

The Re-Judaization of Christianity Its Impact on the Church and Its Implications for the Jewish People

by John T. Pawlikowski¹

In recent years we have witnessed a marked increase in Christian acknowledgment of the ongoing validity of the Jewish covenant, as well as an enhanced awareness of the church's intimate connection with this covenant. In Catholic circles this link was clearly established by Pope John Paul II in a remark originally made to an international catechetical meeting in Rome in 1982, and repeated in the 1985 Vatican-issued *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*:

Because of the unique relations that exist between Christianity and Judaism — “Linked together at the very level of their identity”² — relations “founded on the design of the God of the covenant,”³ the Jews and Judaism should not occupy an occasional and marginal place in catechesis: Their presence there is essential and should be organically integrated.⁴

A similar theme was sounded by Cardinal Carolo Martini of Milan in a 1984 address to the International Council of Christians and Jews. He argued that deepened relations between Christians and Jews are vital to the future health of the church itself:

What is here at stake is not simply the more or less lively continuation of a dialogue. It is the awareness of Christians of their bond with Abraham's stock and

1. This article is based on a lecture presented on February 1, 1988, at Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem, Israel, under the auspices of the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel, the Israel Interfaith Association and the Israel Office of the American Jewish Committee.

2. John Paul II, March 6, 1982.

3. Ibid.

4. Cf. *Origins* 15 (July 4, 1985), p. 103, and Helga Croner ed., *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York, 1985), p. 221.

of the consequences of this fact, not only for doctrine, discipline, liturgy and spiritual life of the Church, but also for its mission in the world of today.⁵

Cardinal Martini made yet another crucial point in this same address: the original split between Judaism and Christianity must be viewed as a schism, not a permanent rupture. Catholicism was impoverished by the loss of living contact with its Judaic roots. He put it this way:

Every schism and division in the history of Christianity entails the deprivation of the body of the Church from contributions which could be very important for its health and vitality, and produces a certain lack of balance in the living equilibrium of the Christian community. If this is true of every great division in Church history, it was especially true of the first great schism which was perpetrated in the first two centuries of Christianity.⁶

With this sense of deep and permanent bonding with the Jewish People as basic theological substratum, the church has gradually, and not without much difficulty, moved toward a positive re-appropriation of its Jewish roots in many areas.

One significant area of change has been the attitude toward and use of the Hebrew Scriptures or the First Testament. The name change itself is indicative of the transformation, a change that is slowly winning acceptance in an increasing number of scholarly and ecclesiastical circles. In the past the so-called "Old Testament" served at best as prelude to New Testament teachings and at worst as foil for these teachings. More and more, Christianity generally is regaining a sense that the Hebrew Scriptures are worth studying in their own right, apart from whatever legitimate insights they offer into the meaning of Jesus and the development of apostolic Christianity. However slowly, Christians are coming to recognize that without deep immersion into the spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures, they are left with a truncated vision of Jesus' message — which in fact relied heavily on "the Scriptures" — and hence an emaciated version of Christian spirituality.

If there is one area of church life that still lags somewhat behind with regard to this development, it would be the general theological realm in which I would include systematic theology, ethics, spirituality and preaching. About the only theological disciplines that have drawn upon the Hebrew Scriptures in the past are liturgy and sacramental theology, and even here the controlling rubric has usually been an ultimately pejorative "foreshadowing" theme. If the Hebrew Scriptures are to continue their movement to the center of faith-identity for Christians — where they were for Jesus — then they must begin to assume the status of primary and not merely peripheral resources for Christian theological statement. In this regard we must move toward the position introduced many years ago by the seminal thinker in Christian-Jewish relations, A. Roy Eckhardt, in one of his earliest works:

5. "The Relation of the Church to the Jewish People," *From the Martin Buber House* 6 (September 1984), p. 9.

6. "The Relation," p. 13.

If there is true sense in which God has manifested himself uniquely in Jesus of Nazareth, it must be said that the mystery of this divine act is in principle no greater than the sacred acts through which Israel was originally elected.⁷

Biblical Themes

Moving from generic considerations relative to the Hebrew Scriptures to specific themes, we can highlight the following as of growing importance for Christian faith-identity and expression. All are themes that have been virtually missing, or at least seriously down-played, during much of Christian history since what Cardinal Martini has termed its schism with the Jewish People.

The first of these biblical themes is that of peoplehood or the primacy of community. Judaism has generally maintained a strong sense that individual salvation must take second place to the salvation of the community. This sense of peoplehood is an integral part of the covenantal tradition of Sinai in which the revelation of God's presence was given to Moses for the well-being and mission of the whole people rather than simply for the good of the individual.

