



Beyond Tolerance

| Bodendorfer, Gerhard

Christian-Jewish Dialogue in the next millennium. The 50th anniversary of the State of Israel - what kind of commemoration is possible? Remembrance as a first step to dialogue. The process of turning over a new leaf must be visible. Tolerance is a misleading concept in interreligious dialogue.

Beyond Tolerance - Christian- Jewish dialogue in the next millennium

**By Gerhard
Bodendorfer**

The 50th anniversary of the State of Israel — what kind of co mmemoration is possible?

Commemorative years are for the most part difficult matters. They are not outgrowths of the cultural memory of the peoples, religions, or nations that observe them. In contrast to regularly recurring festivals or memorial celebrations, they thus barely permeate into the

deepest strata of human existence. They often remain superficial affairs featuring pompous rituals and shallow festivities which have already been forgotten a year later. If such a commemoration aspires to be more than a mere ceremony staged to mark an anniversary, it must fulfill a number of conditions.

Jewish tradition offers an outstanding example of this — the celebration of Passover. Since biblical times, Pesach has been a commemoration of the suffering in Egypt and the hasty exodus from the "house of bondage." This remembrance is to be taken literally as a spiritual internalization of a past event into the hearts and minds of those living in the present. Over the centuries, the memory resulting from this has endowed an identity in the shared beliefs of the people. The Pesach Haggada obligates Jews to recall the exodus not as something that happened in the past, but as an event taking place here and now.

Actually, this act of remembrance becomes an experience of re-currency — that is, one that determines the present and brings it to life. And the living act of performing this ritual enables each successive generation to integrate itself anew into the history of the people. In light of the common memory of exodus and salvation, the Jewish people becomes We, a unified whole united by hope and belief on the verge of liberation.

In the aftermath of Auschwitz, this experience of a liberating actuality has become very difficult. Thus, post-Shoah theology has made remembrance and memory its most significant concern, and has even recognized the necessity of spiritually internalizing the Shoah and including it in modern Pesach Haggadot. Arthur Cohen pointed out that during Pesach, every Jew should literally place himself in the death camps, in the experience of the Shoah, in order to recall this when he is commemorating

the exodus. And Irving Greenberg adds a fifth child to the four mentioned in the Haggada — a child of the Shoah who did not survive to be able to ask his question. The remembrance that this child evokes is the preservation of the countenance created in the image of God of Jews struggling for their lives, the remembrance of ghettos and camps, of the Seder night when the Warsaw Ghetto rose up in revolt. This remembrance is done in silence because words are inadequate to it. In this way, recollected and internalized history becomes the fundamental principle and the moving force of a shared existence. Only when human beings are imbued with such principles and forces can a celebration or festival actually succeed in endowing identity over the course of time.

Now of course, the founding of the State of Israel in May 1948 would be perfectly suited to establish a deep-seated groundwork of this kind. After almost 2,000 years,

Jews could once again determine their own fate and direct their own destiny. And for the first time after years of the most horrifying persecution and the oppression of Jewry as a people, culture, and religion, Jewish men and women could personally experience an act of resurrection and the rebirth of hope for the future. After so much darkness, a dim light shined forth. The commemoration of this light, this rebirth, is more than legitimate. This commemoration, however, must be embedded within a millennia-old experience of Jewish existence as a community of memory, as part of a unified whole in the common remembrance of the origins and history of Jewish existence, which can never be achieved without cognizance of the primal cause of this existence in Israel having been chosen by God.

At this point, Jewish readers (listeners) might well ask how a Catholic Christian (which I am) comes to feel justified in making pronouncements

about the self-image of Jews, so I would like to address this issue. It has been almost 20 years now that I have been dedicating my life to the intellectual consideration of Jewish existence as a student of Jewish studies, as the head of the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Salzburg, and as president of the Coordinating Committee for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Austria. I express my views as a man with a profound attachment to Judaism, and one who has drawn an important part of his identity from this experience of Jewish tradition. Moreover, as a Christian — and without claiming even the slightest entitlement to a part of the heritage of Jewish history — I have shared in the primal experience of the God we have in common as communicated by the Bible we share.

