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THE WALLS ARE NOT CRUMBLING DOWN
Religion and the Constitution in 1985

Church
State

By Morris B. Abram*

The delicate balance between the separate allegiances demanded of the individual by the state on the one hand and religion on the other has troubled mankind for centuries. Jesus Christ was obliged to face the issue when he was taunted by the Pharisees and Herodians to decide "is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" Christ elegantly responded, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."¹ Jesus had addressed a complex issue with an enigmatic response that his enemies could fault neither as treason nor as faithlessness to his principles. The Gospel of St. Mark relates that Jesus's enemies were so stuck by this remark that they "marvelled at him."²

Our founding fathers performed a similar feat when they framed the First Amendment to the Constitution. Theirs too was the task of addressing the relationship among the individual, the state and the church in a manner that would preserve the right of the free exercise of religion and yet guard against those types of church-state entanglements which suggest an "establishment of religion." The language employed-- "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of

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religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"-- is also enigmatic, like Jesus's words, allowing for the flexibility in the complicated balancing of rights and obligations that is essential in resolving such serious questions. Since the 1940's, when the religion clauses of the First Amendment were applied to the states, the Supreme Court has faced the unenviable task of adjudicating disputes within the framework of the founder's carefully constructed language. In zigzagging through this minefield of competing and passionate viewpoints, the Court has generally followed a pragmatic course, while openly recognizing the difficulty of its task. The Justices have found this area so perplexing that Chief Justice Burger, the author of several landmark decisions in the church-state area, confessed in Lemon v. Kurtzman that "candor compels acknowledgement . . . that we can only dimly perceive the lines of demarcation in this extraordinarily sensitive area of constitutional law."³

Of course, the words of the founding fathers, though ambiguous, do furnish some guidance. It is clear that no American must ever be required to endure the traumas of King Charles II, the secretly Catholic King of England who wished to pronounce his last confession and obtain absolution from a Roman priest in the land where he headed the established Anglican church. Here, "free exercise" meant a religious monopoly with the practice of other religions a capital crime.

Thomas MacCaulay relates in his History of England how a transient Catholic priest was clandestinely ushered into the palace to give Extreme Unction to the dying King.⁴ It is a far cry from seventeenth century England to twentieth century Georgia, and the First Amendment was well embedded (though not applied to the states) when I attended the so-called "public school" in Fitzgerald, Georgia. But these Southern public schools were white Protestant Establishments in everything but name. The day began with prayers featuring New Testament scriptures--including the tirades against the Jews in the Gospel of John--read by teachers employed by the state. One would hope that the founding fathers would have regarded this state-enforced, sectarian prayer practice as unconstitutional, a very dangerously close nexus of church and state. To me, that is a logical reading of the establishment clause. A free exercise which imposes religious involvement is really no free exercise, and may slip into the trappings of establishment. Our constitutional framework guarantees free exercise except to those who would demand (as the seventeenth century English state) an exclusive free exercise into which others are coerced.

What does the religion clause mean to me? Insofar as it's at all clear, 1) explicitly, that there shall be no established church to which citizens must either pay tribute or obeisance; 2) implicitly, that there should be no state preference to any faith--or non-faith; 3) also implicitly,

that everyone should be free to follow within the limits of public order his own religious--or non-religious--beliefs and practices.

While the Supreme Court's decisions interpreting the religion clauses have been generally sound in result, it is probably a mistake to try to shoehorn them into any single doctrine. Neat efforts, like the tripartite test of Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971)⁵ tend to founder in an area as complicated as the church-state relationship. Moreover, doctrinal statements of universal applicability generally prove futile in church-state adjudication. Professor Phillip E. Johnson acknowledges the problems:

" . . . Supreme Court decision in the religion area cannot be justified on the basis of the abstract legal concepts discussed in the opinions, because too much freedom exists in characterizing the issues and applying the subjective tests. Moreover, the doctrinal objectives are inherently contradictory, providing at once both a special legal position for religion and a principle that the law is not supposed to favor or disfavor religious belief. Finally, we have no principled definition of religion, and hence no way to justify treating religious beliefs differently from other beliefs. Doctrinally, first amendment religion law is a mess." 6

Where we must balance the rights of diverse religious and non-religious groups, the perils of doctrinaire readings of the religion clauses abound. Some become so doctrinaire in their zeal for separation that they resemble those whose purpose and practice they abhor, elevating a set of secular principles to an establishment. Extremists imperil civic order in a very

diverse society where tolerance is the lubricant that keeps friction at bearable levels. Those who believe that they have a monopoly of righteousness ignore that in matters of religion we are a nation of "behaviors" if not necessarily believers, as the historian Martin Marty has put it. The price of rigidly doctrinaire uncompromising postures in a diverse society is often very high--witness Lebanon and India wracked by religiously inspired violence. I do not think that public policy in this area should be made through cases which litigating lawyers bring at the margins. It is the space in between the extremes that needs to be protected, not the extremes.

The complexity of competing interests and rights is put in dramatic perspective in the current debate over "equal access" for voluntary, student-initiated religious clubs in public universities and schools. The late Justice Harlan ruled in the landmark NAACP v. Alabama case that "people have a fundamental right to associate to advance their political, economic, religious or cultural beliefs or opinions." This right of association is derived from the right of free speech. However, this fundamental right of religious association can conflict with the establishment clause. In its effort to avoid the appearance of government sponsorship of religion, the state may sometimes find it necessary to curb the right of religious association and speech. By so doing, it

inevitably curtails an unqualified right to free exercise. The mandate of the establishment clause and the necessity of preserving an ordered society require that the right of free exercise be qualified. The balancing process requires that each case be judged on its own facts. Thus, the students at a public university in Kansas who were barred from using a room in the Student Activities Center for meetings of a voluntary religious club clearly have a constitutional right of equal access to the facility. Denying adult students access to a student activities center which all "non-religious" clubs are free to use burdens free exercise quite unnecessarily, because the state can hardly advance a particular religion or any religion at all by permitting a voluntary club to exercise its right of religious association.⁷ Such a policy of denial of access even suggests a hostility to religion--scarcely the intentions of the deistic founding fathers. Different questions arise when a religious club wishes to meet during the school day under teacher supervision in a high school, where attendance during school hours is compulsory. (This is the issue that the Court will address in Bender v. Williamsport during the coming term.)⁸ The line between accommodation and free exercise on the one hand and the avoidance of entanglements approaching establishment on the other is so fine that particular variables demand different case-by-case results. In an area imbued with ambiguity, absolutist approaches are most undesirable and practically impossible.

Throughout the last forty-five years, the Supreme Court has recognized that a pragmatic accommodation of religion is mandated by both the free exercise clause and the need to insure that separation of church and state does not result in discrimination against religion. Thus, in the first major case including both establishment and free exercise concerns, Everson v. Board of Education (1947), the Court made clear that some accommodation of religion might be mandated by the free exercise clause. The state "cannot under the free exercise clause hamper its citizens in the free exercise of their religions by denying them the benefits of public welfare legislation." ⁹ The majority ruled that the State of New Jersey could reimburse parents for money spent to transport their children to private schools on public buses. The line of the so-called "accommodation" case is continuous. In 1952, the Court ruled that "released-time" programs in public schools were constitutional. Justice Douglas wrote: "When the state encourages religious instruction or cooperates with religious authorities by adjusting the schedule of public events to sectarian needs it follows the best of our tradi-¹⁰tions." In Board of Education v. Allen (1968), the Court held that a state may lend books to parochial school students without violating the establishment clause mandate. ¹¹ On the same day as the landmark Lemon v. Kurtzman was decided, the Court in Tilton v. Richardson approved grants to private

(including parochial) colleges for construction of religiously
neutral facilities.¹² These decisions alternated with those
which declared religious programs in public school classrooms
unconstitutional,¹³ school prayer (even if voluntary and non-
denominational) a violation of the establishment clause,¹⁴ and
held various forms of direct aid, including some varieties of
tax deductions, salary supplements and reimbursements to
parochial schools and parochial school teachers, impermissible
under the religion clauses.¹⁵

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The Court of the 1980's continues to zigzag through this confusing territory, showing its willingness to remain flexible and occasionally to rethink or modify some of its earlier pronouncements, as well it should. After all, the Court is setting high policy in an area of extreme passion, interpreting an ambiguously worded document proclaiming two principles that are in perpetual tension. It might be said to be "accommodating" religion more benevolently than in previous years, but this hardly seems cause for alarm. As the Chief Justice commented in Lynch v. Donnelly (1984), the Court remains sensitive to the intention of the establishment clause, as it always has been.

