The salvation of all of Israel is assured according to Paul. I believe, therefore, that it is a

misreading of the New Testament if it is taken to mean that saying Yes to Jesus means saying No to the Jews. This may have been a very prevalent and very influential way in which the New Testament has been read throughout Christian history, but it is a misreading, nonetheless. Romans 9-11 undercuts Christian attempts to invalidate the meaningfulness and beauty of the Jewish religious covenant.

### Matthew

A second, particularly troublesome work has been the gospel of Matthew. What untold harm has been done by those who made Matt 27:25 into a general principle: "His blood be on us and on our children." Matthew, indeed, enlarged the Jewish responsibility in the passion of Jesus and diminished that of Pilate, but subsequent readers seized on the word of the "crowd" and used it to justify persecution of all Jews for all time. Other passages have proved equally harmful. "The sons of the kingdom = the Jews) will be thrown into outer darkness" (8:12), an apparent judgment of eternal condemnation on the Jews. The exclusive claims of Christianity are highlighted in 11:25-27, stating that no individual Jew can know God unless Jesus tells him about God. Or consider 21:43, 45: "Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it. When the chief priests and

the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them." Such a passage apparently reflects the bitter conflict between Matthew and his community, on the one hand, and the leadership of post-70 Judaism, which was largely of the Pharisaic party. Matthew wrote at a time when the period of mutual toleration between Jews and Christians was at a close. He tries to see himself within the bounds of Judaism though it is obvious that the Jewish leaders believe he is apostate. The hostility toward the current leadership of the Jews is nowhere more obvious than in chapter 23, dealing with the Pharisees.

Later Christians absolutized the words of Matthew, failing to see how he was shaped by the controversies of his time. As John Koenig points out (1979:93), they also failed to see the door that Matthew left open for Jews who did not believe in Jesus as Messiah. What saves, according to Matthew, is repentance and faith in God's power. Even Jews who do not believe the word about Jesus' messiahship and his cross may still enter the kingdom by acts of loving kindness (7:21-27, 10:40-42; 25:31-46). Matthew, to be sure, still seems to have hoped to convince the Jewish people of Jesus' messiahship (cf. 10:34 and Koenig, 1979:89), and he firmly believed that the acceptance of Jesus the Messiah reaffirms, renews, and fulfills the best of Judaism without destroying its essentials.

There is no point in downplaying the harm that Matthew's gospel has done to Jews, or the harm that still may be done by an insensitive use of this gospel in to-day's church. There are some things we wish Matthew had never said. There are other words which are understandable polemic, given the charged theological climate of his time. Above all, however, Matthew is not opposed to Judaism; for him a non-Jewish Christianity is incom-

prehensible. It was his persuasion that the church is not Israel's replacement, but it is that group within Judaism that correctly perceives the dimensions of God's covenant with Israel (Koenig, 1979:144).

## John

John's gospel is the third, and perhaps most troubling, of all the works discussed in Jewish-Christian relations. The "high christology" of John is in serious tension with Jewish understanding of monotheism. This includes the identification of Jesus as the incarnate Logos and such passages as: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9); "Before Abraham was I am" (8:58); "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6); and Thomas's confession, "My Lord and my God" (20:28). Even more serious is John's censure of Jews and Judaism in what some have called the diabolizing of the Jews (Ruether, 1974:116). We think first of all of the words of Jesus in 8:44: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning." Or again, in 8:47: "He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." In the Gospel of John, Jesus is not opposed by the Pharisees, or by the Sadducees, or by the scribes, as in the synoptics. It is not a faction within Judaism, but simply the Jews who opposed him and tried to kill him (5:16-18). All Jews are tarred with this polemical brush, and the term "Jews" becomes a symbol for unbelievers or enemies of God. Only John in the New Testament can be termed anti-Judaistic. His vehemence can be explained, though not justified, by reconstructing his historical context. John seems to have written at a time when Christians had been expelled from the Jewish synagogues (9:22; 12:42;

16:2), possibly by the amendment of the so-called Eighteen Benedictions so that one of them included a curse on Christians. Perhaps the final redaction of John is more polemical than some of the gospel's earlier stages. Yet even the Johannine church tried to remain Jewish, and its sharpest pain came from being excluded from the synagogues.

