

**A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
CHRISTIANS AND JEWS**

**A PAPER COMMENDED TO THE CHURCH
FOR STUDY AND REFLECTION**

**BY THE 199TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1987)
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

In 1983 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), meeting in Atlanta, asked the Council on Theology and Culture to appoint a task team to prepare a document to help the church reflect on the relationship of Christians to Jews.

The team appointed included Dr. Johan Christian Becker, the Rev. Robert L. Brashear, Dr. Arthur Cochrane, Dr. Donald Dawe, Dr. Elizabeth Edwards, Dr. Victor Makari, Dr. W. Eugene March, Chair, Dr. David W. A. Taylor, Dr. George B. Telford, Jr., and Dr. Sterling B. Williams. Staff assistance was provided by Dr. C. Benton Kline, Jr. and Dr. John Markarian. Dr. David Blumenthal and Dr. Michael Wyschrograd assisted the task force as consultants.

The work of the task force was submitted to the council on Theology and Culture which reviewed the document, made changes, and submitted it to the 1987 General Assembly meeting in Biloxi, Mississippi. The General Assembly, after additional revisions, recommended the document to the church as a provisional statement for study and comment.

The document is intended to engage the church in reflection and conversation about our relationships with Jews. A study guide to the document is also included as well as a questionnaire asking for your comments and response.

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
Office of the General Assembly

James E. Andrews, *Stated Clerk*

341 Ponce de Leon Ave. NE
Atlanta, GA 30365
404-873-1531

475 Riverside Drive
Room 1201
New York, NY 10115
212-870-2005



Atlanta Office

Eugene D. Witherspoon, Jr., Assistant Stated Clerk

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Juanita H. Granody, Assistant Stated Clerk

January, 1988

Dear Friends:

The enclosed paper on Christian/Jewish relations was approved by the 199th General Assembly (1987) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in an action which attracted widespread public attention. The intense general concern indicates the importance of "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews," which now goes to individuals, congregations, and middle governing bodies of this denomination, along with the study guide. It is also being shared with partner churches because of our conviction that General Assembly actions are important for them as well as for us.

This is a document intended for study. The commissioners at the General Assembly understood that the area of Christian/Jewish relations will require serious reflection for an extended period of time as we all seek to understand the issues contained in the document.

One of the largest assembly committees revised the original draft presented to the General Assembly, proposed amendments, and led the whole assembly in a consideration of the matter. It is now time for those who receive the paper for study to prepare their comments to the Assembly, which will be channeled to the Global Mission Ministry Unit. The study guide is intended to help readers think about the text and its implications, and develop a response.

The study paper comes to you in the faith that God will use our efforts not only to further the improvement of personal relationships between Christians and Jews, but also to increase our own church's understanding of its Christology, its Biblical insights, and relationships between Christians and Jews with each other and with other religious and social groups in the United States and around the world. The paper comes to you with a deep sense of gratitude to those who have contributed to this significant project -- the task force which prepared it, the assembly committee which debated it intensely, the consultants and international ecumenical delegates at the Assembly who were active participants in the debate, and the commissioners who reached the final decision.

Sincerely,

James E. Andrews
James E. Andrews

A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

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 Christians 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 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 in-

terpret 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

Affirmation

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 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.

Affirmation

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 Gentiles in God's saving work, not the exclusion 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.

Affirmation

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 a 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 church 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.

Affirmation

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 is 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 repeat-

ed 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.

Affirmation

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.

Affirmation

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 a 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 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 a 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 be 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.

Affirmation

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.

Actions of the 199th General Assembly (1987)

The Council on Theology and Culture makes the following recommendations to the 199th General Assembly (1987):

1a. That the General Assembly adopt for study and reflection the paper, "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews," and distribute it to the church as a provisional understanding of the subject, along with a brief study guide including a bibliography and response questionnaire, the latter of which is to be returned to the appropriate ministry unit;

1b. That instruction be given to the appropriate ministry unit to appoint a work group composed of some members of the task force, some staff with responsibilities for work in the Middle East, and others to be chosen and to invite Christians living in the Middle East to participate with the work group; that a conference be held with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and partner churches of the PC(USA) in the Middle East in the spring of 1988 to discuss and negotiate an acceptable understanding between the PC(USA) and the MECC and partner churches concerning its content, status, and function in our ongoing work together; this committee is to report to the appropriate ministry unit at the conclusion of the conference.