"Rather than mechanically invalidating all governmental conduct or statutes that confer benefits or give special recognition to religion in general or to any one faith--as an absolutist approach would dictate--the Court has scrutinized challenged legislation or official conduct to determine whether, in reality, it establishes a religion or religious faith or tends to do so In each case, the inquiry calls for line drawing; no fixed per se rule can be framed."¹⁶

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On the other hand, the Chief Justice makes clear that the Constitution did not require a total separation of church and state; in fact, "it affirmatively mandates accommodation, not merely tolerance, of all religion and forbids hostility towards any."¹⁷

The recent cases favoring accommodation certainly do not betray the words of Thomas Jefferson in "Memorial and Remonstrance," which might be called the inspiration of the religion clauses. According to Jefferson:

"It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage as such only as he believes to be acceptable to Him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and degree or obligation, to the claims of Civil Society. Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe."¹⁸

(These words seem scarcely consistent with the interpretation usually assigned Jefferson's pronouncements on church-state separation.) Jefferson himself worked to support divinity schools and James Madison helped choose a Congressional chaplain. It would be wrong for the Supreme Court to ignore the past and present rule of religion in American life. It is obvious that the "unbreakable wall of separation" does not exist as a matter of practicality in 1985, nor did it ever. We hire chaplains for our armed forces, grant tax exemptions to our churches, place "In God We Trust" on our coins, and hang nothing less than the Ten Commandments in the chambers of the highest court in the land. None of these "accommodations" seems to threaten our constitutional obligation to guard

against establishing a state church or anything suggestive thereof. And neither for that matter should allowing Menorahs or nativity scenes on public lands during the holiday season or providing some kind of assistance to students attending private schools pose such a threat. As far as the public school classroom is concerned, I fully recognize that there is a difference between science and its method and religion and its faith. I do not suggest that religion be taught as science or science as religion. Thus, I would oppose creationist teaching as science but support references in the classroom to the theory of creationism as an article of faith for certain religions.

Charles Silberman, in his new study of the Jewish community in the United States, makes some salient points regarding the attitude of certain Jews toward religion and the state:

"In the absolutist position Jewish liberals take on church-state issues, they sometimes sound as extreme (and at times as intolerant) as the fundamentalists they oppose. One reason is a failure to distinguish the general question of the relation between religion and politics from the specific questions involved in the debate over abortion, school prayer and other church-state issues--a failure to recognize that Ronald Reagan was right when he said that religion and politics are inseparable and wrong when he advocated a return to school prayer."¹⁹

I cannot help wondering whether the people who are rightly offended when public figures refer to the U.S. as a "Christian nation" might not let pass or even approve of references to our "Judeo-Christian" society. This more inclusive description

still leaves out Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and non-believers, so is it the principle over which they fight or the fear of exclusion?

When strict separationists demand that the Court treat religion "specially" so as to suggest that any accommodation becomes synonymous with an establishment, the net result is that secular, non-theistic beliefs are left alone to receive all the benefits of free exercise protection without being subject to any of the restrictions of the establishment clause. The strict separationists endanger those very values the First Amendment was designed to protect by elevating non-theistic beliefs to a level of protection beyond that afforded traditional religious creeds. It seems ironic that we let the state "celebrate" cultural humanism in our schools, yet outlaw even tangential involvement in the promotion of theism. Isn't it just as harmful to promote secular beliefs exclusively as it would be to establish Catholicism, Judaism or any other single faith? Doesn't non-theism offend the theist as much as theism offends the non-theist? Are those who wish to prohibit public schools from accommodating a moment of silence (with no suggestions by the state as to how it might be used) so as to permit a child to pray silently without having to retreat into an embarrassed corner truly "neutral" in their approach? ²⁰ It's highly debatable. The logical result of excluding any mention or accommodation of a civic morality grounded in religious faith discriminates against

religion and, practically speaking, results in favoring non-religion. While it is abundantly clear from the First Amendment that the government should not prefer one religion over another, must it necessarily then prefer non-theism?

I posit these questions with the full awareness that our public schools must never be allowed to become the "church" school of any one faith. Given the diversity of the people in this country, it is essential that we maintain a public school system where none feel excluded. But I must ask, if our public schools are to be denuded of religious tradition, in deference to non-theism, is it logical that we vehemently oppose any kind of aid to accredited private and parochial schools?

The leaders of the Jewish community in the United States have not always advocated a doctrinaire separationist view of the church-state relationship, as is often presumed. In her new book Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States 1830-1914, historian Naomi Cohen points out that although the Jewish community in the nineteenth century "spouted the rhetoric of separationism, and even cited Jefferson's famous letter on the wall of separation, [they] usually meant a neutral-to-all religions rather than a divorced from religion state." Cohen notes that Louis Marshall, the national spokesman of American Jews on the eve of World War I and President of the American Jewish Committee,

found nothing offensive about the reading of the Bible in public schools, provided that it did not become sectarian (from my experience, a fatuous hope, but that does not make me an absolutist on separation). Instead of blindly following the separationist bandwagon, I think it is time for the Jewish community to reopen the church-state debate. There is certainly every reason for us to remain vigilant that religious preference does not again rear its ugly head; on the other hand, to reject minimal aid to parochial school students who are faced with ever-rising tuition fees on the theory that the wall of separation will come tumbling down uncontrollably seems an overreaction. In our lust to become the ultimate universalists we run the risk of becoming isolated and of upsetting the delicate balance of forces in our society. In a country of believers, or those who act as such, well-intentioned separationist positions that burden free exercise in less than subtle ways are bound to raise hackles. We certainly need not take unequivocal positions on each and every issue which litigating lawyers can demonstrate as involving church-state concerns.

The Court has generally invoked the free exercise right when a central religious tenet is at stake and some form of government action or coercion burdens or violates that tenet. However, if a state interest of sufficient magnitude exists, the right to free exercise must be qualified.²³ For instance, the Court disallowed an Amish

employer's claim for an exemption from paying a Social Security tax on employers/employees because the payment violated his religious beliefs. ²⁴ Nonetheless, when a free exercise claim is invalidated solely on the basis that it would contravene the establishment mandate, there is room for debate as to what exactly is prohibited by the establishment clause. Justice O'Connor has suggested that a more generous reading of the free exercise clause need not threaten the prohibition of establishment. In her concurrence in Wallace v. Jaffree she states:

"The solution to the conflict between the religion clauses lies not in 'neutrality' but rather in identifying workable limits to the Government's license to promote the free exercise of religion. The text of the Free Exercise Clause speaks of laws that prohibit the free exercise of religion. On its face, the Clause is directed at government interference with free exercise. Given that concern, one can plausibly assert that government pursues free exercise values when it lifts a government-imposed burden on the free exercise of religion. If a statute falls within this category, then the standard Establishment Clause test should be modified accordingly."²⁵

The denial of any form of tuition vouchers or tax relief for parents of students attending accredited parochial schools often victimizes the young and the poor who are thereby, practically speaking, unable to exercise their right of free exercise. If free exercise is to be meaningful, then should it not be allowed for young children and college students alike. If a G.I. can use a grant from the state to study for

the priesthood at Notre-Dame, shouldn't parents be given the option of using tax money which presently goes automatically to the public school system to choose a parochial school for their child instead?²⁶ By continuing to sanction a situation in which the religious school option is so prohibitively expensive that only the children of the rich can afford a religious education, we create a system where only the wealthy can effectively exercise their religious beliefs.

It should be remembered that the right of a parent to send his/her child to a non-public school was recognized as a fundamental right of personal liberty even before the First Amendment's religion clauses were incorporated. In Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925),²⁷ the Supreme Court invalidated an Oregon State law which made it mandatory for all children in the state to attend the public school system. Should this right be available only to the rich who can afford tuition fees? I think not, as no more should the right to abortion be denied those who cannot pay. True, the government has no obligation to "fund" each and every fundamental right so that all can exercise it--but when a fundamental right of choice is involved, and the beneficiaries are young people wishing to pursue their education in a religious environment--it is hardly unreasonable to support some sort of arrangement that relieves the prohibitive cost of exercising this right.

Of course, when the government becomes involved in funding private schools, whether directly through subsidies or indirectly through providing secular services or tuition reimbursements and tax breaks, new problems arise. Though any federally or state assisted private schools would be subject to the civil rights laws, thereby assuring that the government is not funding any private school which practices discrimination, that concern is only one of many. With increasing public control, there is a real danger that private and parochial schools will lose their uniqueness and independence. Money for free exercise can easily begin to dull the instinct for free exercise. These are factors which must necessarily be weighed in considering any government assistance program. However, these are not valid reasons to close the debate on the issue entirely. The Jewish community should be willing to consider the many possible routes by which the right to pursue a religious education might be made a truly equal and viable one. To repeat, accommodating a generous right of free exercise does not necessarily mean establishment. I say this while acknowledging the fear that small transgressions of the separatist principle may lead to larger ones. Still, the boundaries of the constitutional language and the precedents of the Court should be very reassuring.

Above all, I think that we lose something as a community by completely banishing religion from the body politic. As Charles Krauthammer has stated: "Jews have failed to see the tolerant, non-coercive and inclusive aspects of a civil religion which has infused American life with a sense of transcendency." This civil religion might use the common threads of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions (practially speaking, the vast majority of the population) as a reference, yet never as a preference or as a tool of coercion.

