Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth

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Guidelines for Christian Clergy and Teachers in their use of the New Testament with reference to the New Testament's presentation of Jews and Judaism. 9 November 1994

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Introduction

The Perennial Problem

For many years it has been recognised by scholars - theologians, historians and philosophers - that there are passages in the New Testament which refer to Judaism and the Jews in terms of animosity. For almost two millennia those passages of the New Testament have caused misunderstandings of Judaism and provoked odium of Jews amongst Christian communities. More particularly those passages have been exploited throughout the ages and continue to be exploited by countless persons for political and social ends, and in some quarters for religious purposes. Hate and odium have led to and created antisemitism expressed by suspicion, mistrust, contempt, prejudice, false charges, discrimination of Jews by Christians, and by persecution, brutalities, forced conversions on pain of death, pogroms, murders and massacres of Jews as exemplified by the Crusades, the York Tower massacre, the Spanish inquisition, the Chmielnicki massacres, subsequent and countless pogroms in Eastern Europe. Those events were all overshadowed by the ultimate of all horrors in the history of mankind the Holocaust perpetrated by pagan Nazis with the full and active participation of, among others, German, Austrian, French, Polish and Hungarian Christians.

The founding of the British Council of Christians and Jews in 1942 by religious and lay leaders of both faiths marked the first step by the enlightened world to bring to an end, by mutual understanding and respect between Christians and Jews, antisemitism and its cruel and murderous consequences. Similarly, the Second Vatican Council in 1965 by promulgation of

Nostra Aetate, took an unprecedented step in the history of the church by presenting Judaism and Jews to Roman Catholics worldwide in a manner freed of some traditional antisemitic connotations. Subsequent commissions of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy expanded upon the Vatican's pronouncement. In 1983 the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches commended for the use of its member churches a series of Guidelines of proper relations between Jews and Christians. A resolution made at the Lambeth Conference of the Church of England in 1988, the Anglican Church of Canada's document, "Rethinking Christian Attitudes Towards Jews and Judaism" (1987), and publication of The Australian Catholic Bishops' "Guidelines for Catholic Jewish Relations" (1993) were all further church initiatives to overcome traditional misrepresentations and misunderstandings.

A Local Issue

Notwithstanding such positive moves, in recent times there has been a resurgence of antisemitic manifestations, behaviour and violence. In many parts of the world, these have taken the form of synagogue bombings, Jewish cemetery and sacred memorial daubings, physical attacks on Jewish men and women, and publications of revisionist history denying the Holocaust.

For many years Australia has been relatively free of those forms of hostility towards Jews and Judaism. However, almost simultaneous with events and experiences overseas, similar forms of attack have been suffered by Australian Jews, and made upon synagogues and Jewish institutions in various parts of the country. There has been distribution of publications disseminating evil falsehoods about Jews and their faith. By these means old hatreds have

been revived and advanced in Australia, bringing about increased antisemitic expressions and activities.

During the latter half of 1991 the attention of the Executive Committee of the Council of Christians and Jews (Victoria) was drawn to the form of teachings in a Melbourne Church School of a particular New Testament text which reflected disparagingly on Jews. Those teachings included the claim of Christianity having superseded Judaism, and the pernicious charge that the Jews had killed God's promised messiah, Jesus, which developed into the historical accusation of deicide against the Jews. For almost 2,000 years those teachings provided and continue to provide seeds for antisemitism. The Executive recognised those and similar teachings arising out of the New Testament as forming part of complex and vexed inter-faith problems, and as having caused misunderstanding of faith and hatred of Jews leading to antisemitism in its many and varied forms. It was further recognised by the Executive that teachers and preachers should receive adequate guidelines to enable them to present areas of the New Testament in a manner without exciting hatred. Accordingly, the Executive appointed its Special Committee with the following terms of reference -

a) To identify areas in the New Testament, the teachings of which, without appropriate explanations and cautions, are capable of provoking feelings of hostility towards Jews and thereby causing distress to the sensibilities of members of the Jewish faith;

b) To consider whether problems arising out of those areas and teachings stem from

differences between the Christian faith as expressed in the New Testament and the Jewish faith, or whether they stem from misguided interpretations of the New Testament; and

c) To draft guidelines for clergy and teachers for the purposes of avoiding the consequences referred to in (a) hereof.