1c. That instruction be given the appropriate ministry unit to report on the results of its study and reflection process and bring any appropriate recommendations to the 201st General Assembly (1989).

2. That the Stated Clerk be directed to print the report and to distribute it to each minister, Christian educator, and session within the church, to ecumenical partner churches in mission, to churches with which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in correspondence, and to the major Jewish organizations in the United States and partner churches of the PC(USA) in the Middle East.

3. That the General Assembly request pastors and Christian educators to initiate educational programs designed to foster understanding and better relationships between Christians and Jews;

4. That the General Assembly urge the expansion of instruction in Judaic studies in the theological seminaries of the church;

5. That we communicate our sensitivity to the issue of including a Holocaust Remembrance Day in the liturgical calendar of the PC(USA) and to refer this matter to the appropriate ministry unit.

6. That the General Assembly instruct the General Assembly Council to give increased encouragement to those working for reconciliation of all parties in the Middle East through exploring the feasibility

of joining with others, in as broadly an ecumenical way as possible, in developing those instrumentalities, acceptable to all participants, which enable and facilitate constructive dialogue and common efforts to improve relationships between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, especially but not only in the Middle East and the U.S.A.

7. That the General Assembly Council be directed to monitor the implementation of these actions of the General Assembly and to report thereon periodically to the General Assembly.

**STUDY GUIDE
FOR
A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JEWS**

**A PAPER COMMENDED TO THE CHURCH
FOR STUDY AND REFLECTION**

**BY THE 199th GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1987)
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

**By Dr. Frank T. Hainer
Church Education Services
Program Agency
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

INTRODUCTION

General. This paper offers vantage points from which to view the relationship between Christians and Jews. The point of view is, primarily, theological. The issues addressed touch feelings that run deep in our church and culture. The scope is personal, political, religious and social. What began as a pastoral concern has been enlarged to include global and ethical considerations. At heart the paper asks the question, How can our theology help us deal with difficult questions that are, at once, extremely personal and broadly social? In studying this paper be aware of what it is and is not; take pains to note what it is saying and not saying.

Synopsis. The paper argues that the answer to the question, How should Christians relate to Jews?, will be quite different if viewed from the perspective of engraftment rather than supersession. Engraftment: the Pauline idea found in *Rom. 11* that the church has been included in the covenant promise as a branch is grafted on to a living tree: "you have been grafted among the rest to share with them the rich sap provided by the olive tree itself" (*Rom. 11:17*). Supersession: the idea that the Christian church has superseded Israel as the covenant people, thereby replacing them as the chosen people and object of God's promises. The traditional viewpoint, inferred from certain biblical passages, has been supersession; the paper suggests that this be reappraised and that we try to answer the question from the point of view of engraftment.

Theology. This paper is not a definitive statement enjoined on the church for its acceptance. Rather, the paper is an invitation to shared theological reflection. The goal is dialogue with scripture and theological insight for the purpose of forming our own minds and the mind of the church on this issue. A person's theology may be compared to a mobile in that if you touch one piece of it, all the other pieces move as well. So it is with any theological discussion: to answer one question raises three more. Doing theology may thus be unsettling for people. Just when we think we have the mobile of our theology set, someone or something moves one of the pieces putting the whole thing in motion again. Dealing with this paper, for instance, includes issues like: How shall we read and interpret scripture? How does the "gospel," taken as a whole, influence the way we read any single scripture? What is the nature of our covenant-initiating, covenant-keeping God? What is the nature of the covenant? With whom was it made? Why is it that neither Jews nor Christians should view their status as covenant people in an exclusive way? How can we maintain the uniqueness of Christ in an increasingly pluralistic world and among those who may worship the same God we do but not honor Jesus as the Christ? How can we understand evangelism in our particularly reformed way? How do we

speak of the meaning of "land" without spiritualizing it out of concrete life? How do we witness to the grace of God and recognize that all of us, in one way or another, have rejected Jesus? And how do we celebrate our redemption and maintain our special identity without adopting a presumptuous triumphalism?