Generally speaking, the Supreme Court, faced with the monumental task of drawing vague boundary lines mapping the territories where church and state should remain separate and where they should be permitted to overlap, has successfully reconciled the powerful social pressures and seemingly inconsistent values with which it has had to struggle. The results that the Court has reached, while clearly difficult to harmonize with a rigidly doctrinal perspective, have accommodated religious exercise without violating establishment. The Court, particularly in recent years, has become increasingly sensitive to the perceived anti-religious implications of a rigidly separationist approach. In so doing, it has managed to fashion a First Amendment consistent with its historical underpinnings and modern social realities. It has managed to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

FOOTNOTES TO TEXT

1. Mark 12:17 (King James)
2. Id.
3. 403 U.S. 602, 612 (1971). In Lemon, the Court struck down a Rhode Island statute providing for a 15% salary supplement for teachers in non-public schools who were required as a condition of receiving the supplement to teach only courses offered in the public schools using the same materials as public school teachers. The Court also invalidated a Pennsylvania statute permitting the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to directly reimburse private and parochial schools for teachers' salaries, textbooks and instructional materials used for the teaching of mathematics, modern foreign languages, physical science and physical education.
4. I MACAULEY, HISTORY OF ENGLAND, 394-396 (Boston Ed.)
5. Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. at 612. The tripartite test requires that the statute under review must have a secular legislative purpose, a principal or primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion and must not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion. All three prongs of the test must be satisfied if a statute is to be upheld under the First Amendment.
6. Johnson, Concepts and Compromise in First Amendment Religious Doctrine, 72 California Law Review, 839 (1984).
7. See Widmar v. Vincent, 454 U.S. 263 (1981). The Court, in an 8-1 decision, struck down a regulation promulgated by the University of Missouri-Kansas prohibiting the use of the state "university buildings or grounds . . . for the purposes of religious worship or religious teaching." The Court held that the federal establishment clause would not be violated by allowing the student religious club to meet--moreover, the university's prohibition constituted a content-based restriction on the students' free speech rights which could only be justified by a compelling state interest--a standard not met by the State of Kansas in denying meeting privileges.
8. Bender v. Williamsport Area School District, No. 84-773.
9. Everson v. Board of Education, 330 U.S. 1, 16 (1947).
10. Zorach v. Clayson, 343 U.S. 306, 313-314 (1952).
11. Board of Education v. Allen, 342 U.S. 236 (1968).

12. Tilton v. Richardson, 403 U.S. 672 (1971)
13. McCollum v. Board of Education, 333 U.S. 203 (1948).
14. Engle v. Vitale, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).
15. Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602; Committee For Public Education v. Nyquist, 413 U.S. 756 (1983).
16. Lynch v. Donnelly, 104 S.Ct. 1355, 1359 (1984). In a 5-4 decision the Court upheld the constitutionality of a life size Nativity scene, owned and erected by the City of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, as part of the city's annual Christmas display. The display was placed in a part owned by a private, non-profit organization.
17. Id.
18. J. Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, Appendix to Everson v. Board of Education, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).
19. CHARLES SILBERMAN, A CERTAIN PEOPLE, Summit Books, New York, 1985. I certainly agree that a return to school prayer is wrong. It smacks of favoritism and is divisive in the classroom and outside.
20. The Court correctly refused to uphold an Alabama statute that would permit a moment of silence for "meditation or voluntary prayer" in Wallace v. Jaffree, 105 S.Ct. 2479 (1985). The legislative history of the statute and the requirement that the teacher in charge suggest that the moment of silence be used for "voluntary prayer" betrayed any state claim of neutrality in enacting the statute.
21. I acknowledge that any program of aid to private or parochial schools stirs fears that too many types of schools will arise, challenging the public school system and the concept of national unity it engenders. However, it should be noted that the splintering has already begun as the rich leave the public schools. Furthermore, some splintering might benefit our crisis-ridden education system. Society has long recognized the danger of monopoly in other areas; more vigorous competition among public and non-public schools may help both improve their standards.
22. NAOMI W. COHEN, ENCOUNTER WITH EMANCIPATION: THE GERMAN JEWS IN THE UNITED STATES 1830-1914. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

23. I think the Court reached the limit on the degree of free exercise compatible with an ordered society in Wisconsin v. Yoder, 406 U.S. 205 (1972). The Court permitted Amish parents to remove their children from public schools at age 14 because they felt that a continuation of the schooling would endanger their own salvation and that of their children. The parents' free exercise right was pitted against the state's compulsory education laws, which required that all children attend public or private schools until age 16.
24. United States v. Lee, 455 U.S. 252 (1982). This case is not the only example of the Court's limitation of the right of free exercise. Over one hundred years ago in Reynolds v. United States, 98 U.S. 145 (1875), the Court upheld a federal law making bigamy a crime and rejected a Mormon's free exercise right to practice polygamy. Justice Waite warned that by elevating doctrines of religious belief to a position of superiority over the law of the land, the state would permit every citizen to become a law unto himself. Similarly, the conscientious claim currently being asserted by some religious leaders that they have a free exercise right to grant sanctuary to refugees from Central America cannot be a defense for those who violate the nation's immigration laws.
25. Wallace v. Jaffree, 105 S.Ct. 2479, 2504 (1985).
26. I recognize the contention that the school child may be more impressionable than the college student. But is free exercise to be denied at the age when family values and religious beliefs are most effectively transmitted?
27. Pierce v. Society of Sisters, 268 U.S. 510 (1925).

Ch.-state

CHANGING CHRISTIAN PERCEPTIONS OF JEWS IN AMERICA

by

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In a remote corner of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo stands a famous inscription. It is known as the Stele of Merneptah, a vital source for both biblical scholars and ancient historians.¹ On this slab, Pharaoh Merneptah (ca. 1220 B.C.E.) records a hymn of victory. It relates how he defeated the inhabitants of Palestine and Syria in a military campaign. Merneptah's inscription is important for it contains the oldest extrabiblical reference to Israel yet discovered. Concerning Israel the pharaoh brags, "Israel lies desolate; its seed is no more."

What a paradox! The great ancient civilization of the Egyptians—not to mention the Babylonians, Canaanites and other nations of the Bible world—died more than two thousand years ago. Their dusty relics and ancient texts are preserved today in museums, mute testimony of once thriving cultures now perished. Yet, the Jewish people live. They now occupy their ancient home land, and the Hebrew language—unlike hieroglyphics—is still alive and flourishing daily.

The mystery of Jewish survival and their ongoing importance to the world community has boggled some of the greatest minds of the ages. The skeptic Voltaire once asked why the world should be made to rotate around the "insignificant pimple" of Jewry? The late historian Arnold Toynbee also had trouble coming to grips with the reality of contemporary Jewish life. He once stated that the Jew was merely a dried-up fossil, the vestige of a dead culture. It would almost seem that Voltaire, Toynbee, and others like them, have really wanted to believe Merneptah was right, that "Israel's seed is no more."

But, as the world knows, Merneptah's words were neither historically accurate nor prophetic. Indeed, one of the certainties of this modern

age is that Israel is real; Israel lives. God has been faithful. His words of promise to his elect have not failed. The Lord affirmed that he would make of Israel "a great nation" (Gen. 12:2), that his covenant would be "everlasting" (Gen. 17:7) and that Israel would be his people "for ever" (II Sam. 7:24). Indeed, God's permanent pledge of himself to Israel is as sure as his promise to uphold the fixed order of the sun, moon and stars of the universe (Jer. 31:35,36).

Though modern Christians have been forced to acknowledge the fact of Jewish survival, many do not know how to interpret or respond to this phenomenon. For centuries, large segments of the church taught that Judaism is a dead and legalistic religion. It ceased to exist nearly two thousand years ago when the new covenant replaced the old. Judaism died and lost all theological relevance when Christianity, the second state of the salvation rocket, took over. For the greater part of two millennia this belief has resulted in intense anger, pain and conflict between church and synagogue. Relations between both communities remained largely gnarled and twisted because the history of the church is about as long as the history of anti-Semitism. Only in this century has there been any serious attempt to address this horrendous past record of Christian-Jewish relations.

Today there is abundant evidence that Christian perceptions of Jews have been undergoing intense re-evaluation and change. Especially since the Catholic council, Vatican II (1963-65), great strides have been made in the field of interfaith relations. For a number of years prior to Vatican II, positive relations had been developing between the Jewish community and most mainline liberal Protestants. This rapprochement rather naturally came about due to a liberal stance on the part of both groups in economic, social justice and religious issues. In addition, Protestant documents issued by the World Council

of Churches (e.g. Holland, 1948, and New Delhi, 1961) and statements by various church groups helped pave the way. In interreligious circles, the powerful influence of such Jewish leaders as Martin Buber, Abraham Heschel and Marc Tanenbaum also did much to pioneer and abet these Protestant-Jewish relations..

