



The Church and the Jewish people

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Section I of the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal strongly commended for careful study the place of the people of Israel in relation to God's purpose in the Old and New Covenant, and that this subject should be referred to a commission.

[1]The Faith and Order Commission at Aarhus responded to this recommendation.

[2]The study was carried out jointly by the Faith and Order and the World Council of Churches' Committee on the Church and the Jewish People. An initial report drafted by a consultation in 1964 was circulated to many groups and individuals asking for their reactions and comments. Further revisions in the light of their responses led to the following report.

I. Introduction

There is a growing awareness in many churches today that an encounter with the Jews is essential. On various occasions in the part the World Council of Churches has condemned any form of anti-semitism. It is, however, necessary to think through the theological implications and the complex questions bound up with the Church's relation to the Jewish people in a more explicit and systematic way. This was, for instance, urged in the report of Section 1 on "The Church in the Purpose of God" at the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963. We hope

that what follows here may be a contribution to such a study. We cannot pretend to offer more than that. We are aware of the shortcomings of this statement, and particularly that differences of opinion among us, which we have not yet been able to resolve, impose limits on what we can say. However, what we offer is, notwithstanding its limitations, new in the history of the World Council. We hope that this statement will stimulate a continuing discussion and will pave the way for a deeper common understanding and eventually a common declaration.

Both in biblical and contemporary language the words "Israel" and "Jews" can have various meanings. To avoid misunderstanding, in this document we have used the term "Israel" only when referring to the people in Old and New Testament times: no present-day political reference is intended or implied. When we speak about the people in post biblical times we prefer to use the terms "Jews" or "Jewish people", the latter being a collective term designating the Jews all over the world. We find it hard to define in precise terms what it is that makes a Jew a Jew, though we recognize that both ethnic elements and religious traditions play a role.

In drawing up this document we set out to answer two distinct questions which were put to us: (1) in what way does the continuing existence of the Jews have theological significance for the Church, and (2) in what way should Christians give witness of their faith to Jews. The structure of this paper is to a great extent conditioned by this starting point. It should also be kept in mind that we speak as Christian theologians; we are conscious of the fact that theological statements often have political, sociological or economic implications, even if that is not intended. That consideration, however, cannot be a reason for silence; we merely ask that this paper may be judged on its theological merits.

In our discussions we constantly kept the biblical writings in mind and tried to understand our questions in the light of the Scriptures. We realized that the evidence of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is varied and complex, and that we are all in constant danger of arbitrarily excluding parts of it. In re-thinking the place of the Jews in the history of salvation we should recognize that the question of Israel is very important for the Gospels and the Pauline letters, but it seems to be less in other parts of the New Testament literature, though it is perhaps rarely entirely absent. The problems of interpreting the biblical evidence in regard to this question are just as difficult as they are in regard to other significant theological issues. Being aware of the danger of building one's thinking upon particular proof-texts, we have refrained from pointing to specific verses. We have tried, however, to be faithful to the overall meaning of the Bible and trust that the scriptural basis of what we say will be evident.

II. Historical considerations

The first community of Christians were Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Christ. They continued to belong to the Jewish communities and the relationship between them and their fellow-Jews was close, not withstanding the tension that existed between them – a tension caused by the fact that the Christian Jews believed that the fullness of time had come in Christ and in the outpouring of the Spirit and that they therefore came to know themselves to be found in one fellowship with Gentiles who also believed in God through Jesus Christ. The two groups of Jews broke apart as the consequence of various facts: for example, the attitude of Christians towards the Law, the persecution of the Stephen group by Jews, the withdrawal from Jerusalem of the Christians during the great uprising 66-73 AD, the increasing hostility between Jews and Christians which found expression in their respective liturgies, and in other ways. In the same period Christians of Gentile origin came greatly to outnumber the Jewish Christians. From this time on the history of Jews and Christians is one of ever increasing mutual estrangement. After Christianity became the accepted religion of the Roman state, the Jews were discriminated against and often even persecuted by the "Christian" state more often than not with ecclesiastical support. As a consequence, the so-called "dialogues" between Christian and Jewish theologians which were

organized from time to time were never held on a footing of equality; the Jewish partners were not taken seriously.

