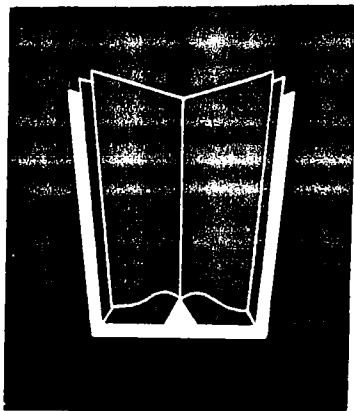
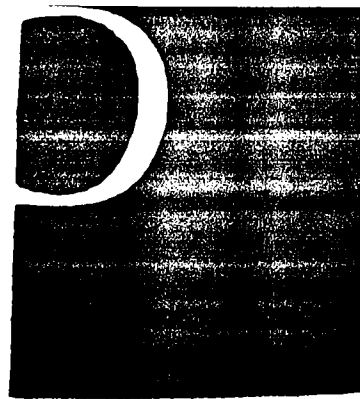
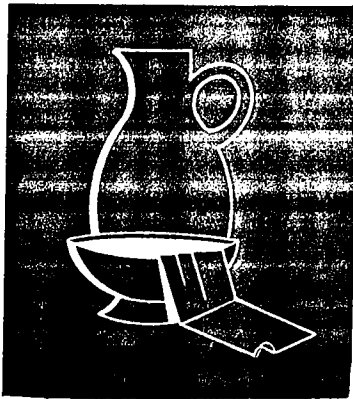


CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

PEOPLE OF GOD



Office of Theology and Worship
Church Issues Series, No. 7

Christians and Jews: People of God
©Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a Corporation,
on behalf of the Office of Theology and Worship.
All rights reserved.

Additional copies available at \$3.00 each
(\$2.00 each for 10 or more copies sent to the same address)
from Presbyterian Distribution Service (PDS)
(800) 524-2612
Request PDS 70420-05-004

To offer comments and response to
Christians and Jews, contact

Office of Theology and Worship
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396
telephone: (888) 728-7228, x5334
e-mail: pfrankli@ctr.pcusa.org

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of
the Bible and are copyrighted © 1989 by the Division of Christian
Education of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. And are
used by permission.

Design and Format: Mark Thomson

Produced for the Office of Theology and Worship
by Congregational Ministries Publishing,
A Ministry of the General Assembly Council, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews	5
Jews and Judaism in <i>The Book of Confessions</i>	22
A Declaration of Faith	31
Presbyterian Catechisms	34
Turn to the Living God	40
Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ	43
<i>Nostra Aetate</i>	50
<i>Dabru Emet</i>	53
A Sacred Obligation	57
The Willowbank Declaration	62

INTRODUCTION

The 216th General Assembly (2004) directed the Office of Theology and Worship, the Office of Interfaith Relations, and the Office of Evangelism to “reexamine and strengthen the relationship between Christians and Jews and the implications of this relationship for our evangelism and new church development in continuing response to the 211th General Assembly (1999) mandate to guide the church in ‘bearing witness to Jesus Christ in a pluralistic age.’”

The Office of Theology and Worship is pleased to provide *Christians and Jews—People of God* as one part of our response to the General Assembly’s action. Like other publications in the Theology and Worship Church Issues Series, *Christians and Jews—People of God* is intended to make available resources that will help Presbyterians think through vital issues of faith and faithfulness. Some of the material comes from our own church, while other contributions come from beyond the PC(USA). All are useful to Presbyterians in congregations and presbyteries and may be suitable for Christian-Jewish dialogues.

The relationship between Christians and Jews is not merely one instance of broader interfaith relations. The New Testament gives witness to the centrality of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles within God’s reign. Thus, contemporary Christians are called to search “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Romans 11:33) in order to live out faithful relationships between Christian and Jew, synagogue and church. A brief overview of the resources in *Christians and Jews—People of God* may indicate their place within the church’s discussion.

- “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews” was approved by the 199th General Assembly (1987) as “a pastoral and teaching document to provide a basis for continuing discussion within the Presbyterian community and to offer guidance for occasions in which Presbyterians and Jews converse, cooperate, and enter into dialogue.”

- “Jews and Judaism in *The Book of Confessions*” is a selection of pertinent confessional materials, selected by the Office of Theology and Worship.
- “A Declaration of Faith,” written in 1977, is not part of *The Book of Confessions*, but it has been “adopted as a contemporary statement of faith, a reliable aid for study, liturgy, and inspiration” (197th General Assembly, 1985). Relevant excerpts have been selected by the Office of Theology and Worship.
- The 210th General Assembly (1998) approved new catechisms for teaching in the church. Both “Belonging to God: A First Catechism,” for children, and “The Study Catechism,” for older youth and adults, include questions and answers concerning Israel and the Jews.
- *Turn to the Living God* was adopted by the 203rd General Assembly (1991) as a call to the church to pursue evangelism “in Christ’s way.” It does not address the issue of evangelism and the Jews, but its affirmations are important in any discussion of evangelism. Excerpts are presented here.
- The 214th General Assembly (2002) affirmed *Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ*, commended it to the church, and urged its study throughout the church. While it does not address Jews and Judaism directly, its christological affirmations are crucial to the church’s exploration of the relationship between Christian faith and the church’s relationship to Judaism.
- The church’s current discussion of the relationship between Christians and Jews began in earnest with the 1965 encyclical of Pope Paul VI titled *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Time”). The groundbreaking fourth section of the encyclical is reprinted here.
- In the years since *Nostra Aetate*, many churches have made statements on the relationship of Christianity and Judaism. In 2000, a group of Jewish scholars offered a thoughtful response, *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*.

- A group of Christian scholars responded in September 2002 with the statement *A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People*.
- *The Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People* of the World Evangelical Alliance, developed and adapted on April 29, 1989, provides yet another perspective, focusing directly on the issue of evangelism.

The Office of Theology and Worship believes that this collection of theological resources will be a valuable contribution to the church's ongoing discussion.

—Joseph D. Small
Office of Theology and Worship
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

(1987)

Introduction

Purpose

Christians and Jews live side by side in our pluralistic American society. We engage one another not only in personal and social ways but also at deeper levels where ultimate values are expressed and where a theological understanding of our relationship is required. The confessional documents of the Reformed tradition are largely silent on this matter. Hence this paper has been prepared by the church as a pastoral and teaching document to provide a basis for continuing discussion within the Presbyterian community in the United States and to offer guidance for the occasions in which Presbyterians and Jews converse, cooperate, and enter into dialogue. What is the relationship which God intends between Christians and Jews, between Christianity and Judaism? A theological understanding of this relationship is the subject which this paper addresses.

Context

Theology is never done in a vacuum. It influences and is influenced by its context. We do our theological work today in an increasingly global and pluralistic context—one that is interpersonal and intercommunal as well. Moreover, as Presbyterians, we do our theological work on the basis of Scripture, in the context of our faith in the living presence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, and of the church's theological tradition. A few words about each of these dimensions of our context may be helpful in understanding this paper.

The context in which the church now witnesses is more and more global and pluralistic. Churches have been planted in every nation on earth, but in most places Christians exist as a minority. The age of "Christendom" has passed, and the age of an interdependent global society is fast emerging. Things said by Christians in North America about the relationships of Christians and Jews will be heard by Christians in the Middle East, where there are painful conflicts affecting the entire region. Moreover it is increasingly difficult to ignore the existence of other religious communities and nonreligious movements in the world, many of which challenge our truth claims. What we say on the subject before us will be considered by these as well. We must be sensitive as we speak of the truth we know, lest we add to the suffering of others or increase hostility and misunderstanding by what we say.

The context in which the church now witnesses is also interpersonal and intercommunal. The reality of which we speak consists of individual persons and of entire peoples who carry within themselves real fears, pains, and hopes. Whatever the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) says about the relationship of Christian and Jews must be appropriate to our North American setting and yet sensitive to the deep longings and fears of those who struggle with this issue in different settings, especially in the Middle East. Recent General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have maintained a clear and consistent position concerning the struggle in the Middle East as a matter of the church's social policy. The General Assembly regards the theological affirmations of the present study as consistent with the church's prior policy statements concerning the Middle East, which speak of the right of statehood in Palestine for Palestinians (cf. *Minutes*, 1986, Part I, page 62) and the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure borders established by the United Nations General Assembly resolutions. Therefore, the attention of the church is again called to the church's policy enunciated in 1974, reaffirmed in 1984 which reads in part:

The right and power of Palestinian people to self-determination by political expression, based upon full civil liberties for all should be recognized by the parties in the Middle East and by the international community. . . . The Palestinian people should be full participants in negotiations . . . through representatives of their own choosing.

The right and power of Jewish people to self-determination by political expression in [the State of] Israel, based upon full civil liberties for all, should be recognized by the parties in the Middle East and by the international community. (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1974, Part I, page 584; cf. *Minutes*, 1984, Part I, page 338; see also pages 82, 335–339, “Resolution on the Middle East.”)

The context of the church’s witness includes also the fact that our church is deeply bound to its own heritage of Scripture and theological tradition. In discussing the relationship of Christians and Jews, we cannot separate ourselves from the Word of God, given in a covenant to the Jewish people, made flesh in Jesus Christ, and ever renewed in the work of the Holy Spirit among us. Acknowledging the guidance of the church’s confessional tradition, we recognize our responsibility to interpret the Word for our situation today. What the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) says on this complex subject will ultimately be evaluated in terms of the theological contribution that it makes.

The context of the church’s witness includes, finally and most basically, the real presence of the risen Lord. We make our declarations within the love of Jesus Christ who calls us to witness, serve, and believe in his name. Since our life is a part of what we say, we seek to testify by our deeds and words to the all-encompassing love of Christ through whom we “who were far off have been brought near” to the covenants of promise.