The Special Committee

Members appointed to the Special Committee by the Executive were the Reverend Dr John Wright, Dr John Foster, Sister Shirley Sedawie nds, Father Peter Cross, the Reverend Robert Gribben, the Reverend Dr Dorothy Lee, Rabbi Dr J S Levi AM, Rabbi R Lubofsky, Rabbi D Schiff, Mr Mark Baker, the Reverend Professor Robert Anderson AM [Chairman] and Father Nigel Wright.

The Reverend Dr John Wright and Dr John Foster were nominees of the Archbishop of Melbourne, Father Peter Cross and Sister Shirley Sedawie were nominated by the Roman Catholic Archbishop, and the Reverend Robert Gribben and Dr Dorothy Lee were nominated by the Moderator of the Victorian Synod of the Uniting Church. Subsequently Father David Wood was appointed to the Committee in lieu of Father Nigel Wright upon the latter's resignation due to new and additional parish duties. During the course of their deliberations upon the terms of reference the Special Committee sought the assistance of Dr A J Kenny and Father Brendan Byrne SJ as consultants in relation to specific matters of theology of which they

are possessed with particular expertise; and the Executive so appointed Dr Kenny and Father Byrne. Rabbi Raymond Apple, who was appointed to the Special Committee during the absence overseas of Rabbi Lubofsky, made valued contributions to many of the researches for and conclusions of the Committee.

An initial report of the Special Committee was received by the Executive at its meeting on 2 December 1993. Due to serious illness throughout 1993, Dr Foster was not a signatory to the report.

In accordance with the Executive's resolutions, copies of the initial report were provided to each of the three church leaders who had nominated persons for appointment to the Special Committee, with an invitation to make their personal comments upon the contents or any particular part thereof. Comments were made by the church leaders.

The following is the report of the Special Committee in its final form, incorporating comments, relevant to the terms of reference, made by the church leaders. The Executive is most grateful to all members of the Special Committee for their careful researches and preparation of this report.

WILLIAM KAYE

Executive

Committee Chairman

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no

need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.2 Timothy 2:15 (NRSV)

The Problem

1. In recent decades thoughtful Christians have become increasingly sensitive to the sufferings the Jewish people have endured down the ages, culminating in the appalling events of the Holocaust. It is now widely recognised that certain New Testament texts, when not accompanied by appropriate explanations and cautions, have created attitudes towards Jews and Judaism that have led to hostility and, at times, to persecution. While it ought to be evident that any such use of Scripture stands in total opposition to the central Gospel of Christ, the danger of harmful and wounding misrepresentations of texts enjoying authoritative status in the Church remains ever present.

2. The memory of the Holocaust has inspired not only the leadership of Christian churches but insightful! scholarship to look again at aspects of Christian teaching and biblical interpretation that have the potential to perpetuate false and damaging perspectives. Resting upon such scholarship, this present document reviews those aspects of Christian origins as well as certain texts of the New Testament which require very careful handling in the area of relations with our Jewish brothers and sisters. Its purpose is to promote sensitivity both to past Jewish sufferings and to present Jewish concerns.