Christians have found great strength in the majestic Christ of John, and it would be wrong for us to discard the whole of John because of its anti-Judaistic parts. Still, one of our primary agendas must be to distance ourselves from those passages in John which denounce the Jews as enemies of Jesus and of God, or which sees Jesus and the church as Israel's replacement. Daniel Harrington concludes, "Neither Matthew nor John yet sees the Christian community as a new religion apart from Judaism. Their anger is over the exclusion of their community from the synagogue. Paradoxically, then, despite their strong anti-Jewish statements, they are eloquent testimony to the radical Jewishness of early Christian self-understanding" (1980:105). The fourth gospel becomes anti-Semitic (or, we might add, it has been anti-Semitic) when it is read in such a way as to suggest that our attitude toward Jews ought to be the same as John's.

In short, while the New Testament contains passages which are or could be taken to be anti-Judaistic, and while many of these passages have served as theological justification for the most fearful anti-Semitism throughout the history of the church, the New Testament as a whole, when understood historically, offers more resources than obstacles to those who value Jewish-Christian dialogue today (Koenig, 1979:137). We Gentiles are, in Krister Stendahl's happy phrase, "honorary Jews," invited by the gospel to praise

God alongside Israel (Rom 15:10; cf. Stendahl, 1976:37).

### **Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism**

Before we go on to cite some specific low points in Christian Jewish history, we need to call attention to recurring themes within Christian theology that have exacerbated the relationship. One big difference between the anti-Semitism in Hellenistic-Roman times and that of the Christian era is that, because of the pervasiveness of Christianity throughout society, anti-Semitism was often a widespread phenomenon. The virulence of this hostility may be due to a kind of sibling rivalry between the two faiths since both came from the same roots. The Christian claim that Jesus superseded God's previous relationship with his people and that Judaism was in a sense obsolete embittered the Jews and gave justification to prejudicial thoughts, feelings, and actions. Jules Isaac complained of Christian contempt for Judaism. Its three main themes were 1) that the dispersion of the Jews was divine punishment for the crucifixion; 2) that Judaism at the time of Jesus was in a degenerate, or legalistic, state, and 3) that Jews are guilty of the crime of deicide (1964:ix-xii).

The historical reality about the dispersion, of course, is that it began more than five centuries before the Christian era and was expanded after the conquests of Alexander and the Romans, long before the crucifixion. The alleged degenerate state of Judaism also does not stand up to critical scrutiny although as Charlotte Klein has argued, this notion persists in some of the "best" of New Testament scholars (1978:chap. 3). First century Judaism was a religion of many sects and movements, including, to cite but two examples, the apocalyptic sectarianism of the Essenes at Qumran and

the creative efforts of Pharisaism, which enabled Judaism to survive and prosper after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. E. P. Sanders has contrasted what he calls covenantal nomism, which characterized Palestinian Judaism ("one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression," 1977:75), and participationist eschatology, which he sees as part of the Jewish legacy in Paul.

The third teaching of contempt, that of deicide, seems first to have been expressed by Melito of Sardis, in the second century though it is present, at least in germinal form, in John and in certain passages in Acts (2:23; 13:28). The charge is at once pernicious and false. While there is some disagreement among contemporary New Testament scholars on the degree of Jewish and Roman involvement in the trial and execution of Jesus, it seems fair to say that a small number of unrepresentative Jews, probably primarily from the priestly oligarchy, played a merely contributory role in bringing about his death. The charge of deicide ignores passages which speak of Jesus voluntarily giving himself up (Phil 2:5-8) or which regard his death as necessary or predetermined by God (Matt 16:21; Acts 2:23). Most of all, accusing others of deicide excuses the accuser who, from a theological, if not from an historical perspective, is also responsible for that death.

