

Why Is This Light Different from All Other Lights?

The Berlin Theses as a Beacon Light of Hope in the History of Jewish-Christian Relations ¹

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Allow me, first of all, to thank the organizers of this conference for hosting us here at the beautiful and tranquil Sigtunastiftelsen. I am also grateful for the kind invitation to give one of the two keynote addresses; I am particularly delighted to have been asked to comment on the document “A Time for Recommitment: Building the New Relationship between Jews and Christians.”² In the nomenclature of our time, we could perhaps call the Berlin document “the Seelisberg 2.0”: it is an upgraded version, with fewer bugs, and with an improved manual.³ The twelve Berlin points are followed by a long in-depth presentation called “the Story of the Transformation of the Relationship”. I hope and I also believe that this extensive text will help many readers understand the magnitude of the millennia-old problems which we encounter in the Jewish-Christian dialogue.

What Is Light Is Not Always Bright

In the title of this paper the Berlin theses are described as a beacon light. I am aware of deficiencies of the light and dark colour symbolism. What is light is not always brilliant and bright; what is dark is not always problematic, and certainly not wrong. In her book *Symbolic*

¹ This article is a revised version of one of two keynote lectures at an international conference (October 6-7, 2010) at the Sigtunastiftelsen, situated outside Stockholm, arranged by the International Council of Christians and Jews. Thanks are due to Dr. Mark Godin, Dr. Inger Nebel, Dr. Alana Vincent and Dr. Deborah Weissman for stimulating conversations and helpful observations.

² *A Time for Recommitment: Jewish Christian Dialogue 70 Years after War and Shoah* (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung: Sankt Augustin / Berlin, 2009).

³ For a presentation and evaluation of the Seelisberg document, see, e.g., Victoria Barnett, “Seelisberg: An Appreciation”, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2:2 (2007), 54-57.

Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature, Gay Byron points out that colour symbolism has played an important role in the literary imagination of early Christian writers.⁴ Light and darkness metaphors are problematic—and the purpose of this paper is certainly *not* to petrify stereotypes. If I remember correctly, this was one of the reasons for not keeping the working title of the document, which was “Seeking the Light”, a quotation taken from the introduction: “Confronted by the horror of darkness, Jews and Christians have turned to one another in dialogue, *seeking the light* of mutual understanding and friendship.”⁵ Although the light metaphor is not without complications, I take the liberty of using it in this presentation, after having sailed—albeit always in daylight—in the Gothenburg archipelago for several weeks this summer, constantly looking for and always being grateful for the many beacons, which help the sailors avoid shoals and sunk rocks. It is not only the light in the night but also the contours of the beacon, visible in daylight, which help us sailors to understand where we are, what to do, and what to avoid. In other words, it is not only a matter of the light emanating from the beacon, but also the shape of the light house. Each lighthouse is unique. There are several important questions to be asked: what are the characteristic contours of the Berlin beacon? In what way do they *inform* us where we are? How do they *form* us? How do they *transform* us? What do we have to do, and what must we seek to avoid?

The Berlin Document and the Feast of Passover

When preparing for this conference, a number of quotations from the *Haggadah shel Pesach* came to my mind. Although a story about the past, it is nevertheless highly relevant for millions of people today. It might seem somewhat odd—or even eccentric—to give a lecture in the autumn and to refer to one of the few Jewish feasts not taking place in that time of the year, but in the spring. There are, however, texts, which refer to Nisan as “the first month” (see, e.g. Ex. 12.2: “This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you.”). Hence, I hope that I may be allowed to reflect on the Berlin theses with the help of the feast of *Pesach* in this lecture, given only a few weeks after *Rosh ha-Shanah*, the Jewish New Year.

During *Pesach*, children all over the world sing *Mah nishtanah ha-lailah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-leilot?* (“Why is this night different from all the other nights?” or perhaps we are to

⁴ Gay Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London / New York: Routledge, 2002), 10.

⁵ *A Time for Recommitment*, 22.

translate it as “How different is this night from all other nights?”) The question for us to pose is a similar one: how different is this lighthouse—i.e., the Berlin theses—from all other lights in the history of Jewish-Christian relations?