ArticleIdentifying the Texts

3. The texts with which we are concerned are dealt with under these topics:

    a. The trial and death of Jesus
    b. The "new" and the "old"
    c. The depiction of the Pharisees

d. The expression "the Jews" in the Fourth Gospel Jesus,
e. Judaism and the Torah

Interpreting the Texts

4. If it could be stated without any qualification that the Jesus of history and the images of Jesus portrayed in the gospels are one and the same, then the problems we face would be considerably reduced. But that such is not the case is clearly indicated by this statement contained within the authoritative Roman Catholic Church document, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" (June 1985):

> The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explicating some things in view of the situation of their Churches, and preserving the form of proclamation, but always in such fashion that they told the honest truth about Jesus. (Dogmatic Constitution of Second Vatican Council: *Dei Verbum* No 19).
>
> Hence it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favourable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish communities. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus.
>
> To establish this is of capital importance if we wish to bring out the meaning of certain Gospel texts for the Christians of today. (IV 21 A).

5. This carefully worded statement would find acceptance in the scholarly circles of the mainstream Christian communions. What is being said is this:

    a. The gospels do not provide us with mere biographies of Jesus but they do give us that understanding of Jesus that enables the Christian with full confidence to assert that this Jesus is both Lord and Redeemer.
    b. This Word of God (see section 7 below) comes to us through the words of the author and it is these words that may also express the views, the needs, and the situations in which each gospel developed and within which each emerged in its present canonical form.
    c. Given that the canonical gospels reached their extant form some thirty to seventy years after the time of Jesus it is understandable that in light of above they will reflect, at times, their religious, social and political context.
    d. Very much to the fore in this context was the religion from which the early Church emerged: Judaism. What must be added is that both the early Church and Judaism, in those areas in which they came into contact, were set within the Roman Empire.

6. All of these factors are taken into consideration in the production of these Guidelines. However, one very important issue for the Christian preacher and teacher must also receive attention. Put in the form of a question it is this: How, then, in the light of the issues just mentioned, are we to recognise within the gospel accounts (or, for that matter, within the New Testament as a whole) what is the definitive Word of God for the Christian?

7. The answer to that question must take into consideration the following:

The authoritative Word of God is Jesus Christ who stands over and above even the words of Holy Scripture. They witness to him but are also subject to him.

The gospels testify to the basic Gospel, the Good News that, in and through the Person of Jesus Christ, God's salvation has been revealed. What is essential is the living Person of Jesus. The gospels also bear witness that the central ethical teaching of Jesus may be summarised as:

> "Hear, o Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-30) and
>
> "you shall love your neighbour as yourself ..." Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31; see Matthew 22:37- 40).

To these Jesus added:

> "I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven ..." (Matthew 5:44,45a).

The interpretation of any particular detail in the gospels must always be subordinate to the central core of the Gospel.

In what concerns the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on this point, The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council states:

> "... all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgement of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God" (III 12).

8. Through knowledge of the circumstances and context in which the gospels arose and were promulgated, and by application of the interpretative principle suggested above, it may be possible to determine those elements within the written gospels which move outside the Gospel itself and which mirror not what is intrinsic but what is extrinsic. The fact that there are differences within the synoptic parallel accounts should also remind us that the circumstances in which the gospels emerged have a part to play in the process that leads to the final form of each. There are occasions when, in order to bring out a particular emphasis, one evangelist may diverge from what has been written by another. For example, compare Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. In the former it is the centurion's faith that is being commended, hence the ending in verse 13. There are other minor variations within the telling of what is demonstrably the same incident. This suggests that we may

expect that in addition to the central and primary features there may also be those that may justifiably be termed secondary, incidental or contingent.

The Trial and Death of Jesus

9. The death of Jesus is of central importance in the Christian understanding of the divine process of redemption. It is not surprising, therefore, that the accounts of the trial and death of Jesus in the four gospels provide us with an unusual degree of common material. Nevertheless individual traits are also clearly evident. Not the least of these is the disagreement on the identification of those who were responsible for bringing Jesus before Pontius Pilate. It is also of importance that both Luke and John fail to mention any role played by the Jewish Sanhedrin. Nor do the synoptics mention any involvement on the part of the Pharisees (compare John 18:3).