Background

This theological study is not unprecedented. Since World War II, statements and study documents dealing with Jewish-Christian relations have been issued by a number of churches and Christian bodies. Among these are the Vatican's *Nostra Aetate* (1965), the Report of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (1968), the statement of the Synod of the Reformed Church of Holland (1970), the statement of the French Bishop's Committee for Relations with the Jews (1973), the report of the Lutheran World Federation (1975), the statement of the Synod of Rhineland Church in West Germany (1980), the report of the Christian/Jewish Consultation Group of the Church of Scotland (1985), and the study of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1986).

The present study has been six years in preparation. It is the product of a project begun in 1981 within the former Presbyterian Church, U.S., then redeveloped and greatly expanded in scope and participation in 1983 upon the reunion which brought into being the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The study has been developed under the direction of the church's Council on Theology and Culture, through a process which involved many people reflecting diverse interests and backgrounds, both in the United States and the Middle East.

In the course of addressing this subject, our church has come to see many things in a new light. The study has helped us to feel the pain of our Jewish neighbors who remember that the Holocaust was carried out in the heart of "Christian Europe" by persons many of whom were baptized Christians. We have come to understand in a new way how our witness to the gospel can be perceived by Jews as an attempt to erode and ultimately to destroy their own communities. Similarly, we have been made sensitive to the difficult role of our Arab Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East. We have listened to the anguish of the Palestinians, and we have heard their cry.

The paper which we here present to the church does not attempt to address every problem nor to say more than we believe that we are able truly to say. It consists of seven theological affirmations, with a

brief explication of each. Together they seek to lay the foundation for a new and better relationship under God between Christians and Jews.

They are:

1. a reaffirmation that the God who addresses both Christians and Jews is the same—the living and true God;
2. a new understanding by the church that its own identity is intimately related to the continuing identity of the Jewish people;
3. a willingness to ponder with Jews the mystery of God's election of both Jews and Christians to be a light to the nations;
4. an acknowledgment by Christians that Jews are in covenant relationship with God and the consideration of the implications of this reality for evangelism and witness;
5. a determination by Christians to put an end to "the teaching of contempt" for the Jews;
6. a willingness to investigate the continuing significance of the promise of "land," and its associated obligations and to explore the implications for Christian theology;
7. a readiness to act on the hope which we share with the Jews in God's promise of the peaceable kingdom.

These seven theological affirmations with their explications are offered to the church not to end debate but to inform it and, thus, to serve as a basis for an ever deepening understanding of the mystery of God's saving work in the world.

Definitions and Language

The defining of terms on this subject is complex but unavoidable. We understand "Judaism" to be the religion of the Jews. It is practiced by many today and extends back into the period of the Hebrew scriptures. Judaism of late antiquity gave rise to that form of Judaism which has been developing since the first century, known as "Rabbinic Judaism." It gave rise to early Christianity as well. Both Christianity and Judaism claim relationship with the ancient people Israel; the use of the term "Israel" in this study is restricted to its ancient reference. When referring to the contemporary State of Israel this document will use "State of Israel."

We understand “Jews” to include those persons whose self-understanding is that they are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, and those converted into the Jewish community. We recognize that Jews are varied in the observance of their religion, and that there are many Jews who do not practice Judaism at all.

The language of this paper is conformable to General Assembly guidelines for inclusiveness within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It avoids gender-specific references either to God or to the people of God, except in reference to the Trinity and the Kingdom of God and in direct quotation from Scripture. The word “Lord” is used only with reference to Jesus Christ. The paper acknowledges the role of both women and men in the church’s tradition.

The following affirmations are offered to the church for our common edification and growth in obedience and faith. To God alone be the glory.

Affirmations and Explications

- 1. We affirm that the living God whom Christians worship is the same God who is worshiped and served by Jews. We bear witness that the God revealed in Jesus, a Jew, to be the Triune Lord of all, is the same one disclosed in the life and worship of Israel.**

Explication

Christianity began in the context of Jewish faith and life. Jesus was a Jew, as were his earliest followers. Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, referred to himself as a “Hebrew of the Hebrews.” The life and liturgy of the Jews provided the language and thought forms through which the revelation in Jesus was first received and expressed. Jewish liturgical forms were decisive for the worship of the early church and are influential still, especially in churches of the Reformed tradition.

Yet the relationship of Christians to Jews is more than one of common history and ideas. The relationship is significant for our faith because Christians confess that the God of Abraham and Sarah and

their descendants is the very One whom the apostles addressed as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The one God elected and entered into a covenant with Israel to reveal the divine will and point to a future salvation in which all people will live in peace and righteousness. This expectation of the reign of God in a Messianic Age was described by the Hebrew prophets in different ways. The Scriptures speak of the expectation of a deliverer king anointed by God, of the appearing of a righteous teacher, of a suffering servant, or of a people enabled through God’s grace to establish the Messianic Age. Early Christian preaching proclaimed that Jesus had become Messiah and Lord, God’s anointed who has inaugurated the kingdom of peace and righteousness through his life, death, and resurrection. While some Jews accepted this message, the majority did not, choosing to adhere to the biblical revelation as interpreted by their teachers and continuing to await the fulfillment of the messianic promises given through the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel.

Thus the bond between the community of Jews and those who came to be called Christians was broken, and both have continued as vital but separate communities through the centuries. Nonetheless, there are ties which remain between Christians and Jews: the faith of both in the one God whose loving and just will is for the redemption of all humankind and the Jewishness of Jesus whom we confess to be the Christ of God.

In confessing Jesus as the Word of God incarnate, Christians are not rejecting the concrete existence of Jesus who lived by the faith of Israel. Rather, we are affirming the unique way in which Jesus, a Jew, is the being and power of God for the redemption of the world. In him, God is disclosed to be the Triune One who creates and reconciles all things. This is the way in which Christians affirm the reality of the one God who is sovereign over all.

2. We affirm that the church, elected in Jesus Christ, has been engrafted into the people of God established by the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, Christians have not replaced Jews.

Explication

The church, especially in the Reformed tradition, understands itself to be in covenant with God through its election in Jesus Christ. Because the church affirms this covenant as fundamental to its existence, it has generally not sought nor felt any need to offer any positive interpretation of God's relationship with the Jews, lineal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, with whom God covenanted long ago. The emphasis has fallen on the new covenant established in Christ and the creation of the church.

Sometime during the second century of the Common Era, a view called "supersessionism," based on the reading of some biblical texts and nurtured in controversy, began to take shape. By the beginning of the third century, this teaching that the Christian church had superseded the Jews as God's chosen people became the orthodox understanding of God's relationship to the church. Such a view influenced the church's understanding of God's relationship with the Jews and allowed the church to regard Jews in an inferior light.

Supersessionism maintains that because the Jews refused to receive Jesus as Messiah, they were cursed by God, are no longer in covenant with God, and that the church alone is the "true Israel" or the "spiritual Israel." When Jews continue to assert, as they do, that they are the covenant people of God, they are looked upon by many Christians as impertinent intruders, claiming a right which is no longer theirs. The long and dolorous history of Christian imperialism, in which the church often justified anti-Jewish acts and attitudes in the name of Jesus, finds its theological base in this teaching.

We believe and testify that this theory of supersessionism or replacement is harmful and in need of reconsideration as the church seeks to proclaim God's saving activity with humankind. The scriptural and theological bases for this view are clear enough; but we are prompted to look again at our tradition by events in our own time and by an increasing number of theologians and biblical scholars who are calling for such a reappraisal. The pride and prejudice which have

been justified by reference to this doctrine of replacement themselves seem reason enough for taking a hard look at this position.

For us, the teaching that the church has been engrafted by God's grace into the people of God finds as much support in Scripture as the view of supersessionism and is much more consistent with our Reformed understanding of the work of God in Jesus Christ. The emphasis is on the continuity and trustworthiness of God's commitments and God's grace. The issue for the early church concerned the inclusion of the Jews. Paul insists that God is God of both Jews and Gentiles and justifies God's redemption of both on the basis of faith (Romans 3:29–30). God's covenants are not broken. "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Romans 11:2). The church has not "replaced" the Jewish people. Quite the contrary! The church, being made up primarily of those who were once aliens and strangers to the covenants of promise, has been engrafted into the people of God by the covenant with Abraham (Romans 11:17–18).

The continued existence of the Jewish people and of the church as communities elected by God is, as the apostle Paul expressed it, a "mystery" (Romans 11:25). We do not claim to fathom this mystery but we cannot ignore it. At the same time we can never forget that we stand in a covenant established by Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8) and that faithfulness to that covenant requires us to call *all* women and men to faith in Jesus Christ. We ponder the work of God, including the wonder of Christ's atoning work for us.

- 3. We affirm that both the church and the Jewish people are elected by God for witness to the world and that the relationship of the church to contemporary Jews is based on that gracious and irrevocable election of both.**

Explication

God chose a particular people, Israel, as a sign and foretaste of God's grace toward all people. It is for the sake of God's redemption of the world that Israel was elected. The promises of God, made to Abraham and Sarah and to their offspring after them, were given so

that blessing might come upon “all families of the earth” (Genesis 12:1–3). God continues that purpose through Christians and Jews. The church, like the Jews, is called to be a light to the nations (Acts 13:47). God’s purpose embraces the whole creation.

In the electing of peoples, God takes the initiative. Election does not manifest human achievement but divine grace. Neither Jews nor Christians can claim to deserve this favor. Election is the way in which God creates freedom through the Holy Spirit for people to be for God and for others. God, who is ever faithful to the word which has been spoken, does not take back the divine election. Whenever either the Jews or the churches have rejected God’s ways, God has judged but not rejected them. This is a sign of God’s redeeming faithfulness toward the world.

Both Christians and Jews are elected to service for the life of the world. Despite profound theological differences separating Christians and Jews, we believe that God has bound us together in a unique relationship for the sake of God’s love for the world. We testify to this election, but we cannot explain it. It is part of the purpose of God for the whole creation. Thus there is much common ground where Christians and Jews can and should act together.

4. We affirm that the reign of God is attested both by the continuing existence of the Jewish people and by the church’s proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, when speaking with Jews about matters of faith, we must always acknowledge that Jews are already in a covenantal relationship with God.