### The Early Church

Throughout this period we find frequent references to the rejection of the Jews as the chosen people and to the superseding or displacement myth (the church is the new Israel instead of the Jews). The Epistle of Barnabas, for exam-

ple, stated that God became man in order to bring to completion the full measure of the sins of those who had persecuted the prophets to death (5:11). That is, in killing Jesus, the Jews continued a disobedient lifestyle they had been practicing all along. From Origen on the misfortunes of the Jews were attributed to divine retribution for what they had done to Jesus. In the late fourth century Chrysostom accused the Jews of extravagance, gluttony, and deicide. Chrysostom accused the Jews of murdering their own offspring or, worse yet, of murdering the Christ. In his view God hates the Jews and always has. He added his own hatred because the Jews have the law but they insult it (cf. Parkes, 1934:163). According to Augustine, the time of the Jews is past. They continue to exist only so that they may bear witness to the truth of Christianity.

While this anti-Judaistic literature, the so-called *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, was being written, Christianity had moved from an illicit movement to a position of control in the Roman empire. In 315 a law was passed that forbade conversion of Judaism and set death by burning as punishment for this "offense." Until the time of Constantine, anti-Semitic views had been primarily theory; with him they became reality in imperial and ecclesiastical laws — and in deeds of violence. The prohibition against Proselytism changed Judaism from a missionary religion to one that was dependent on its own offspring for survival. This would be a contributory factor in the later notion of a Jewish race.

There may have been mitigating circumstances that would color our understanding of this early Christian literature. After all, we only really have the Christian side of the discussion and the efforts of a person like Chrysostom may have been aimed more at Judaizing Christians than at the Jews themselves

(de Lange, 1978:134). But there is no way to justify what these fathers said about the Jews and no point in attempting to try to do so. Rather, this sad record helps explain why Anti-Semitism is the most disturbing legacy of Christianity to the Western World.

### The Middle Ages

Many theologians during the Middle Ages believed the Jews forfeited their right to the promise because of their guilt in the death of Jesus, The destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. and the dispersions of the Jews were interpreted as punishment for this guilt. Thomas Aquinas held that as long as contemporary Jews refused to believe in Jesus Christ, they were on the same level as those Jews who were actually responsible for his death. Hence, there was no difference between the Jews of his time and those of the first century. He and other theologians often merely repeated theological themes from earlier centuries. This epoch, however, is significant for our discussion because of a number of very significant anti-Jewish actions.

The Crusades, for example, called to liberate the Holy Land from the hand of Muslim infidels, led to untold violence on the Jews of Europe. Why go to Palestine to fight infidels, many asked, when the enemies of Christ and the synagogue of Satan are right in our midst? 1096 C.E., the beginning of the first crusade, is a landmark in the history of anti-Semitism, separating a period of strong prejudice but with rare outbursts of violence from another in which violence became a much more frequent occurrence.

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 is another sad landmark in Jewish Christian relationships. Its canon 68 ordered that Jews wear distinctive clothing lest there

be sinful sexual mixing between Jews and Christians. This canon was carried out in a variety of ways, but a yellow circular badge (standing for the betrayal of Jesus for gold) and a distinctive red pointed hat were quite common. Such negative clothing introduced the isolation of Jews from the rest of society and was the antecedent for the various arm-bands, stars, and shields which the Nazis forced European Jews to wear in the twentieth century.

The Fourth Lateran Council also defined the doctrine of Transsubstantiation, which played an indirect but crucial role in Jewish Christian relations. Some Christians imagined that Jews themselves believed that the host was the Body of Christ, and that they tried to renew the passion of Jesus by stabbing, tormenting, or burning the host. The earliest such accusation occurred in 1243, the latest in 1836.

Another scurrilous charge against the Jews was that they participated in ritual murder of non-Jewish children. These children were allegedly crucified and the blood was supposedly used for passover bread or as a drink to rid the Jews of their bad smell (*foeter judaicus*). Behind these charges, which led to many trials and deaths, was the notion that Jews hated Christians and mankind in general. Though the libel of ritual murder was opposed by the Jews themselves and by several emperors and popes, it tended to shape the image of Jews until modern times.