10. No clear reconstruction of what actually took place and who it was precisely who participated in the events is possible on the basis of the extant evidence. What we have before us in the gospels are not eyewitness accounts. The material with which we have to work has been transmitted over a fairly lengthy period during which, in an atmosphere of apologetic and polemic, the nascent Church attempted to assert its claims within an empire controlled by the Romans and in the face of opposition from a virile Judaism. What is clear is that Jesus was arraigned before the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate, on the charge of sedition against the empire and that he was put to death by the Roman method of crucifixion. The synoptic gospels show that this was carried out by Roman soldiers.

11. Yet, and this is the crux of the matter, history has absolved the Romans and laid the blame for the death of Jesus, not merely on some Jews (say, those religious leaders such as the High Priest who were inclined towards and dependent for their offices upon Rome), but upon all Jews. Nor has this charge of responsibility for the death of the Christian Messiah, expressed often in terms of deicide, been restricted even to the contemporaries of Jesus. It has pursued all Jews, wherever they have lived, down through the centuries.

12. The process of transfer of guilt from Romans to Jews is nowhere better illustrated than in an episode recorded only in Matthew's gospel (27:24-26). There we are given the picture of Pontius Pilate, renowned for his corruption and brutality, observing what is, in fact, a Jewish custom, the washing of hands to remove the taint of guilt (see Deuteronomy 21 :1-9). Moreover, he is depicted as meekly submitting to the demands of subject Jews, whom he usually treated with disdain, who take upon themselves voluntarily the responsibility for the Roman-style execution, through the Roman practice of crucifixion, of a prisoner arraigned before him on the Roman charge of sedition. The proclamation of the imminent kingdom of God, a central feature of Jesus' preaching, would have alarmed the Roman authorities no less than it did the High Priest and his associates. Jewish culpability is heightened by the gospel writer's identification of the participants as "the people as a whole". It is they who cry out in unison "his blood be on us and on our children"(Matthew 27:25). Appearing where this cry does, in the text of Holy Scripture, it has assumed the status of a divinely authenticated admission on the part of Jews that it was they who were responsible for the death of Jesus. As has been mentioned above, the gospel accounts themselves indicate that the matter is a much more complex one than that.

13. The public reading of the passion, trial and death narrative, without explanation of some of its intricacies and difficulties and its highly dramatised character, and the proclamation of it without consideration of the ongoing religious and political context, will perpetuate attitudes which, in the past, have caused great anguish and suffering within the Jewish community.

14. When the death of Jesus is considered, the primary question to be asked is not who killed

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Jesus but what? one clear response of the Church is that he died for the sins of the world in accordance with the divine will. Any further response ought not be made without reference

to matters such as those referred to above.

The "New" and the "Old"

15. Very early in the life of the Church, certainly by the early decades of the second century, there arose the notion that the Church had replaced or superseded Israel as the People of God. Such claim has persisted throughout most of the life of the Church. Seldom has it been called in question, and then mainly in recent times.

16. Those who have adopted this position have done so on the basis of the interpretation of certain New Testament texts. However, it is not the sole possibility so far as the witness of the New Testament is concerned. In Romans 9-11 Paul struggles with the issue of God's continuing relationship with that part of his own people Israel that has not come to faith in Jesus as the Christ. The conclusion of a long and complex discussion is that, whatever the human response may be, God's own faithfulness and integrity forbid the annulment of his divinely instituted covenant with Israel ("the divine filiation, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises" (Romans 9:4) and insists (Romans 11:28-29) that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (as was pointed out by John Paul 11 at Mainz in Germany 1980). Paul specifically warns Christians of non-Jewish origin against despising those who belong to the stock of their forefathers in the faith and reminds them that they themselves are the "wild olive" grafted on to the original stock, from which they draw nourishment and life (Romans 11:16-24). Finally, he speaks of a "mystery" whereby that part of the original stock that as yet does not believe in Christ will find a way to salvation: "and so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 1 1:26).