Explication

God, who acts in human history by the Word and Spirit, is not left without visible witnesses on the earth. God’s sovereign and saving reign in the world is signified both by the continuing existence of and faithfulness within the Jewish people who, by all human reckoning, might be expected to have long since passed from the stage of history and by the life and witness of the church.

As the cross of Jesus has always been a stumbling block to Jews, so also the continued existence and faithfulness of the Jews are often a

stumbling block to Christians. Our persuasion of the truth of God in Jesus Christ has sometimes led Christians to conclude that Judaism should no longer exist, now that Christ has come, and that all Jews ought properly to become baptized members of the church. Over the centuries, many afflictions have been visited on the Jews by Christians holding this belief—not least in our own time. We believe that the time has come for Christians to stop and take a new look at the Jewish people and at the relationship which God wills between Christian and Jew.

Such reappraisal cannot avoid the issue of evangelism. For Jews, this is a very sensitive issue. Proselytism by Christians seeking to persuade, even convert, Jews often implies a negative judgment on Jewish faith. Jewish reluctance to accept Christian claims is all the more understandable when it is realized that conversion is often seen by them as a threat to Jewish survival. Many Jews who unite with the church sever their bonds with their people. On the other hand, Christians are commissioned to witness to the whole world about the good news of Christ's atoning work for both Jew and Gentile. Difficulty arises when we acknowledge that the same Scripture which proclaims that atonement and which Christians claim as God's word clearly states that Jews are already in a covenant relationship with God who makes and keeps covenants.

For Christians, there is no easy answer to this matter. Faithful interpretation of the biblical record indicates that there are elements of God's covenant with Abraham that are unilateral and unconditional. However, there are also elements of the covenant which appear to predicate benefits upon faithfulness (see Gen. 17:1ff.). Christians, historically, have proclaimed that true obedience is impossible for a sinful humanity and thus have been impelled to witness to the atoning work of Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah, as the way to a right relationship with God. However, to the present day, many Jews have been unwilling to accept the Christian claim and have continued in their covenant tradition. In light of Scripture, which testifies to God's repeated offer of forgiveness to Israel, we do not presume to judge in God's place. Our commission is to witness to the saving work of Jesus

Christ; to preach good news among all the “nations” (*ethne*).

Dialogue is the appropriate form of faithful conversation between Christians and Jews. Dialogue is not a cover for proselytism. Rather, as trust is established, not only questions and concerns can be shared but faith and commitments as well. Christians have no reason to be reluctant in sharing the good news of their faith with anyone. However, a militancy that seeks to impose one’s own point of view on another is not only inappropriate but also counterproductive. In dialogue, partners are able to define their faith in their own terms, avoiding caricatures of one another, and are thus better able to obey the commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” Dialogue, especially in light of our shared history, should be entered into with a spirit of humility and a commitment to reconciliation. Such dialogue can be a witness that seeks also to heal that which has been broken. It is out of a mutual willingness to listen and to learn that faith deepens and a new and better relationship between Christians and Jews is enabled to grow.

- 5. We acknowledge in repentance the church’s long and deep complicity in the proliferation of anti-Jewish attitudes and actions through its “teaching of contempt” for the Jews. Such teaching we now repudiate, together with the acts and attitudes which it generates.**

Explication

Anti-Jewish sentiment and action by Christians began in New Testament times. The struggle between Christians and Jews in the first century of the Christian movement was often bitter and marked by mutual violence. The depth of hostility left its mark on early Christian and Jewish literature, including portions of the New Testament.

In subsequent centuries, after the occasions for the original hostility had long since passed, the church misused portions of the New Testament as proof texts to justify a heightened animosity toward Jews. For many centuries, it was the church’s teaching to label Jews as “Christ-killers” and a “deicide race.” This is known as the “teaching of

contempt.” Persecution of Jews was at times officially sanctioned and at other times indirectly encouraged or at least tolerated. Holy Week became a time of terror for Jews.

To this day, the church’s worship, preaching, and teaching often lend themselves, at times unwittingly, to a perpetuation of the “teaching of contempt.” For example, the public reading of Scripture without explicating potentially misleading passages concerning “the Jews,” preaching which uses Judaism as a negative example in order to commend Christianity, public prayer which assumes that only the prayers of Christians are pleasing to God, teaching in the church school which reiterates stereotypes and nonhistorical ideas about the Pharisees and Jewish leadership—all of these contribute, however subtly, to a continuation of the church’s “teaching of contempt.”

It is painful to realize how the teaching of the church has led individuals and groups to behavior that has tragic consequences. It is agonizing to discover that the church’s “teaching of contempt” was a major ingredient that made possible the monstrous policy of annihilation of Jews by Nazi Germany. It is disturbing to have to admit that the churches of the West did little to challenge the policies of their governments, even in the face of the growing certainty that the Holocaust was taking place. Though many Christians in Europe acted heroically to shelter Jews, the record reveals that most churches as well as governments the world over largely ignored the pleas for sanctuary for Jews.

As the very embodiment of anti-Jewish attitudes and actions, the Holocaust is a sober reminder that such horrors are actually possible in this world and that they begin with apparently small acts of disdain or expedience. Hence, we pledge to be alert for all such acts of denigration from now on, so that they may be resisted. We also pledge resistance to any such actions perpetrated by anyone, anywhere.

The church’s attitudes must be reviewed and changed as necessary, so that they never again fuel the fires of hatred. We must be willing to admit our church’s complicity in wrongdoing in the past, even as we try to establish a new basis of trust and communication with Jews. We pledge, God helping us, never again to participate in, to

contribute to, or (insofar as we are able) to allow the persecution or denigration of Jews or the belittling of Judaism.

6. We affirm the continuity of God's promise of land along with the obligations of that promise to the people Israel.

Explication

As the Church of Scotland's (1985) report says:

We are aware that in dealing with this matter we are entering a minefield of complexities across which is strung a barbed-wire entanglement of issues, theological, political and humanitarian.

However, a faithful explication of biblical material relating to the covenant with Abraham cannot avoid the reality of the promise of land. The question with which we must wrestle is how this promise is to be understood in the light of the existence of the modern political State of Israel which has taken its place among the nations of the world.

The Genesis record indicates that "the land of your sojournings" was promised to Abraham and his and Sarah's descendants. This promise, however, included the demand that "You shall keep my covenant . . ." (Genesis 17:7-8). The implication is that the blessings of the promise were dependent upon fulfillment of covenant relationships. Disobedience could bring the loss of land, even while God's promise was not revoked. God's promises are always kept, but in *God's* own way and time.

The establishment of the State of Israel in our day has been seen by many devout Jews as the fulfillment of God's divine promise. Other Jews are equally sure that it is not and regard the State of Israel as an unauthorized attempt to flee divinely imposed exile. Still other Jews interpret the State of Israel in purely secular terms. Christian opinion is equally diverse. As Reformed Christians, however, we believe that no government at any time can ever be the full expression of God's will. All, including the State of Israel, stand accountable to God. The State of Israel is a geopolitical entity and is not to be validated theologically.

God's promise of land bears with it obligation. Land is to be used as the focus of mission, the place where people can live and be a light to the nations. Further, because land is God's to be given, it can never be fully possessed. The living out of God's covenant in the land brings with it not only opportunity but also temptation. The history of the people of Israel reveals the continual tension between sovereignty and stewardship, blessing and curse.

The Hebrew prophets made clear to the people of their own day as well, indeed, as *any* day, that those in possession of "land" have a responsibility and obligation to the disadvantaged, the oppressed, and the "strangers in their gates." God's justice, unlike ours, is consistently in favor of the powerless (Ps. 103:6). Therefore we, whether Christian or Jew, who affirm the divine promise of land, however land is to be understood, dare not fail to uphold the divine right of the dispossessed. We have indeed been agents of the dispossession of others. In particular, we confess our complicity in the loss of land by Palestinians, and we join with those of our Jewish sisters and brothers who stand in solidarity with Palestinians as they cry for justice as the dispossessed.

We disavow any teaching which says that peace can be secured without justice through the exercise of violence and retribution. God's justice upholds those who cry out against the strong. God's peace comes to those who do justice and mercy on the earth. Hence we look with dismay at the violence and injustice occurring in the Middle East.

For 3,000 years the covenant promise of the land has been an essential element of the self-understanding of Jewish people. Through centuries of dispersion and exile, Jews have continued to understand themselves as people in relation to the God they have known through the promise of land. However, to understand that promise solely in terms of a specific geographical entity on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean is, in our view, inadequate.

"Land" is understood as more than place or property; "land" is a biblical metaphor for sustainable life, prosperity, peace, and security. We affirm the rights to these essentials for the Jewish people. At the same time, as bearers of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we affirm those same rights in the name of justice to all peoples. We are

aware that those rights are not realized by all persons in our day. Thus we affirm our solidarity with all people to whom those rights of "land" are currently denied.

We disavow those views held by some dispensationalists and some Christian Zionists that see the formation of the State of Israel as a signal of the end time, which will bring the Last Judgment, a conflagration which only Christians will survive. These views ignore the word of Jesus against seeking to set the time or place of the consummation of world history.

We therefore call on all people of faith to engage in the work of reconciliation and peacemaking. We pray for and encourage those who would break the cycles of vengeance and violence, whether it is the violence of states or of resistance movements, of terror or of retaliation. We stand with those who work toward nonviolent solutions, including those who choose nonviolent resistance. We also urge nation states and other political institutions to seek negotiated settlements of conflicting claims.

The seeking of justice is a sign of our faith in the reign of God.

7. We affirm that Jews and Christians are partners in waiting. Christians see in Christ the redemption not yet fully visible in the world, and Jews await the messianic redemption. Christians and Jews together await the final manifestation of God's promise of the peaceable kingdom.