In the past the existence of Jews outside the church and their refusal to accept the Christian faith prompted little serious theological questioning in official Church circles. Christians generally thought about these questions in very stereotyped ways: the Jews as the Israel of the Old Testament had formerly been God's elect people, but this election had been transferred to the Church after Christ; the continuing existence of the Jews was primarily thought of in terms of divine rejection and retribution because they were regarded as those who had killed Christ and whose hearts were so hardened that they continued to reject him.

Despite all this the separation between the Church and the Jewish people has never been absolute. In the liturgy of the Church many Jewish elements have been preserved. And when in the middle of the second century Marcion tried to cut all ties by rejecting the Old Testament as God's revelation and by clearing the New Testament as far as possible of all its Old Testament concepts and references, the Church, by holding fast to the Old Testament, testified to the continuity between the old and the new covenants. She thereby in fact testified also to the common root and origin of the Church and the Jewish people, although this was not clearly realized; and only few Christians have been aware that this common root meant some kind of special relationship.

At the scholarly and theological level also there has always been contact between the two groups. In the Middle Ages especially, Christian theology and exegesis were strongly influenced by Jews, who for instance transmitted Aristotelian philosophy to them; the influence of Jewish mysticism upon Christian mystics, moreover, has been much stronger than is generally known. In the 16th century among Christians of the Western world a new awareness of their relationship with Jews arose, partly under the influence of humanism with its emphasis on the original biblical languages, partly because of the Reformation. Protestant attitudes were, however, by no means always positive. In pietism a strong love and hope for the Jewish people awoke, which in the 18th and 19th centuries found expression in the many attempts to come into missionary contact with Jews. But even so, there was little change in the thinking by Christians generally about the Jews. The time of the Enlightenment, with its common move towards toleration, brought improvement in the position of the Jews, at least in Western Europe. This happened in a cultural atmosphere in which there was a tendency to deny the particularity of the Jewish people. Outright anti-semitism, with its excesses and pogroms, seemed a thing of the past, although in most countries religions and social discrimination remained, the more insidious because it was often not fully conscious.

It is only since the beginning of this century, and even more especially since the last war, that churches, and not merely various individual Christians, have begun to rethink more systematically the nature of their relationship to the Jews. The main theological reason for this is probably the greater emphasis on biblical theology and the increased interest which the Old Testament in particular has received. It is self-evident that this emphasis was to a great extent caused by the preceding outbreak of anti-semitism in Germany and its rationalization on so-called Christian, ideological grounds. In the realm of biblical scholarship there is today increasing cooperation among Christians and Jews; many Christian theologians are aware of what they have learned from men like Rosenzweig, Buber and other Jewish scholars. The question of what is meant by election and the irrevocability of God's love is being asked again in a new way. The biblically important concept of "covenant" has become more central, and the relationship between the "old" and the "new" covenant is being restudied. In addition, Paul's wrestling with the baffling question of the disobedience of the greater part of his fellow-Jews has come up for consideration.

Besides these theological grounds, two historical events in the last 30 years have caused churches to direct their thinking more than before to their relationship to the Jewish people. In Europe persecution has taken place, greater and more brutal than could have been thought possible in our

time, in which some six million Jews were annihilated in the most terrible way, not because of their personal actions or beliefs, but because of the mere fact that they had Jewish grandparents. The churches came to ask themselves whether this was simply the consequence of natural human wickedness or whether it had also another, theological dimension.

The second event was the creation of the State of Israel. This is of tremendous importance for the great majority of Jews – it has meant for them a new feeling of self-assurance and security. But this same event has also brought suffering and injustice to Arab people. We find it impossible to give a unanimous evaluation of its formation and of all the events connected with it, and therefore in this study do not make further mention of it. We realize, however, especially in view of the changed situation in the Middle East as a result of the war of June 1967, that also the question of the present state of Israel, and of its theological significance, if any, has to be taken up.