    Paul's explanation at this point is cryptic and elusive: no clear scenario outlining time or mode of this "salvation" is provided, What is central and truly significant, however, is the presupposition that the Jewish people retain their distinct identity in the sight of God and live within the continuing power of the ancient promises. There is no suggestion - in fact Paul implicitly excludes any such - that the Christian Church has simply "replaced" Israel in the scheme of salvation. Indeed, such a "replacement" would hardly be compatible with Paul's central call to the Christian community at Rome to place their faith in a God whose faithfulness, power and eternal design triumph in the face of human failure and sin. Paul's final vision is not that the covenant with Israel has been abolished but that, in the light of Christ, it is seen to be more inclusive (of the "nations" of the world) than had previously been grasped.

17. The New Testament, it is true, consistently attributes a unique saving role to the person of Jesus Christ. No dialogue between Christians and Jews can ignore or play down this evident truth. However, Christians must realise that one New Testament writer (Paul of Tarsus) who held most firmly to it also insisted upon the abiding validity of God's promise to Israel. There is undoubtedly a tension here. But it is a tension which Paul was prepared to live with and not seek to resolve in a facile way by simply eliminating the claim for Israel in favour of that made for Christ. outstanding theologian as he was (that is, concerned primarily for the honour and status of God), he saw clearly that simply to dismiss Israel would be to impugn the faithfulness and reliability of God.

18. Whether the kind of "supersessionism", that is, the idea that the Christian Church has completely replaced Israel, to be found in later Christian teaching (for example, the early Fathers of the Church), can be detected already in the New Testament is arguable. At most, it could be said that such supersessionism would be the negative implication of the constant assertion of Jesus Christ as sole mediator. However, there are New Testament

texts that could and did provide a basis for the strictly supersessionist teaching that arose at a later period: see Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19; 13:28-36; 17:24-25; 13:28-29; 21 :20-24; John 1:17; Acts 7:51-53; 2 Corinthians 3:12-15 and Hebrews 8:13. Each of these and similar texts needs to be carefully examined in its own context — both literary and historical — and, in particular, in the light of contingent factors such as (a) the animosity that arose between Judaism and the nascent Church, (b) the claim of Jewish culpability for the death of Jesus and the emotive effect of such a charge and (c), most important of all, the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple appeared to be and could be interpreted as the unequivocal sign of the divine judgement upon Israel.

The Pharisees

19. In the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1984 corrected edition) there is this entry under "Pharisee": 1 (a group) ... distinguished ... by their pretensions to superior sanctity. 2 A person oft his disposition; a formalist; a hypocrite. *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* (Penguin Edition, 1981 reprint) lists "pharisaical" as synonymous with "hypocritical" and "sanctimonious". Thus has the name of a Jewish religious group, active at the time of Jesus, entered into the English language. No religious group has been subjected to more adverse criticism nor been more the victim of artless caricature than have the Pharisees. How did this occur and why?

20. First, who were the Pharisees? Their origin goes back at least to the second century B.C.E. according to the later historian Josephus. They were a group, mainly of lay people, who were expert in their understanding and teaching of the Torah (law of Moses as a way of life) and, according to Josephus (first century C.E.), enjoyed the support of the Jewish people in general. They preserved and transmitted in oral form a tradition of interpreting Torah in such a way as to allow it to remain a way of life for new generations in changing circumstances. Indeed, it was the Pharisees who preserved and safeguarded Judaism. It was they who provided the leadership at Yavneh and successive centres of Jewish religious life that enabled Judaism to redefine itself and engage in religious reconstruction after Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in the year 7O C.E. It was the rabbis, the successors of the Pharisees, who provided opposition to the fledgling Church especially during the period in which the gospels were being developed and composed.

21. The gospels and the Acts of the Apostles speak of considerable conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. It is unlikely that all Pharisees opposed Jesus and the early Church, quite the contrary, but there is strong evidence to suggest that there were divisions. The very closeness of some of Jesus' own teachings to those of the Pharisees may account for some sharp differences of opinion. Others were due, no doubt, to fundamental disagreements. Only a close reading of the relevant texts can clarify these matters.