It is not until after Vatican II, however, that significant progress has been made with both the Roman Catholic and fundamentalist/evangelical communities. The resulting dialogue has brought Christian-Jewish relations to a new level of awareness and maturity. Accordingly, in this essay it is our purpose to give an overview of how Christian perceptions of Jews have been changing, rather than a detailed in-depth analysis of any one particular area of change. Our concern is to highlight significant developments within various broad segments of the Christian community. However, the changing scene within the evangelical church —the religious community of the present writer— and the Catholic Church will be objects of particular focus.

I. A STORMY PAST

The word stormy best describes the general climate of synagogue-church relations until the middle of this century. The cumulative effect of centuries of bad history between both communities makes the current thaw from this icy past an achievement little short of miraculous. For centuries immense barriers remained unscaled. Memories of ugly disputations needed healing. Painful myths and stereotypes awaited exploding.

Church and synagogue came to a parting of the way toward the end of the first century. Since that time, wave after wave of hostility was directed by the church toward the Jew. The collective Jewish memory is long —and understandably so— but, unfortunately, that of the Christian community is short. In this connection, Edward Flannery has

pointed out in his recently revised work, The Anguish of the Jews, that "those pages of history Jews have committed to memory are the very ones that have been torn from Christian (and secular) history books."²

The church is just now beginning to come to grips with its past record of anti-Semitism. To this day the story of anti-Semitism and the church remains largely untold for it is often sordid and self-indicting. It contains many accounts of overt acts of hostility and hatred directed toward Jews. This story also includes those times when the Jewish community has been attacked —especially during the Holocaust years— and the only response coming from the Christian community was that of guilty silence. In this vein, wisely did Abraham Heschel warn that "Indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself; it is more universal, more contagious, more dangerous."³

One can only appreciate the present change of climate in Christian-Jewish relations by understanding the stormy history of past relations. A brief chronological survey of this tragic history is therefore in order. In this regard it must be stressed that much of the strife between Christians and Jews has centered around theological anti-Semitism promulgated by the church. Christian literature and sermons have abounded with the preachment of contempt. Regrettably, New Testament teaching has been distorted and made the basis of much of this error. The destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 was said to be chastisement for rejecting the messianic claims of Jesus. This event which slaughtered, enslaved and exiled hundreds of thousands of Jews was thought proof that God had forever cast away his once chosen people. In their stubbornness and unbelief, Jews were no longer seen to be the people of God. Rather, the church, the "new" and true Israel, had displaced the "old" Israel in the plan of God.

In the early Christian centuries an anti-Jewish polemic arose within the church. Leaders such as Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch and John Chrysostom spoke with great arrogance and derision against Jews and Judaism. Marcion, before the middle of the second century, sought to rid Christianity of every trace of Judaism: he attempted to remove the Hebrew Writings (Old Testament) from the canon of holy Scripture. Various church fathers also leveled the charge of deicide. One of the first to do so was Melito of Sardis (120-185) who wrote, "God has been murdered, the King of Israel slain by an Israelite hand."⁴ This accusation not only stressed that in murdering Jesus Jews had murdered God, but also that they corporately were to be held culpable for all time for this crime. Hence Jews were forever consigned to bear misery and pain, a logical consequence of being disinherited from the grace of God. Called a "perverse people," Jews were denounced, cursed and said to be possessed by the devil. The synagogue was described as a brothel, a place of robbers and a den for evil beasts. Christianity alone thought itself to be spiritual, whereas Judaism, because it represented a people rejected of God, was considered carnal. In the pointed words of Augustine, 16
11 "The Church admits and avows the Jewish people to be cursed, because after killing Christ they continue to till the ground of an earthly circumcision, an earthly Sabbath, an earthly Passover—."⁵

By the Middle Ages, Jews were generally viewed as the outsiders of history, a wandering people condemned to suffer among the nations. Jews were charged with being a treacherous people guilty of usury. Jews were also accused of being desecrators of the Host, murderers of Christian infants, spreaders of the Black Plague, poisoners of wells and sucklers of sows.

The First Crusade was launched in 1096. In its wake came numerous forced baptisms, mass suicides and torched synagogues. By 1215, the time

of the 4th Lateran Council (Pope Innocent III), Jews were ordered to wear distinctive clothes. Shortly after this, Jews began to be expelled from England, France, Spain, and other countries. The Spanish Inquisition and Expulsion of 1492 resulted in thousands of forced conversions, torturings and burnings at the stake. The full impact of hundreds of years of organized religious opposition against the Jew is summed up by Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide: "No less than 96 church councils and 114 popes issued edicts against the Jews, mocking, scorning, disinheriting, and dispossessing them, treating them as pariahs, and bringing Israel to the brink of destruction."⁶

In the sixteenth century, in Germany Martin Luther produced a series of vitriolic pamphlets and addresses attacking Jews. Contemptuously he labeled Jews as "thieves," "bitter worms," "thirsty bloodhounds," and "disgusting vermin;" he also called them "venomous," "stiffnecked," "ironheaded" and "stubborn as the devil."

The Jewish community emerged at the middle of the twentieth century decimated and perplexed. At the beginning of this century it had experienced a series of vicious pogroms in Russia which left thousands dead. More recently (1933-45), world Jewry endured the Holocaust. It was an unspeakable event, Hitler's so-called "final solution", in which six million Jewish lives were snuffed out. In the years immediately following the Holocaust Jews asked whether there was any place on this earth where they could peacefully live in security and freedom. Centuries of painful experience had taught them they could not depend on their "Christian" neighbors. But where else could they turn?

II. TOWARD A NEW CLIMATE

Many specialists in interfaith relations concur that in the past two decades more progress has been made in the change of attitudes

of Christians toward Jews than in the previous 1900 years. The long history of hostility between younger and elder brother had created a fear and a lack of trust between both. The social isolation experienced from alienation from one another brought mutual ignorance and negative stereotypes in its wake.

World War II, however, began to break down some of this separation. Christian GIs from all over America found themselves in the same units —and often in the same foxholes— as Jewish soldiers. This mutual cooperation and social mixing brought about through military service was continued in a different context after the war. Recipients of the same GI bill of rights, Jews and Christians found themselves face-to-face in the classrooms of American colleges and universities. Furthermore, after the War, large numbers of Jewish people in America began moving from their ethnocentric urban ghettos to the mainly Gentile suburbs. Through the new friendships afforded by these broadening social contacts, mistrust and superstition between Christians and Jews had new opportunities for change. The impact of Martin Buber's truism, "all real living is meeting," was slowly becoming a reality.

In the years immediately following World War II the conscience of the world community began to be pricked as never before. Certainly news of the vote of the United Nations which led to the birth of the State of Israel was warmly greeted by those exhausted survivors of Hitler's madness. This small piece of real estate —the historic home land of the Jews— became a welcome earthly haven. In Israel, Jews could now begin to shape freely their own destiny, no longer victims of those who sought their destruction. Israel also provided the opportunity for the development of Jewish religious and cultural identity. In no way should the State of Israel be viewed as a kind of "atonement" on the part of the world for the Holocaust. Nothing could

could do that, not to forget the fact that progress toward a Jewish State was well underway even before the U.N. vote. But in the eyes of world Jewry, the creation of the State of Israel was a concrete positive step in seeking to right an ugly historical wrong.

The picture of anti-Semitism in America during the 1950s and early 60s, though improving, was yet far from encouraging. Prejudice against Jews was still being felt in a number of key areas. Resort hotels discriminated against Jews. Homes in exclusive residential neighborhoods were frequently not available to Jews. Jews were also deprived of country and civic club memberships. Furthermore, industrial discrimination was often present. Also during this time (as to this present day) various dictionaries of the English language continued to publish for one of the definitions of "Jew", a verbal meaning, namely, "to bargain sharply with; beat down in price." In addition to the above, the literature of various church and Sunday School groups was continuing to perpetuate a number of negative stereotypes and caricatures of Jews typical of the Middle Ages. But it would not be long before significant progress would be made on these and other issues.

Over the past two decades a number of important developments have contributed to the remarkably improved present climate in interfaith relations. Among Catholics, the work of Pope John XXIII in calling together the Ecumenical Council (Vatican II) has done more to eradicate Catholic-Jewish misperceptions than any other single force. Pope John XXIII knew of the pain of Jews under the Nazis when he served as Apostolic Delegate to Turkey. There he helped Jews escape. In addition, he was impressed in 1960 by a visit from the French Jewish historian Jules Isaac who urged church teaching on Jews and Judaism be corrected.⁷ These experiences had a direct impact on the structuring of the Vatican II agenda.