III. Theological considerations

We believe that God formed the people of Israel. There are certainly many factors of common history, ethnic background and religion, which can explain its coming into existence, but according to Old Testament faith as a whole, it was God's own will and decision which made this one distinct people with its special place in history. God is the God of the whole earth and of all nations, but he chose this particular people to be the bearer of a particular promise and to act as his covenant-partner and special instrument. He made himself known specifically to Israel, and showed this people what his will is for men on earth. Bound to him in love and obedience, it was called to live as God wants his people to live. In this way it was to become, as it were, a living revelation to others, in order that they also might come to know, trust, love and obey God. In dealing with Israel, God had in view the other nations; this was the road by which he came to them. In other words, in his love for Israel his love for mankind was manifested: in its election, Israel, without losing its own particularity, represented the others.

In the Old Testament Israel is shown to be an imperfect instrument; again and again it was untrue to its calling so that it often obscured rather than manifested God's will on earth. But even in its disobedience it was a witness to God, a witness to his judgment, which however terrible was seen as a form of his grace, for in punishment God was seeking to purify his people and to bring them back to himself; a witness also to his faithfulness and love, which did not let his people go, even when they turned away from him.

We believe that in Jesus Christ God's revelation in the Old Testament finds its fulfillment. Through him we see into the very heart of God, in him we see what it really means to say that God is the God of the covenant and loves man to the very end. As he became the man who was the perfect instrument of God's purpose, he took upon himself the vocation of his people. He, as its representative, fulfills Israel's task of obedience. In his resurrection it has become manifest that God's love is stronger than human sin. In him God has forgiven and wiped out sin and in him created his true covenant-partner.

A part of Israel recognized in Jesus as the Christ the full revelation of God. They believed that in him God himself was present, and that in his death and resurrection God acted decisively for the salvation of the world. Numerically they were perhaps only a very small minority, yet in these "few" God's purpose for the whole of Israel is manifested and confirmed. And together with Israel the Gentiles too were now called to the love and service of God. It cannot be otherwise; for if in Jesus Christ the fullness of time has really come, then the nations also must participate in God's salvation, and the separation of Israel is abolished. This is what the Church is: Israel having come to recognize God in Christ, together with the Gentiles who are engrafted into Israel, so that now Jew and Gentile become one in Christ. It is only in this way that the Church is the continuation of the Israel of the Old Testament, God's chosen people, called upon to testify to his mighty acts for

men, and to be his fellow workers in this world.

Christ himself is the ground and substance of this continuity. This is underlined by the preservation of the Old Testament in the Church as an integral part of her worship and tradition. The existence of Christians of Jewish descent provides a visible manifestation of that same continuity, though many Christians are hardly aware of this. The presence of such members in the Church which in the course of time has become composed predominantly of Gentiles, witnesses to the trustworthiness of God's promises, and should serve to remind the Church of her origin in Israel. We are not advocating separate congregations for them. History has shown the twofold danger which lies in this: the danger of discriminating despite all intention to the contrary, and the danger that such separate congregations tend to evolve sectarian traits. But more important than these considerations is that in Christ the dividing wall has been broken down and Jew and Gentile are to form one new man; thus any separation in the Church has been made impossible.

However, without detracting in any way from what has just been said, we should remember that there is room for all kinds of people and cultures in the Church. This implies that Jews who become Christians are not simply required to abandon their Jewish traditions and ways of thinking; in certain circumstances it may therefore be right to form special groups which are composed mainly of Jewish Christians.

The fact that by far the greater part of Israel did not recognize God in Jesus Christ posed a burning question for Paul, not primarily because of the crucifixion, but because even after Christ's resurrection they still rejected him. The existence of Jews today who do not accept him puts the same question to us, because in this respect the situation today is basically the same as it was in Paul's time.