The Characteristics of the Jewish-Christian Encounter

Before addressing this specific issue, however, I would like to mention something about the characteristics of the Jewish-Christian encounter. In other words, how different is this relation from all other interreligious relationships? The Berlin document encourages the readers to acquaint themselves with what recent biblical scholarship has to say about both “the *commonality* and gradual *separation* of Christianity and Judaism.”⁶

(a) The fact that Jews and Christians have so much in *common* has been both a blessing and a curse in history. In times of concord it has certainly been a blessing; in times of conflict, unfortunately, it has been a curse. In a thought-provoking article, Joseph B. Tyson argues that it would be wrong to see Marcion (who rejected the Hebrew Bible) as the arch-antisemite of the early Church. Tyson suggests that the victory of proto-orthodox Christianity (which wanted to include the Hebrew Bible in the Christian canon) over the Marcionites opened the way to an increasingly virulent form of anti-Judaism.⁷ Needless to say, it is contra-factual speculation to suggest what would have happened if the Marcionites had won the day, but I am nevertheless inclined to agree with him. Christians (i) who want to see the Hebrew Bible as part of their Scriptures, and (ii) who do not ponder the fact that it is Holy Writ also for another faith community, easily—albeit not necessarily—end up with a triumphalistic understanding of the *true* meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures. Was God an allegorist in “Old Testament” times? Did God wilfully mislead the Jewish people to interpret the commandments concretely? Why are Jews wrong when they take for granted that the expression *berit ‘olam* actually means “an eternal covenant”? To complicate things even more: I suggest that Jews and Christians have more in common when they do not use a common terminology, i.e., *mitzwot*, *sacramentum*, *Torah*, *incarnation*, etc.⁸ I also propose that Jews and Christians misunderstand each other because, at times, they share a common terminology, i.e., “Law”, “Messianism”, “good deeds”, etc. All this suggests that it is

⁶ *A Time for Recommitment*, 15 (emphases added).

⁷ Joseph B. Tyson, “Anti-Judaism in Marcion and His Opponents”, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 1:1 (2005-2006), 196-208, esp. p. 208.

⁸ For an excellent anthology on similarities between Judaism and Christianity in spite of autonomous nomenclature, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky (et al. eds.), *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder: Westview, 2000).

important to identify the fundamental points of agreement. Jews and Christians need to be reminded of what they have in common—even if separated by a common nomenclature.

(b) Secondly, the Berlin theses state that it is also important to recognise the *controversies*. This is a call for assistance from historians, sociologists, theologians and other members of the scholarly community. We simply need to know more about what actually happened during the first centuries. We already recognize that this was an era of gradual separation between what would later be called “Judaism” and “Christianity”. We are also acquainted with the fact that the texts in the collection which we call the “New Testament” were written down at a time characterized by controversies and conflicts. The canonization of these texts petrified what I would like to call “a discourse of divorce”. This discourse is more obvious in the newer texts in the New Testament than in the older. Hence, it is more apparent in the second volume of Luke’s two books (more evident in the Acts of the Apostles than in the Gospel of Luke); and it is more evident in the Gospel of John than in the three Synoptic Gospels. Christians with little or no historical knowledge—or interest, I might add—are led to think that Jews are perpetually persecuting Christians. Judaism is presented as the everlasting opposite of and as a religion in constant opposition to Christianity.

For these reasons it is important to remember that it was a two-sided divorce. It is also imperative to teach our students that the labels “Judaism” and “Christianity” were not established until several centuries later. In contemporary New Testament scholarship we see a rising star; a new technical term is being suggested: “Jewish Christianity” (or “Christian Judaism”).⁹ The purpose is to find a term which can encapsulate what we know of some of the earliest forms of Christianity. A word of caution might be in place. Is there an inherent risk that this new and strange animal will be considered to be more authentically “Jewish” than what we usually call “Judaism”? Are we, once again, approaching the trap of a Christian interpretation which is so original, so authentic, so genuine that it becomes not only pre-Christian, but also de-Christianized and anti-Jewish?¹⁰ I am not suggesting that this must necessarily be one of the consequences; I simply want to raise the question. Now, whether we

⁹ See, e.g., David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T & Clark, 1998), and more recently, Matt Jackson-McCabe (ed.), *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) and Oskar Skarsaune & Reidar Hvalvik (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007).

