



# Krister Stendahl, Pioneer in Christian-Jewish Dialogue, Dies at 86

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The Rev. Dr. Krister Stendahl, former Dean of Harvard Divinity School and Bishop of Stockholm and a pioneering leader in Christian-Jewish dialog, died on April 15, 2008, in Boston, Massachusetts, at age 86. Through his writings and lectures as well as his position as moderator of the World Council of Churches' Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People (1975-85), Stendahl urged Christians to understand Judaism in its own terms and to reformulate their own faith in such a way as to make room for the Jews' continuing role as a covenant people. The important document "[Ecumenical Considerations on Christian-Jewish Dialogue](#)" was issued by the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People during his tenure as its chair (1982). (Photograph: [HDS photo](#))

Born in Stockholm in 1921, Stendahl completed his doctorate at Uppsala University with a dissertation on the Dead Sea Scrolls, laying the groundwork for his subsequent editing of the symposium *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (1975). In 1954 he moved to the United States to accept a position as professor of New Testament at Harvard Divinity School, where he also served as Dean for eleven years (1968-79). A seminal essay published in the *Harvard Theological Review* in 1963, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," argued that St. Paul's ruminations on the role of "the Law" in the Christian life grew not out of an existential struggle within his own soul, but a historical reflection on the respective roles of Jews and Gentiles in the providence of God. The essay was reprinted in Stendahl's 1976 publication, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*. He returned to this and related themes in *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans* (1995). Stendahl also published *The Bible and the Role of Women* (1966), a treatise relating to his strong support for the ordination of women in the Lutheran church, and *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (1984).

Dr. Stendahl returned to his native Sweden to serve as Bishop of Stockholm from 1994 to 1998. From 1991 to 1993, he served as the first Myra and Robert Kraft and Jacob Hiatt Distinguished Professor of Christian Studies at Brandeis University, and from 1994 onward, as co-director of the Osher Center for Religious Pluralism at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. Several symposia have been published in his honor, including *Christians among Jews and Gentiles: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl on his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, edited by George W. E. Nickelsburg and George W. MacRae (1986), and *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, edited by Richard A. Horsley (2000).

For examples of his work, see three articles by Stendahl on the present website: "[From God's Perspective We Are All Minorities](#)," "[Qumran and Supersessionism ? and the Road Not Taken](#)," and "[St. Paul and the Jews](#)."

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