As we examine Christian history, we see that very often Christian faith degenerated into an almost exclusively individualistic sense of divine-human encounter. Personal salvation assumed a primacy it never had in biblical Judaism and which it never had for Jesus — or even for Paul, contrary to later interpretations of his thought. This individualistic approach to Christian faith often was accompanied by an other-worldly, ahistorical and at times antihistorical interpretation of spirituality. The world for Christians frequently became a place from which they longed to escape rather than one they were called to transform as a people along with their Jewish partners.

The individualist tendency even infiltrated the most central of religious acts for many Christians — the Eucharist. The origins of this primal sacrament are directly rooted in the Pharisaic communal meals which formed a crucial part of Jesus' constructive appropriation of Second Temple Judaism. The Eucharist tended in later Christianity to become an occasion when the individual Christian believer offered personal prayers to God while the priest performed sacred mysteries on the altar. Such a tendency mitigated against any communal consciousness among the individual believers assembled for worship. It was only with the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council that this began to change. Picking up on its definition of the church as the People of God, a notion that was absolutely central to the reformation produced by the Second Vatican Council, the Council restored Christianity's historical and communal orientation which had been lost in the original schism with Judaism. This is clearly seen in its attempts to reform eucharistic practice, and a check of bibliography for this eucharistic reform will show that many of the key liturgical scholars who shaped the reform were significantly influenced by new contacts with the Jewish liturgical tradition beginning with the Hebrew Scriptures and the sacred meals which formed a core element in Second Temple Judaism.

This is but one example of how the enhanced Christian-Jewish dialogue not only has benefited intergroup understanding but also has positively influenced

7. *Elder and Younger Brothers* (New York, 1973), p. 142.

the general renewal of Christian faith-expression widespread in our time. The only word of caution I would introduce here is the same one voiced by ecumenical New Testament scholar Gerard Sloyan, who has warned that a false appropriation of the term "People of God" can easily breed a new form of theological imperialism:

The very eagerness of the Christian bodies to employ the term "people of God" to describe themselves only is an indication of how little alerted they are to their own coming to birth from a Jewish mother who continues in good health. The problem is therefore as much of an understanding in depth of Christian origins as it is of ecumenical relations with the Jews.⁸

Clearly for the term "People of God" to contribute to a constructive re-Judaization of Christianity it must be used with the concomitant assertion that the Jewish People also remain "People of God."

Liberation theology, controversial in many ecclesiastical leadership circles and viewed with apprehension by many Jews but popular with significant numbers of Christians at the local and regional levels in the Third World, is another example of some positive appropriation of Judaism's communal/historical sense. Several of the leading theologians in this movement have turned to the Exodus covenantal tradition as the inescapable starting point for the ongoing process of human liberation from all forms of oppression. One cannot fully understand the liberating mission of Jesus, according to Gustavo Gutierrez and Jose Miguez Bonino, without seeing how it flows from the liberation of the People of Israel recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Without this positive connection with the Exodus tradition of liberation, interpretations of Jesus' preaching frequently become overly individualistic — the "Jesus as my personal Savior approach" — and ahistorical.

To be totally candid, there are also disturbing trends that cannot be ignored in liberation theology regarding Judaism. Not all of the theologians related to this movement view the covenantal tradition in Exodus as positively as Gutierrez and Bonino. Examples of this are to be found in the works of Leonardo Boff and especially Jon Sobrino. They not only are silent about any link between the liberating spirit of Jesus' proclamation and the liberating spirit of Exodus, but they reintroduce the notion of Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death in a way that seems to return us to the tragic days prior to the Second Vatican Council's repudiation of the deicide charge. Even Gutierrez and Bonino are not free from legitimate criticism for their inadequate understanding of the role of Torah in biblical Judaism, the unsatisfactory way in which they tie the Exodus tradition of liberation to the Christ Event, and their silence on Jewish liberation in our time. But given the history of Christian neglect of the Hebrew Scriptures as a resource for contemporary articulation of the Christian faith, the positive use of the Exodus covenantal tradition by Gutierrez and Bonino, though in my judgment in need of substantial reformulation on the Jewish question, represents a step forward in the re-Judaization of Christian theology.

8. "Who are the People of God?" in Asher Finkel and Lawrence Frizzell, eds., *Standing Before God* (New York, 1981), p. 113.

Another important dimension of the Jewish covenantal tradition that has begun to influence Christian faith is the theme of the individual as co-creator, as co-responsible for history and for the world God created. This notion of co-creatorship emerges both from the biblical tradition and from the later Jewish mystical tradition. In light of the *shoah* (Holocaust), it has taken a renewed importance. It is a major theme of Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter *Laborem Exercens* ("On Human Work") and is also present in the Canadian Catholic Bishops' statement on economics as well as the U.S. Catholic Bishops' statements on energy, peace and economic justice. It is especially prominent in the last of these statements where the U.S. Bishops have drawn exclusively upon Genesis for a spirituality that can undergird an indispensable sense of co-creational responsibility within humankind in our day. In so doing they have acknowledged, albeit indirectly, the basic poverty of the New Testament in some areas when taken by itself.