Feeling. The preceding indicates the wide range of theological issues discussion of this paper may generate about which some people may feel very strongly. If this seems like too much to deal with, bear in mind that theology is slow; discussion of this paper is only one moment in the lifelong process of spiritual formation and re-formation that is the Christian journey. Encourage people to enter into this discussion with grace and humility, trying not to get angry at things or people they disagree with but patiently looking for the things that bind us together. Doing this witnesses to the sovereignty of God, whose Being is beyond the comprehension of any one of us. In loving dialogue we may discern the Spirit.

Settings. This paper may be used in a variety of ways: With the Session, perhaps as part of a regular Session meeting, taking one affirmation at a time, or on a Session retreat; with adult study groups of various kinds; as part of church officer development classes; as the program for an intergenerational event, along with a church supper, perhaps; as program for an all-church retreat; with older youth and young adult groups; for an Advent or Lenten study.

Format. The study guide is divided into four sessions. Even at that, you may find more material than you can cover in that period. You could easily spend eight sessions, one introductory and one each on the seven affirmations. The guide reflects this option and the sessions are divided into two parts. If you have less time, you might do the introductory section in session 1, read through the entire paper, then choose which affirmations to focus on, using the appropriate material in the guide. Minimally, you should consider focusing on affirmations 2 and 6, the supersession and land issues.

The guide offers a simple pattern: 1) read the affirmation and explanation; 2) determine what is at stake; 3) share any personal stories that place yourself in the issue; 4) explore possibilities; 5) envision next steps and ways to make use of new understandings.

Study of the paper is intended as preparation for later interfaith dialogue. There may be, however, certain sessions where Jewish participation might be beneficial (session three, for instance).

Resources. The amount of material available on these issues is huge. The following is merely representative.

Books

- Brueggemann, Walter, *The Land* (John Knox Press, 1982).
Buber, Martin, *Two Types of Faith* (Routledge & Paul, 1951)
Croner, Helga, ed., *Issues in the Jewish Christian Dialogue* (Paulist Press, 1979).
Davies, W. D., *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements In Pauline Theology* (S.P.C.K., 1948; Fortress, 1980).
Dawe, Donald ed., *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World*, (1978).
Gager, John, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford University Press, 1983).
Flusser, David G., *Jesus* (Herder & Herder, 1969)
Klausner, Joseph, *From Jesus to Paul* (Macmillan, 1943, Menorah, 1978).
Klein, Charlotte, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Fortress, 1978).
Koenig, John, *Jews and Christians in Dialogue: New Testament Foundations* (1979).
Linburg, James, *Judaism: An Introduction for Christians* (Augsburg).
Littel, Franklin H., *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (Harper, 1975).
Parkes, James W., *Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism* (World Publications Company, Atheneum, 1969).
Pawlikowski, John T., *What Are They Saying About Christian-Jewish Relations?* (Paulist Press, 1980).
Rudin, A. James, *Israel for Christians*, (Fortress Press, 1983).
Ruether, Rosemary, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Seabury, 1974).
Sandmel, Samuel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford, 1978).
Schoeps, Hans Joachim, *The Jewish-Christian Argument: A History of Theologies in Conflict* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).
Stendahl, Krister, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, (Fortress, 1976).
Talmage, Frank E., *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* (KTAV, 1975).
Thoma, Clemens, *A Christian Theology of Judaism*, (Paulist, 1980).
Von Rad, Gerhard, "The Promised Land and Yahweh's Land in the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, (McGraw-Hill, 1966).
Williamson, Clark M., *Has God Rejected His People?* (Abingdon, 1983).

Other Resources

A Middle East Study Action Packet (Available from the Office of Interpretation, Presbyterian Church (USA), 341 Ponce de Leon Avenue, N.E., Atlanta, Ga. 30365).