Explication

Christian hope is continuous with Israel's hope and is unintelligible apart from it. New Testament teaching concerning the Kingdom of God was shaped by the messianic and apocalyptic vision of Judaism. That prophetic vision was proclaimed by John the Baptist, and the preaching of Jesus contained the same vision. Both Jews and Christians affirm that God reigns over all human destiny and has not abandoned the world to chaos and that, despite many appearances to the contrary, God is acting within history to establish righteousness and peace.

Jews still await the kingdom which the prophets foretold. Some look for a Messianic Age in which God's heavenly reign will be ushered in upon the earth. Christians proclaim the good news that in Christ "the Kingdom of God is at hand," yet, we, too, wait in hope for the consummation of the redemption of all things in God. Though the waiting of Jews and Christians is significantly different on account of our differing perception of Jesus, nonetheless, we both wait with eager longing for the fulfillment of God's gracious reign upon the earth—the kingdom of righteousness and peace foretold by the prophets. We are in this sense partners in waiting.

Both Christians and Jews are called to wait and to hope in God. While we wait, Jews and Christians are called to the service of God in the world. However that service may differ, the vocation of each shares at least these elements: a striving to realize the word of the prophets, an attempt to remain sensitive to the dimension of the holy, an effort to encourage the life of the mind, and a ceaseless activity in the cause of justice and peace. These are far more than the ordinary requirements of our common humanity; they are elements of our common election by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah. Precisely because our election is not to privilege but to service, Christians and Jews are obligated to act together in these things. By so acting, we faithfully live out our partnership in waiting. By so doing, we believe that God is glorified.

JEWES AND JUDAISM IN THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS

The Scots Confession

(1560)

Chapter V: The Continuance, Increase, and Preservation of the Kirk

We most surely believe that God preserved, instructed, multiplied, honored, adorned, and called from death to life his Kirk in all ages since Adam until the coming of Christ Jesus in the flesh. For he called Abraham from his father's country, instructed him, and multiplied his seed; he marvelously preserved him, and more marvelously delivered his seed from the bondage and tyranny of Pharaoh; to them he gave his laws, constitutions, and ceremonies; to them he gave the land of Canaan; after he had given them judges, and afterwards Saul, he gave David to be king, to whom he gave promise that of the fruit of his loins should one sit forever upon his royal throne. To this same people from time to time he sent prophets, to recall them to the right way of their God, from which sometimes they strayed by idolatry. And although, because of their stubborn contempt for righteousness he was compelled to give them into the hands of their enemies, as had previously been threatened by the mouth of Moses, so that the holy city was destroyed, the temple burned with fire, and the whole land desolate for seventy years, yet in mercy he restored them again to Jerusalem, where the city and temple were rebuilt, and they endured against all temptations and assaults of Satan till the Messiah came according to the promise. (3.05)

Chapter XVI: The Kirk

... This Kirk is catholic, that is, universal, because it contains the chosen of all ages, of all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the Jews or be they of the Gentiles, who have communion and society with

God the Father, and with his Son, Christ Jesus, through the sanctification of his Holy Spirit. . . . (3.16)

Chapter XVIII: The Notes by Which the True Kirk Shall Be Determined from the False, and Who Shall Be Judge of Doctrine

Since Satan has labored from the beginning to adorn his pestilent synagogue with the title of the Kirk of God, and has incited cruel murderers to persecute, trouble, and molest the true Kirk and its members, as Cain did to Abel, Ishmael to Isaac, Esau to Jacob, and the whole priesthood of the Jews to Christ Jesus himself and his apostles after him. So it is essential that the true Kirk be distinguished from the filthy synagogues by clear and perfect notes lest we, being deceived, receive and embrace, to our own condemnation, the one for the other. . . . (3.18) [Note: "Synagogue" refers not to Jewish synagogues, but to the "false" people of God in every age.]

Chapter XXI: The Sacraments

As the fathers under the Law, besides the reality of the sacrifices, had two chief sacraments, that is, circumcision and the passover, and those who rejected these were not reckoned among God's people; so do we acknowledge and confess that now in the time of the gospel we have two chief sacraments, which alone were instituted by the Lord Jesus and commanded to be used by all who will be counted members of his body, that is, Baptism and the Supper or Table of the Lord Jesus, also called the Communion of His Body and Blood. These sacraments, both of the Old Testament and of the New, were instituted by God not only to make a visible distinction between his people and those who were without the Covenant, but also to exercise the faith of his children and, by participation of these sacraments, to seal in their hearts the assurance of his promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union, and society, which the chosen have with their Head, Christ Jesus. . . . (3.21)

The Heidelberg Catechism

(1563)

Q. 18. Who is this mediator who is at the same time true God and a true and perfectly righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is freely given to us for complete redemption and righteousness.

Q. 19. Whence do you know this?

A. From the holy gospel, which God himself revealed in the beginning in the Garden of Eden, afterward proclaimed through the holy patriarchs and prophets and foreshadowed through the sacrifices and other rites of the Old Covenant, and finally fulfilled through his own well-beloved Son. (4.018, 4.019)

The Second Helvetic Confession

(1566)

Chapter III: Of God, His Unity and Trinity

... HERESIES. Therefore we condemn the Jews and Mohammedans, and all those who blaspheme that sacred and adorable Trinity. We also condemn all heresies and heretics who teach that the Son and Holy Spirit are God in name only, and also that there is something created and subservient, or subordinate to another in the Trinity, and that there is something unequal in it, a greater or a less, something corporeal or corporeally conceived, something different with respect to character or will, something mixed or solitary, as if the Son and Holy Spirit were the affections and properties of one God the Father, as the Monarchians, Novatians, Praxeas, Patripassians, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Aëtius, Macedonius, Anthropomorphites, Arius, and such like, have thought. (5.019)

Chapter XI: Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World

CHRIST IS TRUE GOD. We further believe and teach that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was predestinated or foreordained from eternity by the Father to be the Savior of the world. . . . Therefore, with respect to his divinity the Son is coequal and consubstantial with the Father; true God (Phil. 2:11), not only in name or by adoption or by any merit, but in substance and nature, as the apostle John has often said: "This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). Paul also says: "He appointed the Son the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding all things by his word of power" (Heb. 1:2f.). For in the Gospel the Lord himself said: "Father, glorify Thou me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made" (John 17:5). And in another place in the Gospel it is written: "The Jews sought all the more to kill him because he . . . called God his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). . . . (5.062)

Chapter XV: Of the True Justification of the Faithful

. . . WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH ALONE. But because we receive this justification, not through any works, but through faith in the mercy of God and in Christ, we therefore teach and believe with the apostle that sinful man is justified by faith alone in Christ, not by the law or any works. For the apostle says: "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:28). Also: "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. . . . And to one who does not work but believes in him who justified the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4:2ff.; Gen. 15:6). . . . (5.109)

Chapter XVII: Of the Catholic and Holy Church of God, and of the One Only Head of the Church

. . . THE TWO PEOPLES. Generally two peoples are usually counted, namely, the Israelites and Gentiles, or those who have been gathered from among Jews and Gentiles into the Church. There are also two Testaments, the Old and the New. THE SAME CHURCH FOR THE OLD AND THE NEW PEOPLE. Yet from all these people there was and is one fellowship, one salvation in the one Messiah; in whom, as members of one body under one Head, all united together in the same faith, partaking also of the same spiritual food and drink. Yet here we acknowledge a diversity of times, and a diversity in the signs of the promised and delivered Christ; and that now the ceremonies being abolished, the light shines unto us more clearly, and blessings are given to us more abundantly, and a fuller liberty. . . . (5.129)

Chapter XVIII: Of the Ministers of the Church, Their Institution and Duties

. . . PRIESTS AND PRIESTHOOD. Surely in the new covenant of Christ there is no longer any such priesthood as was under the ancient people; which had an external anointing, holy garments, and very many ceremonies which were types of Christ, who abolished them all by his coming and fulfilling them. But he himself remains the only priest forever. . . . (5.154)

Chapter XXIV: Of Holy Days, Fasts and the Choice of Foods

. . . SUPERSTITION. In this connection we do not yield to the Jewish observance and to superstitions. For we do not believe that one day is any holier than another, or think that rest in itself is acceptable to God. Moreover, we celebrate the Lord's Day and not the Sabbath as a free observance. . . . (5.225)

The Westminster Confession of Faith

(1647)

Chapter VII: Of God's Covenant with Man

... 4. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in the Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ, the testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.

5. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

6. Under the gospel, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed, are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations. (6.040 – 6.042)

Chapter XXII: Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

1. ... Under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of. ... (6.108)

The Westminster Larger Catechism

(1647)

Q. 34. How was the covenant of grace administered under the Old Testament?

A. The covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances; which did all foreshadow Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they then had full remission of sin and eternal salvation.

Q. 35. How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament?

A. Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was, and still is to be, administered in the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism, and the Lord's Supper; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy to all nations. . . . (7.144 – 7.145)

Q. 191. What do we pray for in the second petition?

A. In the second petition (which is, "Thy Kingdom come"), acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray: that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; that the church may be furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate; that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted; that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him forever; and that he would be pleased so to exercise the Kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends. (7.301)

The Confession of 1967

Part I: God's Work of Reconciliation

Section B. The Love of God

... God expressed his love for all mankind through Israel, whom he chose to be his covenant people to serve him in love and faithfulness. When Israel was unfaithful, he disciplined the nation with his judgments and maintained his cause through prophets, priests, teachers, and true believers. These witnesses called all Israelites to a destiny in which they would serve God faithfully and become a light to the nations. The same witnesses proclaimed the coming of a new age, and a true servant of God in whom God's purpose for Israel and for mankind would be realized. (9.18)

Out of Israel, God in due time raised up Jesus. His faith and obedience were the response of the perfect child of God. He was the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel, the beginning of the new creation, and the pioneer of the new humanity. He gave history its meaning and direction and called the church to be his servant for the reconciliation of the world. . . . (9.19)

Part II: The Ministry of Reconciliation

Section A. The Mission of the Church

... The church in its mission encounters the religions of men and in that encounter becomes conscious of its own human character as a religion. God's revelation to Israel, expressed within Semitic culture, gave rise to the religion of the Hebrew people. God's revelation in Jesus Christ called forth the response of Jews and Greeks and came to expression within Judaism and Hellenism as the Christian religion. The Christian religion, as distinct from God's revelation of himself, has been shaped throughout its history by the cultural forms of its environment. . . . (9.41)

A Brief Statement of Faith

(1990)

. . . In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.
Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still. . . (10.3)

A DECLARATION OF FAITH

(1977)

Chapter Three: God and the People of Israel

(1) God chose one people for the sake of all.