In 1348 the Jews in many parts of Europe were blamed for causing the Black Death. Jews were accused of poisoning wells with spiders, toads, lizards, hearts of Christians, bags of excrement and menstrual blood, and consecrated wafers. Despite protests by Pope Clement VI, an estimated 16,000 Jews died because of attacks stemming from this charge.

Because Jews were banned from land-owning and from most of the trade guilds they were forced more and more into money lending. The church, mean-while, forbade the taking of interest since money lending was thought to be charity extended to the poor rather than a way of generating new wealth. The church made no exception for the Jews in this respect, but the princes protected Jewish usurers in order to finance their own operations. Popular thought seems to have tolerated Jewish taking of interest either because the Bible permitted taking interest from a "stranger," or because the Jews were considered damned already so that it made no difference if they committed additional sins. The Jews were forced into money lending and were then hated for it. It led to a classical stereotype of the Jew: a miserly old man, with a hooked nose and greedy claws, avidly grasping his money bags. As late as 1966, Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark concluded, "Perhaps the most constant theme in anti-Semitism from medieval times down to the present is of the Jew as a cheap, miserly manipulator of money, forever preoccupied with materialism, and consequently possessing virtually unlimited economic power" (1966:109). As economic tools of the princes, the Jews often exacted from the people the money needed for his activities and were hated for it. Not a few Jews were killed or expelled by princes and barons in order to cancel their debts to them (Morais, 1976:111). Jews were in fact expelled from many countries during the Middle Ages: from England in 1290; from France in 1306 and 1394; from Spain and Portugal in 1492-1497. This latter expulsion, numbering more than 100,000 has kept the Iberian peninsula devoid of Jews until the present day. The basis for all these expulsions from Christian lands was hatred of the Jews, often compounded with economic

motives and nationalistic tendencies. The Spanish, at the suggestion of Torquemada and other leaders of the Inquisition, hoped to separate the New Christians or Morranos, who had been forced to convert from Judaism to Christianity, from any on-going Jewish influence. The expulsions were devastating: great loss of property, a feeling of insecurity, an increase in disease and a decline in population, and a feeling of Jews being foreigners in the Diaspora. The Jews were driven from the countries along the Atlantic coast of Europe, just when these countries were becoming leaders in world trade. The expulsions rearranged the Jewish population of Europe and left an indelible mark upon Jewish thinking.

The tendency to isolate and humiliate Jews led to the establishment of ghettos, separated and closed off by law from the other parts of town. While the word ghetto arose in the sixteenth century, the actual practice of segregation is known much earlier and can be traced to the Third Lateran Council of 1179, which prohibited Jews and Christians from living together. Ghettoization was often accompanied by the wearing of badges, compulsory attendance at conversionary sermons, restrictions on professions, and other humiliations. The ghettos were crowded and unsanitary.

Even art came to express Christian hatred of the Jews. Judas alone was depicted as a Jew in depictions of the Last Supper, and statues in many cathedrals represented the synagogue as a blindfolded woman. The synagogue was thus portrayed as blind to the truth about Christ. In the cathedral at Paris the blindfold was replaced by a snake wrapped around the woman's eyes.

Four solutions were tried for the Jewish "problem" during the Middle Ages: conversion or forced baptism, expulsion, strict segregation, and exter-

mination. As Vamberto Morais sums up, "The greatest evil of 'Christian' and ecclesiastical anti Judaism . . . did not lie in the destruction of human lives, great and criminal as it was, but in its permanent poisoning of entire generations, and in the mental distortion it produced not only among the Christian people but inevitably in the Jews themselves" (1976:99).

### **Martin Luther**

To survey the bases for and manifestations of anti-Semitism in the reforming movements of the sixteenth century would easily exceed the limits of this article. Instead, it is appropriate to recall Luther's well-known pronouncements on the Jews. In 1523 he published an essay, "That Jesus Christ was born a Jew," whose outlook toward Judaism was positive, if conversionalist (Text in 1962:199-229). Luther believed that God had revealed himself more clearly in the Reformation gospel, and he hoped that many Jews would become Christians. Even here Luther took issue with Jewish exegesis since he believed that the Jews erred in not believing that in Jesus, the messiah had already arrived. His mission strategy, nonetheless, was sensible: first the Jews should be assured that the messiah had arrived; only in a second stage should the Christian preacher assure them that Jesus was true God.