There is yet another way in which renewed exposure to the Jewish covenantal tradition has been affecting Christianity's theological outlook: theological anthropology. Judaism generally has maintained a more positive image of the human being than Christianity. Catholicism has been somewhat better in this regard than Protestantism, but both have tended to stress sinfulness much more than goodness in their theological anthropology. Judaism has not been ignorant of a deep sinful drive within the human person, but the stress on this drive has been far less dominant in Judaism than it generally has been in Christianity.

Christian theologians' lack of contact with the Jewish biblical, rabbinic and mystical viewpoint on basic human goodness has resulted in a distorted emphasis on certain statements in the Pauline writings without counterbalancing them with other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. New Testament scholars such as Krister Stendahl, now Bishop of Stockholm, have even argued that later Protestant theologians projected back into Paul guilt feelings arising from their own introspection which would have been foreign to Paul the Pharisaic Jew.⁹ While Judaism also may need to do some rethinking about the innate power of evil in the light of the *shoah* experience, Christianity's approach stands in need of greater review. Since so much of Christianity's approach to human sinfulness, especially in Catholicism, has been related to sexuality, increased interchange with the Jewish tradition may help restore the far more positive outlook on sexuality as an avenue for experiencing the divine presence, which is found in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the later Jewish mystical tradition.

A related issue is that of the Christian understanding of forgiveness of sin and, for sacramentally-based Christian denominations, the celebration of Penance. For centuries the understanding and liturgical celebration of forgiveness has focused on the cleansing of the individual sinner from the stain of sin. This rather truncated interpretation of forgiveness and the sacrament of Penance was due in large measure, as my late colleague the liturgical scholar

9. Cf. "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963), 199-216.

Ralph Keifer used to emphasize, to the teachings of the Irish monks in the pre-medieval period. Unfortunately they took the Church's understanding of forgiveness far afield, cutting it off from its roots in the Jewish tradition where it involved reconciliation with the person or persons affected by one's sinful action rather than inner cleansing. The New Testament, in its story of the return of the prodigal son and its injunction not to dare offer gifts at the altar until one has made amends with the person against whom the sinful act has been directed, carries on this authentic Jewish spirit. We can hope that Christians will continue to recover this understanding of forgiveness and Penance through the present-day encounter with Judaism.

The final issue I would raise in relation to the biblical part of the Jewish covenantal tradition is the potential impact of the Jewish tradition of land on Christian faith-expression. Christian scholars such as Walter Brueggemann and W.D. Davies have completed important studies on this question in recent years. It is not possible here to present their respective analyses in full detail. Both assert that failure to grasp the insights of this land tradition not only leaves Christians with a falsified picture of Judaism, but also deprives Christianity of a vital rootedness in history and a full appreciation of the role of non-human creation in the emergence of the eschatological divine reign.

I certainly would wish to maintain some significant differences between Christianity and Judaism regarding the present meaning of the land tradition. It is my firm belief that one result of the Christian theology of the Incarnation is an equalization of all land in terms of sacredness. Jerusalem is from the standpoint of theological principle no holier than Geneva, Rome, the *favelas* of Rio or the inner city of Chicago. I know this view places me outside the pale of what some call "Christian Zionism," but this has been a tenaciously held position on my part for a long time and I would find it a violation of my basic commitment to Christian incarnational faith to break with it.

But having made the above assertion of personal faith on the land tradition, I wish to proclaim with equal vigor my firm conviction that the church's faith-expression must always be firmly rooted in the earth. By reason of the church's fundamental affirmation of the ongoing significance of the Jewish covenant, there is need for Christians to show great respect for this biblically based land theme in Judaism, even though their own interpretation of this theme may take different paths in light of the Christ event. Christian faith must always remain firmly implanted in the earth. Far too often concentration on the "heavenly Jerusalem" as a supposed replacement for the Jewish "earthly Jerusalem" has led to an excessively ethereal spirituality in the churches.