Interfaith Circles, Marty, Martin and Mittleman, Alan, resources for dialogue, "Getting Acquainted," "Celebrations of Faith," and "God in Everyday Life." Available from: Interfaith Resources Inc., 1328 Oakwood Drive, Anoka, MN 55303. \$39.99 each.

Middle East Issues, Five-part video resource, (Available from Synod of Lakes and Prairies, 8012 Cedar Ave. South, Bloomington, Minn. 55420).

National Conference of Christians and Jews booklets: *Homework for Christians: Preparing for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, by Eugene J. Fisher; *Homework for Jews: Preparing for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, by Arthur Gilbert. 35¢each.

Session 1

AIM: To introduce the study and set the tone.

To consider the introduction and first affirmation. (NOTE: With each of these sessions you may have to select some activities and omit others depending on your time constraints.)

Part One: Introduction

A. Naming the task.

1. You might want to begin with a prayer for illumination and the reading of a Psalm. *Ps. 15* would be appropriate.
2. If you have not done so, distribute copies of the paper. You may want to note the following preliminary points:
 - This study arose originally from a pastoral concern to help people think biblically and theologically about their personal relations with Jewish people. Thinking about that issue, however, quickly spills over into other, broader global and ethical issues.
 - The paper is not a definitive public policy statement but a working paper designed to help individuals and the church at large think through these issues.
 - The goal is to understand ourselves better and our own relationship with God rather than speculate about others.
 - Discussing theology and other deeply held views can sometimes be unsettling and emotionally charged. Let humility, kindness, and a desire to find the things that bind us together rather than separate us characterize our discussion.
 - Try to keep very distinct "Israel," the biblical covenant people of God, and the "State of Israel," the modern political entity. (See page 4 of the document.)

B. Exploring possibilities.

1. To help people put themselves into the picture, let them respond to the following:

How does this issue touch you personally? What have been your relations with Jews? What draws you to this discussion?

As people reply, listen for the different kinds of concerns that arise. You might keep track of these real concerns and relate ensuing discussions to them.
2. Have the people read the introduction to the paper. Ask: What is most striking to you? The pastoral and theological implications of the issue? The silence of our Reformed confessions? The call for a new internal dialogue within the church to reinterpret

scripture and tradition in the light of the new circumstances of our day? The global ramifications of theological and religious discussions today? The affirmation of both the right of statehood for the Palestinians and the right of the State of Israel to exist? Non-religious definitions of who is a Jew? (To name only a few of the issues that might be brought up.)

3. Invite people to give a first response to the seven affirmations listed on page 4. Which of these seems most striking? Most challenging? Different from what you previously thought? The point here is not to get into substantive discussion (that will come later) but to ease yourselves into the topic. Let the group know that the paper is not asking people necessarily to adopt these affirmations but only to consider them as fruitful vantage points from which the question of Jewish-Christian relations may be viewed. What is called for here is not acceptance but only a willingness to consider.

C. Promises and Visions.

1. As a kind of "How-we-see-it-now" exercise, let people respond to the following: How shall we Christians relate to Jewish people? What is the basis for our relationship? What are the common grounds of our believing? Encourage people to talk about both personal and group relations and interactions.
2. Discuss: What are the global considerations and why do we have to be concerned with them?

Part Two: Affirmation 1

A. Naming the task.

1. Let the group read Affirmation 1 and the explication.
2. Discuss what is at stake here.
3. Share any personal stories around the issue.

(NOTE: this form is suggested after each affirmation to allow the group an open response and individuals to relate themselves to the discussion in a personal way. You may not need to do this with each affirmation. Or the group may like the technique, do it easily, and move right into discussion. At any rate, use this step according to the needs and dynamics of your group.)

B. Exploring possibilities

1. Bailey Smith, President of the Southern Baptist Convention, has made the now well-publicized statement to the effect that "God does not hear the prayers of Jews." What do you think of that statement? What does that say to Christians about how they

should relate to Jews? What does that say to Jewish people? Do Christians worship a different God than the Jews? If not, what implications does that have for the way Christians should relate to Jews?