22. One means of close reading of the text is through the comparison of the synoptic parallel accounts. The addition of certain words in one account, or the nuanced expression in another, may provide some indication of the individual evangelist's emphasis as well as the context from which the gospels emerged. For example, note how the Pharisees are very much more to the fore in certain Matthaean accounts (compare Mark 3:22-30 and Matthew 12:22-33; Mark 12:13-17 and Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:28-34 and Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:34-37a and Matthew 21:41-46). The differences may appear to be minor but, in fact, they are quite significant. It is in the gospel of Matthew that we find the most sustained criticism of the Pharisees and it is this gospel, more than any other, that has been used by the dictionary compilers, particularly chapter 23.

23. But that is not the whole of the story so far as the New Testament's depiction of Pharisees is concerned. On three occasions, as recorded in Luke's gospel, Jesus is the guest of a

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Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-41 and 14:1-24). Also in the same gospel there is a story which tells of Pharisaic support of Jesus when certain of their number warn him of an impending threat to his life from Herod (Luke 13:31). The Acts of the Apostles informs us of the Pharisee Gamaliel's tolerant and sympathetic attitude to the early Church (Acts 5:34-39). This would indicate that we need to read the evidence carefully, bearing in mind that the paucity of information within our reach may point to a relationship that is far more complex even than that which we have suggested.

24. What is clear beyond question is that Jesus was forthrightly critical oeniny attitude that was empty and merely formal. But in this he had the full weight of the Hebrew Scriptures on his side and took up a position similar to that of his near contemporary the great Pharisaic teacher, Hillel, whose influence permeated the ranks of his students as well as those of the later rabbis.

25. Nevertheless, there are problem texts in this area. If we could disengage the first century C. E. Pharisees from the ensuing history then perhaps the difficulties would disappear. But we cannot do that. The Pharisees, as the pre-eminent religious leaders of those times and as the founders of Rabbinic or Traditional Judaism, are not only remembered by Jewish women and men today but are recalled with great affection. Some suggestions for dealing with this issue are:

    a. We cannot just arbitrarily alter the text of scripture but we may, when it is appropriate, introduce the public reading with a brief explanation [cf. (c) following].
    b. In the classroom it is possible to give longer treatment to the topic taking up such issues as the diversity within first-century Judaism and the tensions that may arise quite naturally as a result of "in-house" differences.
    c. At appropriate times, when discussing or explaining a text, provided the substance is preserved, phrases open to misinterpretation such as "the Pharisees", "the Jews", could be rendered in a way less likely to cause prejudice. Expressions such as "some religious leaders" or "the Jewish leaders" or "some citizens of Jerusalem"

The Expression "The Jews" in the Fourth Gospel

26. The gospel of John makes frequent use of the expression "the Jews", in all some seventy-one times. In the vast majority of these occurrences it is used of the opponents of Jesus and these are often clearly identified as the Pharisees. If the context in which the Fourth Gospel was written, i.e. towards the end of the first century of the Common Era, is not taken into account the gospel itself may readily be interpreted in an anti-Jewish sense. That this has happened within the Church, even from the early years of its existence, is beyond question.

27. A central influence in the composition of the Fourth Gospel was the break with the Synagogue, reflected most sharply in such texts as John 9:22,34 and 12:42. To some extent the breach is anticipated in Mark 13:9-11 (and parallels) but in John its presentation is intensified. This tense relationship between local church and local synagogue reaches its zenith in the sharp encounter recorded in John 8:31-47 and in the Fourth Gospel's passion narrative: see John 19:14-16, especially verse 16. Without question both of these Johannine passages have been used in ways that have caused great distress and suffering. How, then, are we to approach this matter in such a way as to avoid depicting Jews as blind, recalcitrant and vengeful opponents of Jesus?