We are convinced that the Jewish people still have a significance of their own for the Church. It is not merely that by God's grace they have preserved in their faith truths and insights into his revelation which we have tended to forget; . . . But also it seems to us that by their very existence in spite of all attempt to destroy them, they make it manifest that God has not abandoned them. In this way they are a living and visible sign of God's faithfulness to men, an indication that he also upholds those who do not find it possible to recognize him in his Son. While we see their continuing existence as pointing to God's love and mercy, we explicitly reject any thought of considering their suffering during the ages as a proof of any special guilt. Why, in God's purpose, they have suffered in that way, we as outsiders do not know. What we do know, however, is the guilt of Christians who have all too often stood on the side of the persecutors instead of the persecuted.

Conscious of this guilt we find it impossible to speak in a generalizing way of Christian obedience over against Jewish disobedience. It is true that we believe that Jesus Christ is the truth and the way for every man, and that for everyone faith in him is salvation. But we also know that it is only by grace that we have come to accept him and that even in our acceptance we are still in many ways disobedient. We have therefore no reason to pride ourselves over against others. For Christians as well as Jews can live only by the forgiveness of sin, and by God's mercy.

We believe that in the future also God in faithfulness will not abandon the Jewish people, but that his promise and calling will ultimately prevail so as to bring them to their salvation. This is to us an assurance that we are allowed to hope for the salvation of all who do not yet recognize Christ. So long as the Jews do not worship with the Church the one God and Father of Jesus Christ, they are to us a perpetual reminder that God's purpose and promise are not yet realized in their fullness, that we have still much to hope for the world, looking for the time when the Kingdom of God will become plainly and gloriously manifest.

All this we can say together. However, this considerable agreement, for which we are grateful

indeed, should not conceal the fact that when the question is raised of the theological identity of Israel with the Jewish people of today we find ourselves divided. This division is due not only to the differences in the interpretation of the biblical evidence, but also in the weight which is given to various passages. We might characterize our differences, rather schematically, as follows:

Some are convinced that, despite the elements of continuity that admittedly exist between present-day Jews and Israel, to speak of the continued election of the Jewish people alongside the Church is inadmissible. It is the Church alone, they say, that is, theologically speaking, the continuation of Israel as the people of God, to which now all nations belong. Election and vocation are solely in Christ, and are to be grasped in faith. To speak otherwise is to deny that the one people of God, the Church, is the body of Christ which cannot be broken. In Christ it is made manifest that God's love and his promises apply to all men. The Christian hope for the Jews is the same as it is for all men: that they may come to the knowledge of the truth, Jesus Christ our Lord. This does not imply any denial of the distinctive and significant witness to Christ which the Jews still bear. For their continued separate existence is the direct result of the dual role which Israel as God's elect people has played: through them salvation has come to the world, and they represented at the crucial time of human history man's rejection of God's salvation offered in Christ.

Others of us are of the opinion that it is not enough merely to assert some kind of continuity between the present-day Jews – whether religious or not – and ancient Israel, but that they actually are still Israel, i.e. that they still are God's elect people. These would stress that after Christ the one people of God is broken asunder, one part being the Church which accepts Christ, the other part Israel outside the Church, which rejects him, but which even in this rejection remains in a special sense beloved by God. They see this election manifested specifically in the fact that the existence of the Jewish people in this world still reveals the truth that God's promises are irrevocable, that he will uphold the covenant of love which he has made with Israel. Further they see this continuing election in the fact that God has linked the final hope of the world to the salvation of the Jews, in the day when he will heal the broken body of his one people, Israel and the Church.

These two views, described above, should however not be understood as posing a clear-cut alternative. Many hold positions somewhere in-between, and without glossing over the real disagreements which exist, in some cases these positions can be so close, that they seem to rest more on different emphases than to constitute real contradictions. But even where our positions seem particularly irreconcilable, we cannot be content to let the matter rest as it is. For the conversation among us has only just begun and we realize that in this question the entire self-understanding of the Church is at stake.

IV. The Church and her witness

In the foregoing it is set forth that the Church stands in a unique relationship to the Jews. Every one who accepts Christ and becomes a member of his Church shares thereby in this special relation, being brought face to face with the Jewish people. That is to say that the problem we are dealing with in this paper is not one which confronts only the so-called Western churches, but concerns every Christian of whatever race, cultural or religious background he may be. So too the Old Testament is not only of importance for those whose culture is to a greater or lesser degree rooted in it, but becomes also the spiritual heritage of those Christians whose own ethnic culture is not touched by it.