The evangelical mission to the Jews was not successful, and Luther tried in a later publication to prevent Christians from converting to Judaism. This essay was a vicious denunciation of the Jews ("On the Jews and their Lies," 1543; Text in 1971:137-306). He accused the Jews of self-praise and insisted that they were blood thirsty and bent on revenge, and that they persisted in an anti-Christian explanation of the Old Testament against their better knowledge. Luther

claimed that the Jews knew that the messiah had already come. They were held to be greedy for money, and all chance for them to convert was long since past. He recommended that their synagogues be burnt, their houses destroyed, and their books, including the Talmud, be confiscated. Rabbis should be banned from teaching and safe conduct should be denied them. Jews in general should be prevented from loaning money at interest. Deprived of cash and jewels, they should, like Adam, perform manual labor in the sweat of their brow. Luther apparently had become convinced that the Jews were making light of and even blaspheming Christ in their prayers and synagogues. He seemed to fear that the wrath of God would descend upon Christians for tolerating the supposed Jewish public blasphemy. In his last sermon of February 15, 1546, he recommended that unrepentant Jews be banished from the land though anyone who repented should be accepted as brother or sister. Luther passed on his recommendations to the secular authorities, who, however, failed to carry them out in their generation.

Jaroslav Pelikan summed up this sad chapter in the life of Luther well: "I cannot escape the conviction that the time has come for those who study Luther and admire him to acknowledge, more unequivocally and less pugnaciously than they have, that on this issue Luther's thought and language are simply beyond defense" (Fourth International Congress for Luther Research, St. Louis, 1971). We need to recognize that it was not only in such polemical tracts that Luther said anti-Judaistic statements. It was also in his condemnation of the doctrine of merits, interpreted by him as works-righteousness, that the Reformer wrote, "Such dreadful monstrosities and horrible blasphemies ought to be propound-

ed to Turks and Jews, not to the Church of Christ" (1963:125 see also now Oberman [1984])

### Modern Anti-Semitism Before the Holocaust

In a period marked by the Enlightenment, the rise of Democracy, and the decline of the church's influence, the Jews were emancipated, that is, they were accepted as full citizens. With the revolutions in France and the United States a new age seemed to be dawning. Many thought persecution was unworthy of enlightened men and women; many liberals thought that emancipation would pave the way for assimilation and conversion. Still the Jews remained, even after emancipation, a distinct group by virtue of their marriages, their concentration in certain professions, their social cohesiveness, their maintenance of particular cultural patterns, and their denial of the predominant religion (Katz, 1980:9). Jacob Katz, in fact, claims that modern anti-Semitism continues to show the influence of the pre-modern Christian rejection of Judaism, even when the modern anti-Semites are antagonistic to Christianity itself. Voltaire, for example, was anti-Semitic, but believed that Christianity was a "higher religion" than Judaism. As the Jews moved into the mainstream of society, they expanded their sphere of influence, physically, economically, socially, and intellectually. These sociological challenges and the underlying anti-Judaistic heritage of Christianity were compounded in the 19th century by a new phenomenon, racial anti-Semitism. According to the racial theories then propounded, races were distinctively different and these differences affected human history. Count Gobineau was one of the leading racial theoreticians. He predicated innate differences between groups of different

racial descent, but the application of such racial theory to Semites and Aryans reached a nadir in the work of Ernest Renan. He wrote: "The Semitic people almost entirely lack curiosity . . . One does not find in their midst either great empires or commerce or public spirit . . . The Semite knows almost no duties except for himself . . . to ask him to keep his word, to do justice in a disinterested position is to ask something impossible" (Katz, 1980:137). Heinrich von Treitschke coined the terrible slogan, "The Jews are our misfortune."