28. No one explanation of the use of the epithet "the Jews" is likely to suit each and every occurrence of it, not even where it is used in a pejorative sense. However, these two points

may offer some guidance when dealing with this matter:

a. At the time when the Fourth Gospel reached its existing form, probably late in the first century C.E., it no longer made sense to distinguish one Jewish group from another. The erstwhile opponents of Jesus, whether they were Pharisees, Sadducees or Herodians, could now simply be described as "the Jews".
b. The forthright language that we encounter in the Fourth Gospel, not least the frequent occurrence of the expression "the Jews" in a polemical context, was part of the rhetoric of the times. It does not imply an abiding evaluation of the Jewish people and ought not be understood as such.

29. Within the classroom there will be opportunity for the above points to receive attention. It should not be overlooked that, so long as there is a continuing and identifiable group of people who are Jews, the problem created by the polemical use of the expression "the Jews" in the Fourth Gospel will remain.

30. While the classroom situation offers an opportunity to speak at length about the issue, this is not the case when it comes to the more public reading of biblical passages. The constant reiteration of "the Jews" ... "the Jews", in what is often a decidedly negative sense, may readily engender attitudes which run counter to a proper understanding of the Gospel. An explanation which takes up points similar to those set out above will at least draw attention to the fact that there is an issue here that has to be addressed; that it may not simply be left without comment.

31. Whatever else is said, either by way of introduction or by later explanation, it should be made clear that the expression "the Jews" cannot possibly be used to refer to all Jews living at that time (in Judaea, Galilee and the huge diaspora), let alone all Jews of all time. Sensitive handling of this matter will be required so that all Jews of whatever time are not

Jesus, Judaism and the Torah

32. In keeping with this issue the following points need to be kept in mind:

a. Jesus was a Jew and cannot be understood apart from the Judaism of his time.
b. Judaism, like any other religion, has to be understood in its own terms and not in those imposed upon it.
c. Torah is a complex term and may not simply be equated with Law. Any suggestion that it stands over and against the grace of God fails to see it in its true covenantal context.
d. There developed within Judaism, under the leadership of the Pharisees, the concept of the oral Torah by means of which the Written Torah of the Hebrew Bible, i.e. the Pentateuch, was interpreted in such a way as to meet the needs of changed times and changing circumstances (see Appendix A).

33. What should be kept in mind is that just as Christianity moved beyond its old Testament in its formulation of a New Testament, so too Judaism moved beyond its Hebrew Scriptures. Christian scholars, in the main, are now becoming more and more aware that a knowledge of the Mishnah, the Talmuds (Babylonian and Jerusalem) and the Midrash is essential for a sound appreciation of first century and later Judaism. Like Christianity, Judaism was undergoing development at that time, and the complex and developing relationship between the two movements must always be given consideration.

34. Jesus stood firmly within Judaism, not outside it. The texts which indicate this may be simply identified as lacking faith or as standing in opposition to Jesus.

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relatively few in number but the fact that they are there suggests how crucial they are in our understanding of Jesus' relationship to the religion into which he was born and in which he was nurtured.

The gospels present him as one who attended the Synagogue (Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 4:16), made the pilgrimage to the Jerusalem Temple on festal occasions (Mark 11:15; John 5:1;7:10) and celebrated Passover (Mark 14:15-16). The gospel of Matthew presents Jesus' relationship to the Torah in a very positive light. Most striking is Matthew 5:17-20, where Jesus insists that he has come not to abolish the law but to bring it to fulfilment. The "fulfilment of the law" envisaged here appears to include even the ritual requirements (cf. e.g. Matthew 23:23,26) but Matthew also makes clear that justice, mercy, faith and, above all, love are the central qualities of the law.

Elsewhere in the gospels Jesus is often presented as contesting obligations imposed in the name of the Law (e.g. Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17). But even here the issue is not the efficacy of the Torah as such but that of interpretation in certain circumstances.