2. Name some of the religious things Christians and Jews have in common (e.g., beliefs, holy places, history, ancestors, literature, cultic forms, ethical principles, eschatological hopes).
3. In 1904, the papal secretary of state, Cardinal Merry del Val, said to Zionist leader Theodor Herzl, "We shall never forget that without Judaism, we would be nothing." Take a moment and consider just why this is true. (NOTE: the history of Zionism is long and complex. A dictionary definition of the term is, "a theory, plan, or movement for setting up a Jewish national or religious community in Palestine.")

C. Promises and visions.

1. Think about the concrete life of Jesus. Name some of the things that marked him as a Jew who was devout. What happens to our point of view if we forget that and emphasize only Jesus' divinity, timelessness, and transcendent nature?
2. Look quickly at *Rom. 3:1-4; 27-31*. From these verses, what would you conclude about Paul's attitude toward the question of whether Christians and Jews worship the same God? As you have time, explore these verses. How does Paul view the question of God's commitment to the Jews? What does he propose about how Christians should view their own adoption as covenant people? What implications does this have for your attitude toward the issue at hand? Consider what Paul says about boasting. How does that apply to Christians? How does it apply to Jews? How can the church preach the gospel but refrain from boasting?

Session 2

AIM: To Consider Affirmations 2 and 3. Affirmation 2 is central to the paper. As you proceed, note how affirmations 3-7 follow naturally from 2.

Part One: Affirmation 2

A. Naming the task.

1. You might want to begin with a suitable prayer and a brief scripture reading. *Luke 14: 7-11* would be appropriate.
2. Let the group read Affirmation 2 and the explication.
3. Discuss what is at stake here.
4. Share any personal stories around the issue.

B. Exploring possibilities.

1. In 1904 Pope Pius X said to Theodor Herzl (Zionist leader), "The Hebrews have not recognized our Lord, therefore we cannot recognize the Hebrew people . . ." and, "If you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we shall keep churches and priests ready to baptize all of them." How does this sum up the way many Christians have traditionally felt about Jews? What do you think about this view? What practical consequences has such a view had in Christian-Jewish relations?
2. Why do you suppose it was (and continues to be) important for some to believe that God abandoned the Jews and established an entirely new covenant with the Christians? What do we have to assume about God to accept such a view? If we assert that God abandons covenants and rejects people just because they, in one way or another, reject God, what does that say about our own relationship with God? (Cf. "If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" *Ps. 130:3*.)
3. What are the Christian grounds for redemption? (Cf. *Rom. 9:14-16; 10:14-17*. This is a large topic, of course. The contrast in these verses is between God's mercy and human effort.) If we say grace and not works or belief, how can we *categorically* claim that God has rejected anyone? Further, why would anyone make such a claim? Why do some people find it necessary to have an exclusive claim on God's favor? Is that consistent with Jesus' teaching? (NOTE: this is not necessarily an argument for universalism but only for the mystery of God's freedom in redemption.)

4. Look quickly at the following passages: *Gen. 12:1-3, 7; Rom. 3:1-4a; 10:12-13; 11:1-2a, 17-18*. How does the view of engraftment expressed here fit with the gospel claim of the grace and mercy of God? What are the implications of this view? How can we affirm both the atoning death of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world and the freedom of God to say, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." (*Ex. 33:19b* and *Rom. 9:15*)?
5. Consider the imagery of *Rom. 11:17-24*. Who are the branches "broken off" and who is the "wild olive shoot . . . grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree"? Who or what is the "olive tree"? Is that Israel or the love of God? What is the root that supports us? In what sense are both Christians and Jews not rooted in Israel at all but in God? How should Christians *and* Jews read the warning about "natural branches" not being spared? How does the kindness and severity of God apply to both Christians and Jews? How do both peoples participate in belief and unbelief?
6. Depending on your time constraints, you may want to look in depth at *Rom. 9-11*, where Paul discusses the whole matter of whether Christians have superseded Israel.

