

## THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER

by ELIZABETH M. MILLER

Within the context of this paper, I refer to the Jewish-Christian encounter predominantly in its theological aspect, largely in the form of inter-faith dialogue, while the social context refers to that cluster of social determinants which act upon the encounter in such a way as to seriously and significantly influence its outcome. In other words, I am presenting a sociologist's perspective on the nature of the activity which is the focus of this journal. In order to clarify the intellectual framework within which I wish to present this subject, let me begin with a few comments concerning the relevance of the sociological vocation to theological understanding. Though people in fact appear to talk about those of other faiths, cultures and societies without too much difficulty, the philosophical and sociological problems surrounding such activity cast considerable doubt on whether one can ever claim to "understand" the "other." Sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers engaged in the tasks of understanding other cultures share the philosophical difficulties surrounding the problems of translation and relativism. For those who agree that the meaning of language is dependent on cultural context, the analysis of social structure becomes crucial. Therefore, knowledge about our relationship to others and, by extension, our theological knowledge – that is, our understanding of our relationship to God – is embedded in social structure.

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The sociology of religion and the sociology of knowledge ask related questions – questions which center upon the origins and varieties of expression of human knowledge. The significant point about inter-faith dialogue is that Jews and Christians are also implicitly involved in this kind of questioning. Thus, the examination of the nature of epistemology is central: where does our knowledge come from? Is it divine revelation? Is it socially created? Can it be sought through dialogic interaction? If so, under what conditions? While in profound opposition on other matters, both Jurgen Habermas and Karl Popper upheld the importance of the “open society” for the pursuit of truth and rational knowledge. Hence, the importance of understanding the nature of the society in which dialogue takes place. To restate our main point: the analysis of social structure is crucial to our understanding of the epistemological bases of knowledge, and this includes, by extension, our theology.

Participants in inter-faith dialogue who search for mutual understanding and religious truth encounter difficulties of interpretation, translation and theological relativism. Dialogue is circumscribed by certain structural constraints, which bear important consequences for the outcome of the dialogic encounter itself. It is in light of these issues that we must now consider the inherently problematic nature of theological dialogue among Jews and Christians in contemporary Israel.

A significant transformation has occurred in the Christian understanding of the Jewish people. Rather than emphasize that which differentiates them from the Jews – traditional Christian discourse perceived the Jew and Judaism through frameworks based upon notions of exclusion and separation – Christians are now seeking to establish that which binds them to the Jews. Granted that there can be expressions of dissent and varying interpretations of aims within dialogue, the most important point is that the overall priority about which most agree is the pursuit of commonality and oneness. This argument even applies when the parties involved stress their separate identity and oppose what they view as syncretism, as even under those circumstances the claim is often made that they belong to one another as the “one people of God,” however divergent their theology.

We may examine the dialogic relationship between Jews and Christians in Israel as a process involving the “reconstruction” of the other. Both parties have inherited a past characterised by deep-seated animosity and in many ways an apparently irresolvable conflict. The discourses of the past are inescapable and continue, on different levels, to inform, constrain and influence the present. Nevertheless, given the changed conditions under which the non-Jewish world acquires its knowledge of the Jewish world – in the words of Rabbi Henry Siegmann, “it is not only Jews who have returned to Tel Aviv, but Judaism that has returned to Jerusalem” – Christian efforts to reconstruct their traditional discourses are symptomatic of fundamental changes in Christian attitude towards Judaism and the Jewish people. Dialogue may be perceived as a framework providing the setting for the development of new representations of the other.

It may be argued that the language used to describe, understand and analyse other peoples, cultures and religions is an expression of the will to power and the desire to dominate the other, by containing him in a manageable way, within the terms prescribed by the observer rather than the observed. Thus, the language used to describe others is an important expression of power relations. The language of the anti-Judaic discourse emphasized the discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity; it was convenient to think of Judaism as “stopping” at the point at which Christianity “took over.” This notion of “arrested development” was a crucial component of the Christian understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship. The break between the two worlds – before Christ and after Christ, the Jewish and the Christian – became a recurring theme throughout the long centuries of maintaining entrenched positions. The contemporary rejection of arguments based upon discontinuity in favour of those which stress continuity, such as we can observe in the dialogue, indicates a significant shift of the epistemological basis which had previously informed Christian understanding of self and other.