It seems indisputable that Jesus adopted a radically fresh stance in matters of Sabbath observance, ritual cleanliness, table-fellowship and association with those generally regarded as sinners. His teaching and action in these areas was an essential part of his proclamation of the Kingdom. Nonetheless, it cannot be said that his aim is simply to overthrow these key features of Jewish religion. Had this been so, it is difficult to understand how matters such as Sabbath observance, circumcision and dietary laws remained contentious issues in the later Church (cf. Acts 15:1-11; Galatians 2:1-14).

35. With Jesus the emphasis is always upon the internal attitude. In this he reflects Samuel's words to Saul in I Samuel 15:22-23, that obedience is preferable to sacrifice. But this concentration upon the internal is by no means foreign to the Judaism of Jesus' time and later. The Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 was anticipated by the great pharisaic sage, Hillel, with this statement:

> "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole of the Torah. The remainder is interpretation."

Jesus' reduction of the Torah to certain basic principles such as love of God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love of neighbour (Leviticus 19:18,34) reflects a common practice of the Jewish sages, for example Rabbi Akiba in the early second century C.E. A little later Rabbi Simlai found the essence of the Torah in Amos 5:4: "Seek me and live." A contemporary, Rabbi Nahman, found it in Habakkuk 2:4: "the righteous live by their faith". The above examples of common attitudes should warn us against making facile comparisons between Judaism and Christianity whether in the classroom or in the pulpit.

36. The following particular points can be made by way of correction of some common misrepresentations of Judaism:

    a. In the "Antitheses" in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17-47) there is no abrogation of the Torah, not even in part. The position adopted by the evangelist Matthew is what the Sages called "the fencing of the Torah". The individual is

safeguarded from breaking the scriptural commandment by being faced with a more rigorous demand. It thus serves as a protection. Jesus is not attacking the Torah: he is confirming its importance, while at the same time insisting upon the centrality of love, mercy and generosity.

b. One could perhaps infer from Matthew 5:43 that hatred of one's enemy has biblical or Jewish sanction. It is true that the writings of one group within Judaism, the community of Qumran, do give some evidence of such an attitude. But it is by no means characteristic of Judaism as such nor is it to be found in Hebrew Scriptures.
c. Jesus' healing on the Sabbath (e.g. Mark 3:1-6 and parallels) is not presented by the gospels as a breach of the commandment in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15) but as a reinterpretation of the meaning of the Sabbath within the community of faith.
d. Washing of the hands (Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23) is required in the Hebrew Scriptures only of priests. The extension of the requirement to others came after the time of Jesus. Jesus is not opposing any biblical injunction in this regard.
e. The commonly stated view that the principle of "an eye for an eye ..." (Matthew 5:38) is a fundamental element of Judaism, standing in stark contrast to a Christian emphasis upon forgiveness, is incorrect. The "law of retaliation" (*lex talionis*) dates from primitive times when there was no judicial system. Its purpose was to place a limit upon the degree of retaliation. It was later replaced by a monetary penalty.

The above comments (and they are a selection only) remind us of how easy it is to accept and perpetuate in teaching and preaching interpretations and attitudes which are based not upon careful exegesis and knowledge of the period but upon unexamined assumptions.

Conclusion

37. The purpose in preparing these Guidelines has been a limited one. They do not purport to be descriptive of either Christianity or Judaism. Nor are they meant to cover the field of what is referred to as "Christian and Jewish relations". The Guidelines' main concern is with

certain New Testament texts which, in a great deal of Christian preaching and teaching down through the centuries, have been used and interpreted in a way that has been damaging to Judaism.

38. Necessarily, the Guidelines have had to be presented in a form much briefer than the importance of the issue demands. To overcome this, at least to some extent, two appendices have been attached. These may prove to be useful adjuncts to the Guidelines but the prime requisites, so far as this issue is concerned, are a willingness to learn and a sensitivity in attitude.

Appendixes

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See also the Council's Guideline Re-Reading Paul