For the racist Theodor Fritsch, Christian teaching arose as a protest of the Aryan spirit against the inhumane Jew-spirit. He was among the first to assign an Aryan, non-Jewish descent to Jesus (Katz, 1980:304-306). Houston Stewart Chamberlain, son-in-law of Richard Wagner, asserted that the Jews suffered from racial bastardization and its consequences, and denied that the Jews ever possessed even the rudiments of what might be called religion. Whatever might be termed positive in Jewish religion was not considered native. In Chamberlain's view the Ten Commandments had been borrowed from Egyptian sources.

Fortunately, the visions of Fritsch and Chamberlain were not easily translatable into concrete action. It took the disappointment of World War I, the chaos of the Weimar Republic, and the monomania of Adolf Hitler to translate racial theory into the "final solution," the annihilation of six million Jews in the Holocaust. As Katz remarks, "The basic principle of anti-Semitism, the denial of Jews of the right to exist, came here to a wholly unexpected, but not inconsistent, fruition as the policy of a government" (1980:317).

Katz's central hypothesis about anti-Semitism in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries is profoundly sobering. He

points out that the negative characterization of the Jews was part of anti-Jewish tradition prior to the emergence of the theory of race, and it was this anti-Jewish tradition, nurtured in and, to an extent, by Christianity, that was the determining factor in racial discrimination against Jews. The nineteenth century saw the condemnation of the Jews transferred from its original religious-historical framework into a supposedly scientific context. The overt reaction to Jewish emancipation came in those countries where Christian resentment against the Jews and Judaism remained a latent but mighty force.

Through the centuries a variety of factors have played into Western anti-Semitism. Sociological factors lie behind current American perceptions of Jews as conceited, insolent, overbearing, clannish, and exclusive (Glock and Starck, 1966:113). Economic factors arose in the Middle Ages, when Jews participated in banking and usury, and also after emancipation, when Jews were leaders in many of the economic changes of the nineteenth century. Politics figured prominently in Bismarck's use of anti-Semitism to grasp for power and in the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which reported an international Jewish conspiracy aimed at world domination, the overthrow of Christendom, and the establishment of the devil's reign on earth. But we need to be very clear: While there are racial, cultural, political, economic, and sociological causes for anti-Semitism, "Christian" attitudes, feelings, words, and actions to and about Jews were always at the center of the problem or provided a climate in which such anti Judaism could flourish. It needs to be stated with emphasis that all anti-Semitism is also anti-Christian. No one who has penetrated the meaning of the Gospel to any extent at all can discover in it the slightest justification for the

tragedy of the last 2,000 years of anti-Semitism. Of course, many of those who believed in or practiced anti-Semitism were non-Christians or even anti-Christian. Throughout the centuries there have always been Christians who loved the Jews, and those great ancestors whose words were intended, or have been interpreted, as anti-Semitic — the author of the fourth Gospel, Ambrose, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther — also bequeathed to us a different, dearer picture of a God of grace, love, and forgiveness for all men and women everywhere. But when all the provisos and mitigating circumstances have been recorded, when you and I have written down our own, "It was not I," the thesis with which this essay began still stands: Anti-Semitism is Christianity's most disturbing legacy to the Western world.

The record is clear and, to a large extent, highly displeasing. Christian accountability has been documented briefly here and in extensive detail in the vast literature dealing with anti-Semitism. Collectively and individually we need to confess our sins of the past and the present, to lay hold of the forgiveness offered to us through the Gospel, and to resolve, as individuals and the church, to lay out a new agenda in Christian Jewish relationships.

### **How Might We Relate to Jews in the Future?**

Christians need to lead in a society-wide effort to eliminate the sociological, economic, and political bases for anti-Semitism. Stereotypes die hard, and the notion that Jews are clannish and pushy, or greedy and materialistic, or in any kind of conspiracy to control banking and commerce need to be counteracted by what we say and what we do. This includes all kinds of disparaging ethnic and religious humor.

Christian churches and related institutions must expand areas of cooperation with Jews in social ministry and social justice. The Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews concluded: "Jewish and Christian tradition, founded on the Word of God, is aware of the value of the human person, the image of God. Love of the same God must show itself in effective action for the good of mankind. In the spirit of the prophets, Jews and Christians will work willingly together, seeking social justice and peace at every level" (1974:187).