In section four of the 1965 Vatican II decree, "Declaration on Relations with Non-Christians," issued by Pope Paul VI the successor of John XXIII, many important affirmations and corrections were offered. In this document, often referred to as "Nostra Aetate" or "In Our Times," the Church's Jewish ancestry and spiritual debt to Judaism is freely acknowledged. In this regard it states that though "the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected and accursed of God." Concerning the death of Jesus it states, "what happened in Christ's passion cannot be charged against all Jews, then alive without distinction, nor against the Jews of today." Furthermore, this Vatican II statement stresses that "the Church decries hatred, persecution, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and by anyone." In addition, in light of the Church's common spiritual roots with the Jewish community, the document states "the Council recommends and wishes to foster understanding and respect from Biblical and theological studies and from fraternal dialogue." Today, at the Vatican, an office for Catholic-Jewish relations is maintained to encourage the furthering of contact and understanding between both communities.

Before the end of the 60s, the Archdiocese of New York, in consultation with Jewish community leaders, issued a document titled, "Guidelines for the Advancement of Catholic-Jewish Relations." This valuable statement called for studying the New Testament in its Jewish setting, re-examining pharisaism at the time of Jesus, avoiding proselytizing as part of dialogue, repudiating anti-Semitic statements in textbooks and affirming the permanency of God's election and covenant with Israel despite the election of Christianity. In the years to follow, other diocesan offices —including Houston, Los Angeles, Cleveland and Detroit— have also issued their own guidelines for improving Catholic-Jewish relations. Furthermore, the Catholic Church maintains

in Washington, D.C. the office for U.S. Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations. Through this office and other diocesan offices much progress has been made in furthering Catholic-Jewish understanding. In the recent words of Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, Christian doctrine needs to be stated "in such a way as to acknowledge authentic theological space for Judaism."⁸ Religious and Holocaust curricula have been written with this acknowledgment in mind. A Passover Hagaddah has been published, but adapted so Catholics can celebrate the seder with their Jewish friends. In addition, many Catholic universities offer courses on Judaism and the Jewish people. The general result has been summed up most positively by one international Jewish spokesperson: "During the past two decades, 'a revolution in mutual esteem' has taken place between millions of Catholics and Jews throughout the world."⁹

Similar progress, especially since the late 60s, may also be charted between evangelicals and Jews. Accordingly, by the mid 70s Martin Marty had observed that the deepening of evangelical-Jewish relations in this country and in regard to Israel was "the most significant religious trend in the United States."¹⁰

One of the strong motivations on the part of evangelicals to enter into dialogue with Jews is a genuine interest to deepen their understanding of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Evangelicals are a people strongly wed to the biblical text. Rabbi Joshua Haberman is correct in noting that "the Bible, far more than any kind of opportunistic political alliance, is the abiding ground on which evangelical-Jewish relations will grow."¹¹ In the 40s, with the founding of such organizations as the National Association of Evangelicals (1942), Fuller Theological Seminary (1947), and the Evangelical Theological Society (1949), a "new evangelicalism" began to appear. Far less anti-intellectual and

separatistic than its fundamentalist forbears, evangelicalism emerged into the 50s and 60s with increased cultural openness and interest in pursuing ecumenical dialogue. This openness led a number of younger evangelicals to begin pursuing graduate work in the fields of Hebrew and Judaic Studies. At Jewish institutions such as Dropsie College, Brandeis University and Hebrew Union College, Jewish professors such as Cyrus Gordon, Samuel Sandmel and others served as mentors to a coterie of evangelical scholars. Many of these graduates now teach in evangelical colleges and seminaries, and one, a Dropsie College graduate, the late G. Douglas Young, founded the Institute for Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem, a school now holding formal ties with more than a hundred evangelical schools of higher learning. Evangelicals who have studied under Jewish scholars are currently one of the strongest forces in America geared to promoting positive and intelligent dialogue with the Jewish community. As "Hebrewphiles" desirous of understanding the Hebraic message and background of the Bible, these people are fully appreciative of the benefits which have accrued to them having had the opportunity to discuss the Scriptures face-to-face with those people whose ancestors produced this Book.

A second factor which has contributed to a more positive climate for dialogue is the growing impact of relational theology within evangelicalism. Today, evangelicals are seeking to balance the doctrinal and propositional side of truth with its relational and personalizing dimension. Evangelicals are learning the importance of relating to others first and foremost as people, not as mere trophies to be targeted and bagged on an evangelistic safari. Evangelicals have not always been sensitive in their outreach to others. Instead of creating a positive interest on the part of others through their life style and witness (cf. Romans 11:11), evangelical zeal, often insensitive and without knowledge, has been known to produce the opposite effect. Evangelicals

are now discovering that lasting friendships with Jewish people are built on mutual trust. They are learning they must first earn that trust as well as the right to be heard. This means many evangelicals are coming to realize that their friendship, respect, and care for Jewish people —as with all people— should be unconditional, genuine, and irrevocable, never preconditioned or governed by the acceptance of any Christian belief or dogma.

Another factor which has helped foster evangelical-Jewish dialogue is the curiosity on the part of Jews about the religious commitment of evangelicals holding high public office, and the parallel impact of the New Christian Right. Jimmy Carter began his drive to the presidency in 1975 as a "born-again" Christian. Jews immediately became curious about the religious background of this southern evangelical. The same curiosity was again peaked in the mid 80s when religious broadcaster M.G. "Pat" Robertson declared that he was pondering a move for the presidency. Many Jews have raised questions and suspicions such as "How would a self-professed 'born-again' Christian lead a pluralistic nation of more than two hundred million? "Would he be a president who is evangelical or would he prove to be an evangelical president?" "If the latter, what effect would this have on Jews and all other Americans who for centuries have prized the priceless right of religious liberty?" In addition, with the rise of the New Christian Right, Jews have been asking whether it is the goal of organizations like the Moral Majority to create a "Christian republic" by "Christianizing" government and politics. Since many affiliated with the New Christian Right claim either an evangelical or fundamentalist religious identity, interfaith dialogue has been providing a useful platform to air these and other issues.

A fourth reason prompting greater evangelical-Jewish contact is the jointly perceived need to dispel faulty images and popular stereotypes of each other. Both groups freely acknowledge that many prejudices, distortions and faulty perceptions exist. The geographical concentration of evangelicals is largely in the south and the "Bible belt" of the midwest. Jews, on the other hand, are located mostly in the northeast and large cities of the west. As a result, various half-truths and stereotypic images arise from this mutual isolation. Accordingly, cutting epithets such as "Elmer Gantrys," "rednecks" and "wild-eyed religious fanatics," or "Pharisee," "Shylock" and "people-whose-prayer God-doesn't-hear" have created unfair descriptions of each group. Today, a new climate in interfaith relations has provided a platform for personal encounter so that many of these unjust portrayals and painfully naive stereotypes of the past are beginning to give way to accurate modern-day images. Evangelicals are coming to realize that contemporary Judaism is not simply the blood-sacrifice religion of the Old Testament, but one that developed from it. Jews are coming to see evangelicals as other than simply "street preacher" types, interested solely in personal redemption, but also as people with a real passion for justice.

These are not the only factors and motives that lie behind current evangelical-Jewish encounter.¹² Additional reasons contributing to this new climate of openness are: (1) Common interest in the security and survival of the State of Israel, (2) A greater ecumenical and minority group consciousness brought about by the civil rights movement and specialized efforts aimed at easing racial tensions, (3) Mutual concern to secure human rights —especially freedom— for those Jews and Christians trapped in the Soviet Union. (4) The need for Holocaust education within both communities. (5) A deeply felt need —especially on the part of evangelicals— to seek to address and correct various historical wrongs done in the name of the Christian faith.

As the close of this century draws rapidly nearer, the realization grows greater as to how far we have moved toward a new climate of maturity in Christian-Jewish dialogue. The immense problems of the past which brought separation and acrimony between both communities are now being addressed with candor and progress. Christians and Jews are coming to see each other no longer as enemies, but as allies, jointly called to witness to God in an increasingly secular society. There are still disagreements. Yet these differences are being handled more and more as a family members' disagreement. But more importantly, beneath it all, there is a mutual respect and growing commitment to each other not present twenty years ago.

III. PRESENT WINDS OF CHANGE

The new climate of openness and personal encounter which has developed since the mid 60s has resulted in many changes in the way Christians are coming to perceive Jews and Judaism. In many areas lay people are just now becoming aware of issues that religious leaders and clergy have been grappling with for several decades. But this fact is not unusual. In movements of religious reform, the full impact of the winds of change is often not felt on the grass roots level until years after scholars and professionals have thoroughly discussed and written about these. In this third main section of this paper our purpose is to survey briefly some specific additional areas where Christians are coming to grips with change in regard to the Jewish community.

First, there is the area of anti-Semitism and Holocaust education. Earlier in this paper the history of anti-Semitism is briefly outlined and then followed by some of the positive developments from Vatican II aimed at combating this disease. It is our present concern to focus on where some of the changes are now taking place.