The existence of this unique relationship raises the question as to whether it conditions the way in which Christians have to bear witness of Jesus to Jews.

We all agree that the Church is the special instrument of God, which is called to testify in her word

and her life to his love revealed in its fullness in his Son. She has to proclaim that in Christ's cross and resurrection it has become manifest that God's love and mercy embrace all men. Moreover, being rooted in his reconciliation, she is called to cross all frontiers of race, culture and nationality, and all other barriers which separate man from man. Therefore we are convinced that no one can be excluded from her message of forgiveness and reconciliation; to do otherwise would be disobedience to the Lord of the Church and a denial of her very nature, a negation of her fundamental openness and catholicity.

In the World Council of Churches much thinking has been done about the question of how the Church can give her witness in such a way that she respects the beliefs and convictions of those who do not share her faith in Christ, and perhaps, with God's help, bring them in full freedom to accept it. It is agreed that in an encounter with non-Christian people real openness is demanded, a willingness to listen to what the other has to say, and a readiness to be questioned by him and learn from his insights. This means that at all times Christians have to guard against an arrogant or paternalistic attitude. Moreover, the way in which they approach different men in different circumstances cannot be a single one; they should do their utmost to gain a real understanding of the life and thinking of the non-Christian, for only thereby can they speak to his situation in their witness.

That this is the generally accepted attitude for Christians to men of other faiths can be seen from the statement on "Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty" accepted at the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi, 1961, and from the declaration of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism at Mexico City, 1963. It will therefore be evident that we consider the alternatives of mission or dialogue, which formerly was perhaps justified, untenable today. We are convinced that an encounter with non-Christians on the lines indicated above can be a real enrichment for the Church in which she not only gives but also receives.

The very fact that the particular situation in which the Christian witness is given must always be taken into account, applies of course also to the Jews. Moreover, where they are concerned this consideration receives a special dimension, for with no other people does the Church have such close ties. Christians and Jews are rooted in the same divine history of salvation. As has already been shown; both claim to be heirs of the same Old Testament. Christian and Jewish faiths share also a common hope that the world and its history are being led by God to the full realization and manifestation of his kingdom.

However, in an encounter between Christians and Jews not only the common ties are to be considered but also their age-long alienation and the terrible guilt of discrimination which Christians share with the world, and which in our own time has culminated in the gas chamber and the destruction of a large part of European Jewry. Though certainly not all Christians are equally guilty and though anti-semitism has played no particular role in the Oriental and in the so-called younger churches, we all have to realize that Christian words have now become disqualified and suspect in the ears of most Jews. Therefore often the best, and sometimes perhaps even the only, way in which Christians today can testify to the Jewish people about their faith in Christ may be not so much in explicit words but by service.

We all are thus basically of one mind about the actual form which in practice the Christian encounter with the Jewish people has to take. We differ, however, among ourselves when we try to analyze and to formulate this common attitude in theological terms. The differences which exist in this respect are closely connected with the ones we noted before. There it was remarked that the very self-understanding of the Church was at stake (par. 22). Here even more, our differences are bound up with differences in ecclesiology, or rather with the different ecclesiological points on which we lay stress. If the main emphasis is put on the concept of the Church as the body of Christ, the Jewish people are seen as being outside. The Christian attitude to them is considered to be in principle the same as to men of other faiths and the mission of the Church is to bring them,

either individually or corporately, to the acceptance of Christ, so that they become members of his body. Those who hold this view would generally want to stress that besides service to the Jews it is also legitimate and even necessary to witness in a more explicit way as well, be it through individuals, or special societies, or churches.

If, on the other hand, the Church is primarily seen as the people of God, it is possible to regard the Church and the Jewish people together as forming the one people of God, separated from one another for the time being, yet with the promise that they will ultimately become one. Those who follow this line of thinking would say that the Church should consider her attitude towards the Jews theologically and in principle as being different from the attitude she has to all other men who do not believe in Christ. It should be thought of more in terms of ecumenical engagement in order to heal the breach than of missionary witness in which she hopes for conversion.