To the world in its rebellion and alienation

God promised blessing and restoration.

The Lord chose Abraham and his descendants

as bearers of that promise for all peoples.

They had done nothing more than others

to deserve the Lord's favor,

but God loved them and made them his own.

We acknowledge God's freedom and grace.

Though we are unworthy,

the Lord has made us his own in Christ.

God has chosen us as his servants for the sake of the world

and destined us to be his daughters and sons,

giving us love and life,

calling us to worship and honor him.

(2) God delivered his people.

When Abraham's descendants were slaves in Egypt,

God heard their cries and prayers.

God remembered his promise

and sent Moses to free them from bondage.

We declare God's steadfast love and sovereign power.

The Lord can be trusted to keep promises.

The Lord still acts in the affairs of individuals and nations

to set oppressed and persecuted people free.

(3) God bound his people to himself in covenant.

Freed slaves became the people of God

when they accepted the Lord's covenant.

God charged them to respond to his rescuing love

by obeying his commandments.

Their life together was to express
the justice and compassion of their Holy God.

Since we, too, are the Lord's covenant people,
we know we must be holy as the Lord is holy.
We must keep God's commandments,
not in order to earn or compel the Lord's favor,
but to reflect the character of God
and to be his grateful and loving people.

(4) God blessed and judged his people.

The Lord's care sustained the people of Israel.
God gave them a land where they could celebrate his goodness.
The Lord established their kingdom and
promised a ruler from the line of David
to reign in justice and peace.

When God's people worshiped the gods of the land,
when they put their trust in military alliances,
when they failed to do justice and oppressed the poor,
God sent the prophets to condemn their sins
and to call the people back to obedience.

There were times of repentance and reform,
but in the end their kingdoms fell.

We declare God's goodness and justice.
God has blessed us beyond our deserving.
When we forget the Lord and worship our possessions,
when we fail to do justly with the poor,
when we seek security no matter what it costs others,
we can expect God's judgment upon us.

(5) God did not forsake his people.

God restored some of the people to their land
and left others scattered over the earth.

In a time of exile and alien rule,
the Jews survived and multiplied.

They enriched the whole world:
they compiled the Scriptures, preserving God's word to them;
they sang their songs of praise and lamentation;
they sought wisdom, examining God's ways in the world;
they searched the mysteries of rising and falling kingdoms
and set their hope on the kingdom of God.

We testify that God is faithful.
Even when we are faithless, God remains faithful.
The Lord still brings from oppressed and uprooted peoples
riches of insight and daring visions
that can judge and bless the world.
We can have confidence in God's coming kingdom
even in the darkest times.

Chapter Seven: The Christian Church

(3) The Christian church arose within Israel.

The followers of Jesus
remained at first within the people of Israel.
As persons from all nations joined them,
they were separated from the Jewish community.
Yet they continued to accept Israel's story as their own
and to consider themselves part of the people of God.

We can never lay exclusive claim to being God's people,
as though we had replaced those
to whom the covenant, the law, and the promises belong.
We affirm that God has not rejected his people the Jews.
The Lord does not take back his promises.
We Christians have often rejected Jews throughout our history
with shameful prejudice and cruelty.
God calls us to dialogue and cooperation
that do not ignore our real disagreements,
yet proceed in mutual respect and love.
We are bound together with them in a single story
of those chosen to serve and proclaim the living God.

PRESBYTERIAN CATECHISMS

(1998)

I. The Study Catechism

(for adults and older youth)

Question 36. How did God use the people of Israel to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus?

God made a covenant with Israel, promising that God would be their light and salvation, that they would be God's people, and that through them all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. Therefore, no matter how often Israel turned away from God, God still cared for them and acted on their behalf. In particular, God sent them prophets, priests, and kings. Each of these was "anointed" by God's Spirit—prophets, to declare God's word; priests, to make sacrifice for the people's sins; and kings, to rule justly in the fear of God, upholding the poor and needy, and defending the people from their enemies.

Gen. 17:3–4 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you; You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations."

Gen. 12:1–3 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Ex. 6:4–5 I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.

Gal. 3:14 . . . in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Jer. 30:22 And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

1 Peter 2:9–10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Zech. 1:6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your ancestors? So they repented and said, "The LORD of hosts has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he planned to do.

Lev. 5:6 And you shall bring to the LORD, as your penalty for the sins that you have committed, . . . a sheep or a goat, as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for your sin.

Ps. 72:1, 4 Give your king justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. . . . May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

Question 37. Was the covenant with Israel an everlasting covenant?

Yes. With the coming of Jesus the covenant with Israel was expanded and confirmed. By faith in him Gentiles were welcomed into the covenant. This throwing open of the gates confirmed the promise that through Israel God's blessing would come to all peoples. Although for the most part Israel has not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, God has not rejected Israel. God still loves Israel, and God is their hope, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). The God who has reached out to unbelieving Gentiles will not fail to show mercy to Israel as the people of the everlasting covenant.

Isa. 61:8 For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Jer. 31:3 I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

2 Sam. 23:5 Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?

Rom. 11:29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

II. Belonging to God: A First Catechism (for children)

Question 15. What is the covenant?

The covenant is an everlasting agreement between God and Israel.

Gen. 9:12–13 This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Rom. 11:29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Gen. 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land. . . .”

Gen. 17:4 As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

Ps. 89:3–4 You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.”

Heb. 8:10 This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Question 16. What is in this agreement?

When God called Abraham and Sarah, God promised to bless their family, which was later called Israel. Through the people of Israel, God vowed to bless all the peoples of the earth. God promised to

be Israel's God, and they promised to be God's people. God vowed to love Israel and to be their hope forever, and Israel vowed to worship and serve only God.

Gen. 12:1-3 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Gen. 17:1-7 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."

Ex. 6:6-7 I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.

Ex. 24:3 Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do."

Jer. 7:23 But this command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you."

Gal. 3:14 . . . in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

1 Peter 2:9–10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

TURN TO THE LIVING GOD: A CALL TO EVANGELISM IN JESUS CHRIST'S WAY

(1991)

Prologue

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in grateful response to the triune God, commits itself with other Christians to witness to God's grace and love in Jesus Christ. Together we will invite people of "every tribe, tongue, people, and nation" to join us in turning to the living God. . . .

The Wholeness of Evangelism

Evangelism in these past decades has come to be seen as the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. . . .

People of Many Religions

With other Christians we are called to make joyful witness to persons of other faiths in a spirit of respect, openness, and honesty. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms with ecumenical partners that

the proclamation of the gospel includes an invitation to recognize and accept in personal decision the saving lordship of Christ. . . . Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and every people. ("Mission and Evangelism," an ecumenical document of the World Council of Churches, paragraphs 10, 41)

In calling people to faith in Christ we are not only offering personal salvation but also calling them to follow Jesus in the service of God's reign. ("Message" of San Antonio, World Council of Churches, Section I.26)

As our Christian affirmation meets the faith of others, we are not called to respond in judgment but in awareness of the limitless, saving presence, power, and grace of God. The spirit that is to inform our presence among people of other faiths

... presupposes our presence with them, sensitivity to their deepest faith commitments and experiences, willingness to be their servants for Christ's sake, affirmation of what God has done and is doing among them and love for them.
("Message" of San Antonio, World Council of Churches, Section I.25)

As Christians our faith demands that we seek to build loving relationships with persons of other faiths. Where possible we will work in solidarity with them in struggles for justice, freedom, peace, and human dignity. . . .

The Whole Gospel

The whole gospel is the good news of God's love and salvation as revealed in Jesus Christ, as set forth in Scripture, and as demonstrated in the life of God's people. It is good news for people in all realms of life and in all human circumstances. . . .

For those of other faiths and ideologies, the good news is that in Jesus of Nazareth, God has revealed the fullness of divine love and extends through the church an invitation for all to share in the banquet of God's reign. . . .

Concluding Affirmation

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) commits itself

- to announce the good news that in Jesus Christ the world is reconciled to God;
- to tell all nations and peoples of Christ's call to repentance, faith, and obedience;

- to proclaim in deed and word that Jesus gave himself to set people free;
- to offer in Christ's name fullness of life now and forever;
- to call people everywhere to believe in and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and
- to invite them into the community of faith to worship and serve the triune God.

HOPE IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

(2002)

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1–4).

“Jesus is Lord!” This foundational declaration is the earliest Christian confession of faith. The Scriptures and our confessions expand the basic affirmation, providing abundant witness to the word of life revealed in Jesus Christ. “The depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” revealed in Christ far exceed the scope of this brief exposition. We cannot say all there is to be said, but there is much that we can say, clearly and confidently.

Christian faith is Trinitarian faith. Our understanding of Jesus Christ is necessarily expressed within our understanding of “the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.” From the Nicene Creed to A Brief Statement of Faith, the church shapes its confession by the certain knowledge of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the ages, when praying at the Lord’s Table and the baptismal font, Christians have given thankful praise for God’s work in creation, providence, and covenant history—followed by thankful recalling of the acts of salvation in Jesus Christ—and concluding with a call for the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the faith expressed in creed and prayer that we invite all Presbyterians to speak and live.

In Jesus Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. Jesus Christ is God with us. He is the eternal Son of the Father, who became human and lived among us to fulfill the work of reconciliation. He is present in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue and complete his mission. This work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the foundation of all confessional statements about God, humankind, and the world (The Confession of 1967, 9.071).