It may be said with considerable confidence that a much greater effort is being made today to educate Christians about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Many public schools have adopted the recent Facing History and Ourselves curriculum on the Holocaust and genocide.¹³ More than twenty-five percent of Catholic high schools now use some form of Holocaust education in their curricula. In 1985, a Vatican document was issued titled, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church." Though this document has drawn criticism from the Jewish community for failing to emphasize the moral challenge that the Holocaust poses for the Christian community, it is nonetheless representative of ongoing efforts to implement the teachings of Vatican II in a practical manner.

Holocaust education will remain a growing concern in interfaith circles in the decades ahead. David Wyman, author of the well-known volume, The Abandonment of the Jews, has demonstrated the great need among Christians for this education. Wyman has stressed that the Holocaust "is still not perceived by non-Jews as their issue — or their loss." Wyman further emphasizes the Holocaust was a "Christian tragedy" by pointing out that "It was Christians who perpetrated it — the Nazis who were the product of Western Christian civilization and those Christians in the U.S. and Britain who stood by and failed in their Christian duty to do everything to stop it and to help those who needed help."¹⁴

While revisionists of the Holocaust continue to question its historical veracity, and Neo-Nazi hate groups distribute their literature throughout the land, not every one today in the church is silent. In the summer of 1985, a group of fifteen clergy from various denominations in the Boston area spontaneously came together to form a Christian Clergy Task Force on Anti-Semitism. This interdenominational ministerial group is one of the first to be organized in the country for the purpose

of (1) meeting regularly to become informed about anti-Semitism, and (2) mobilizing during times of crisis to take appropriate action in response to any anti-Semitic incidents. The Task Force believes that Christians everywhere must ever remain vigilant and be prepared to speak out against this seemingly ubiquitous evil.

Another positive development in the war to combat anti-Semitism is the work being done cooperatively by Christians and Jews to change the Oberammergau Passion Play. As an observer of the play in Germany during its 350th Anniversary season (summer of 1984), this writer found the play powerful, yet disappointing, due to its anti-Semitic slant. Though the text of the play was revised for the 1980 production, and again for 1984, it still perpetuates the myth that Jews collectively, then and now, must bear the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion. Furthermore, Jews are portrayed as corrupt, bloodthirsty antagonists, and Jewish law is represented as cruel and vindictive. Jewish authorities are dressed in strange costumes with horned hats, but Jesus and his followers are clad in simple flowing robes. The play also fails to emphasize Jesus' positive identity with his first century Jewish roots. Along with this, a questionable selection of passages from the Gospels allows the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus to come across as the "bad guys" of the play, while those guilty of Roman oppression are virtually ignored.

Numerous articles and reviews of the Oberammergau play —and of the teaching of other current Passion plays— have appeared in recent years. Several detailed critiques recommending specific changes in the text of the Oberammergau play have also been published. The National Conference of Christians and Jews and other concerned groups have produced useful materials dealing with the Passion narratives.

Each time the village of Oberammergau produces this Passion Play

(normally once a decade), more than half a million people come to view it from around the world. Yet, it is a tragic commentary that most spectators who have been asked about the play indicate that they think it is an accurate and faithful portrayal of the story of Jesus. Considerable work obviously still needs to be done before the next scheduled Oberammergau performance in 1990. Unfortunately, however, the removal of anti-Semitism —wherever it is found— is a very slow process that requires persistence and patience. As Edward Flannery realistically reminds us in his survey of the current scene, "Antisemitism is not in its death throes. A civilization contaminated so long with a toxin so virulent could hardly be detoxified in such short order."¹⁵ If, however, Catholic reforms in the annual Passion Week liturgy already have led from praying for the "perfidious Jews," to praying for the "conversion of the Jews," to praying now that Jewish people may be faithful to their covenant, let us not give up hope that some future day will also bring changes in the Oberammergau production.

A second area where Christian perceptions of Jews are changing is theology. For centuries, a major teaching of the church was that Jews have no continuing covenant with God. With Jesus, the history of Israel came to an end. The church, with its "new" covenant, displaced God's ancient people. Judaism hence has become the Christian problem. In the words of J. Coert Rylaarsdam, "In making his inevitable definition of the Jew the Christian has assumed that because his own faith is 'true' that of the Jew can be true no longer. That is his problem."¹⁶

Many Christian theologians have attempted of late to produce a revisionist theology of Judaism. In an effort to establish the theological validity of Judaism considerable time has been spent reworking and emending various passages from the New Testament thought to be anti-Judaic in teaching. By rethinking traditional Christology many

revisionists have accepted a "two covenant" theory, a concept earlier expounded by Jewish scholar Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929). In short, this view teaches that Judaism has been with God the Father from the very beginning. Judaism does not need to be converted as its pilgrimage to God has already been completed. Non-Jews, however, need the Son in order to come to the Father. The vocation of Christians therefore is to bring the rest of humanity to God through Christianity. Though Paul Van Buren's observation may be correct that "Now, the main body of Christians believes God's covenant with the Jews is still in effect and will endure forever",¹⁷ not every Christian is comfortable with the kind of Christological revision often demanded by the ecumenical broadmindedness of certain dialogue. More conservative Christians have usually questioned the wisdom of Christological revision lest the uniqueness of Christianity be impaired. In addition, other Christians have taken issue with Rosemary Ruether's theology that claims anti-Semitism is the "left hand of Christology."

Another example of how theological thinking about Jews is changing is that which developed out of the widely-quoted remark that "God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew." This statement, by the President of the Southern Baptists, made in 1980 from the pulpit of a large evangelical church in Oklahoma, ignited a national controversy. Jews and Christians alike immediately jumped into heated debate. To many Christians such remarks came across to the American religious community as insensitive at best and as offensive and arrogant at worst. Others expressed concern that the statement would undercut respect and appreciation for Jews and Judaism, and that ultimately, if left unchecked, might pave the way for a new wave of anti-Semitism. After a meeting between the evangelical leader and Jewish leaders --including a tour of Israel-- the controversy subsided. An apology was also offered. However, in retrospect, it was the reflective response made by the Rev. Jerry Fal-

well to this matter of whose prayer God hears that brought appreciation from many American Christians. Said Falwell, following a meeting with a national Jewish leader, "God hears the cry of any sincere person who calls on him."

A greater awareness to Jewish sensitivities is also now being observed in the use of certain Christian terminology. A growing number of Christians choose to refer to the Old Testament as the "First" or "Original" Testament, or simply the "Jewish" or "Hebrew Scriptures." Also, the "law" versus "love" distinction between testaments is considered misleading and invalid, as is the common equating of "Pharisee" with "hypocrite." Furthermore, in many public school classrooms the use of Christmas carols —many of which have overtly Christocentric wording— is being rethought. Increased learning by Christians about Hanukkah, a Jewish holiday commemorating religious freedom (note Jesus celebrated this festival in John 10:22), has resulted in Hanukkah songs being introduced into classrooms with increasing frequency.

As Christians are re-examining their understanding of theological literature, Jews are making efforts to understand Christianity more accurately through a study of its original sources. In the words of New Testament scholar Rabbi Michael Greenwald, "To many Jews, a Jew who studies the New Testament is an apostate; a rabbi who does so is eccentric."¹⁸ Yet, in emphasizing the Jewishness of the New Testament, Jewish scholar Ellis Rivkin points to the fact that the New Testament is a "mutation-revelation within Judaism."¹⁹ The great Maimonides encouraged dialogue with Christians, pointing out that no harm will come since "They will not find in their Torah (the Christian Bible) anything that conflicts with our Torah."²⁰ David Flusser of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and other Jewish scholars, have likewise noted the profound Jewishness of most of the New Testament narratives. Hence,

there is a greater openness on the part of Jews today to study the New Testament. Various temples and Jewish education programs are now providing courses in the New Testament. Occasionally local Christian clergy assist in these efforts. Furthermore, the Anti-Defamation League and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia have engaged in a project to prepare jointly a booklet that will introduce Jews to the basic teachings and history of Christianity.

A third realm where Christian perspectives on Jews are being rethought is that of outreach and missionizing. On this point, the Jewish position is clear. It sees Christian missionary activity directed toward Jews as a threat to Jewish survival; if unchecked, it may lead to cultural genocide.

Since Vatican II Christians have been much more inclined to listen to Jews define themselves, thus affecting the whole Christian understanding of outreach to Jews. Roger Cardinal Etchegaray, Archbishop of Marseilles, recently stated, "As long as Christianity has not integrated Judaism in its history of salvation there are always seeds of anti-Semitism that can be reborn."²¹ Since Bible times, Christians have sent basically one message to Jews: "You have everything to learn from us; we have no reason to listen to you." Today, however, things are changing. Former president of the Synagogue Council of America, Mordecai Waxman has observed a new trend: "For the first time in 2,000 years, Christianity is prepared to listen to Jews on their own terms."²²

Christian mission specially aimed at Jews has been undergoing reassessment and change. For the Jewish community, fundamentalists and evangelicals —not liberal Protestants or Catholics— have posed particular problems in regard to missionary campaigns. This has created a certain Jewish dilemma: Do Jews accept the strong political support that evangelicals offer them in regard to Israel —despite a reluctance

to allow Jews the right of full theological self-definition? Or do Jews opt for closer ties with others within the Christian community whose support of Israel has, at best, been questionable, yet who exert little or not missionary zeal toward Jews?