¹⁰ For further reflections, see, e.g., John Rousmaniere, *A Bridge to Dialogue: The Story of Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991), 71.

see such a risk or not, we need to consider that Jewish-Christian relations were forged (in both senses of the verb) in a time of conflict. This is not to suggest that we should go on a guilt trip or to state that there are no significant differences. On the contrary, there are many unresolved questions and many painful tensions. Jewish-Christian relations are a story about controversies and conflicts.

“In Every Generation”

Returning to the *Haggadah shel Pesach*, I am reminded of another expression: [*she*]be-khol dor wa-dor (“in every single generation”), which occurs at least twice in the *Haggadah*: once in the *be-chol dor wa-dor*: “it is every person’s duty to think of himself and herself as one of those who went out of Egypt.” The other instance is the reminder that *she-be-khol-dor wa-dor* (i.e., in every generation there are those who rise to destroy us). The expression *dor wa-dor* reminds us both (i) of everything positive that has been said and done in order to help us leave the derogatory teaching of contempt behind and (ii) the constant need to scrutinize ideologies and theologies that are destructive and devastating—and this simply has to be done in every generation (*be-chol dor wa-dor*). I believe that we should consider it to be every person’s duty to do this. Hence, it is both a calling to all of us and a characterization of the Berlin theses. Philip A. Cunningham has described them as “a photograph, a snapshot of the current state of Jewish-Christian relations.”¹¹ That is why this light is different from all the other lights: it is the lighthouse of *our* times.

In the introduction to the Berlin theses it is stated that “we ... resolve to renew our engagement with the Ten Points of Seelisberg that inspired our beginnings.”¹² What is it that must be said and stated in every generation (*be-chol dor wa-dor*)? I often think of the difference between paragraphs three and four in the Roman-Catholic document *Nostra Aetate*, promulgated in 1965. The paragraph addressing Muslim-Christian relations could be summarized in three words: *let us forget!* Try to turn the pages in our history books; do not always talk about the past!

Although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, this synod urges all parties that, *forgetting past things*, they train themselves

¹¹ Philip A. Cunningham, “Introduction of A Time for Recommitment: Building the New Relationship between Christians and Jews”, 1-4 in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4:1 (2009), 3.

¹² *A Time for Recommitment*, 14.

towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people.¹³

The tone and tenor is different in the following paragraph, which discusses Judaism—because *Christians simply cannot do this in a similar way when Judaism is addressed*. Hence the hermeneutics is fundamentally different in the fourth paragraph: *Please remember that not all Jews opposed Jesus! Please remember that not all Jews killed Jesus!*

As holy scripture is witness, Jerusalem did not know the time of its visitation, and for the most part the Jews did not accept the gospel, indeed many of them opposed its dissemination. Nevertheless, according to the apostle, because of their ancestors the Jews still remain very dear to God, whose gift and call are without regret. [...] Although the Jewish authorities with their followers pressed for the death of Christ, still those things which were perpetrated during his passion cannot be ascribed indiscriminately to all the Jews living at the time nor to the Jews of today.¹⁴

It has always been necessary for Christian theologians to reflect on Christianity's relation to the Jewish people. During the first decades the Christian movement was quite simply one of the Judaisms of that time, but no more than three centuries later Christianity was not only understood as a distinctive religion, but also as a religious tradition characterized by an all-pervading criticism of some of the fundamental pillars of Judaism, e.g., circumcision, Sabbath and kashrut. By the time of Emperor Constantine, we find few if any Christian theologians who do not portray their faith with Judaism as the gloomy background.¹⁵

So why is the Jewish-Christian encounter different from all other interreligious relations? We have seen that the answer is that the conflict is perpetuated, petrified and fossilized because *we find the discourse of divorce in the canonical texts themselves*. It is absolutely impossible *not* to relate to these questions: the first part of the Christian Bible is also Sacred Scriptures to Jews, the latter part constantly refers to Jewish practices and people. We cannot forget; therefore we have to remember. This means that in every generation (*be-chol dor wa-dor*), Christians and also Jews—but primarily Christians—will have to address these topics: how are Jews presented in sermons, liturgy and theological books?

¹³ *Nostra Aetate*, paragraph three (emphases added).

¹⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, paragraph four.