Brueggemann has produced his materials partially in reaction to the school of New Testament exegesis associated with the German scholar Rudolf Bultmann, whom he holds responsible for much of the loss of the land tradition in recent Christian theology. The Bultmannian approach mistakenly tried to free the New Testament from the biblical land tradition in favor of personal, existential meaning for the individual believer acquired through instantaneous and radical decisions of obedience. The central problem for Christians, as Brueggemann sees it, "is not emancipation but **rootage**, not meaning but **belonging**, not separation from community but **location** with it, not isolation

from others but **placement** deliberately between the generation of promise and fulfillment.”¹⁰ Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, Brueggemann maintains, present homelessness as a central human problem, and they seek to respond to it in terms of promise and gift. No truly believing Christian can avoid making land a principal category in his or her belief system. On this point Brueggemann is unbending: “landed” faith is as much an imperative for Christians as it is for Jews.

W.D. Davies analyzes the required Christian appropriation of the biblical land tradition more finely than Brueggemann. Davies feels that after all is said and done the New Testament must be described as ambivalent on the land question, a view shared by another New Testament exegete long associated with the Jewish-Christian dialogue, John Townsend of the Episcopal school of theology at Harvard. Davies insists that there are various strata within the New Testament which take a critical view of these promises, one passage in Acts 7 even rejecting it outright. However there are other passages in which the land, the Temple and Jerusalem in a clearly geographical sense are looked upon quite positively in terms of their continued meaning for the Christian Gospel.

The New Testament, Davies concludes, leaves us with a twofold witness regarding the land tradition. On one hand there is a sense in which faith in Christ takes the believer beyond the land, Jerusalem and the Temple; yet on the other hand its history and theology cannot escape concern about these realities. In the New Testament, holy space exists wherever Christ is or has been. The Christ event has universalized the land tradition in a significant way, but it has not eliminated its centrality. Davies would no doubt concur with Brueggemann that the Bultmannian approach is very misguided in this regard. Davies summarizes the impact of the Christ event on the land tradition in this way:

It [the New Testament] personalizes “holy space” in Christ, who, as a figure of history, is rooted in the land; he cleansed the Temple and died in Jerusalem, and lends his glory to these and to the places where he was, but, as Living Lord, he is also free to move wherever he wills. To do justice to the personalism of the New Testament, that is, to its Christocentricity, is to find the clue to the various strata of tradition that we have traced and to the attitudes they reveal: to their freedom from space and their attachment to spaces.¹¹

My own position is somewhat closer to that of Davies than to Brueggemann, though I share the latter’s firm commitment to Christian faith as “landed” faith. If I would have a question to address to Davies, it would be how he might relate the view expressed in the passage I just cited above to the perspectives of some Reform Jewish historians such as Ellis Rivkin who argue for a certain universalization of land and Temple as an integral element in the Pharisaic revolution during the Second Temple period.

There is yet one other way in which contact with the land dimension of the Jewish covenantal tradition has aided the confrontation of a traditional weak spot in Christian faith-expression. In much of Christian liturgy we have lost almost all consciousness of the need to proclaim the glory of creation. Our liturgical cycle is virtually bereft of festivals which highlight God’s continuing

10. *The Land* (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 187.

11. *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley, 1974), p. 367.

presence in nonhuman creation. Such sensitivity must be resurrected by Christians if the churches are to assume a leadership role, in collaboration with Jews and others, in protecting our ecological heritage.

Impact on New Testament Scholarship

The contemporary dialogue with Jews and Judaism has begun to demonstrate an impact on the presentation of the New Testament in Christian circles that is even greater than the significantly changed approach to the Hebrew Scriptures that I have just described. We are witnessing a genuine revolution in New Testament scholarship, made possible in part by a much greater understanding of Hebrew and Aramaic and an enhanced reliance on Jewish materials from the Second Temple or so-called "intertestamental" period made possible through this new language facility among Christian scholars. We are experiencing a rapid end to the dominance of early *Religionsgeschichte* which emphasized the almost totally Hellenistic background of Pauline Christianity as well as its later modified manifestation in Rudolf Bultmann and some of his disciples such as Ernst Käsemann and Helmut Koester. These exegetical approaches to the New Testament seriously eroded Jesus' concrete ties to, and dependence upon, biblical and Second Temple Judaism. This in turn tended to produce an excessively universalist interpretation of Jesus' message — a point made above with regard to the land tradition — which harbored the seeds for theological anti-Judaism.

In the last decade or so we have witnessed a dramatic shift in New Testament scholarship led by people such as W.D. Davies, E.P. Sanders, Douglas Hare, Daniel Harrington, Robin Scroggs and an ever increasing list of others that is returning Jesus to his Jewish milieu in a central way. My colleague at the University of Chicago, Arthur J. Droge, in his review of Sanders' recent volume *Jesus and Judaism* speaks of this development in blunt terms:

Like Professor Sanders, I take this to be a positive development — a sign that New Testament studies is finally emerging from its "Bultmannian captivity."¹²

This is not to say that there exists complete agreement among these scholars regarding the precise forms of Judaism that most directly influenced Jesus — far from it. Major source problems and ambiguities will likely guarantee the continuation of much of this uncertainty for the foreseeable future. Nonetheless there is a growing consensus that makes New Testament scholarship today increasingly different regarding the fundamental understanding of Judaism than was the case even a decade ago. Robin Scroggs nicely summarizes these broad conclusions in a recent essay:

1. The movement begun by Jesus and continued after his death in Palestine can best be described as a reform movement within Judaism.... There is no evidence during this period that it attempted to break with its matrix.
2. The Pauline missionary movement, as Paul understood it, is a Jewish mission which includes the Gentiles as the proper object of God's call to his people.