Now, a spiritual avowal of friendship and brotherhood would be a simple matter if I were an American. But as a Catholic Christian in Austria, I will never be able to cross that

threshold which my forefathers — I was born in 1960 — left as a legacy for me: the history of guilt that we share. As a Catholic and Austrian Christian, therefore, it is also incumbent upon me to ask how I can commemorate the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel in the consciousness of this history of guilt and of the crimes my coreligionists committed against Jews and from which I cannot exclude myself, and in the consciousness of the fact that these 50 years since Israel's founding are overshadowed by the 60-year-old remembrance of the Reichskristallnacht pogrom and almost 2,000 years of Christian domination over Jewry. So then, what contribution can Christians make to a process of remembrance?

Remembrance as a first step toward dialogue

Remembrance and memory can take place on three levels that exist alongside each other.

1. *Recalling one's own identity*

This means endowing and keeping alive a unique identity as a community based upon a common history, as the example of the Pesach Haggada shows. Festivals and celebrations are necessary for this. In Christianity, for example, this form of remembrance takes place during the religious service through the Eucharist which recalls the passion and death of Jesus.

2. *Remembering one's roots*

Remembrance and memory also involve a process of maintaining consciousness of one's own roots. A not inconsiderable part of the effort that must be made in the churches—and that is slowly but surely taking place now — is the perpetual reference to the Jewish roots of belief and of the religious service. It is precisely due to Christianity's undeniable dependence upon its Jewish roots that the dialogue between Christianity and Judaism is — as Pope John Paul II

himself once said —
not least of all an
internal dialogue
between the Old
and New
Testaments.

Judaism belongs to
the central essence
of Christianity;
actually, it is its
core. It is precisely
this reason why the
Church has long
endeavored to
appropriate
Judaism, in that it
has understood
itself to be the
People of Israel,
has laid claim to
Jewish
remembrance for
itself, and has
adopted the Jewish
Bible as a part of
the Christian one.

As a biblical
theologian, I have
been fighting for
years on behalf of a
process of
rethinking with
respect to the
intrinsic value of the
Old Testament,
which ought to be
referred to as the
First Testament, the
Hebrew Bible or
simply as the
Tanach.

Furthermore, the
Church has
tentatively begun to
cast aside its
understanding of
the First Testament
as a precursor and
herald of the coming
of Jesus. The First
Testament must be
read in the context
of a dialogue with

the Second, so that the portions of the Bible other than the Second Testament which, for Christianity, necessarily complement and amplify it, must also be recalled in a way that the Bible is seen as a whole consisting of two equally valid parts. And indeed, the practice of the early Church shows that one may not read the First Testament as an illustration of the Second; rather, the early Church placed the experiences of Jesus totally within the context of the First Testament, which it preserved in a complete and unrevised form, and carefully and cautiously assigned Jesus' message a place as a true continuation of the tradition of the First Testament.

Thus, the First Testament can exist in and of itself — and, as the Jewish Bible, does precisely this—whereas the Christian Bible can never consist solely of the Second (New) Testament. This would merely be an incomprehensible remnant. And the Church quite

properly vetoed any such attempt to uproot the First Testament. This understanding of the Bible is now symptomatic of an understanding of the relationship to Judaism as a whole. Only when Judaism is recognized as, on one hand, the inalienable roots of Christianity, and, on the other hand, as an independent entity, can a dialogue take place.