¹⁵ Paula Fredriksen argues that Augustine challenged this anti-Jewish tradition, see *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York *et alii loci*: Doubleday, 2008).

The Bread of Affliction

What do we find on the table at a Passover meal? A synonym for *Pesach* is the feast of the unleavened bread (e.g., Ex. 12.17 and 34.18). *Bread* is central to Jews and Christians alike: *matsah* (“unleavened bread”) is the only bread that is allowed during Passover, and over the *matsot* the following is stated: “This is the bread of affliction (Aram. *ha lachma ‘anya*) which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who hunger come and eat. Let all who are in need come and partake of the paschal lamb!” Bread also plays a central role in a Sabbath meal, and, indeed, *lechem* is the very definition of a meal.

If possible, bread is even more essential to Christians, as part of the Eucharist, which many Christians understand as the core of the Christian service: when Christians break the bread they do this in remembrance of him who died on the day Christians know as Good Friday. We all know that, in history, this day has been a very, very *bad* Friday for Jews. If it is to become a *good* Friday, in what sense is it *good* for Christians—and in what way can it be good for Jews? Modern theology actually poses this question, whether it was a *good* Friday or a *bad* Friday.¹⁶ It remains a critical, central and crucial question: how is the death of Jesus to be interpreted? How could it promote reconciliation? Time does not allow me to go into all these questions. Allow me just to mention that I find S. Mark Heim’s book *Saved from Sacrifice* profoundly helpful. I consider it a must read for everyone interested in Christian Good Friday interpretations.¹⁷

The Bitter Herbs

This takes me to the bitter herbs on the Passover table: *maror*. We all know that there are bitter herbs in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. I recently read Susannah Heschel’s fascinating examination of pro-Nazi German Protestant theologians during the Third Reich Era: *The Aryan Jesus*.¹⁸ What struck me as particularly relevant to this conference was that the difference between, so to speak, the ordinary Protestant discourse and the discourse of these Nazi theologians is *not* as astonishing as one might think: the Third Reich theologians argued that Jesus’ teaching was fundamentally different from Jewish beliefs and that

¹⁶ See, e.g., Marit Trelstad, *Cross-Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

¹⁷ S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006).

¹⁸ Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008). See also Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill / London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Christianity is the end of Judaism. Now, is this not what one might hear in an ordinary sermon in an ordinary church in a service any Sunday morning? There is nothing *extra*-ordinary in the Christian teaching of contempt for Judaism and Jews; on the contrary, it is quite ordinary. In the computer jargon of our times, “the default setting” of Christian theology is that Judaism necessarily *has* to be presented as the opposite of Christian theology. Christianity is what Judaism is not; Judaism is what Christianity is not.

Several years ago I wrote a book—unfortunately available only in Swedish—which is called the “Back Alleys of Biblical Interpretation”.¹⁹ Susannah Heschel’s book is a splendid exposition of “the back alleys” of anti-Jewish Protestant teaching, but what I want to emphasize now, however, is that the divergence between the main road and the back alleys is not substantial. When writing the book on the theological back alleys, I spent some time tracing the cause and consequences of an extremely influential anti-Jewish book, first published in Swedish in 1943: “Pharisaism and Christianity”.²⁰ The book survived its original anti-Jewish context and was for generations of Christians *the* text on the essence of Christianity in its contradistinction to Judaism. There are bitter herbs on the table of Jewish-Christian relations, but there is also more. What else do we find of the Passover table?

Charoset

We certainly do have to remember the past, but we also need to cope with it, which reminds me of *charoset* on the Passover table. To eat *charoset*, symbolizing the mortar of the pyramids in Egypt, is to allow history, somehow, to nurture us. We need to learn from the past. In the words of Miroslav Volf, we have “to remember therapeutically”. In his book *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, Volf argues that there are three aspects here: (i) *to remember truthfully*, (ii) *to remember therapeutically*, and (iii) *to learn from the past*.²¹ Throughout his study he relates to his own experiences from the war on the Balkan Peninsula.²² (i) When emphasizing the necessity *to remember truthfully*, he reminds us of the difference between *forgiving* and *forgetting*: “what we don’t remember truthfully, we aren’t

¹⁹ Jesper Svartvik, *Bibeltolkningens bakgator: Synen på judar, slavar och homosexuella i historia och nutid* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2006).