We Believe in One God (Nicene Creed 1.1)

Our faith is in God who created heaven and earth, who formed us from dust and breathed us into life, who made us to live with one another in love. Our faith in God is far more than generalized belief in an abstract deity. We trust in God who loved us and sought us even when we chose sin and death rather than communion and life. We are loyal to God who established a covenant with us through Abraham and Sarah, who revealed the shape of faithful living in the Law given through Moses, and who called us to obedience through the cries of the prophets.

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands;
serve the Lord with gladness
and come before God's presence with a song.
Know this: The Lord alone is God;
we belong to the Lord, who made us. (Psalm 100:1–3)

God is known to us only through self-disclosure in words and acts of grace, love, and communion. While complete knowledge of God remains beyond human capacity, and human attempts to imagine the divine nature easily become reflections of our own desires or fears, God has revealed the truth to us in the One who is the Truth. God is most fully known to us through God's free presence with us in Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and
lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a

father's only son, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known (John 1:1, 14, 18).

Thus we join with the church throughout the centuries to affirm that *God was in Christ*. God is not a mysterious unknown who remains veiled in remote transcendence. God has come among us in terms we can understand, in the human one, Jesus of Nazareth.

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. (The Confession of 1967, 9.27)

We Believe in . . . One Lord, Jesus Christ

(Nicene Creed 1.1-1.2)

It pleased God to come to us in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. God did not simply show us a path to follow, but lived among us as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Although we have done nothing to deserve the free gift of God, in Jesus Christ we receive new life, know the truth about God and ourselves, and are set upon God's way in the world. Jesus Christ was and is *the* path, for Jesus Christ was and is:

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
one in Being with the Father. (Nicene Creed, 1.2)

Jesus Christ came to us as one of us, sharing our joy and sorrow. He proclaimed God's love, healed the sick, and was a friend of sinners. He continues to reveal God's gracious love, he is among us now to make us whole, and he is still the friend of sinners. Jesus Christ was and is one with us in life; Jesus Christ was and is one with us in suffering and death. The Lord and Savior is Christ crucified, in whom

God's weakness is stronger than human strength and God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation . . . For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:15, 19–20).

The cross of Christ is at the heart of our faith, for it is through the Lord's death that we receive new life. The gospel of Christ crucified is a treasure that surpasses the limits of human language, and so the Bible displays a wealth of expression that leads us to thankful knowledge and grateful faith.

God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery which the Scriptures describe in various ways. It is called the sacrifice of a lamb, a shepherd's life given for his sheep, atonement by a priest; again it is ransom of a slave, payment of debt, vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and victory over the powers of evil. These are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God's love for humankind. They reveal the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of God's reconciling work (The Confession of 1967, 9.09).

Jesus Christ is with us in life and death. But death is not the last word, for God has raised him from the dead and exalted him above all rule and authority and power and dominion. The risen Christ is the living Lord of the cosmos. "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). For the sake of the world, the Word became flesh, for the sake of the world Jesus Christ lived among us, was crucified and raised from the dead. For the sake of the world Christ ascended to heaven, and for the sake of the world Christ will come again. All of this is God's good pleasure set forth in Christ "as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10).

For we teach and believe that this Jesus Christ our Lord is the unique and eternal Savior of the human race, and thus of the whole world, in whom by faith are saved all who before the law, under the law, and under the Gospel were saved, and however many will be saved at the end of the world (The Second Helvetic Confession, 5.077).

Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord, and all people everywhere are called to place their faith, hope, and love in him. No one is saved by virtue of inherent goodness or admirable living, for “by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). No one is saved apart from God’s gracious redemption in Jesus Christ. Yet we do not presume to limit the sovereign freedom of “God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Thus, we neither restrict the grace of God to those who profess explicit faith in Christ nor assume that all people are saved regardless of faith. Grace, love, and communion belong to God, and are not ours to determine.

Paul, after a beautiful development of his thought, in Rom. 10:17 at length comes to the conclusion, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of God by the preaching of Christ.” At the same time we recognize that God can illuminate whom and when he will, even without the external ministry, for that is in his power (The Second Helvetic Confession, 5.006, 007).

We Believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life (Nicene Creed, 1.3)

The Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, draws redeemed people to a shared life of grateful praise, and shapes our lives in obedience to God’s gracious law. The Spirit forms diverse people into the one body of Christ, giving a variety of gifts that enable us to upbuild the church and serve the world. The Holy Spirit is God’s abiding presence among

us, equipping us to proclaim the gospel, nurture each other in the fullness of communion, worship God, know and live the truth, cultivate justice, and exhibit God's new Way in the world.

By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit all believers being vitally united to Christ, who is the Head, are thus united one to another in the Church, which is his body. . . . By him the Church will be preserved, increased, purified, and at last made perfect in the presence of God (The Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.054).

The power of the Holy Spirit leads the whole community of faith into holy and joyful living, enabling each of us to conform our lives more fully to Christ. Christians are called to live by the Spirit, forsaking works of the flesh and receiving the fruit of the Spirit.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1–2).

Because the church is founded and enlivened by the presence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, we can be confident that it is Christ who works through the imperfect and sinful fellowship of the church. Even in our brokenness we testify that we belong solely to Jesus Christ. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we proclaim Christ's love, in word and deed, to all the world.

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort

and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance (The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.17).

One Lord, One Faith

Each time we gather at the baptismal font, we rejoice that God welcomes another person into fellowship with Christ. In one baptism, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are united to Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. In one baptism we are also united to our brothers and sisters in faith around the world. The waters of baptism do not belong to the Presbyterian church or to any particular church. They belong to God alone, and as we pass through these waters we are incorporated into the one body of Christ. It is our new life in Christ that we Presbyterians are called to celebrate, deepen, and share with the world. Let us join together, brothers and sisters, to proclaim the gospel of God's saving love in Jesus Christ.

Beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life (Jude 20–21).

The Office of Theology and Worship
Joseph D. Small, Coordinator
Theodore A. Gill, Jr.
Eunice McGarrahan
Martha Moore-Keish
Sheldon Sorge
Charles A. Wiley

Note

1. Unless otherwise noted, all citations are from *The Book of Confessions*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

NOSTRA AETATE:

DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

(1965)

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ—Abraham's sons according to faith¹—are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.² Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.³

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's mainstay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,⁴ nor did the Jews in large number accept the Gospel; indeed, not a few opposed its spreading.⁵ Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues—such is the witness of the Apostle.⁶ In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and “serve him shoulder to shoulder” (Soph. 3:9).⁷

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;⁸ still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the Spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church’s preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

Notes

1. Cf. Gal. 3:7.
2. Cf. Rom. 11:17–24.
3. Cf. Eph. 2:14–16.
4. Cf. Lk. 19:44.
5. Cf. Rom. 11:28.
6. Cf. Rom. 11:28–29; cf. Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium (Light of Nations)*.
7. Cf. Isa. 66:23; Ps. 65:4; Rom. 11:11–32.
8. Cf. John 19:6.

DABRU EMET:
A JEWISH STATEMENT ON
CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY
(2000)

In recent years, there has been a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish and Christian relations. Throughout the nearly two millennia of Jewish exile, Christians have tended to characterize Judaism as a failed religion or, at best, a religion that prepared the way for, and is completed in, Christianity. In the decades since the Holocaust, however, Christianity has changed dramatically. An increasing number of official church bodies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have made public statements of their remorse about Christian mistreatment of Jews and Judaism. These statements have declared, furthermore, that Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people and celebrate the contribution of Judaism to world civilization and to Christian faith itself.

We believe these changes merit a thoughtful Jewish response. Speaking only for ourselves—an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars—we believe it is time for Jews to learn about the efforts of Christians to honor Judaism. We believe it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity. As a first step, we offer eight brief statements about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another.

Jews and Christians worship the same God. Before the rise of Christianity, Jews were the only worshippers of the God of Israel. But Christians also worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; creator of heaven and earth. While Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews, as Jewish theologians we rejoice that, through Christianity, hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel.

Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book—the Bible (what Jews call “Tanakh” and Christians call the “Old Testament”). Turning to it for religious orientation, spiritual enrichment, and communal education, we each take away similar lessons: God created and sustains the universe; God established a covenant with the people Israel; God’s revealed word guides Israel to a life of righteousness; and God will ultimately redeem Israel and the whole world. Yet, Jews and Christians interpret the Bible differently on many points. Such differences must always be respected.

Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel. The most important event for Jews since the Holocaust has been the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land. As members of a biblically based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised—and given—to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God. Many Christians support the State of Israel for reasons far more profound than mere politics. As Jews, we applaud this support. We also recognize that Jewish tradition mandates justice for all non-Jews who reside in a Jewish state.

Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah. Central to the moral principles of Torah is the inalienable sanctity and dignity of every human being. All of us were created in the image of God. This shared moral emphasis can be the basis of an improved relationship between our two communities. It can also be the basis of a powerful witness to all humanity for improving the lives of our fellow human beings and for standing against the immoralities and idolatries that harm and degrade us. Such witness is especially needed after the unprecedented horrors of the past century.

Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon. Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi extermination of Jews has been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly

to Christians. We recognize with gratitude those Christians who risked or sacrificed their lives to save Jews during the Nazi regime. With that in mind, we encourage the continuation of recent efforts in Christian theology to repudiate unequivocally contempt of Judaism and the Jewish people. We applaud those Christians who reject this teaching of contempt, and we do not blame them for sins committed by their ancestors.

The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture. Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition. That difference will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other; nor by exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians' faithfulness to their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.

A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice. An improved relationship will not accelerate the cultural and religious assimilation that Jews rightly fear. It will not change traditional Jewish forms of worship, nor increase intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, nor persuade more Jews to convert to Christianity, nor create a false blending of Judaism and Christianity. We respect Christianity as a faith that originated within Judaism and that still has significant contacts with it. We do not see it as an extension of Judaism. Only if we cherish our own tradition can we pursue this relationship with integrity.

Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace. Jews and Christians, each in their own way, recognize the unredeemed state of the world as reflected in the persistence of persecution, poverty, and human degradation and misery. Although justice and peace are finally God's, our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our

world. In this enterprise, we are guided by the vision of the prophets of Israel:

It shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established at the top of the mountains and be exalted above the hills, and the nations shall flow unto it . . . and many peoples shall go and say, "Come ye let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in his paths" (Isaiah 2:2–3).

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, University of Chicago

David Novak, University of Toronto

Peter Ochs, University of Virginia

Michael Signer, University of Notre Dame

A SACRED OBLIGATION: RETHINKING CHRISTIAN FAITH IN RELATION TO JUDAISM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

(2002)

Since its inception in 1969, the Christian Scholars Group has been seeking to develop more adequate Christian theologies of the church's relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people. Pursuing this work for over three decades under varied sponsorship, members of our association of Protestant and Roman Catholic biblical scholars, historians, and theologians have published many volumes on Christian-Jewish relations.

Our work has historical context. For most of the past two thousand years, Christians have erroneously portrayed Jews as unfaithful, holding them collectively responsible for the death of Jesus and therefore accursed by God. In agreement with many official Christian declarations, we reject this accusation as historically false and theologically invalid. It suggests that God can be unfaithful to the eternal covenant with the Jewish people.

- *We acknowledge with shame the suffering this distorted portrayal has brought upon the Jewish people.*
- *We repent of this teaching of contempt.*
- *Our repentance requires us to build a new teaching of respect.*

This task is important at any time, but the deadly crisis in the Middle East and the frightening resurgence of anti-Semitism worldwide give it particular urgency.

We believe that revising Christian teaching about Judaism and the Jewish people is a central and indispensable obligation of theology in our time. It is essential that Christianity both understand and

represent Judaism accurately, not only as a matter of justice for the Jewish people, but also for the integrity of Christian faith, which we cannot proclaim without reference to Judaism.

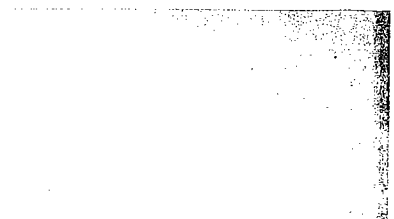
Moreover, since there is a unique bond between Christianity and Judaism, revitalizing our appreciation of Jewish religious life will deepen our Christian faith. We base these convictions on ongoing scholarly research and the official statements of many Christian denominations over the past fifty years.

We are grateful for the willingness of many Jews to engage in dialogue and study with us. We welcomed it when, on September 10, 2000, Jewish scholars sponsored by the Institute of Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore issued a historic declaration, *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*. This document, affirmed by notable rabbis and Jewish scholars, called on Jews to re-examine their understanding of Christianity.

Encouraged by the work of both Jewish and Christian colleagues, we offer the following ten statements for consideration by our fellow Christians. We urge all Christians to reflect on their faith in light of these statements. For us, this is “a sacred obligation.”

God’s covenant with the Jewish people endures forever: For centuries Christians claimed that their covenant with God replaced or superseded the Jewish covenant. We renounce this claim. We believe that God does not revoke divine promises. We affirm that God is in covenant with both Jews and Christians. Tragically, the entrenched theology of supersessionism continues to influence Christian faith, worship, and practice, even though it has been repudiated by many Christian denominations and many Christians no longer accept it. Our recognition of the abiding validity of Judaism has implications for all aspects of Christian life.

Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as a faithful Jew: Christians worship the God of Israel in and through Jesus Christ. Supersessionism, however, prompted Christians over the centuries to speak of Jesus as an opponent of Judaism. This is historically incorrect. Jewish worship, ethics, and practice shaped Jesus’ life and teachings. The scriptures of his people inspired and nurtured him. Christian



preaching and teaching today must describe Jesus' earthly life as engaged in the ongoing Jewish quest to live out God's covenant in everyday life.

Ancient rivalries must not define Christian-Jewish relations today: Although today we know Christianity and Judaism as separate religions, what became the church was a movement within the Jewish community for many decades after the ministry and resurrection of Jesus. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by Roman armies in the year 70 of the first century caused a crisis among the Jewish people. Various groups, including Christianity and early rabbinic Judaism, competed for leadership in the Jewish community by claiming that they were the true heirs of biblical Israel. The gospels reflect this rivalry in which the disputants exchanged various accusations. Christian charges of hypocrisy and legalism misrepresent Judaism and constitute an unworthy foundation for Christian self-understanding.

Judaism is a living faith, enriched by many centuries of development: Many Christians mistakenly equate Judaism with biblical Israel. However, Judaism, like Christianity, developed new modes of belief and practice in the centuries after the destruction of the Temple. The rabbinic tradition gave new emphasis and understanding to existing practices, such as communal prayer, study of Torah, and deeds of loving-kindness. Thus Jews could live out the covenant in a world without the Temple. Over time they developed an extensive body of interpretive literature that continues to enrich Jewish life, faith, and understanding. Christians cannot fully understand Judaism apart from its post-biblical development, which can also enrich and enhance Christian faith.

The Bible both connects and separates Jews and Christians: Some Jews and Christians today, in the process of studying the Bible together, are discovering new ways of reading that provide a deeper appreciation of both traditions. While the two communities draw from the same biblical texts of ancient Israel, they have developed different traditions of interpretation. Christians view these texts through the lens of the New Testament, while Jews understand these scriptures through the traditions of rabbinic commentary.

Referring to the first part of the Christian Bible as the “Old Testament” can wrongly suggest that these texts are obsolete. Alternative expressions—“Hebrew Bible,” “First Testament,” or “Shared Testament”—although also problematic, may better express the church’s renewed appreciation of the ongoing power of these scriptures for both Jews and Christians.

Affirming God’s enduring covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian understanding of salvation: Christians meet God’s saving power in the person of Jesus Christ and believe that this power is available to all people in him. Christians have therefore taught for centuries that salvation is available only through Jesus Christ. With their recent realization that God’s covenant with the Jewish people is eternal, Christians can now recognize in the Jewish tradition the redemptive power of God at work. If Jews, who do not share our faith in Christ, are in a saving covenant with God, then Christians need new ways of understanding the universal significance of Christ.

Christians should not target Jews for conversion: In view of our conviction that Jews are in eternal covenant with God, we renounce missionary efforts directed at converting Jews. At the same time, we welcome opportunities for Jews and Christians to bear witness to their respective experiences of God’s saving ways. Neither can properly claim to possess knowledge of God entirely or exclusively.

Christian worship that teaches contempt for Judaism dishonors God: The New Testament contains passages that have frequently generated negative attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. The use of these texts in the context of worship increases the likelihood of hostility toward Jews. Christian anti-Jewish theology has also shaped worship in ways that denigrate Judaism and foster contempt for Jews. We urge church leaders to examine scripture readings, prayers, the structure of the lectionaries, preaching, and hymns to remove distorted images of Judaism. A reformed Christian liturgical life would express a new relationship with Jews and thus honor God.

We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people: The land of Israel has always been of central significance to the Jewish people. However, Christian theology charged that the Jews had condemned themselves to homelessness by rejecting God's Messiah. Such supersessionism precluded any possibility for Christian understanding of Jewish attachment to the land of Israel. Christian theologians can no longer avoid this crucial issue, especially in light of the complex and persistent conflict over the land. Recognizing that both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own, we call for efforts that contribute to a just peace among all the peoples of the region.

Christians should work with Jews for the healing of the world: For almost a century, Jews and Christians in the United States have worked together on important social issues, such as the rights of workers and civil rights. As violence and terrorism intensify in our time, we must strengthen our common efforts in the work of justice and peace to which both the prophets of Israel and Jesus summon us. These common efforts by Jews and Christians offer a vision of human solidarity and provide models of collaboration with people of other faith traditions.

THE WILLOWBANK DECLARATION ON THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

(1989)

Preamble

Every Christian must acknowledge an immense debt of gratitude to the Jewish people. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus is the Christ, the long-promised Jewish Messiah, who by his life, death, and resurrection saves from sin and all its consequences. Those who worship Jesus as their Divine Lord and Saviour have thus received God's most precious gift through the Jewish people. Therefore they have compelling reason to show love to that people in every possible way.

Concerned about humanity everywhere, we are resolved to uphold the right of Jewish people to a just and peaceful existence everywhere, both in the land of Israel and in their communities throughout the world. We repudiate past persecutions of Jews by those identified as Christians, and we pledge ourselves to resist every form of anti-Semitism. As the supreme way of demonstrating love, we seek to encourage the Jewish people, along with other peoples, to receive God's gift of life through Jesus the Messiah, and accordingly the growing number of Jewish Christians brings us great joy.

In making this Declaration we stand in a long and revered Christian tradition, which in 1980 was highlighted by a landmark statement, "Christian Witness to the Jewish People," issued by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Now, at this Willowbank Consultation on the Gospel and the Jewish People, sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship and supported by the Lausanne Committee, we reaffirm our commitment to the Jewish people and our desire to share the Gospel with them.

This Declaration is made in response to growing doubts and widespread confusion about the need for, and the propriety of, endeavors to share faith in Jesus Christ with Jewish people. Several factors unite to produce the uncertain state of mind that the Declaration seeks to resolve.

The Holocaust, perpetrated as it was by leaders and citizens of a supposedly Christian nation, has led to a sense in some quarters that Christian credibility among Jews has been totally destroyed. Accordingly, some have shrunk back from addressing the Jewish people with the Gospel.

Some who see the creation of the state of Israel as a direct fulfillment of biblical prophecy have concluded that the Christian task at this time is to “comfort Israel” by supporting this new political entity, rather than to challenge Jews by direct evangelism.

Some church leaders have retreated from embracing the task of evangelizing Jews as a responsibility of Christian mission. Rather, a new theology is being embraced which holds that God’s covenant with Israel through Abraham establishes all Jews in God’s favor for all times, and so makes faith in Jesus Christ for salvation needless so far as they are concerned.