It is generally agreed that inter-faith activity is one of the responses on the part of the Christian churches to decreasing Christian hegemony in the Western world, increasing secularisation, the challenge of the pluralist society and the problems it poses for the mutual co-existence of different belief-systems. In the specific realm of Jewish-Christian relations, however, a dramatic structural change was effected with the establishment of a Jewish nation-state in 1948, which subsequently led to the acknowledgement on the part of certain Christians that the questions raised by the Holocaust and the return to the land of Israel somehow ultimately had to be faced.

The reality of Israel is also of central importance to Jewish self-understanding and status in the dialogic relationship. Professor Talmon has highlighted the significance of this new social context as follows:

We should recognize quite clearly that we are dealing, in the Jewish-Christian encounter, with a meeting between a huge majority and a tiny minority in the world – in spite of the fact that here in Israel the situation has been reversed. We cannot overlook the fact that with regard to Christianity, the Jewish position remains to a large extent a defensive posture. Jews are still on their guard, for instance, against the possibility that Christianity still assumes that missionary purpose which we know to be part and parcel of the Christian heritage. For this reason, the dialogue will remain restricted on the Jewish side, to those people who now have more confidence in their own existence and existential role, who can afford to open up to such encounters without feeling endangered by doing so. Here Israel plays an important part. The psychological and political security – as far as political security exists – which the Jew has in Israel, gives him, more than in other countries, the possibility of meeting on a basis of equality, without fear and with a certain confidence.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, from the Jewish perspective, Israel may provide a more secure basis on which

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1. S. Talmon, quoted in an article on “Christian-Jewish Dialogue” in *The Jerusalem Post*, 10.3.76.

to enter dialogue with Christians; the Christian emphasis on conversion, however benign, remains a source of tension and conflict. This, of course, is not at all surprising, given the legacy of anti-Judaism in Christian teaching and the consequent efforts within Jewish society to safeguard against further dilution of Jewish identity. Thus in contemporary dialogue, “mission” is redefined and re-interpreted, if not entirely rejected, as out of place and offensive. This latter position is encouraged by many of the exponents of dialogue as a pre-requisite for “genuine” dialogue. A. Roy Eckardt, for example, has claimed that: “If the Christian community must insist upon missionizing, and hence upon extinguishing, the Jewish people, it ought to be honest enough to abandon the duplicity of claiming to foster friendship and understanding.”<sup>2</sup>

Such a polarisation of options available to Christians is of course not held by all, and many view the problem of developing an authentic Christian position as far more complex than such a statement might indicate. Certainly, the establishment of mutual trust is commonly assumed to be an essential prerequisite for successful dialogue, and it is understandable in this regard why many would like to see the problem of Christian mission disappear. Given the reluctance of Orthodox Jews, and indeed of “orthodox” Christians to enter the dialogic relationship, the dialogue is the province of individuals who subscribe to what are seen as “dialogic values” – namely, openness, tolerance, reconciliation and mutual acceptance. Many of the participants have their cultural and religious roots in the West. But although most participants share a Western bias, Jewish and Christian motives for dialogue can differ substantially. It is generally assumed that Jews enter dialogue for largely “humanistic” reasons, while Christians have largely “theological” concerns. These interests are of course compatible and inter-related, indeed indispensable to any attempt to encourage mutual understanding between the two faiths, but emphasis on one rather than the other can lead to difficulties in defining the aim of dialogue and hopes for future Jewish-Christian relations. Professor Werblowsky draws our attention to the asymmetrical structure of the dialogic encounter in the following comments:

Jews encounter Christianity either because the latter has encountered them for centuries as a dominant, powerful and often hostile and dangerous reality, or else because it presents an interesting and even challenging religious phenomenon much like any other number of challenging religious phenomena. In other words: the Jew can totally ignore Christianity without detriment to the spiritual integrity of his Judaism viz. Jewishness. It is different with the Christian. He encounters Israel as part of his encounter with himself as a Christian – that is the enduring price Christianity has paid for its rejection of Marcion – and he cannot encounter the reality of the Jews, Judaism and Jewish history without having to struggle at the same time with himself, as a member of the *novus* and *verus Israel*, and responding to an immanent challenge. His relationship to Judaism cannot be of the same order as that to, for example, Shinto or Hinduism.<sup>3</sup>

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2. A. Roy Eckardt, *Your People, My People*, (New York, 1974).

3. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, “Jewish-Christian Relations: New Territories, New Maps, New Realities,” in *Judaism and Christianity under the impact of National Socialism, 1919-1945*, an

Thus, while Christian motives for dialogue may be fairly clear, it is not so clear why Jews, especially in light of Christianity's moral bankruptcy regarding the Jewish people, should particularly want to talk to Christians. Jews have always lived in tension with the Gentile world, and have drawn from this relationship self-understanding and definitions of Jewish identity. Some would argue that, paradoxically, the creation of a Jewish state has resulted in the dissipation of this aspect of the Jewish-Christian relationship. Thus, self-understanding can become problematic and, particularly for Jewish intellectuals, the opportunity to interact with Christians who exhibit a certain empathy with the Jewish world offers the possibility of recapturing something of the creative tension which informs and enriches one's concept of self and of the other.

Jews, whether humanist or religious, face an existential predicament concerning the "nature of man" following the awful events at the heart of European civilization. The modern world is inexplicable: it has failed the human race, it has lost all credibility, it has given way to the nightmare world anticipated by Nietzsche. In this context, the reflections of the Jewish sociologist, Daniel Bell, on the future of religion are particularly significant. He comments:

If there are to be new religions - and I think they will arise - they will, contrary to previous experience, return to the past, to seek for a tradition and to search for those threads which can give a person a set of ties and place him in the continuity of the dead and the living and those still to be born. Unlike romanticism, it will not be the involuted self; it will be the resurrection of Memory.<sup>4</sup>

The "resurrection of Memory," the searching out of a common history, are significant features of dialogue between Christians and Jews. Establishing the lines of continuity in order to construct a common future has become central to the development of "new relations". Christians speak of re-discovering their Jewish roots, of sharing in the Judaic heritage, of being, in the words of St. Paul, simply the branches grafted into the main trunk of the tree. This imagery reasserts the place of the Jewish people in the historical and theological understanding of the Christian faith, although, as we know, it can lead to conflicting theological interpretations of the Jewish-Christian relationship.

Affirmation of their mutual Hebraic heritage has been a common feature of the Jewish-Christian encounter (often accompanied, incidentally, by a negative evaluation of the Hellenistic influence on Christian theology); this same affirmation has also been an intrinsic element of the debate on the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments which has proved crucial to the process of re-defining the Christian discourse on Judaism.

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international symposium under the Historical Society of Israel, June 1982, pp. 405-413 (p. 405).

4. D. Bell, "The return of the sacred?" in *Sociological Journeys* (London, 1980), pp. 324-354 (p. 349).

As we have indicated, rather than stress arguments based on discontinuity and therefore the obsolescence of Judaism, the emphasis within the dialogic relationship is for Christians to re-conceptualise the Jewish-Christian relationship in terms of a discourse which conveys notions of continuity and hence validity. As Gregory Baum has noted: "Following Vatican II, Catholic theologians have affirmed the abiding power of the ancient covenant in the religion of Israel and hence laid the foundation-stone for a new Christian approach, transcending past teaching, to Jewish existence."<sup>5</sup> The Rhineland document also stressed continuity, as did the 1973 statement from the French Bishops' Committee for Relation with Jews, which was welcomed as an important document by those involved in dialogue, but was later severely criticised by opponents in the Catholic Church. Part of the declaration contained the following reappraisal:

The first condition is that Christians always be respectful of Jews, no matter how they express their Jewishness; that they seek to understand the latter as they understand themselves, instead of judging them by Christian ways and thinking. Christians must respect Jewish convictions, aspirations, and rites, as well as the attachment that Jews bear them. Christians must admit that there are different ways of being a Jew, of considering oneself Jewish, without detriment to the fundamental unity of Jewish existence.

The second condition is that, in encounters between Christians and Jews, there should be recognised the mutual right to bear witness to one's faith without being suspected of a disloyal attempt to detach the other from one's own. Such an intention must be excluded, not only out of respect which must apply to dialogue with any person, but for a particular reason to which Christians, and especially the clergy, must pay more attention. That reason is that the Jews as people have been the object of "eternal covenant" without which the "new covenant" would not even exist.

Far from envisaging the disappearance of the Jewish community, the Church is in search of a living bond with it.<sup>6</sup>

Theological debates surrounding the meaning and interpretation of "covenant" have thus come to figure prominently in dialogue. In this area, theological pronouncements inevitably bear political implications, since an integral part of God's covenant with the Jewish people involved promises concerning the Land. These debates also, as we might expect, provide an important context for the re-formulation of Christian perceptions of Judaism "in Jewish terms," which means appreciating the inter-connections between religion, nationhood and land in Judaism.<sup>7</sup> Within the Israeli context, declarations on the Christian understanding of

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5. G. Baum, *Christian Theology after Auschwitz; The Robert Waley Cohen Memorial Lecture* (London: Council of Christians and Jews, 1976), p. 10.