²⁰ Hugo Odeberg, *Fariséism och kristendom* (Lund: Gleerups, 1943). For a critical survey of Odeberg’s book, see Svartvik, *Bibeltolkningens bakgator*, 118-145.

²¹ Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), 93.

²² Volf, *The End of Memory*, 39. The thesis of his book could be summarized as *speaking truth, practicing grace*.

remembering but imagining.”²³ That is why, Volf says, that we have a *moral obligation* to remember truthfully, remembering *rightly*: “I will argue that it is important not merely to remember, but also to remember rightly.”²⁴ It is not a matter of something you do passively, but actively: “To remember a wrongdoing is to struggle against it. The great advocates of ‘memory’ have rightly reminded us of that.”²⁵ As I understand his argument, the best way to remember what has happened is to do everything we can in order not to let it happen again. (ii) He also writes about what he calls *to remember therapeutically*. He argues that there is a difference between *reacting* and *responding*, which I believe is an important distinction: the significance of not “to act toward wrongdoers the way we *feel* like acting rather than the way we *should* act.”²⁶ “To triumph fully, evil needs two victories, not one. The first victory happens when an evil deed is perpetrated, the second victory, when evil is returned.”²⁷ He also stresses that “... *we are not fundamentally the sum of our past experiences*”, as we are a great deal more than our memories.²⁸ At the same time, “... one should never *demand* of those who have suffered wrong that they ‘forget’ and move on. This impossible advice would be also the *wrong* advice.”²⁹ (iii) Thirdly, we have to *learn from the past*. It is not primarily a matter of guilt for the past but of responsibility for the future. When pondering his three points I think of the *charoset* on the Passover table: to remember the past in such a way that it is transformed into something which can help us and nurture us.

The Four Cups of Wine

Wine is also on the table when we read the Berlin theses, first and foremost because wine is the symbol of deliverance from difficulties, and also of happiness. Jacob’s theological insight is also ours to claim and to reclaim—over and over again—as we become more and more acquainted with other faith traditions: “Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it” (Gen. 28.16).

But there is more than first meets the eye when referring to the wine metaphor. It is often pointed out that *the four cups of wine* symbolize various aspects of liberation (Ex. 6.6f.: “I

²³ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 48.

²⁴ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 10

²⁵ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 11.

²⁶ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 8.

²⁷ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 9.

²⁸ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 1, 25 and 99.

²⁹ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 146.

will bring out”, “I will deliver”, “I will redeem”, and “I will take”, respectively). An entire school of theology takes its name from this word: *liberation theology*. Christian liberation theologians pose important questions, and that is only one of the many important reasons for them to be heard and for other theologians to listen carefully.

In every dialogue document, in every statement in this genre, there are a couple of sentences which attract more attention than all the other together. I believe that the following sentence will be one of these well-known—perhaps even notorious—statements in the Berlin theses:

By ensuring that emerging theological movements from Asia, Africa and Latin America, and feminist, liberationist or other approaches integrate an accurate understanding of Judaism and Christian-Jewish relations into their theological formulations.³⁰

Allow me to explain how I perceive this assertion: I understand it to be a statement on inherent theological risks, not an accusing finger against some theologians. Judaism has always been the theological other in and to Christian theology, although the motivations vary from time to time: sometimes Jews are presented as being wrong because they believe that they can be righteous if they keep the commandments when they ought to realize that righteousness is a gift from God, at other times they are wrong mainly because they do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah—although Jesus to most Christians is something else or something more than a Jewish Messiah etc. Hence the arguments shift, but the theological otherness of the Jew remains. Katharina von Kellenbach is one of those who have scrutinized how a certain strand of feminist theology tends to present Judaism in a negative way.³¹ These critical examinations are necessary, but it is always so much better if it is self-criticism, so that feminists scrutinize feminism etc.

One reason for this passage in the Berlin theses to be misunderstood is that few drafters of the document identify themselves with those movements that are mentioned in this passage. A number of the authors would call themselves feminists or identify themselves with a feminist agenda. But there were no two-third world theologians in the group; there were no theologians from Africa, nor from Latin America, and only three from Asia: Michael McGarry and Debbie Weissman from Israel, and Marianne Dacy from Australia. The other twenty-three drafters of this document are Jews and Christians from Austria, Germany, Italy,

³⁰ *A Time for Recommitment*, 16.