C. Promises and visions.

1. Look at *Luke 14:7-11*. How might the intention of this parable be applied to the present issue? What guidelines might Christians derive from this parable for their relations with Jews? Why does this parable suggest that those who exalt themselves may be in for a surprise? Why would Jesus say such a thing? What does this imply about the nature of God? About God's freedom and grace?
2. How can we Christians celebrate our own redemption without at the same time denying redemption to those who believe other than we do?
3. What are the implications of this affirmation (2) for your personal relations with Jews? What steps might your church take to improve relations with Jews in your community?

Part Two: Affirmation 3

A. Naming the task.

1. Let the group read Affirmation 3 and the explication.
2. Discuss what is at stake here.
3. Share any personal stories around the issue.

B. Exploring possibilities.

1. Look at *Gen. 12:1-3*. What is the significance of these verses? What do they mean to you? Why were Abraham and Sarah chosen? What was God's intent? What was the purpose of their election?
2. Compare this scripture with *Acts 13:47*. Can this passage be read as an extension of the promise in *Gen. 12:1-3* rather than a replacement? If God's purpose embraces the whole creation, what prevents us from interpreting the promises made to both Israel and Christianity as invitations to humankind in general? How shall we view these promises in the light of Paul's comment in *Rom. 11:32*, "For God has consigned all humanity to disobedience, that God may have mercy upon all"?
3. Consider the topic of election. Does God choose us or do we choose God? Does anyone "deserve" to be elected? What is "election" like? The Academy Awards? The Superbowl? Russian Roulette? Something else? What follows from this regarding Christians and Jews?
4. What is the difference between judgment and rejection? In what way does God judge all peoples? Jews? Christians? Others? Was the Holocaust a judgment on the Jews? Or a judgment on western Christian culture?
5. Consider this issue: Does God take back the election? If God elects, does God also "un-elect"? Put another way, what are we saying about God if we say that God changes the divine mind about election? One of the ways Calvin dealt with anxiety over one's personal salvation was to say that since our salvation is rooted in God's gracious will, it is out of our hands and sure. If we say that God "un-elects," doesn't that reintroduce anxiety? Our faith is that God is a covenant-maker. Are we to believe that God is also a covenant-breaker?
6. Our biblical faith is that God is faithful, humans are not. If we accept this premise, what light does it shed on how we understand God's relationship with the Jews? Why is there any contradiction in both preaching the gospel and believing that God's love for the Jews continues?

C. Promises and visions.

1. What is the common ground between Jews and Christians? Where in your experience have Jews and Christians cooperated? In what areas of community life? Religious life? National life? In what concrete ways, therefore, can Christians and Jews consider a common divine election?

- 2. Try to imagine how Jews and Christians might join in cooperative dialogue. What view of covenant and promise would make for the most fruitful dialogue? How can Christians recognize that they and all Jews are each or both under God's judgment and living by grace?**

Session 3

AIM: To consider Affirmations 4 and 5.

Part One: Affirmation 4

A. Naming the task.

1. You might want to begin with a suitable prayer and a brief scripture reading. *Gen. 17:1-8* would be appropriate.
2. Let the group read Affirmation 4 and the explication.
3. Discuss what is at stake here.
4. Share any personal stories around the issue.

B. Exploring possibilities.

1. On the basis of the affirmation and its explication, unpack and relate the following words: a) evangelism; b) proselytism; c) gospel; d) militancy; e) dialogue; f) reconciliation. What do these words mean? To the Christian? To the Jew? To others? Why would anyone think (or, better, feel) that evangelism is a hostile activity? Is it because it assumes a negative judgment on the faith of another person? What is the place of militancy in evangelism? The gospel? Why is it so problematic and, often, counterproductive? What is the goal of evangelism? Dialogue? Reconciliation? In what way are these three compatible? At cross purposes? Be sure to consider these words from the point of view of 1) the one evangelized and, 2) the one doing the evangelizing.
2. What does the continued existence of the Jewish people suggest? How can Christians account for this existence theologically? (Bear in mind the theological truth of Gamaliel's words in *Acts 5:38b-39*, ". . . for if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God") If we believe that God acts in history, what does the continuing existence of people of religions other than ours imply?
3. How do we reconcile our faith in the uniqueness of Christ with the continued existence of a people who worship the same God but do not honor Jesus as we do? What does this imply about the proposal that Christians should take a new look at the relationship that God wills between Christians and Jews?
4. How does it change things to put the question this way, i.e., by asking what relationship does God will *today* between Christians and Jews?
5. Why is it that Jews might be offended by Christian evangelism in a way that those who do not believe in God at all would not?