### What We Teach

Christians must rethink their theology and the curriculum currently used in parishes and seminaries. Four issues come immediately to mind:

1) We need to discover and teach a fair picture of Judaism in the first century C.E. and in our own era. The stereotype still prevails that Judaism then — and now — is degenerate or deteriorated in comparison with the canonical Hebrew Scriptures. As Charlotte Klein has pointed out, this deficiency comes about in part because all too many Christian scholars know Judaism only from secondary sources, and these sources often betray their bias by calling first century Judaism, "Late Judaism." They often misinterpret the role of the law, the Pharisees, and the Jewish role in the death of Jesus. Christian lay people and leaders today often only know contemporary Judaism secondarily and not from face-to-face confrontation and dialogue.

2) We need to emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus (for a discussion of this from a Jewish perspective, see Vermes, 1973). Christians need to affirm both that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises and, in many ways, a radically new understanding of the promise. The Hebrew Scriptures, read on

their own terms, would not lead one to expect a messiah who would die or a messiah whose deity would be confessed. Jews do not reject Jesus because they deny the Scriptural testimony, but because they find God leading them, through Scripture and Talmud, in a different direction.

3) We need to make sure that anti-Judaism is not the left hand of Christology. Saying Yes to Jesus dare not mean saying No to the Jews. This will require particular care as we speak about the uniqueness and universality of the Christ. The potentially anti-Judaistic comments of the New Testament call for special efforts. Some of this offense may be removed by educating the church about the true state of affairs in the first century. We may also need, following John Koenig, to identify various levels of authority within the canon. The evangelist John's enunciation of God's goodness and triumph through the crucifixion of Jesus needs to be retained; his polemical comments about the Jews need to be identified as expressions of people who were involved in controversy with the synagogue, but without universal authority. Public reading of the New Testament may require replacement of terms like "the Jews" in the Gospel of John.

4) Our education goals in parish and seminary must include teaching about the Holocaust, its "Christian" roots, and its formative efforts in making Jews and Christians what they are too. Pray God, we will never have again the combination of social, economic, political, and human factors that led to the "final solution." Christians need to reflect on the religious causes of all forms of anti-Semitism in order to purge our guilt and to amend our present conduct.

It seems to me, however, that there are additional implications, often of a more controversial nature, that flow from our

past record and the imperative of the Gospel.

### Israel

Christians need to say Yes to Israel since the state of Israel keeps Hitler from gaining a posthumous victory (Fackenheim, 1968:20). Israel provided a homeland for thousands of Jewish refugees after World War II, and it provides now a place where Jews can be unencumbered by the remaining relics of anti-Semitism. Our Yes to Israel need not be an uncritical Yes or an unconditional Yes. A mature, wholesome relationship will allow (demand) criticism of the annexation of the Golan Heights or insist also on the rights of the Palestinians. But on the right of Israel to exist and to live within safe borders there can be no equivocation or prevarication. Like any nation state, Israel is bound to err; the way the state itself was formed may not be without moral problems. But given the circumstances of the Holocaust, and given the intricate way in which Christianity has been interlocked with the whole sad history of anti-Semitism, solidarity with the people of Israel is the only option.

### Mission or Witness?

As a second, decisive response to anti-Semitism, we must reject the notion of a special mission to the Jews. It goes without saying that Christians will eschew any kind of proselytism or forced conversion. In addition, we need to acknowledge openly the validity of the faith system of Judaism. Franz Rosenzweig spoke of Christianity as Judaism for Gentiles. He believed that Jews do not need Christ, because they are already of God. Perhaps this proposal is too simple or too much of a slogan to resolve this question completely (cf. Pawlikowski,

1980:89-90), but it contains at least a germ of the truth.

Renouncing efforts to convert Jews does not mean that we remain silent about God's revelation to us. We must continue to bear witness to *Jews and all others* about what we have seen and heard: what happened in Christ is an action of God embracing all mankind. To share the faith is an essential responsibility of us as believers, but we also need to listen to what Jews have seen and heard. If we want to continue to profess that the salvation offered through Jesus is both unique and universal, we need to clarify and express wherein the uniqueness and universality consist. The implications of the Christian Gospel may be further disclosed as our living faith is shared with contemporary Jewish sisters and brothers, who are, like us, daughters and sons of God.