In recent years evangelicals and fundamentalists have been taking a second look at missionary principles and practices. As a result, a number of leaders are now taking a clear stand against singling out Jews as some uniquely needy objects for proselytism. Evangelist Billy Graham has stated, "in my evangelical efforts I have never been called to single out Jews as Jews . . . God has always had a special relationship with the Jewish people."²³ Jerry Falwell has stated he does not believe the New Testament teaches that Christians are "to zero in on anybody" and that those who do believe this "are missing the commission of the Christian Gospel, which is to preach to everyone."²⁴ Others from the conservative Christian community now denounce "hard-line conversionary tactics" and disassociate themselves from any evangelistic methods considered to be deceptive or devious or coercive or manipulative. Currently the evangelical community is struggling with what it means for an evangelical to be genuinely "evangelical" i.e. faithful to tradition and the historic Christian call to spread the gospel to all men (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), and yet do so in an honest, open and humble way.

Evangelicals are coming to realize that Christians are not called to convert anyone. Conversion is God's work, not man's. The history of the church indicates that Christians have often sought to show their "love" for the Jewish people by trying to convert them. Unfortunately, such blood-shrouded events as the Crusades and the Inquisition bear painful testimony that tens of thousands of Jews were literally "loved" to death in the name of Christ. Jewish leader, Yechiel Eckstein, has

sought to help the evangelical community by pointing out a better way. He has stressed to evangelicals that Jewish survival is the central force guiding Jewish life today, while for evangelicals it is to proclaim the gospel to the world. Though there is a conflict between both communities' core self-definitions, Eckstein says that evangelical-Jewish relations need not be doomed to failure. This writer agrees. But, as Eckstein stresses, both communities will need to build a modus vivendi whereby in the process of "give and take" each will be able to affirm its own central commission in a way least offensive to the other.²⁵

The messianic Jewish movement poses a growing challenge for both Jews and Christians. Much of the financial backing for messianic or Jewish Christian congregations and missions comes from fundamentalist and mainline evangelical churches. Their supporters recognize them not as "fringe groups" or "cults" made up of religious fanatics but as those who represent a legitimate outgrowth of early Christianity.

The Jewish community, however, is generally unwilling to acknowledge that a Jew can believe in Jesus as Messiah and still rightfully retain his Jewish identity. A Jew cannot have it both ways. He must choose on what side of the fence he will fall —Jewish or Christian. Some Jewish leaders today urge fundamentalist and evangelical churches not to support the Jewish-Christian cause for it is little more than a fraudulent masquerade. Evangelicals often counter however by pointing out that Jewish Christianity is authentic, for it is "biblical." Also, according to Jewish law, there is nothing a Jew can ever believe or do that can take away from the fact of his Jewishness which is established by birth. A Jew may be a lapsed or an errant Jew, it is argued, but that person is still a Jew.

Presently, many evangelicals feel caught in a vise regarding messianic Jews. They feel they are being forced to choose sides: either to support the Jewish community by seeking to negate or ostracize messianic Jews—many of whom are Christian friends, or to support the Christian community which affirms the legitimacy of the messianic movement, but by doing so run the risk of alienating one's Jewish friends. Unfortunately, the complex problem of Jewish Christianity has not yet been thoroughly addressed by the interfaith movement today. Ignoring this troublesome phenomenon will not cause it to go away. Indeed, should deeply agitated Christians ever start to direct anger and hostility toward Jews who seek to discredit other Jews for believing in Jesus, it may eventually cause a backlash which destroys some of the gains already made in interfaith relations.

A fourth area where Christians are changing their perceptions of Jews is in regard to Israel. Of all Christian groups, evangelicals and fundamentalists have been the strongest supporters of Israel. This has been primarily due to their literalness of biblical interpretation and their belief in predictive prophecy concerning the return of Israel to the land. A current practical outworking of this approach to Scripture was reported in a recent major story in The Wall Street Journal.²⁶ It concerns evangelical businessmen who are using the Bible to track oil in Israel and are investing millions in this search. Until recent times, many evangelicals have seen Israel chiefly in theological terms. Their support has been given primarily for theological reasons. Israel is often said to have a "divine right" to the land. Accordingly, evangelicals have viewed the return of Jews to the land as a prelude to the Second Coming—and some would even stress the need for conversion to Christianity before that coming.

One recent positive effect of evangelical-Jewish dialogue is that evangelicals are coming to see Israel as far more than part of some apocalyptic theological scenario. Israel is no longer being viewed simplistically as the key piece to God's gigantic eschatological jigsaw puzzle. Rather, Israel is being understood by a growing number of evangelicals as a contemporary nation-state struggling for long-term survival. This means support not simply for biblical and historical reasons, but for social justice, humanitarian and ethical reasons as well. Furthermore, evangelicals are more open today to criticize specific political policies or military actions of the Israelis without fear of being labeled "anti-Zionist" or "anti-Semitic." In addition, there is growing concern for legitimate Palestinian rights. This is based on the realization that God is on the side of justice, and has love for all people. Evangelical missionary work in the Arab world, however, continues to pose a special problem for those who would choose also to lend encouragement to the Zionist cause. Nonetheless, evangelicals are more and more coming to the position that to be "pro Arab" does not have to mean "anti Israel" any more than being "pro Israel" must mean "anti Arab." In short, there is a growing evangelical concern that American Christians must urge a just and creative sharing of the land between both peoples, with a maximum of justice and minimum of injustice.

Evangelical support for Israel is not waning, but it is maturing. Evangelicals are far less apt to give "blind" emotional support or carte blanche endorsement to Israel today than formerly. Their approach to Israel is becoming increasingly considered and thoughtful. There are reasons for this change. One pertains to the 1982-85 incursions of Israel into Lebanon. This war brought not only Israel's security problem to the world's attention, but especially the plight of the Palestinian people. Another related factor concerns various questions raised about

the wisdom of Israeli foreign policy. In specific, should Israel have authorized the bombing of a PLO base in North Africa, more than a thousand miles to the west of Israel? In addition, other evangelicals are wondering how Rabbi Meir Kahane's racist policies — endorsed by thousands of Israeli Jews— can be squared with the teaching of Moses that one must be compassionate and just in dealing with one's neighbor in the land? Furthermore, many evangelicals are perplexed how the Israelis can work so closely with the U.S. (they receive more than two billion dollars in aid annually) and yet be accused of espionage? In particular, attention is called to the 1985 case of Jonathan Pollard, a Navy counterintelligence analyst, arrested and charged with spying on the United States and selling top-secret information to Israel. Despite these and other problems, because the bottom line of most evangelical support of Israel remains firmly rooted in firm biblical teaching rather than politics, evangelicals will continue to remain true friends of Israel in the years ahead.

Unlike evangelicals, the Catholic Church in general has not experienced the same positive relations with the Jewish community in regard to Israel. This has been mainly due to the hesitancy of the Catholic Church to establish formal and full diplomatic relations with the Jewish State. The Vatican has offered several reasons for its refusal to grant de jure recognition to Israel: the ambiguity over the borders of the West Bank and the status of Jerusalem, the need to protect the rights of Palestinians and concern about what Christians in Arab countries might suffer should Israel be formally recognized. Arthur Hertzberg, however, is correct in arguing that unless dialogue is constructed to include temporal concerns of Jews and Catholics, it is missing the mark and must change. This, he believes, is the reason behind the failure of Rome to recognize Israel. "Church leaders," states Hertzberg, "refuse to accept the notion that

world Jewry —like the Church itself— has temporal as well as spiritual concerns. They want to treat us as a purely spiritual entity so they can avoid dealing with the issue that matters most to us —explicit recognition of Israel."²⁷ An increasing number of Catholic leaders feel that the position of the Vatican must change in regard to Israel. Until that occurs, however, Israel will likely remain a "sticking point" in Catholic-Jewish relations.

IV. CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE: KEY TO FUTURE CHANGE

For nearly two thousand years the church has said to the Jew, "You repent!" But as regards the Jew, the church itself has never seriously come to grips with the need of its own repentance. This spirit of hubris and pride has kept the church from facing its own sin. Indeed, this tragedy has been a major impediment in the history of Christian-Jewish relations. The church must change, and Christian repentance is the key. Only when the church gets its own spiritual house in order can there be any long term optimism about the future of Christian-Jewish relations.