3. *Coming to terms with (the guilt of) the past*

Remembrance and memory also mean the critical confrontation with one's own — often guilt-laden—past as a process of self-purification and as a way out of the false paths that have been traveled. This calls for a renewed approach to one's own identity. It is precisely the Christian churches — with the Catholic Church not the least among them — that have frequently succumbed to the temptation to derive their self-conception from both their history of persecution and victimization and from their triumphalism. One example ought to

suffice. At an international conference on the position of religion in society held in Cordoba in February 1998, the prominent regime critic Adam Michnik referred to the Polish Church's mode of dealing with the collapse of communism as a triumphalistic attitude. After long years of opposition and self-assertion in resisting the regime, together with a high degree of moral integrity, the Church became a factor to be dealt with, one which claims power for itself and seeks to play a massive role in directing the affairs of state. The consequences of this have been powerful forms of resistance emerging, for the first time in Polish history, among segments of the population which, until now, have expected backing and moral support in this Church. Even the remembrance of a history of victimization can lead to, among other outcomes, a cover-up of the real facts and circumstances and to a history written as an elaborate excuse. How long did Austria regard

itself as the first victim of Hitler's Germany and its Church as the victim of national socialism, thereby masking its own guilt in historical events leading up to and taking place during the Third Reich. And how often one hears — not only among Christians — of the Jewish persecution of the early Christians, as if this would justify 2,000 years of anti-Judaism.

Dividing up the entirety of history into that of victims and that of perpetrators seems highly problematic to me. For the interfaith dialogue among Christians, Jews (and Moslems), this should mean that no side ought to insist from the outset on being exclusively a victim or a perpetrator. To a much greater extent, each individual group's process of elaborating its own history calls for the indispensable first step of self-criticism and the forthright disclosure of the responsibility it bears for injustice and suffering. This is certainly not meant to imply that

an offsetting of guilt might be the upshot. Particularly between Christians and Jews, this is impossible; here, it is quite clear that the Christian side bears the burden of this disastrous narrative. As difficult as this may be, however, no side should have its blind spots, and this naturally applies as well to an open and critical assessment of Israel's history over the last 50 years.

As a Catholic Christian, it is my supreme duty not only to describe rigorously and pointedly our own history of injustice, but also to recall it in a fitting way. This might take the form of the Church's public acknowledgment of guilt vis-à-vis Jewry, which many expect from the Vatican in the year 2000. An acknowledgment of guilt could be recalled and internalized at a proper place in the liturgy. One place which is in particular need of such remembrance is the Good Friday liturgy, which was long characterized by anti-Judaism and the damning of Jewry. Here, a

public acknowledgment of guilt on the part of the community would be appropriate, and could slowly but surely become a counterweight in the spiritual identity of Christendom, that endeavored for so long — precisely at Easter time — to set itself off from the Children of Israel. Many others have proposed January 17th, the last day before World Prayer Week, as the day that ought to be set aside for this process of remembrance.

Such liturgical gestures must be supported and maintained by the intellectual and scholarly process of coming to terms with the Church's anti-Judaism and antisemitism, which has made progress in the recent past but has suffered repeated reversals. Particularly in light of the Church's position with regard to the State of Israel, it must be recalled that the ominous connection of the death of Jesus with the collective guilt of the Jews had, until recently, made the recognition of a Jewish state

impossible.

The issue of the guilt of the Jews in the death of Jesus is as old as Christianity itself. The Acts of the Apostles 2:23.36; 3:13-17; 4:25; The Letter of James 5:6; 1Thessalonians 2:14-16 can be mentioned here as documentation of this in the New Testament. Whereas these passages can still be understood as intra-Jewish admonitory tirades, during the first centuries of the common era this rebuke was massively intensified to an indictment of now-estranged Jewry. Melito, bishop of Sardis, wrote in his Easter sermon at around 160/170 AD:

"He was murdered. And where was he murdered? In the middle of Jerusalem. Why? Because he [had] healed their cripples (523ff.)... O Israel, what terrible injustice have you done? You have defiled the one who honored you; the one who extolled you, you have debased; you denied him, who revealed himself to you; you rejected

him who preached
to you; you killed
him who gave you
life. What have you
done, O Israel?
(534-540)... To be
sure, he had to
suffer, but not
through you (546)...
You prepared sharp
nails and false
witnesses for him,
and shackles and
whips, and vinegar
and bile, and the
sword and the
affliction as if for a
murderous thief,
and you fettered his
body and placed
thorns upon his
head; and you
bound his beautiful
hands that formed
you from the earth;
and his beautiful
mouth that
nourished you with
life, you nourished
with gall; and thus
you killed your Lord
on the great festival
day. And you were
merry, but he
hungered; you
drank wine and ate
bread, but he had
vinegar and bile
(572-583)... But you
were not created as
Israel, because you
did not see God;
you did not
recognize the Lord,
you did not know, O
Israel, that this is
God's first-born son
(603-607)... You
killed the Lord in the
middle of
Jerusalem! Hear
this, all you peoples,
and see:
outrageous murder

was committed in
the middle of
Jerusalem, in the
city of the law, in the
city of the Hebrews,
in the city of the
prophets, in the city
that was said to be
a place of justice!
And who was
murdered? Who is
the murderer?
(710-718)... He who
hung the earth in
the firmament was
himself hung up; he
who bound the
heavens was
himself bound; he
who made fast the
universe was
himself fastened to
a length of wood.
The Lord—has been
reviled; God—has
been murdered; the
King of Israel has
been done in by
Israel's hand. O
murder most vile! O
the terrible
injustice!"
(731-738).

The charge of
deicide — moreover,
in connection with
the accusations of
collective guilt —
played an essential
role in allowing
Jewish-Christian
coexistence to
increasingly turn
into hostilities. This
monstrous assertion
is not diminished
from the perspective
of not knowing,
which is mentioned
once (604-607);
rather, the non-
recognition of God
is just one new point

in a whole catalogue of indictments, and does not come into play in the sense of forgiveness occasioned by mitigating circumstances as is the case in the New Testament (The Acts of the Apostles 3:14-15.17; cf. Luke 24:34). The charge of murder now permeates the entire history of the Church — it is even aggravated in comparison to Melito, in that the mitigating circumstances are soon dropped completely; henceforth, there is only talk of brutal and premeditated murder. Whereas in Melito's writings as well as in the Didascalia Apostolorum, the term Jew was a title of honor which the Jews themselves lost as a result of their actions, it increasingly became a term of disparagement. Typical of this murder accusation is the collective responsibility of all Jews, which was mentioned as early as the writings of Tertullian and later became generally accepted.

"The blood of the Lord himself is on

their hands for all eternity" (De oratione 14) were the words of Tertullian, who also wrote: "The extent of their transgression... even if they would not admit it themselves, is proven by the extent of their catastrophe today. Dispersed, restlessly drifting about, expelled from the land and the heavens of their homeland, they wander across the face of the earth without a man, without God as their king. And it is not even permitted to them to briefly set foot as strangers in their own fatherland" (Adv. Jud. 21:5-6).

Here, in a passage written in the 2nd century AD, we already have the painful answer to the question of why we commemorate Theodor Herzl and why Jewry needed such a man. As early as this, a father of the Church set down in writing the essence of what would later be most distinctly expressed in the legend of the restlessly drifting Jew Ahasver ("The Wandering Jew"). Jewry is homeless because it crucified Christ. The

expulsion from its land was said to have been a well-deserved punishment that was even further aggravated by the loss of Jerusalem which meant an end to the Jewish cult. The enormity of Jewish guilt was said to correlate with the harshness of the punishment. Over the course of the first millennium, Origen, Commodianus, Hieronymus, Chrysostom, Aphraates, Ephraem, Basil, Prudentius, Augustine, Eucherius, Pope Leo (in this case, however, moderated by God's mercy), Abogard, Amolo of Lyons and Christian of Stablo repeatedly elaborated this thesis so full of suffering and catastrophe, according to which, as Abogard put it, the Jews have earned "the full measure of our hate" (*De Judaicis superstitionibus MG Epistolae* 5, 190, 32). According to Agobard, the Jews are the devil's spawn, collectively damned for all times.