How can we witness to the saving work of Jesus Christ without at the same time presuming to judge in God's place?

C. Promises and visions.

1. If dialogue is an appropriate form of faithful conversation between Christians and Jews, what forms of dialogue can you imagine? Just what is true dialogue? What steps can your church take to establish such dialogue? One of the essential ingredients of interfaith dialogue is clarity about similarities and differences. Such clarity can be one of the goals of dialogue. True cooperation, respect, and appreciation is grounded in this clarity.
2. What advice would you give governing bodies (Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly) as to how meaningful dialogue might proceed? What ramifications would such dialogue have for the life and worship of the church? For its educational program? What other events, studies, etc. might be undertaken?
3. What specific actions might individuals take? How might your behavior reflect any new understandings of the matters under discussion?

Part Two: Affirmation 5

A. Naming the task.

1. Let the group read Affirmation 5 and the explication.
2. Discuss what is at stake here.
3. Share any personal stories around the issue.

B. Exploring possibilities.

1. This is a sensitive issue. Proceed with pastoral concern. People may need to confess anti-Jewish feelings, but the group need not dwell on that. The issue is compounded by our need to express compassion for all our brothers and sisters caught in conflict in the Middle East—Jews, Christians, Muslims, Palestinians, Israelis, Arabs, Persians, others.
2. You might explore some feelings by asking the class how each responds to terms like: "Christ-killers" and a "decide race" as applied to Jews. Why are these terms wrong at best and inflammatory at worst? Why is there no excuse for such language in the Christian vocabulary? Consider the anomaly of Holy Week as a time of terror for Jews.
3. In what ways do the church's present worship, preaching, and teaching lend themselves to a perpetuation of the "teaching of contempt?" Invite a guest, perhaps, who can speak first hand of this.

4. In what way did the church's teaching of contempt directly or indirectly contribute to the climate that allowed the Holocaust to occur? What other horrors occur in the world of a similar nature that the church ought to resist? Sometimes people confess that they are tired of hearing about the Holocaust. Why is that attitude dangerous? What is sometimes unhelpful in Holocaust discussions?

C. Promises and visions.

1. What can the church do to confess its complicity in the Holocaust? What, if any, are the implications for dispossessed people in the Middle East today?
2. What steps should we take in our local church worship, mission, and educational ministry to equip people for dealing with this issue in themselves and in the wider community? How can we overcome the "teaching of contempt" with regard to the Jews and other peoples, races, and religions different from our own?
3. How can the church's attitudes be reviewed? What does that mean? What would it involve? Is the church's attitude simply the collective of the attitudes of each of its members? Or is it something else, expressed, say, in confessions and church documents? In certain actions? How do we go about changing the attitude of a whole church? Where do we begin? What will you do, this week, in your own life?
4. What steps can we take to establish a new basis for trust and communication with the Jews? With our brothers and sisters in other religions? What advice would you give to the General Assembly and its staff? To your own church, Presbytery, and Synod?

Session 4

AIM: To consider Affirmations 6 and 7.

To bring this study to a close and make plans for future studies.

Part One: Affirmation 6

A. Naming the task.

1. You might want to begin with a suitable prayer and a brief scripture reading. *Lev. 25:18-24* would be appropriate.
2. Let the group read Affirmation 6 and the explication.
3. Discuss what is at stake here.
4. Share any personal stories around the issue.