12. "The Facts About Jesus: Some Thoughts on E.P. Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism*," *Criterion* 26:1 (Winter 1987), p. 15.

3. There is ... prior to the aftermath of the war against the Romans, no such thing as Christianity.... Believers in Jesus did not have a **self-understanding** of themselves as a religion over against Judaism.
4. After the war, the two communities gradually separate.
5. The later writings of the New Testament all show signs of this movement toward separation, but they also always demonstrate some form of dialogue with the Jewish matrix.¹³

There is now a growing willingness within Christianity, Cardinal Martini being but one prominent example, to acknowledge that in the rupture with the Jewish community led by Gentile Christians, or in their behalf, the post-war Christian community may have made some serious mistakes. Most Christians, for example, tend to cheer for Paul, not Peter and James and the Jewish-spirited Jerusalem church, at the so-called Council of Jerusalem. The enhanced appreciation of Jesus' positive Jewish ties now forces us to take a second look at the situation. From the new perspective it now appears Peter and James were trying to retain something most important however inadequately they stated their case, and in totally severing links with Judaism a part of Christianity's soul was deadened. This "hero modification" with respect to the Council of Jerusalem story is but one example of the fundamental attitudinal shifts in the church that are being generated by the process of re-Judaization for which the profound exegetical shift described by Professor Scroggs is very much responsible.

The restoration of Jesus and his teachings to a fully Jewish matrix by New Testament scholars will not reach its full potential within Christianity until this vision begins to penetrate other theological disciplines. Most of these other areas of theology, especially systematics, are operating on the basis of the older exegetical approach dominated by Bultmann. This accounts for the continuation of a fairly widespread, though often subtle, theological anti-Judaism among many contemporary systematic theologians who still present the church founded by Jesus as the total replacement for the outmoded, spiritually inferior, covenanted People of Israel.

But it is not only the positive appropriation of the Hebrew Scriptures and the enhanced appreciation of Jesus' Jewish context that constitute the re-Judaization process. Post-biblical and post-rabbinic forms of Jewish expressions are also beginning to be taken seriously by some Christian scholars. This includes the Jewish mystical tradition as well as reflections on the covenant in the modern era. If we truly believe what the churches have increasingly been saying in a variety of documents about the enduring links between Judaism and Christianity, then it is impossible for them to express the theological and ethical meaning of the Christian covenantal relationship without explicit reference to the ways various Jewish scholars have interpreted covenantal responsibility in our time.

Hence contemporary Jewish reflections on the meaning of such basic religious issues as the significance of the God of the covenant today, or Jewish deliberations on such pressing ethical issues as abortion and peace, assume an

13. "The Judaizing of the New Testament," *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 75:1 (Winter 1986), pp. 42-43.

indispensable status. It is not a question of taking such Jewish materials seriously out of interreligious sensitivity or a commitment to pluralism, as important as these considerations might be, but because in the light of the renewed theology of the Christian–Jewish relationship they now become integral to any authentic Christian theological methodology — they no longer can be viewed merely as extra resources from a parallel community to be incorporated in a peripheral way.

The experience of the *shoah*, certainly one of the pivotal events shaping contemporary Jewish self-identity, has begun to influence Christian theology as well. This is not to say that among Christian theologians who have taken the *shoah* seriously some of the same divisions do not exist as are currently present within Jewish scholarship. They do, but time does not allow us to pursue this discussion here. Suffice it to say that a number of prominent Christian theologians have highlighted several major areas of theological impact on the part of the *shoah*.

The first is the return of the God-problem to its proper centrality. Too often Christian theology has focused unduly on Christological questions while ignoring this more fundamental problem. Jewish theological thought on the reality of God since the *shoah* has led the way for all serious theological reflection in this area. These are the words of noted theologian David Tracy on the matter:

As far as I am aware, the ultimate theological issue, the understanding of God, has yet to receive much reflection from Catholic theologians. And yet, as Schleiermacher correctly insisted, the doctrine of God can never be “another” doctrine for theology, but must pervade all doctrines. Here Jewish theology in its reflections on the reality of God since the *tremendum* of the Holocaust, has led the way for all serious theological reflection.¹⁴

David Tracy has also pursued other theological implications of the Holocaust for Christianity. After the God-reality issue, the most decisive impact is to be found, according to Tracy, in the area of theological methodology. After the *shoah* neither a purely metaphysical approach to theological consciousness nor merely an emphasis on historical consciousness will do. Such concrete historical events as the Holocaust and the emergence of the State of Israel now assume central importance for the Christian theologian as Tracy sees it.