6. From the Introduction to the discussions of the Plenary Session of Bishop members of Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, 1969, p. 2, quoted in a mimeograph of statements issued by The Council of Christians and Jews, London.

7. For example, see M. Dubois, "A Christian view of Jews, Judaism and Israel," an unpublished paper given at the November 1975 meeting of the Rainbow Group in Jerusalem.

covenant theology are carefully scrutinised for their contemporary application to theological and political claims regarding the land of Israel.<sup>8</sup>

For Christians involved in dialogue, this becomes a matter of deciding the theological significance to be attributed to the creation of the State of Israel. Some, while committed to Jewish-Christian dialogue, would resist any theologising of contemporary events regarding Israel,<sup>9</sup> seeking rather to support the *raison d'être* of the State on secular and political grounds, which they would argue as no less valid. However, for the most part, Christians committed to Israel perceive her establishment, even on the vaguest theological level, as a sign of God's faithfulness to his covenant people. Thus theological statement and socio-political reality are inevitably enmeshed. In the highly contentious atmosphere of the Jewish-Arab conflict, it is not surprising that Arab Christians and their supporters in Western churches avoid theological statements that would appear to legitimate the State of Israel, and generally subscribe to the theological position that the Church as the true Israel is heir to the biblical promises.

Inevitably, the political conflict limits the prerequisites of openness which provide the conditions under which genuine dialogue can proceed. The tragic irony of Jewish-Christian dialogue in Israel is that the very people who should be involved, the indigenous Christian inhabitants of the land, are not part of the encounter.<sup>10</sup> It is too problematic politically for Arab Christians to show signs of accommodation to the State of Israel, with which they have a very different relationship from that of Western Christians. They also do not identify with the acknowledgement of Western Christian guilt over the Holocaust, and thus do not have the same motivations or the felt need to engage in theological re-appraisal. Therefore on various levels, Arab Christians experience alienation from both the Jewish and the Christian parties to dialogue. The contrast conventionally drawn between East and West is a major element of their alienation. As Jews have been subject to the anti-Judaic discourse, so have Arab Christians been victims of the Orientalist discourse.<sup>11</sup> Father Elias Chacour has been very critical of the Western influence on inter-faith dialogue in Israel:

The Western Christians who live in our country and in our milieu apparently believe that they have been entrusted to monopolize contacts with the Jews and often claim that "the Arab-Christians do not know how to deal with the Jews." ... (They) have assumed

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8. See G. Lindbeck, "Christians between Arabs and Jews," *Worldview*, (September, 1979), pp. 25-39.

9. For example, A.R. Eckardt, "Towards a Secular Theology of Israel," in *Religion and Life* 48 (1979), pp. 462-473.

10. On this point, see now D. Rossing, "Christian Minorities in the Middle East," *Immanuel* 19 (1984/85), pp. 87-101.

11. For an exposition of the contemporary critique of orientalism, see E. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978).

the responsibility for speaking in the name of the “Christians of Israel,” without paying attention to what the locally rooted churches think, suffer or consider fitting for their spiritual health. They think and act as though they understand every detail of our lives – except our language and mentality.<sup>12</sup>

Father Chacour has further suggested that any “dialogue” which occurs would be more accurately referred to as “monologue,” as the participants in this process all share the same “Western mental framework.”

This further illustrates the structural limitations of dialogue. Participants bring to the dialogue sets of ideas, presuppositions, conceptions, and, however inarticulately, the history of the past two thousand years of Jewish-Christian relations: a history marked by conflict, persecution, enforced conversion, the Crusades, the Inquisition, pogroms, defamation, denial of elementary rights, and Holocaust. Some Christians have been brought to the point where the burden of Christian theology is too much to bear, and so have embarked on the process of re-evaluating Christian belief in light of the indictment on Christian civilisation which this history clearly pronounced. Gregory Baum, for example, has used insights from the sociology of knowledge to argue for a greater critical awareness on the part of Christians regarding the “ideological distortions” of the past. He has stressed that part of the theological task is to prevent religious belief declining into ideology. He writes:

Ideology, in the sense in which this term is used in the sociology of knowledge, refers to the set of teachings or symbols unconsciously generated by a society to protect itself against others, legitimate its power, and defend its privileges... We have come to realise that woven into the language we use, the teachings we propose, and the institutions in which we live, there may well be trends that aim at protecting and promoting the power we hold as a group and keeping those under our power in their position of subjugation.<sup>13</sup>

Father Baum has addressed the question: why, when the Church espouses love as its most cherished value, has it treated the Jewish people with such contempt? The Holocaust, he claims, “summons the church to free itself from all the ideologies implicit in its tradition.”<sup>14</sup>

Just as Karl Mannheim saw his own thought and the growth of the sociology of knowledge as arising out of the massive social transformations in the Europe of his day, it is possible to view the renewed contemporary interest in the problems of knowledge in the areas of theology, sociology and philosophy as developing under the influence of the major societal shifts in our day, exemplified particularly in the crisis surrounding the bases of values, and hence knowledge, on which society rests. In the area of theology, the “crisis of credibility” and the subsequent examination of epistemological foundations has been a major focus of interest for sociologists of

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12. E. Chacour, “An Arab Christian speaks out,” *Face to Face, an Interreligious Bulletin*, Vol. 11 (Winter/Spring, 1977).

13. G. Baum, “The Cardinal Bea Memorial Lecture” in *The Month*, June 1972.

14. G. Baum, *Christian Theology after Auschwitz*, op. cit., p. 13.



religion, being discussed notably in the work of Peter Berger.<sup>15</sup> Inter-faith rapprochement is often explained in terms of this crisis of modern religious belief.

Certainly, this provides an important background to Jewish-Christian inter-faith relations, but in addition to grappling identity in the modern world, Christians in dialogue are engaged in re-interpreting their religious heritage in such a way as to recover the “undistorted” essence of Christian faith. However, for most this task is viewed with trepidation. Kurt Hruby of the Catholic University of Paris, recognising that a fundamental re-appraisal is required, has written:

Most serious theologians today feel that the “classical” description of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity has become untenable and indefensible. But when it comes to withdrawing from them and working for a new approach, they all too often do nothing and become seized by a “prudence” for which the weight of history must be largely responsible. It is hard to escape the impression – recently confirmed publicly by the reactions to the French bishops’ declaration – that people fear that the whole structure of Christian doctrine will be made unsafe if attempts are made to do justice to Judaism and recognise it as a theological factor and a valid form of spirituality in the present.<sup>16</sup>

Faced with the reformulation of theology entailed by dialogue, the Jewish-Christian encounter has proved divisive for Christianity, and will probably continue to do so. This is part of the irony of the ecumenical process in general: though the intention is to search for unity, in practice the outcome can often be divisive, and is certainly feared to be so.

This is particularly evident in the field of Christology. A prominent Christian participant in dialogue has remarked that, in his own experience, “a slow but steady conviction began to emerge in me that no lasting resolution of the historic Christian-Jewish tension is possible unless the Church is ready to significantly rethink its traditional interpretation of Christology.”<sup>17</sup> In an excellent study on tensions between “theocentricity” and “Christocentricity” in Christianity, Jean Millet of the Institute Catholique de Paris has argued for a renaissance of theocentricity:

Only theocentricity can allow dialogue between the three monotheistic religions. Christocentricity (whether inspired by Berulle, the themes of Catholic Action, Bonhoeffer or the liberation theologians) can only lead to misunderstanding and even to insult. In all these cases the development of the Catholic church in this direction reduces it to growing isolation over against other religious movements of the world. Here as

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15. See P. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels* (Harmondsworth, 1979); *The Heretical Imperative*, (London, 1980).

16. K. Hruby, “The Future of Christian-Jewish Dialogue: A Christian View,” in H. Kung and W. Jasper (eds.), *Christians and Jews* (*Concilium*, Vol. 8, no. 10 (New York, 1975/5)), pp. 87-92, (p. 90).

