

IN MEMORIAM

PETER SCHNEIDER — FROM HIS WRITINGS

Our friend, Peter Schneider, has returned to God. We had known for a long time that he was immobilised by a grave illness, but were nevertheless shocked by this news, as we could hardly believe that the Lord would take him from us so soon.

We suddenly measured, in the void left by his presence and the profound memories which he left behind, the importance of the work which he had accomplished on behalf of mutual understanding and reconciliation between Jews and Christians.

In particular, all those involved with Immanuel — editors, contributors, and readers, owe him a debt of recognition and gratitude. To put it quite simply, this review would never have come into existence had not Peter Schneider prepared the framework, the milieu and the conditions for it. By his enthusiasm, his hope and his labor, he was in effect the pioneer of the meeting between Christians and Jews, particularly in Israel.

It was in his house in Jerusalem, in 1965, that the Ecumenical Students Discussion Group met, a bi-monthly gathering out of which were subsequently born, not only the Christian Students Forum, but also the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity and the Rainbow Group. Peter Schneider was struck by the fact that many scholars and students coming to Jerusalem, to engage in studies in the most diverse disciplines, from archeology to theology, and including philology and history, were barely touched by the Jewish reality around them or by the existence of the State of Israel. Out of this shocking near-scandal was born the idea of the Ecumenical Fraternity. The intent was to assemble Christian intellectuals living in or visiting Jerusalem, to invite them to discover together the riches of the Jewish tradition and to reflect together on the relationship, continuity and rent between Israel and the Church. At about the same time, with the most efficient help of Prof. Werblowsky, Peter Schneider developed the idea of a permanent group for Jewish-Christian encounter, on the level of academic research. This was the birth of the Rainbow Group. These two institutions have not only

continued to exist through the present but, in the course of time, have gained assurance and consistency. One may say, in all objectivity, that they play an exemplary role for Christian programs of Jewish studies and for Jewish-Christian dialogue. Immanuel is, by its definition, nothing other than the expression of the labor of common thought undertaken by these two bodies.

Already in Israel, at the end of 1969, Peter Schneider knew of his illness. This was particularly difficult for a personality so active and enterprising as his own. Returning to England, he left a part of himself behind in Jerusalem, in the midst of the Jewish people. What were for him years of testing, he confidently referred to in a sermon in Jerusalem in 1971, using the words of the apostle Paul: "We are in difficulty on all sides, but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair; we have been persecuted, but never deserted; knocked down, but never killed" (I Cor. 4:8-9). The fervor and hope remained intact. It was with the same enthusiasm that he established the Rainbow Group of London, whose meetings, to his great joy, were to take place in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey.

The best way in which we can express our gratitude to him is doubtless by reproducing here, prior to fuller publication of his works, several of those texts in which he conveys the core of his intuitions. The last of these extracts is entitled "In a Flame of Fire." I cannot help thinking, as I read this, of a certain phrase of Gregory of Nazianze, which applies so well to the person, vocation and destiny of our friend, Pastor Peter Schneider: "The flame which devoured the shepherd gave light to the flock!" May the flame which animated and consumed him shed light on our path.

M.J.D.

It is one of the marvels of the contemporary religious scene how a history of religious enmity is, in the second half of this century, being transmuted into the beginnings of a 'Fraternal Relationship' . . .

It is admittedly a highly ambitious aim to attempt to pick out the main traits in this Jewish-Christian transformation, but even at the risk of gross oversimplification, I attempt to do this partly in question form and partly in bland statement in some seven meagre points that will I hope at least convey the flavour of movement and a debate that has of necessity been theological as well as cultural and social.

1. Is antisemitism and its more serious root of anti-Judaism endemic to the Christian Church, its Bible, liturgy and teaching?
2. Can there be a mutual acceptance of the religious validity of each other's Household of Faith without doing violence to the true identity of Judaism and Christianity?
3. Given the special relationship of the Church and the Jewish People, is it that of mother and daughter or should it more properly be understood as that of two sisters from a common Hebraic origin?
4. Judaism cannot be treated as an exterior paganism to Christianity or Christianity as a diluted Judaism for the world or merely as something good for others but of no relevance for Judaism. In other words, mere religious parallelism or indifferentism will not do.

5. Are mission and dialogue mutually exclusive or is there a sense in which mutual witness within dialogue or our most distinctive heritage is possible? Further, is such mutual witness of a kind different from the traditional mission that sought the inclusion of one within the other?
6. What is the nature and condition (or indeed precondition) of community dialogue that goes beyond the dialogue of mutually interested and committed friends?
7. Biblical theology is rooted in God-centered events whose meaning is teased out by reflection. The motif of the Exodus is a prime example in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the Christ event in the New Testament. In our time it is the twin event of the Holocaust and the emergence of Israel that has raised serious theological questions, both to the structure of relationship of the Church and the Jewish People and in the way we have understood each other's spirituality. There is a beginning of theological reflection of the Holocaust from both the Christian and Jewish side, but this in-depth approach has barely been initiated as far as the emergence of Israel is concerned. Such beginning as has been attempted indicates that we will need to rethink the nature of Covenant, of a Biblical Word, Promise and Prophecy, and the whole area of 'Biblical Interpretation'.