³¹ Katharina von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States. When the readers of the document see the list of drafters, they might misunderstand the document to be patronizing. This, however, was never the intention of the drafters. The purpose was to point out that Judaism and the people that Jesus knew as his own must not be presented as his theological contrast but as his historical context. I do not know how many times I have written and stated this—that Second Temple Judaism was Jesus’ historical context, not his theological contrast—and still I often see Christians falling into the trap of presenting Christianity as the contrast to or superior to Judaism. In the words of Mieke Bal, there are problematic discourses which are “...invisible to those who practice it yet offensive to those subject to its generalizations.”³² The discussion on “emerging theological movements” should perhaps have been phrased differently, elaborated further or furnished with some examples.

Another notable sentence addresses Judaism: “By grappling with Jewish texts that appear (*sic*) xenophobic or racist”, as if there were no really problematic texts in the enormous Jewish textual corpus.³³ In hindsight I would say that “appear” is too weak a word. There are certainly numerous texts in the Jewish tradition which favour religious pluralism and provide theological space for those who identify themselves with other religious traditions, but—let us be honest—there are also passages that not only “appear” to be condescending vis-à-vis other religious traditions. There are also numerous texts about *‘avodah zarah* and polemics against *‘ovdei kokhavim*, which give rise to important questions: Is Christianity idolatry? Can a Christian keep the Noahide commandments—or is Christianity itself a violation of one of the seven commandments?

... and the Fifth Cup of Wine

Daniel Rossing, the late Director of *Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations*, pointed out that the call to the Jewish communities in the Berlin theses is much shorter and less specified. He therefore interprets it primarily as a document for the Diaspora.³⁴ This takes me to *the fifth cup of wine*, which is poured but not drunk: “And I will bring you into the land which I have raised my hand [i.e., swore] to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and I will give it to you as an inheritance for I am the Lord” (Ex. 6.8).

³² Mieke Bal, *Loving Yusuf: Conceptual Travels from Present to Past* (Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 100. The quotation is taken from her discussion of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept *habitus*.

³³ *A Time for Recommitment*, 18.

³⁴ Daniel Rossing, “The Twelve Points of Berlin: Viewed through the Prism of Jewish-Christian Relations in Israel Today”. (Lecture held on December 2, 2009 at the Jerusalem Rainbow Group, unpublished manuscript.)

There is a certain vagueness in the document when it talks about “critiquing attacks on Zionism when such critiques become expressions of antisemitism.”³⁵ Later in the text it is stated that “just criticism” is one of the “expressions of loyalty and love.”³⁶ Hence, there is “just critique”, “critiques” which are actually “attacks”, and also a need for “critiquing” such “attacks”.³⁷ More than one reader will find this confusing and it should perhaps have been elaborated further either in the points or in the addendum “the Story of the Transformation of a Relationship”.

How Different Is this from All Other Documents?

Mah nishtanah ...? How different is this document from all other documents? Allow me to mention three aspects: (a) First of all we will have to acknowledge *the reciprocal nature of the document*. We have travelled from the hallway to the study: from *requirements* of an interreligious dialogue to the *reciprocity* of an ongoing Jewish-Christian dialogue. In this document Jews and Christians address each other. The standard format is a one-way dialogue: although both Jews and Christian participated in the Seelisberg conference in 1947, the ten points are directed to Christians only. The Roman Catholic document *Nostra Aetate* from 1965 is of course an inner-Catholic text. As we are in Sweden, allow me also to mention *The Ways of God*, accepted by Church of Sweden in 2001.³⁸ Also the Jewish document *Dabru Emet* and the Christian document *A Sacred Obligation* are unilateral.³⁹ These texts are all important, but they are nevertheless unilateral, not bilateral—and, in the long run, dialogue, by its very nature, has to be bilateral.

Hence, on the way from Seelisberg in 1947 to Berlin in 2009, the Jewish-Christian dialogue is no longer only an address to the churches, but an endeavor for both Christians and Jews. This could only take place after decades of intense dialogue where we have sought to *define* the problems, to *refine* our thinking, and to *refute* the teaching of contempt. Yes, we have moved from the requirements for a dialogue to the reciprocity of an ongoing dialogue;

³⁵ *A Time for Recommitment*, 17.