Several other Christian theologians are proceeding in the same general direction as Tracy in this regard. Johannes Baptist Metz now speaks of Jews and Christians being assigned to “an alliance belonging to the heart of **saving history**.” But then he immediately warns that this new alliance must not “serve as a screen for a triumphalist metaphysic of salvation which never learns from catastrophes nor finds in them a cause for conversion....”¹⁵

The well-known feminist Bible scholar Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, in the conclusion to the *Concilium* special Holocaust issue she co-authored with David Tracy, also refers to the “return to history” as a central implication of the *shoah* for subsequent theology. In her view, we cannot speak of the suffer-

14. “Religious Values After the Holocaust: A Catholic View,” Abraham J. Peck, ed., *Jews and Christians after the Holocaust* (Philadelphia, 1982), p. 101.

15. *The Emergent Church* (New York, 1981), pp. 19–20.

ing of the victims of the Holocaust as “a theological metaphor” for all human suffering. Rather that suffering “must be named in its political particularity. The ideological heart of Nazi-facism was racism, its ideological catch-word was *Untermensch*, the less than human, the sub-human being.”¹⁶ Nazism represented an extreme example of the Western capitalistic form of patriarchy, with origins in Aristotelian philosophy and subsequent mediation through Christian theology. The same ancient philosophical system, imported into Christian theology by Thomas Aquinas and others, first subjugated women as people with “subhuman” nature, and then combined with religiously rooted bigotry and a new bio-theology to produce the Nazi cataclysm in Europe. For Schussler-Fiorenza, overcoming biblical and theological anti-Judaism becomes the first step in the complicated, rather wrenching process of cleansing Western society of its patriarchal basis.

Another Christian theologian, Rebecca Chopp, addresses this issue in the same *Concilium* volume. She lays special stress on the profound connection she feels between *shoah* literature and liberation theology, a relationship she terms unique among Western religious writing. Both, in her judgment, create new theological space which in turn forces upon Christianity a fundamental reconceptualization of its theology. Christian theology must grapple not merely with individual suffering, but even more with mass suffering:

Liberation and theology and Holocaust literature interrupt and disrupt Christianity and Christian theology with the question and the quest “who is this human subject that suffers history?”¹⁷

She goes on to add that both liberation theology and Holocaust literature force us to understand history not merely in terms of abstract notions of evolution or process but primarily in terms of the real suffering of that history caused by various forms of human exploitation. The history that now must be the basis of theological reflection is not abstract history, but the history of human victims, and the voices and memory of the tortured, the forgotten and the dead must become primary resources for Christian anthropology. While Chopp does not herself explicitly articulate this position, one can surmise that she would identify with the direction taken by Schussler-Fiorenza and Tracy, namely that biblical anti-Judaism with its inevitable dehumanization of concrete Jewish persons opened the way for Jewish suffering in the Holocaust and for the suffering experiences under imperialist colonialism to which liberation theology has been responding.

I consider Chopp’s linkage of the Holocaust and liberation theology most important. David Tracy is quite correct in my judgment when, while praising the liberation theologians for having begun to treat history with the seriousness it deserves in terms of ultimate salvation, he faults them for not relating their thought to the Holocaust experience.

Before turning to some observations on how this process of re-Judaization might effect Jewish religious expression, I would like to offer one additional

16. “The Holocaust as Interruption and Christian Return into History,” *Concilium* 175, 5/1984 (Edinburgh, October 1984), p. 86.

17. “The Interruption of the Forgotten,” *Concilium*, *ibid.*, p. 20.

reflection. I have consistently warned that the Christian–Jewish dialogue cannot be seen as a closed affair, as if we would suddenly reach utopia if Christians and Jews overcame their historical antagonism. This is especially true here in the Middle East. In my view Christian–Jewish dialogue must become a vehicle for beginning a dialogue with Islam in particular, and with the other world religions as well. I believe the re-Judaization process can help us achieve this goal, provided we are careful not to allow the new “bonding” language to create a sense of exaggerated exclusivity about our relationship which is a potential dark side of this positive theological development.