B. Exploring possibilities.

1. Look quickly at the following scriptures. *Gen. 12:1-3; 7; Lev. 25:18-24*. According to Leviticus, who possesses the land? What ramifications does this have for the State of Israel? For life in the United States of America, especially vis-a-vis Native Americans? What are the obligations of anyone who possesses land?
2. In what way is the understanding of land broadened in the Bible to include more than just place or property? In what sense is "sustainable life, prosperity, peace, and security" the right of all people? What are notable examples of the denial of this right? Consider, for example, in relation to this point, Native Americans, Northern Ireland, the aspirations of Jewish and other peoples?
3. Why is land so important in any people's self-consciousness? What is the danger of spiritualizing "land," of making it mean something other than a concrete place to be? How can any people exercise faithfulness if they have no concrete place in which to do so? Does the document spiritualize land? If so, how?
4. The question of the theology of land moves us from ancient, biblical Israel to the modern State of Israel. Invite the group to share their feelings about the modern State of Israel. Consider the ideas mentioned in the paper (e.g., modern Israel viewed as the fulfillment of divine promise, as an unauthorized attempt to flee divinely imposed exile, as a totally secular state, etc.)
5. One issue here is whether the modern State of Israel is an expression of God's will. Has any state ever been the full expression of God's will? The reformed tradition teaches that no state could be, due to human sin. What does this say about the modern state of Israel? About our own nation? What does it mean to

say that we accept the State of Israel as a geopolitical entity but do not validate it theologically?

C. Promises and visions.

1. How are we to understand the biblical promise of land? Granted that theology and politics cannot be separated, how should theology inform our politics with respect to the significance of land?
2. What does the phrase, "peace with justice" mean for the Middle East? How is the seeking of justice a "sign of our faith in the reign of God"?
3. Why should we "confess our complicity in the loss of land by Palestinians"? How can we "stand in solidarity with Palestinians as they cry for justice as the dispossessed"?
4. What further study does consideration of these issues call for (e.g., the Middle East, Palestinian rights, Lebanon, etc.)?

Part Two: Affirmation 7

A. Naming the task.

1. Let the group read Affirmation 7 and the explication.
2. What is at stake here?
3. Share any personal stories around the issue.

B. Exploring possibilities.

1. Christians and Jews have this in common: both are waiting for the fulfillment of God's promised Reign on earth. A significant difference is found in the Christian belief that God's Reign has been initiated in Jesus of Nazareth. Nonetheless, Christians still wait for the full Reign of God. Thus, the attitude of hopeful expectancy suits both Jews and Christians. What implications does this have for Jewish-Christian relations? For cooperation?
2. Jews and Christians worship the same God. What implications does this have for our relations? If Christ came again, would he come as a Jew or a Christian? Something else? Who would be the more likely to recognize him? Accept him?
3. In what sense are Jews and Christians waiting for the same thing? How is the Reign of God's righteousness described by Christians any different from that described by Jews?
4. Are Jews and Christians waiting for something different from what humanity in general waits for? How does our (Jewish and Christian) common election by God affect this waiting? What does it mean to say that our election is not to privilege but to service?

C. Promises and visions.

- 1. In what ways can Christians and Jews share in: 1) Striving to realize the word of the prophets? 2) Remaining sensitive to the dimension of the Holy? 3) Encouraging the life of the mind? 4) Furthering the cause of peace and justice?**
- 2. Why are Jews understandably suspicious of Christian intentions? What can Christians do to alleviate that mistrust and build trust? What expectations might Christians have of Jews in this work of building trust? How does the global context of this issue complicate matters?**
- 3. Our goal is to honor God. God is not honored when people are persecuted. In what ways can we honor God in our relations with Jews? What can we do personally and as a church?**
- 4. Discuss ways you and your church can carry out learnings, new understandings, and insights gained from the present study. How do you feel about including a Holocaust Remembrance Day in the liturgical calendar? Consider what further study your church might undertake around these issues and what action is called for.**
- 5. Take time now to fill out the questionnaire on the next page.**
- 6. You might conclude with a suitable prayer of thanksgiving, affirmation, and hope.**