Jews who respond to the Gospel and who become Christians should be welcomed and nurtured within the Christian community. What we need to deplore are evangelistic efforts aimed specifically at the Jews or the compiling of arguments based on a pre-critical understanding of the Old Testament, designed to convince them that Jesus is the promised messiah and that Christianity is the only way to salvation. I continue to hope that Christ will finally be all in all, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. That is now primarily an eschatological hope which will require God's own action to effect it. We need to affirm and live out what we have in common with the Jewish people, and we need to recognize the discontinuity with Judaism that the coming of Christ and his gospel has brought about. Need we add that the coming of Christ places Judaism in a situation of crisis? (Cf. the statement in 1975 by a Consultation of the Lutheran World Federation, cited in Croner, 1977:129.) The crisis for

Judaism needs to be tempered, at least to this extent, that Jews at the beginning of the church could be baptized in the name of Jesus and *continue to belong* to the Jewish people (see the study by the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, cited in Croner, 1977:147).

### The Dialogue

Jewish-Christian dialogue should remain high on our agenda, at international and trans-Christian levels, as well as at the local level, between individual churches, synagogues, and temples and between individual Jews and Christians. Dialogue means more than politeness. The aim of dialogue is a fuller understanding of the position of the other, in order better to grasp the inner logic of one's own position and in order to achieve some clarity and authenticity in relations with the other traditions. Monika Konrad Hellwig is surely correct that the central and constitutive claim on which one's own tradition rests must be placed central in the dialogue (1981:202). "We cannot accept the rules of a dialogue that require us to remain silent about what lies at the core of our movement" (Braaten, 1981: 79). Christian perception of revelation and redemption are focused in Jesus of Nazareth.

Some Christian participants in the dialogue assume a position which appears to make dialogue easier, but which in fact makes the dialogue irrelevant for many adherents of a classical Christianity. Rosemary Ruether, for example, says that to reaffirm Jesus' hope in his name is to say that now in his memory we affirm his hope. Jesus is not, in her view, the messiah. Rather, he hoped for the Kingdom of God and died in that hope (1974:249). A. Roy Eckhardt proposes that it was God's purpose that a majority of Israel should not accept Jesus. In his

view, Auschwitz at once undercuts the idea of God's faithfulness to Israel and means the end for Christians of the belief in the Resurrection. Jesus now sleeps with the Holocaust victims (cited in Pawlikowski, 1980:40). Despite the great debt we owe to Eckhardt for his work in combatting anti-Semitism, we need to challenge him on this position. "The true identity of Jesus," Carl Braaten has argued, "can be acknowledged only by faith in him as the risen Lord and the living Christ" (1981:77). Jesus was a Jew, that we proudly affirm. But the Jesus we worship is the Christ, the Savior, and the Lord. Again in the words of Braaten, "Salvation in the New Testament is what God has done to death in the resurrection of Jesus" (1981:84).

The dialogue we call for allows neither side to water down its distinctive views. I am grateful to Jewish colleagues who assure me that I have a place in the life to come because I have kept the Noachic laws. But I owe them the witness that their generosity does not begin to touch my own self understanding or why I can confess, in the words of the Nicene Creed, "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." For real and continued progress to be made in Jewish-Christian dialogue, I believe that Christian participants should begin with the faith of the ecumenical creeds and learn from the dialogue the deeper meaning of these words as they confront the living faith of Israel.

Our dialogue with the Jews has important implications for the entire mission of the church in the world. Someone has said that the very credibility of Christianity is at stake. No one, the charge goes, can be the true messiah whose followers are compelled to torture and destroy others who think differently. As the very first step, we need once more to join the call of the first assembly of the

World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948 and renounce anti-Semitism as "absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Anti-Semitism is sin against God and man" (cited in Croner, 1977:70).

This categorical renunciation of anti-Semitism in all its forms may well be the most beneficial legacy we can leave to the Jewish and Christian sisters and brothers who will follow us in the ages to come.

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