Many more issues related to the above could be highlighted but the above seven points will, I hope, at least make clear that the issues are important and can be divided into two categories. First, there are points which directly affect the structure of the relationship of the Church and the Jewish People, and second, the contemporary religious issues that are raised, with which both Households of Faith have to cope in the real world of today and tomorrow.

(From a lecture given by Canon Schneider at the First Jewish-Anglican Consultation, Ampport House, Andover, England 26-28 November 1980. Cited from *Christian Jewish Relations*, 14:1, pp. 69-71).

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If the concrete situation of Israel is taken seriously (and there can be no Jewish-Christian relations without that) then it is impossible to avoid involvement in the actual situation of the Arab-Israel impasse. No doubt Jewish-Christian relations would be simpler without this awesome complication. . . . Christians in the West seem to expect that the Church will be able to blaze the trail of a significant Christian contribution towards peace in the Middle East. At this juncture, one can hardly do more than enumerate instructive points, some of which have already emerged from on-going efforts for Christian-Jewish rapprochement.

- Genuine and construed misunderstanding is unavoidable;
- Inspirational enthusiasm is no substitute for proper comprehension of both sides of the problem, but the urge to perceive and discover the approach towards peace will flag without a passionate concern for both peoples involved and their absolute good in peace.

- Tantalizing hurdles and evasive solutions, even the possibility of failure, are not sufficient reasons to give up the struggle.
- Both commitment on essentials and restraint from extremes in concepts and terminology IS NECESSARY.
- Intellectual and moral integrity are indispensable, even if they involve one in unpopularity on both sides.
- And lastly, like the Prophets, would-be peace makers must be prepared to think independently of governments for, after all, there would be no need for them if governments could arrive at peace without the enlightenment, correction, and inspiration of men of faith.

This is a formidable list but all that and much more will need to be applied in working out a “theology of peace” that will inspire thoughts and deeds of peace and will keep up the urge for peace . . .

Such a work cannot even be initiated, let alone sustained, without a real love for Israel and Jerusalem, which must, of necessity, include all citizens. A love like this needs to be sustained by a steadfast will and prayer that neither expects nor is prepared to fail. In other words:

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee.”

(From an article, “Jewish-Christian Relations and Middle-East Peace,” in *Jerusalem Post*, December 24, 1968).

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We can hardly do better than to conclude our meditation on the Shechina with some thought on the call of Moses at the burning bush . . . Returning to the Midrash on this passage which comments on the phrase, “in a flame of fire,” we read:

At first an angel acted as intermediary and stood in the centre of the fire, and afterwards the Shechina descended and spoke with him from the midst of the thorn bush . . .

Moses had thought to himself that the Egyptians might consume Israel; hence did God show him a fire which burned but did not consume, saying to him: “Just as the thorn bush is burning and is not consuming, so the Egyptians will not be able to destroy Israel.” (Ex.R. 2:5)

Israel by itself is no more unusual than the thorn bush in the wilderness, but because the *Shechina* cannot be separated from her she can never be destroyed. Here is a genuine clue why the Synagogue has persisted alongside the emergence of the Church, and at the same time the exposure of what has been so sadly amiss in our approach to Israel. The moment that we recognize that the unextinguishable life of Israel is nothing less than the indestructible presence of God in her midst, our attitude to the Jewish people and faith undergoes a most radical change. We are ourselves present at the burning bush and hear the words, ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet’ — words that can only mean one thing, to step down from a position of superiority and to remove the conceit and high-handed manner

that has so largely characterized the Christian approach to Judaism in the past and so make our approach in the deep humility symbolized by bare feet. . . .

We are on holy ground — God is present there and we need to approach humbly.

(From his *Sweeter than Honey*, London, 1966, pp. 123–125).

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But this cannot be a one-sided adventure. Already there are voices within Judaism that admit that there is deep failure in the Jewish evaluation of Jesus.

Language is difficult at this point, for in the past any approach in this direction has inevitably meant absorption into a dominant Gentile Church. We have no other option but to express this in language of the past, though a genuinely new Jewish recognition of Jesus will undoubtedly be different from anything known to us so far. A Jew of the first century described this in a lyric that formed one of the earliest songs of Christian worship and found its way into the New Testament. It is cherished and used by Christians today the world over but its ethos remains essentially Jewish.

This day. Master. thou givest thy servant his discharge in peace; now thy promise is fulfilled.
For I have seen with my own eyes the deliverance which thou hast made ready in full view of
all the nations;

A light that will be a revelation to the heathen, and glory to thy people Israel (Luke 2:29-32)

(*Ibid.*, p. 178)

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