Again it should be pointed out that these views are not static positions; there are gradual transitions between the two and often it is more a question of a more-or-less than of an either-or. That is in the nature of the matter. For the Church must be thought of both as the body of Christ and as the people of God, and these two concepts express the one reality from different angles.

But even though we have not yet reached a common theological evaluation of the Christian encounter with Jews, we all emphatically reject any form of "proselytizing", in the derogatory sense which the word has come to carry in our time, where it is used for the corruption of witness in cajolery, undue pressure or intimidation, or other improper methods (see the New Delhi declaration on "Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty").

V. Ecumenical relevance

We are convinced that the Church's rethinking of her theology with regard to the question of Israel and her conversation with the Jewish people can be of real importance to the ecumenical movement. In this way questions are posed which touch the foundation and the heart of Christian faith. Though these questions are also being asked for other reasons, it is our experience that here they are being put in a particularly penetrating form. Because there is no doctrine of Christian theology which is not touched and influenced in some way by this confrontation with the Jewish people, it is impossible for us here to develop fully its implications. We can only indicate some salient points.

1. The documents of the Old Testament belong to the heritage which the churches have received from and have in common with the Jews. In a theological encounter of the two groups the question of the right understanding of these writings will necessarily come to the fore, the Jews placing them in the context of the Talmud and Midrash, the churches in that of the New Testament. Thereby Christians are called upon to analyze the criteria they use in their interpretation of the Bible. Clarity in this respect will help the churches in their search together for the biblical truth.
2. The Old Testament is also part of the common heritage that lies beyond the separation of the churches themselves. Differences in its evaluation and interpretation may result in different understandings of the New Testament. When in their meeting with Jewish theologians the churches are driven to reconsider whether they have understood the Old Testament aright, and perhaps coming to new insights into it, it may well help them also to understand the Gospel in a deeper and fuller way and so overcome one-sided and different conceptions which keep them apart.
3. Jewish faith regards itself as being based on God's revelation written down in the Bible as it is interpreted and actualized in the ongoing tradition of the Jewish believing community. Therefore, in their theological dialogue with Jews the churches will be confronted with the question of tradition and Scripture. When this problem, which has been a cause of

dissension between Christians for a long time, is considered in this new setting, the churches may gain insights which can contribute to a greater understanding and agreement among themselves.

4. The emphasis made by Jews in their dialogue with Christians on justice and righteousness in this world reminds the churches of the divine promise of a new earth and warns them not to express their eschatological hope one-sidedly in other-worldly terms. Equally, reflection in the light of the Bible on the Jewish concept of man as God's covenant-partner working for the sanctification of the world and for the bringing in of the kingdom should prompt the churches to reconsider their old controversy over the cooperation of man in salvation.
5. The existence of Jews, both those who have become Christians and those who have not, compels the churches to clarify their own belief about election. They must ask themselves whether election is not a constitutive element in God's action with men, whether it does not have an unshakable objectivity which precedes the response of those who are elected, but which on the other hand requires ever anew acceptance by faith, realized in human acts of obedience. A study of these questions may bring closer together those who stress the prevenient grace of God and those who put the main accent on the human decision of faith.

VI. Some implications

Finally we want to point to some implications of this study. Needless to say, they can be indicated only briefly; we hope that in the future some of these points will be taken up and further elaborated and acted upon. In this connection we recall the following words of the Third Assembly in New Delhi, which renewed the plea against anti-semitism of the First Assembly in 1948, adding that "the Assembly urges its member churches to do all in their power to resist every form of anti-semitism. In Christian teaching the historic events which led to the Crucifixion should not be so presented as to fasten upon the Jewish people of today responsibilities which belong to our corporate humanity and not to one race or community. Jews were the first to accept Jesus and Jews are not the only ones who do not yet recognize him."