³⁶ *A Time for Recommitment*, 18.

³⁷ *A Time for Recommitment*, 17.

³⁸ The original document *Guds vägar* (together with a translation into English [“The Ways of God”], and also responses by Ophir Yarden, Mary Boys, Peter A. Pettit, Hans Ucko and Jesper Svartvik) is published in *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* 79:3 (2003), 114-121.

³⁹ For *Dabru Emet*, see Frymer-Kensky (et al.), *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, xvii-xx. For *A Sacred Obligation*, see Mary Boys (ed.), *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity’s Sacred Obligation* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), xiii-xix.

we have moved from talking *about* each other to talking *to* each other, from preconditions to practice.

(b) Another difference is the passages on *the Land*. The State of Israel was, of course, not discussed in the Seelisberg theses, as it was written in 1947 (i.e., before 1948). Proclaimed in 1965, there is, of course, nothing in *Nostra Aetate* about the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip which commenced after the 1967 war. The Berlin theses, on the other hand, do address some of the political issues. Hence, the Seelisberg and the Berlin documents are two very different texts, written in two profoundly different contexts. Allow me to give you two examples: (i) First, when the *Shoah* is discussed in the Seelisberg text it is referred to as “the extent of the Jewish problem in all its alarming gravity and urgency.” (ii) Secondly, as I have already stated, there are of course no references to the State of Israel, simply because it was written before Israel was founded. Whereas Judaism today never is discussed without references to the State of Israel, this is not the case in the Seelisberg document. There are numerous nations in this world, whose flags carry crosses, there are many Muslim nations, but there is only one Jewish nation and only one nation flag with a *Magen David* (“a Star of David”). Is not this the reason for the wrongheaded assertion that everything that happens in Israel by definition is the necessary outcome of Judaism? These two examples—i.e., the way to describe the *Shoah* and the lack of references to the State of Israel—demonstrate that the Seelisberg document is not a text written in our times: whereas the *Shoah* in the preamble to the Seelisberg theses is described as “the Jewish problem”, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not mentioned at all. In these two respects, the Seelisberg document is fundamentally different from today’s discourse. Today, few would say that Jews are to be blamed for the *Shoah*, but a growing number of people seem to be willing to blame Jews in general and Israelis in particular for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many cannot even refer to Judaism without condemning settlements.

An example of this is what happened in the wake of a lecture I gave last spring at a Nordic symposium at Lund University on the two concepts “memory” and “manipulation”.⁴⁰ In my presentation I stated that Swedes, generally speaking, are interested only in two aspects of Jewish life: Israel and the *Shoah*. The journalist who wrote an article about the conference in the major daily newspaper in southern Sweden, the *Sydsvenskan*, began with an appreciative note but simply had to condemn Israel in the very same sentence—and the article was

⁴⁰ A conference in Lund, taking place on March 25, 2010, co-sponsored by the Centre for European Studies at Lund University and Citizens without Borders.

illustrated with a photo from Third Reich Germany with the famous sign *Deutsche! Wehrt Euch!* (“Germans! Defend yourselves!”) The author Maria Küchen wrote in the daily newspaper *Sydsvenskan*:

*I sympathize with Svartvik’s wish that Jewish culture and history be discussed without being automatically associated with Israeli policies in the Middle East. My hope would be that the State of Israel’s leadership showed grace—Rabbi Morton Narrowe highlighted grace as a fundamental element in Jewish tradition—but the connection between wars of conquest and religion in Israel today must not be ignored.*⁴¹

Theology and politics are constantly intertwined—not only in the Middle East, but certainly *always* when Judaism is discussed. I often meet people who think of Israelis as the Pharisees and chief priests of our times. In other words, *there have always been good reasons for disliking Jews*: sometimes because they (all) killed Jesus, at other times because they (all) are communists—and today because they (all) build settlements in the West Bank.