For decades theologians and sociologists have argued that the best way to deal with anti-Semitism is through education. But education alone is not the answer. Many of Hitler's notorious SS men held the Ph.D. degree from European universities, and were churchmen as well. Yet they acted like barbarics, lacking in sensitivity and compassion for their fellow humanity. There must be something that penetrates deeper into the human soul so that a person can be changed from the inside out. That deeper work is repentance.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once stated that repentance is the key to the health of the church. Bonehoffer is right. The church can never hope to be fully healed of its sickness concerning the Jew without first dealing with the issue of repentance.

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The Hebrew word for repentance, teshuvah, literally means "returning" or "going back." In the Bible it often connotes God's convicting work whereby a person turns aside from sin and returns to God in faith and renewal. But teshuvah may also be translated "response" or "answer." God is always talking to people, but they are not always listening. When they respond to the voice and promptings of God's spirit within, repentance begins to take place; a change is begun. This idea of repentance as change is reflected in the New Testament Greek term metanoia, meaning literally "to change the mind." This change is not humanly contrived; it is not the product of mere psychological manipulation; it is more than an emotional feeling. Repentance which is biblically based results from God convicting of sin. But this is not a once and for all event. In the words of the contemporary rabbinic scholar, Adin Steinsaltz, "Repentance is a stage on an everlasting journey."²⁸ It is a process, a prayer which is daily lived; it is a turning point which must be repeated over and over again. Rabbinic literature places special emphasis on this point: "Rabbi Eleazar said: 'Repent one day before your death.' His disciples asked him, 'Who knows when he will die?' Rabbi Eleazar answered, 'All the more then should a man repent today, for he might die tomorrow. The result of this will be that all his life will be spent in repentance'" (Midrash Tehillim 90:16).

Anti-Semitism is a spiritual problem and requires a spiritual solution, repentance. It is a spiritual problem because anti-Semitism is rooted in that pride which denies God's sovereignty in choosing the Jew. The Lord chose Israel "out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Deut. 7:6). Whenever the church has sought to negate the "apple of God's eye," a unique people chosen to be the vehicle of revelation and blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3), it has violated the authority of God. Anti-Semitism therefore is an affront to God's will for it is a spurning of the wisdom and

calling of God. It is an arrogant rejection of the notion that God's covenant with Israel is eternal. It is the casting aside of one's elder brother. It is an attempt by the "wild branches" to usurp the place of the roots and trunk of the cultivated olive tree (cf. Rom. 11:17-24). Only when God's love is allowed to change the bitterness and hostility of human hearts through repentance will anti-Semitism fully cease.

It is imperative that the church realizes that neither superiority, spiritual elitism nor exclusive possession of innate gifts is intended in Israel's election. Rather, the Jewish community has understood chosenness as a summons to action, a call to responsibility, an acceptance of the burden of Torah. When Christians affirm Jewish chosenness, they must not fall into the trap of seeking to idealize Jewish people. Christians must learn to accept the real Jew —as he is now, on his sin-prone human level. They must not look for an idealized Jew on an other-worldly, not-yet-existent spiritual level. Jews seek to be understood as people in a relationship of mutuality. They have never desired as a people to be viewed as objects "on a pedestal" or those specially loved. specially loved.

The church is called to function as a body, each member of the body bearing responsibility for the other. The church is not made up of independent individuals who have no relation to other parts of the body. Rather, there is a corporate solidarity. When one part of the body suffers, all parts suffer; the whole body is affected. All are members one of another. It is futile to try to disassociate oneself from the rest of the body. All members bear responsibility for the weaknesses and strengths of each other. In this connection, it is often claimed that the victimizers and bystanders of the Holocaust were not genuine Christians, but "Christian" in name only. But this line of reasoning is both shaky and fallacious. One can not avoid the fact that most

of these people were baptized, church-going Christians. Certainly, if fundamentalist, "Bible believing" Christians in America are capable of bombing abortion clinics, is the thought of Christian collaboration in the Holocaust any less believable? Who is to say how "evil" it is possible for any Christian to be in his actions? If the church is a world-wide fellowship, then Christian repentance must also be a catholic concern.

According to Maimonides, the process of repentance involves four steps. First there is confession, the frank acknowledgment of one's failure. In this connection, the church today has a poor sense of historical awareness. In most churches there is little knowledge of the history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. When there is historical awareness it is possible to deal with the spiritual necessity of repentance. Guilt paralyzes one from action, but the Gospel makes one free. One cannot repent for others, but one can deplore what others have done. Repentance is not just for the wicked; everyone must be concerned with the quality of his attitudes and actions so they can be raised to a higher level. Certainly, the Holocaust shows the silence, indifference and failure of man in being his brother's keeper. The Sermon on the Mount underscores the importance of coming to terms quickly with one's brother: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23,24).

Following confession, as a second step, there must be sorrow and regret over the wrong that has been done. Third, the act of repentance involves a resolve not to repeat the sin again. Godly repentance means "sorry enough to quit." The final step in the process of repentance is reconciliation and restoration. Turning from the ugliness of the past brings joy at the thought of a new beginning. With reconciliation

comes the fruits of repentance. These deeds will be directed to those who have been sinned against, thus giving evidence of the sincerity of the act. Where the church was silent when Jews were being destroyed in the past, today it is only reasonable that it be incumbent upon the church to provide support for Israel. This concrete step of social action to effect restoration is crucial. Otherwise, the concept of repentance will amount to little more than pious sounding theological rhetoric.

Abraham Heschel once stated that a prophet is a man who knows what time it is. Recent years have brought a climate of openness in which many revolutionizing changes have been taking place in inter-faith relations. In this essay we have sought to point out the significance of many of these. The key, however, for determining how rapidly and deeply future changes in the church will occur is the willingness of the church to effect a new relationship with the Jewish community through the dynamic of repentance. The hour has come. But will the church know what time it is?

ENDNOTES

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³Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Religion and Race," The Insecurity of Freedom (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 92.

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⁵Quoted in Isaac Rottenberg, "Christians and Jews in Quiet Revolution," Seventh Angel (February, 1985), p. 24.

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⁸Interreligious Newsletter, Vol. 9, No. 1, The Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, New York, NY, p. 2.

⁹"Rabbi Sees Improved Ties With Christians," U.P.I. story in the Beverly Times (Massachusetts), Nov. 24, 1984, p. A7.

¹⁰Martin Marty, Context (Jan. 1, 1978), p. 1.

¹¹Joshua O. Haberman, "The Ties That Bind," United Evangelical Action, (July-August, 1983), p. 7.

¹²For a more extensive discussion of these and other factors behind the evangelical-Jewish encounter see Marvin R. Wilson, "An Evangelical View of the Current State of Evangelical-Jewish Relations," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (June, 1982), pp. 139-160; also "Evangelicals and Jews Are Talking," Christian Herald (May, 1981), pp. 26-28, 52, 53, 58.

¹³The Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc. is committed to helping teachers and administrators bring education about twentieth century genocide, specifically the Holocaust and the genocide of the Armenian people, to students and their communities. The program uses the resource book, Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior. The Foundation provides numerous services and resources including a regular newsletter. Further information about Facing History and Ourselves may be secured by writing to 25 Kennard Rd., Brookline, MA 02146.

¹⁴Interview of David Wyman by Aviva Cantor in "The Holocaust — Also A Christian Tragedy," Jewish Advocate, March, 1985, p. 12.

¹⁵Flannery, The Anguish of the Jews, p. 283.

¹⁶J. Coert Rylaarsdam, "Judaism: The Christian Problem," Face to Face (Spring, 1984), p. 4.

¹⁷Quoted in Context (August 1 and 15, 1983), p. 2.

¹⁸Michael R. Greenwald, "When A Rabbi Studies the New Testament," Genesis 2 (April, 1985), p. 13.

¹⁹Ellis Rivkin, "A Jewish View of the New Testament," Evangelicals and Jews in An Age of Pluralism, eds. Marc H. Tanenbaum, Marvin R. Wilson and A. James Rudin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p. 101.

²⁰Quoted in Harvey Falk, Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 4.

²¹The New York Times (November 7, 1983).

²²See "Waxman Promotes Spirit of Cooperation," U.P.I. interview in the Beverly Times (Massachusetts), Sept. 7, 1985, p. A8.

²³Quoted in Leo Trepp, Judaism: Development and Life, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1982), p. 183.

²⁴Merrill Simon, Jerry Falwell and the Jews (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1984), p. 35. Also see "An Era of Understanding." The Boston Globe (April 5, 1985), p. 2.

²⁵Yechiel Eckstein, What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1984), pp. 320, 21.

²⁶This 1985 Journal story by George Getschow titled, "Evangelicals Use Bible To Track Oil in Israel," is reprinted in The Boston Jewish Times (August 29, 1985), pp. 1, 11.

²⁷Arthur Hertzberg, "Rome Must Recognize Israel," The New York Times (Dec. 4, 1985), p. A31.

²⁸Video-taped lecture by Adin Steinsaltz, August 19, 1985, in Jerusalem, Israel, sponsored by the Ecumenical Center of Christian Repentance, Vancouver, B.C., Canada.