The extent to which we create independent, constructive theological space for Judaism — something Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago called for in a 1984 address to the National Executive Committee Meeting of the American Jewish Committee in Chicago — to that same extent we moderate, albeit implicitly, any absolutist claims about Christian faith. Because Christianity has so often cast its relationship to Judaism in “over-against” terms, far more than has been the case with the other religions, any changes in the theological conception of the Christian–Jewish relationship will automatically redound favorably on the church’s ability to relate theologically to other religions as well. A climate will also be created in which Jews and Christians will be able to respond affirmatively to the perceptive challenge of formulating a positive theology of religious pluralism issued by Rabbi A. James Rudin of the American Jewish Committee in remarks to the 1984 North American National Workshop on Christian–Jewish Relations in St. Louis. Without such a theology, Rudin argued and I concur, everyone’s religious freedom remains endangered and highly dependent on the whims of political leaders.

Implications for World Jewry

To conclude my presentation I would like briefly to address the implications for world Jewry of the re-Judaization process in the churches. I have left this to last deliberately because I am convinced such reflections are primarily the responsibility of the Jewish community and its leading scholars. But in the hope of stimulating this necessary process within Judaism, I would like to offer some indication of the topics it needs to confront.

Certainly the major issue is whether Judaism is willing to respond constructively to the newly emergent Christian theology of intimate covenantal bonding. Jews cannot continue simply to applaud these theological developments within Christianity (and some Orthodox Jewish scholars do not for reasons that seem to me fairly obvious) without seriously asking what these developments mean for their own commonplace perspectives on Christianity as either “failed Messianism” or “Judaism for the Gentiles.” The new proclamations of bonding and partnership on the part of the churches cannot long endure if they remain a one-way affair with no concomitant declaration from the Jewish side. A few individual Jewish scholars have attempted this in recent times as have others in the past, but there must be a far more concerted effort in this regard. And I believe in part it must involve an attempt by the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) to create a consensus statement on whether Christianity in any way represents a covenantal moment

from the Jewish perspective. I think it is vital for Jews to have some concrete experience in writing a consensus document of this kind so that there might be better appreciation of the difficulties involved when any official Christian body attempts it. Also, Jews cannot continue critiquing the churches' theological approach to Judaism without an equal opportunity for Christians to do the same with a Jewish statement.

Thus far an examination of contemporary Jewish literature dealing with communal identity reveals virtually no recognition of the fundamental re-thinking of the basic Christian-Jewish relationship by Christian scholars. Typical is Jacob Neusner's recent volume *Death and Birth of Judaism*,¹⁸ in which Neusner staunchly maintains the thesis that changes in basic self-perception and expression of the Jewish People, the emergence of what he terms new "Judaisms," have been occasioned by events in Christianity. But he is strangely silent on this score in terms of the recent re-Judaization process growing within the churches.

Part of the basic re-examination process with regard to covenantal relationship will inevitably involve a fresh look at Jesus and his message. Dr. Eric Meyers of Duke University raised this issue in an address to a Miami Jewish audience. According to Meyers there is a "healthy and strong tradition within Judaism that sees Jesus very much in the mainstream of Jewish thought." Unfortunately this tradition is insufficiently known and appreciated in most Jewish circles. "It is not enough for Jews to want Christians to appreciate this, but they need to recognize his [Jesus'] unique contribution." For Meyers, Jesus "was an important turning point. As much as he was in the mainstream, he also was pointing in a new direction. Jews have been a little lax in recognizing the positive, constructive contribution of his radical commandments to love one another that expanded the world of Judaism well beyond Palestine."

Once Jews begin to take far more seriously than they have the implications of Christian re-Judaization for their own self-perception and not to remain hidebound by an asymmetrical model of their relationship with Christianity, then certain other more specific questions become relevant. The first is the issue of joint Christian-Jewish exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is only recently that Jewish Bible scholars have begun employing the various modern methods of critical biblical interpretation. But even the scholars who have accepted what had been regarded previously as an exclusively Christian, even at times antisemitic tool, are extremely reticent about admitting the possibility of any communal efforts. The overriding feeling seems to be that Christian exegesis is inevitably locked into a Christological understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. This is evident in the recent volume of scientific essays entitled *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* edited by Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine and Ernest S. Frerichs.¹⁹ It would seem to me that what we have said above regarding changing Christian attitudes toward the role of the Hebrew Scriptures in Christian faith-expression as well as the reaffirmation of the enduring valid-

18. New York, 1987.

19. Philadelphia, 1987.

ity of the Jewish covenant dictates some reconsideration of this traditional Jewish stance.