17. J.T. Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York, 1982).

elsewhere we can see clearly how christocentricity leads to a kind of “purism,” of “neocatharism,” which can only imprison the Catholic church in mental frameworks and social structures which cut it off from the rest of the world. This is what a large number of acute observers have noted, and this explains the first reactions in favour of a return to theocentricity.<sup>18</sup>

In the emphasis upon oneness, commonality and unity, there is a clear shift away from the emphasis of the traditional discourse on difference and otherness. The move towards “consensus theology,” though admittedly not the intention of all parties involved in dialogue (there are varying conceptions of the purpose of dialogue), incurs accusations of relativism. Many advocates of inter-faith dialogue reject the charge of relativism, preferring to describe their approach in terms of “relationism” within a wider universe of knowledge which leaves room for all faiths. For example, in his study on *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, Alan Race has argued that:

Truth, especially in religious matters, belongs within a whole context of life and culture. To say that the divine is manifest in different ways in different cultures is not to side-step the issue of truth in a religiously diverse world, but is to pave the way for a dialogue in which the cognitive discrepancies can be better evaluated in a wider setting.<sup>19</sup>

Though there is undoubtedly an important argument here, the problem to some extent remains, unless truth claims as such are to be described in other terms, and concepts relating to “truth” and “falsity” abandoned.

New forms of self-understanding develop through the process of attempting to understand the other. As it is difficult to conceive of a “static” dialogue, the assumption that dialogue is a continuing and ever-adapting process is not unreasonable. In this shift to a form of epistemological relativism in place of an earlier epistemological absolutism, the question arises: how much dialogue (if it involves theological relativism) can be tolerated by a belief system such as Christianity? However, as we have noted, theological dialogue is circumscribed, being in practice subject to structural limitations of a social, political and theological nature. Thus, without the political reality of a Jewish state, we might well ask when, if ever, the Christian world would have embarked on the task of re-appraisal and understanding of the Jewish reality.

The significance of the State of Israel is constantly on the agenda of dialogue. Commenting on Christian responses to the Middle East crisis of 1967, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum condemned:

The failure of the diplomatic institutions of Christendom to speak an unequivocal word in defense of the preservation of the Jewish people... No future Jewish-Christian dialogue

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18. J. Millet, *God or Christ?* trans. by J. Bowden, (London, 1981), pp. 211-212.

19. A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London, 1983), p. 144.

will take place without Jews insisting upon the confrontation on the part of Christians of the profound historical, religious, cultural and liturgical meaning of the land of Israel and of Jerusalem to the Jewish people.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, Sir Immanuel Jakobovits, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, whilst welcoming the “enormous strides” that have been made in Jewish-Christian relations, remarked to a meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews, that “the guidelines on relations with Jews urgently require some similar guidelines to revise relations with Israel and Zionism, if the forward thrust of Jewish-Christian reconciliation is to be maintained and not reversed.”<sup>21</sup>

In the light of these conditions upon which continuing dialogue rests, it is clear that the future course of events in Israel, and the Christian church’s response to them, are critical. Though the expression of right-wing political support for Israel from certain Christian quarters may alienate potential Christian support from more liberal elements, the Christian church is still faced with the task of continuing to understand the Jews’ own definition of their reality and identity, which necessarily entails (for Gentile Christians) an appreciation of the inescapable connections between the religious and national elements of Jewish self-expression and understanding. The meeting of Jews and Christians in dialogue has been an indispensable starting-point towards this understanding; however, the process has scarcely begun in terms of the church at large.

Though important strides have been made in Jewish-Christian relations, particularly on the level of theological scholarship, and to some extent also in official church statements, it remains questionable how far these ideas have percolated through the structures of the church. The conditions which should characterise successful dialogue are indeed demanding, and to the extent that they do not obtain, we can assume that the dialogic process is less than it ought to be. The contingencies of the social and political reality of Jewish-Christian relations can throw dialogue into a state of flux and uncertainty. Participants can be brought to the point of questioning whether there is a future for dialogue. From the Jewish perspective, there is often dismay at the peripheral nature of the dialogue as far as the wider church is concerned, as well as frustration over the slowness with which Christians appear to be genuinely changing. From the Christian perspective, there is the realisation that they enter dialogue with Jews heavily burdened by the past, a past which cannot be ignored and which thus informs the present. While the demands for a reconstruction of theological perspectives are clearly expounded, and many recognise that History must now inform Christian theology as never before, this is a highly problematic task for theologians.

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20. M. Tanenbaum, quoted in J.H. Banki, *Christian Reactions to the Middle East Crisis* (New York: American Jewish Committee, n.d.), pp. 15-16.

21. *The Jewish Chronicle*, July 1, 1983.

Nevertheless, at certain levels, the reformulation of theological perspectives has certainly been a serious challenge and in some cases has radically altered traditional Christian perceptions of Judaism and the Jewish people – and the Jewish-Christian dialogue does continue. It has already brought changes and will bring more. The transformations which have already occurred could eventually serve as the new foundations on which the reconstruction of the Jewish-Christian relationship may proceed.

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