(c) These observations take us to my third and final point. It brings to the fore the need for Christians to intensify the dialogue with other Christians. *The Berlin theses also constitute a call for intra-religious dialogue.* I hope that this document may promote dialogue between Christians. It is a well-known fact that there is a wide variety of Christian attitudes towards the State of Israel: on the one hand, there are pro-Israeli Evangelicals who are categorically anti-Palestinian, not even acknowledging their Palestinian *Christian* sisters and brothers. On the other hand, there are also numerous Christians, whose theology is characterized by anti-Israeli statements.⁴² This division is referred to in the document “Let Us Have Mercy Upon Words”, when addressing the issue of the “increasing polarization in the discourse between

⁴¹ Maria Küchen, *Sydsvenskan* (March 27, 2010), p. B4 (original text: “Jag delar Svartviks önskan att judisk kultur och historia ska kunna diskuteras utan att automatiskt associeras till Israels politik i Mellanöstern. Min förhoppning vore att staten Israels ledning visade nåd— rabbinen Morton Narrowe lyfte fram nåden som bärande element i judisk tradition—men sambandet mellan erövringskrig och religion i Israel idag får inte ignoreras.”).

⁴² For a survey, see Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel* ([Montréal / Kingston]: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

Jews and Christians and also within each community”.⁴³ The text, presented by *the International Council of Christians and Jews* is commenting on the *Kairos* document.⁴⁴

The remainder of this paper will discuss two important and influential trends in Christianity: on the one hand, Palestinian liberation theology and, on the other hand, the theology of religions of *the International Council of Christians and Jews* and other similar organizations. In order to understand these two ventures, we need to address the question of *genre*. The liberationist discourse is prophetic and critical; it seeks to detect, label and classify what is destructive in the *other* camp in the conflict. The dialogue discourse, on the other hand, takes as its starting-point something else; it begins with the shocking insight that something is utterly wrong in one’s *own* camp. Its purpose is therefore self-critical and soul-searching; it is an endeavor which seeks to *recognize* the fundamental problems, to *remove* stereotypes, and to *renew* one’s self-understanding.

We all have our weak spots. The two theological trends I am presently discussing constitute no exceptions to the rule. The Achilles’ heel of Palestinian liberation theology and those who subscribe to a similar liberation theology is that, at times, it tends to present the historical context of Jesus as his theological contrast.⁴⁵ In spite of all its many advantages, the *Kairos* document, to which I have already referred, neither discusses, nor recognizes what has happened in Jewish-Christian relations during the last decades.

Those dedicated to theology of religions seek and find what is beautiful in the other tradition and praise it; this is what Krister Stendahl called *holy envy*.⁴⁶ It is quite possible that one of the shortcomings of us who are devoted to improved Jewish-Christian relations is that we have not seen the speck in the eye of the other, because we have been so eager to remove the log from our own eyes.

⁴³ “‘Let Us Have Mercy upon Words’: A Plea from the International Council of Christians and Jews to All Who Seek Interreligious Understanding” (www.iccj.org/en/pdf/ICcj%20-%20Mercy%20Upon%20Words.pdf), 1.

⁴⁴ *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (www.kairospalestine.ps). For a printed edition, see, e.g., Sune Fahlgren (ed.), *Kairos Palestina: Ett sanningsans ögonblick. Tro, hopp och kärlek mitt i det palestinska lidandet* ([Stockholm?]: Bilda, 2010).

⁴⁵ For a discussion of Palestinian liberation theologies, see, e.g., Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (Oxford *et alii loci*: Oxford University Press, 2008), 213-230 and also Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006), 183-185.

⁴⁶ For a presentation of Krister Stendahl’s concept “holy envy”, see Jesper Svartvik, *Textens tilltal: Konsten att bilda meningar* (Lund: Arcus, 2009), 134-153.

All this leads up to the final conclusion: *inter-religious dialogue must never be isolated from intra-religious dialogue*. Dialogue between those who identify themselves with different faith traditions must never be at the expense of dialogue with those who belong to the same religious tradition. This is no less true when we address the issue of liberation theology. The venture to build bridges also between Christians and Christians is one of the most urgent topics today in Jewish-Christian relations.

Two days ago, I had lunch with Brita Stendahl. She and her late husband Krister were both pioneers in interreligious dialogue. Brita and I were talking about what to do in the dialogue when the participants come to an impasse. Brita then quoted Krister who, in such a situation, used to say: “please, tell me more!”