The last sentences of the statement just quoted refer to the question of the responsibility of the Jews today for the crucifixion. This question has both a historical and a theological dimension. (1) Modern scholarship has generally come to the conclusion that it is historically wrong to hold the Jewish people of Jesus' time responsible as a whole for his death. Only a small minority of those who were in Jerusalem were actively hostile to him, and even these were only indirectly instrumental in bringing about his death: the actual sentence was imposed by the Roman authorities. Moreover, it is impossible to hold the Jews today responsible for what a few of their forefathers may have participated in nearly twenty centuries ago. (2) Theologically speaking we believe that this small minority, acting together with the Roman authorities, expressed the sin and blindness common to all mankind. Those passages in the New Testament which charge the Jews with the crucifixion of Jesus must be read within the wider biblical understanding of Israel as representative of all men. In their rejection of Christ our own rejection of him is mirrored.

We recommend that, especially in religious instruction and preaching, great care be taken not to picture the Jews in such a way as to foster inadvertently a kind of "Christian" anti-semitism. In addition to the way in which the crucifixion is often taught, we have in mind, among other things, the historically mistaken image often given to the Pharisees, the misconception of the Law of the Old Testament and its so-called legalism, and the stress repeatedly placed upon the disobedience of the Jews according to the Old and New Testaments, without it being made sufficiently clear that those who denounced this disobedience were also Jews, one with their people notwithstanding their denunciation.

Similarly, some Christian prayers contain expressions which, whatever their meaning formerly was, can easily promote misunderstanding today. We feel that it would help if the churches would re-

examine both traditional liturgies and also lessons, hymns and other texts used in worship from the point of view set out in this document.

The fact that the Jewish people is of continued significance for the Church should also have its effect on the way history is presented. Because of this special relationship all through the ages, church history cannot rightly be taught without taking into account its impact on the history of the Jews, and vice versa. We are of the opinion that theological teaching and text books are in general inadequate in this respect and need to be reconsidered and supplemented.

There is a general tendency among Christians to equate the faith of the Old Testament with Jewish religion today. This is an over-simplification which does not do justice to Jewish understanding of the Old Testament and to subsequent developments. Here the oral law must be specially mentioned, for it has played such a central role in shaping Jewish life and thought, and still continues to be of paramount importance for large groups.

We should also be aware that many, while affirming that they belong to the Jewish people, do not call themselves believing Jews. For a real encounter with the Jews we consider it imperative to have knowledge and genuine understanding of their thinking and their problems both in the secular and in the religious realm. We should always remain aware that we are dealing with actual, living people in all their variety, and not with an abstract concept of our own.

We have often been aware in our discussions that no problem should be examined in isolation. Nor should this one be, since there may be a danger that, instead of reducing anti-semitism, we may even increase it by concentrating on this issue.

Through our study together it has been brought home to us that much thinking still has to be done, and how impossible it is to ignore or avoid the theological questions in this area. We feel assured that an ongoing encounter with Jews can mean a real enrichment of our faith. Christians should therefore be alert to every such possibility, both in the field of social cooperation and especially on the deeper level of theological discussion. We realize that at the moment many Jews are not willing to be involved with Christians in a common dialogue; in that case Christians must respect this expressed or silent wish and not to force themselves upon them. But when such conversation is possible, it should be held in a spirit of mutual respect and openness, searching together and questioning one another, trusting that we together with the Jews will grow into a deeper understanding of the revelation of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What form this further understanding may take, we must be willing to leave in his hands, confident that he will lead both Jews and Christians into the fullness of his truth.

The Commission accepted this report and commended it for further theological study on a wider geographical scale. It was, however, felt that such issues as 1) the concepts of salvation and election, and 2) the nature of God in relation to the two concepts of the People of God and the Body of Christ require a more thorough study and a more detailed examination.

[1] *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order*, eds P. C. Rodger and L. Vischer. Faith and Order Paper No. 42. London, SCM Press, 1964, para. 17. p.44.

[2] Aarhus Minutes, Faith and Order Paper No. 44, Geneva, WCC, 1965, p.42.

* From: *New Directions in Faith and Order*, Bristol 1967. Faith and Order Paper No. 50 Geneva, WCC, 1968.