Another area that will require some re-examination by Jews in light of Christianity's re-Judaization process is that of interreligious prayer experiences. Generally Jews have opposed such prayer experiences on the grounds that they cannot ask the Christians involved to suspend their Christological beliefs at prayer and Jews, of course, cannot in conscience offer prayer in Christ's name. Such opposition came forth from the IJCIC leadership in 1975 in response to the Vatican Guidelines' recommendation of joint prayer experiences. But if Christians are beginning to re-appropriate the Jewish covenantal tradition and make use of the Hebrew Scripture without direct Christological association, this would seem to me to open some concrete possibilities for prayer, however limited, centered on the Exodus covenant or the creational theme of Genesis.

In my judgment, re-Judaization in the churches also will necessitate some reconsideration of the role of Christians in the Land of Israel. If *Eretz Yisrael* is seen as integral to covenantal expression, as indeed it is for many Jews, then any recognition by Jews of the legitimacy of Christianity's re-appropriation of this covenantal tradition would seem to dictate an inherent role for Christians, a theological role one might say, to join with Jews in the building up of Zion. I recognize this is an extremely controversial assertion and in saying it I do not rule out Israel's valid right as a nation to control its borders in terms of immigration. I also make the assertion against the background of my earlier disclaimer of being considered a Christian Zionist. Hence, I fully admit that I also have considerable reflection to do in this regard. Nonetheless, I still would reaffirm my basic contention on this point.

By grappling with the re-Judaization process in Christianity and what it might mean for Jewish theological restatement *vis-à-vis* Christianity's significance, the Jewish community will also prepare the ground for constructive work on a broader theology of religious pluralism. Though Judaism starts in a somewhat better situation in this regard, having never defined itself in contrast to another religion in the same way as Christianity, nonetheless its need to engage in such a process is every bit as great as that of the churches. This is especially true in the complex religious world in which you live here in the Middle East.

My final point is perhaps the most sensitive of all. It relates very directly to the present political crisis in this area, but goes far beyond it. If Judaism is willing to acknowledge in any way Christianity's positive re-incorporation of the first covenant, then it assumes some responsibility to take seriously how Christians relate the demands of that covenant to concrete dimensions of peace and justice as they apply to the current situation in the Administered Areas. Suffice it to say that I am unalterably convinced that brute force is not the answer. There must be a comprehensive peace effort soon that will protect Israel's legitimate security interests while providing the Palestinians with political and territorial recognition. To that end I was pleased to join with other U.S. religious leaders representing Christianity, Judaism and Islam in Washington last week to launch the new U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the

Middle East which has the personal support of such national figures as Rabbi Alexander Schindler, head of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Speaking more generally, let me emphasize that in my perspective the Christian–Jewish dialogue would be unfaithful to its birthright if it closed its eyes to critical issues of justice and peace whether here in the Middle East or elsewhere in the world. The contemporary dialogue is very much the child of the terrible experience of night on the European continent during the Nazi era, as well as the joint struggle for human dignity and equality, especially for the working classes, by Jews and Christians in North America in the years of the Great Depression and the reforms which followed. To lose that connection would be indeed to sacrifice a precious legacy — it would be to engage in purely esoteric dialogue of the worst sort.

One of the concrete results of re-Judaization in terms of the Jewish community may be assistance from Christians in dealing with social issues from the standpoint of a developed religious ethic. Judaism has had little opportunity for such application in the past and therefore lacks the comprehensive kind of social ethics that one tends to find in Christian circles, and which I feel are most necessary under present global circumstances. I must confess a certain disappointment in what appears to me a serious lack of Jewish religious voices in the present crisis facing this nation. If Jewish religion cannot do more than involve itself with the blessing of Hannukah menorahs at the homes of controversial politicians, I am afraid it may be in very deep trouble.

Let me make it clear that I am by no means asserting the absolute superiority of Christianity in this realm. I would be the first to acknowledge that Christianity has failed miserably on many social issues. I would likewise admit that it can also expand its understanding of social ethics through contact with Jewish notions such as that of co-creatorship. But on the whole, Christianity has a far richer and more extensive experience in dealing with social issues, which Judaism might profitably encounter through the dialogue. New Jewish contact with liberation theology, for example, may help Jews recapture the liberating tradition of the Exodus covenant along the lines suggested recently in the writings of Marc Ellis. It may help them in the formulation of a response to contemporary social issues that creatively draws upon the *shoah* experience in a way that the mere power response, advocated by many *shoah* commentators, does not.

Though I hope these reflections on the implications for Jews of the re-Judaization process now under way in Christianity may prove of some value to Jews, ultimately the effort to sort out the implications must come primarily from the Jewish side if it is to have any lasting impact. We truly are living in an era with monumental possibilities for permanently reshaping the historical relationship between Jews and Christians, and paving the way for an outreach by both to peoples of other faith perspectives. My prayer and fervent plea is that all of us join in whatever way possible in this sacred and creative task.

Immanuel 22/23