On this basis, it is argued that dialogue with Jews in order to understand each other better, and cooperation in the quest for socio-economic shalom, is all that Christian mission requires in relation to the Jewish people. Continued attempts to do what the church has done from the first, in seeking to win Jews to Jesus as the Messiah, are widely opposed and decried, by Christians as well as Jewish leaders.

Attempts to bring Jews to faith in Jesus are frequently denounced as proselytizing. This term is often used to imply dishonest and coercive modes of inducement, appeal to unworthy motives, and disregard of the question of truth even though it is truth that is being disseminated.

In recent years, “Messianic” Jewish believers in Jesus, who as Christians celebrate and maximize their Jewish identity, have emerged as active evangelists to the Jewish community. Jewish leaders often accuse them of deception on the grounds that one cannot be both a Jew

and a Christian. While these criticisms may reflect Judaism's current effort to define itself as a distinct religion in opposition to Christianity, they have led to much bewilderment and some misunderstanding and mistrust.

The Declaration responds to this complex situation and seeks to set directions for the future according to the Scriptures.

I. The Demand of the Gospel

Article I.1

WE AFFIRM THAT the redeeming love of God has been fully and finally revealed in Jesus Christ.

WE DENY THAT those without faith in Christ know the full reality of God's love and of the gift that he gives.

Article I.2

WE AFFIRM THAT the God-given types, prophecies and visions of salvation and shalom in the Hebrew Scriptures find their present and future fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who by incarnation became a Jew and was shown to be the Son of God and Messiah by his resurrection.

WE DENY THAT it is right to look for a Messiah who has not yet appeared in world history.

Article I.3

WE AFFIRM THAT Jesus Christ is the second person of the one God, who became a man, lived a perfect life, shed his blood on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for human sins, rose bodily from the dead, now reigns as Lord, and will return visibly to this earth, all to fulfill the purpose of bringing sinners to share eternally in his fellowship and glory.

WE DENY THAT those who think of Jesus Christ in lesser terms than these have faith in him in any adequate sense.

Article 1.4

WE AFFIRM THAT all human beings are sinful by nature and practice, and stand condemned, helpless and hopeless, before God, until the grace of Christ touches their lives and brings them to God's pardon and peace.

WE DENY THAT any Jew or Gentile finds true peace with God through performing works of law.

Article 1.5

WE AFFIRM THAT God's forgiveness of the penitent rests on the sacrifice rendered to his justice by the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

WE DENY THAT any person can enjoy God's favor apart from the mediation of Jesus Christ, the sin-bearer.

Article 1.6

WE AFFIRM THAT those who turn to Jesus Christ find him to be a sufficient Savior and Deliverer from all the evil of sin; from its guilt, shame, power, and perversity; from blind defiance of God, debasement of moral character, and the dehumanizing and destructive self-assertion that sin breeds.

WE DENY THAT the salvation found in Christ may be supplemented in any way.

Article I.7

WE AFFIRM THAT faith in Jesus Christ is humanity's only way to come to know the Creator as Father, according to Christ's own Word: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

WE DENY THAT any non-Christian faith, as such, will mediate eternal life with God.

II. The Church of Jews and Gentiles

Article II.8

WE AFFIRM THAT through the mediation of Jesus Christ, God has made a new covenant with Jewish and Gentile believers, pardoning their sins, writing his law on their hearts by his Spirit, so that they obey him, giving the Holy Spirit to indwell them, and bringing each one to know him by faith in a relationship of trustful gratitude for salvation.

WE DENY THAT the blessings of the New Covenant belong to any except believers in Jesus Christ.

Article II.9

WE AFFIRM THAT the profession of continuing Jewish identity, for which Hebrew Christians have in the past suffered at the hands of both their fellow Jews and Gentile church leaders, was consistent with the Christian Scriptures and with the nature of the church as one body in Jesus Christ in which Jews and non-Jews are united.

WE DENY THAT it is necessary for Jewish Christians to repudiate their Jewish heritage.

Article II.10

WE AFFIRM THAT Gentile believers, who at present constitute the great bulk of the Christian church, are included in the historically continuous community of believing people on earth which Paul pictures as God's olive tree (Romans 11:13–24).

WE DENY THAT Christian faith is necessarily non-Jewish, and that Gentiles who believe in Christ may ignore their solidarity with believing Jews, or formulate their new identity in Christ without reference to Jewishness, or decline to receive the Hebrew Scriptures as part of their own instruction from God, or refuse to see themselves as having their roots in Jewish history.

Article II.11

WE AFFIRM THAT Jewish people who come to faith in Messiah have liberty before God to observe or not observe traditional Jewish customs and ceremonies that are consistent with the Christian Scriptures and do not hinder fellowship with the rest of the Body of Christ.

WE DENY THAT any inconsistency or deception is involved by Jewish Christians representing themselves as “Messianic” or “completed” or “fulfilled” Jews.

III. God's Plan for the Jewish People

Article III.12

WE AFFIRM THAT Jewish people have an ongoing part in God's plan.

WE DENY THAT indifference to the future of the Jewish people on the part of Christians can ever be justified.

Article III.13

WE AFFIRM THAT prior to the coming of Christ it was Israel's unique privilege to enjoy a corporate covenantal relationship with God, following upon the national redemption from slavery, and involving God's gift of the law and a theocratic culture; God's promise of blessing to faithful obedience; and God's provision of atonement for transgression.

WE AFFIRM THAT within this covenant relationship, God's pardon and acceptance of the penitent which was linked to the offering of prescribed sacrifices rested upon the foreordained sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

WE DENY THAT covenantal privilege alone can ever bring salvation to impenitent unbelievers.

Article III.14

WE AFFIRM THAT much of Judaism, in its varied forms, throughout contemporary Israel and today's Diaspora, is a development out of, rather than an authentic embodiment of, the faith, love, and hope that the Hebrew Scriptures teach.

WE DENY THAT modern Judaism with its explicit negation of the divine person, work, and Messiahship of Jesus Christ contains within itself true knowledge of God's salvation.

Article III.15

WE AFFIRM THAT the biblical hope for Jewish people centers on their being restored through faith in Christ to their proper place as branches of God's olive tree from which they are at present broken off.

WE DENY THAT the historical status of the Jews as God's people brings salvation to any Jew who does not accept the claims of Jesus Christ.

Article III.16

WE AFFIRM THAT the Bible promises that large numbers of Jews will turn to Christ through God's sovereign grace.

WE DENY THAT this prospect renders needless the active proclamation of the gospel to Jewish people in this and every age.

Article III.17

WE AFFIRM THAT anti-Semitism on the part of professed Christians has always been wicked and shameful and that the church has in the past been much to blame for tolerating and encouraging it and for condoning anti-Jewish actions on the part of individuals and governments.

WE DENY THAT these past failures, for which offending Gentile believers must ask forgiveness from both God and the Jewish community, rob Christians of the right or lessen their responsibility to share the Gospel with Jews today and for the future.

Article III.18

WE AFFIRM THAT it was the sins of the whole human race that sent Christ to the cross.

WE DENY THAT it is right to single out the Jewish people for putting Jesus to death.

IV. Evangelism and the Jewish People

Article IV.19

WE AFFIRM THAT sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with lost humanity is a matter of prime obligation for Christian people, both because the Messiah commands the making of disciples and because love of neighbor requires effort to meet our neighbor's deepest need.

WE DENY THAT any other form of witness and service to others can excuse Christians from laboring to bring them to faith in Christ.

Article IV.20

WE AFFIRM THAT the church's obligation to share saving knowledge of Christ with the whole human race includes the evangelizing of Jewish people as a priority: "To the Jew first" (Romans 1:16).

WE DENY THAT dialogue with Jewish people that aims at nothing more than mutual understanding constitutes fulfillment of this obligation.

Article IV.21

WE AFFIRM THAT the concern to point Jewish people to faith in Jesus Christ which the Christian church has historically felt and shows was right.

WE DENY THAT there is any truth to the widespread notion that evangelizing Jews is needless because they are already in covenant with God through Abraham and Moses and so are already saved despite their rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Article IV.22

WE AFFIRM THAT all endeavors to persuade others to become Christians should express love to them by respecting their dignity and integrity at every point, including parents' responsibility in the case of their children.

WE DENY THAT coercive or deceptive proselytizing, which violates dignity and integrity on both sides, can ever be justified.

Article IV.23

WE AFFIRM THAT it is unchristian, unloving, and discriminatory, to propose a moratorium on the evangelizing of any part of the human race, and that failure to preach the gospel to the Jewish people would be a form of anti-Semitism, depriving this particular community of its right to hear the gospel.

WE DENY THAT we have sufficient warrant to assume or anticipate the salvation of anyone, who is not a believer in Jesus Christ.

Article IV.24

WE AFFIRM THAT the existence of separate churchly organizations for evangelizing Jews, as for evangelizing any other particular human group, can be justified pragmatically, as an appropriate means of fulfilling the church's mandate to take the Gospel to the whole human race.

WE DENY THAT the depth of human spiritual need varies from group to group so that Jewish people may be thought to need Christ either more or less than others.

V. Jewish-Christian Relations

Article V.25

WE AFFIRM THAT dialogue with other faiths that seeks to transcend stereotypes of them based on ignorance, and to find common ground and to share common concerns, is an expression of Christian love that should be encouraged.

WE DENY THAT dialogue that explains the Christian faith without seeking to persuade the dialogue partners of its truth and claims is a sufficient expression of Christian love.

Article V.26

WE AFFIRM THAT for Christians and non-Christian Jews to make common cause in social witness and action, contending together for freedom of speech and religion, the value of the individual, and the moral standards of God's law is right and good.

WE DENY THAT such limited cooperation involves any compromise of the distinctive views of either community or imposes any restraint upon Christians in seeking to share the Gospel with the Jews with whom they cooperate.

Article V.27

WE AFFIRM THAT the Jewish quest for a homeland with secure borders and a just peace has our support.

WE DENY THAT any biblical link between the Jewish people and the land of Israel justifies actions that contradict biblical ethics and constitute oppression of people-groups or individuals.