"Cursed is the fruit of their loins, their

earth and their
livestock; cursed
are their
storehouses,
pantries, and
larders, their
foodstuffs and even
their leftovers" (De
cavendo convictu et
societate Judaica,
MG Epistolae 5,
200, 44-201, 8).

It seems strange
that it was precisely
that Christianity
which spoke of
Jesus having died
because of and for
the sins of all
mankind which
collectively indicted
Jewry and
condemned it to
exile and servitude
as punishment for
the death of Jesus.
Although the view of
Anselm of
Canterbury —
whereby Christ had
to die in order to
heal the total
dissolution of the
world—caused a
furor in the Church,
Jewry nevertheless
remained
unexonerated up to
modern times. To a
much greater
extent, this charge
exerted
considerable
influence upon
Christian anti-
Judaism and played
an important role in
its disastrous
alliance with the
racial antisemitism
of the Nazis. Thus,
Archbishop Gröber
in his 1941 pastoral

letter blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus, which would justify the doings of the national socialists. The Jews were said to have "cursed themselves" with the words "his blood shall be on us and on our children." The Catholic Church — and my words here apply exclusively to it — did not take a position on the question of deicide until the Second Vatican Council. After lengthy consultations and embarrassing discussions, the Church finally managed to come out against the charge of collective guilt of the Jews for the death of Jesus: "What took place as part of his suffering can neither be charged indiscriminately to all Jews living at that time, nor to the Jews living today." The National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America provided a concise expression of the Church's new course of dialogue with Jewry in its statement concerning Catholic-Jewish relations dated November 20, 1975:

"The first major step in this direction was the repudiation of the charge that Jews were and are collectively guilty of the death of Christ. Nostra Aetate and the new Guidelines have definitely laid to rest this myth which has caused so much suffering to the Jewish people. There remains however the continuing task of ensuring that nothing which in any way approaches the notion of Jewish collective guilt should be found in any Catholic medium of expression or communication. Correctly viewed, the disappearance of the charge of collective guilt of Jews pertains as much to the purity of the Catholic faith as it does to the defense of Judaism."

It remains to be seen whether these words and this appeal are sufficient. The fact is that the long history of antisemitism in the Church, which was substantially nurtured by collective Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus, constitutes a mosaic tile of not inconsiderable size

in the explanation of the Shoah, and shows how it was not exclusively political issues — consideration for the Palestinian Christians — but also theological ones that made the recognition of Israel such a difficult matter.

Nevertheless, once the process of disclosure has been initiated, there is no more turning back; the acknowledgment of guilt must be followed by an act of penance.

The process of turning a new page must be visible

The acknowledgment of guilt is followed by repentance, in Hebrew teshuva, which must be translated as Turning. Turning refers to an active undertaking, in the sense of concrete, tangible, visible action, not merely a fresh start internally without consequences externally. Turning must express itself in clear signs of a new beginning — not in lip service, not in intellectualizing. What is needed here is to establish

and sustain organizations like the Coordinating Committee for Christian-Jewish Cooperation, that can work on a local, grass-roots level on behalf of a renewed understanding of faith, organizations that are cognizant of the Church's roots in Judaism and the continuing significance of Judaism for the self-conception of the Church. The mistakes of the past must not only be regretted; they also have to be addressed in order to learn from them.

Thus, an indispensable part of the Church's process of Turning is solidarity with the Jewish people in Israel. Even in voicing justified criticism of political conditions — which is not equated with criticism of the society and the state as such — every Christian also assumes responsibility for the existence of Jewry in a state recognized by international law. To say nothing of so many other reasons, this arises from the clear and unmistakable biblical hope for an existence in

freedom and peace
in one's own
promised land.
Christianity has
allied itself with this
hope through its
unadulterated
adoption of the First
Testament. A
biblical text might be
specially mentioned
here which seems
to me to be
symptomatic of this
hope. The First
Book of Kings 4:25
says: "So Judah
and Israel lived in
safety, every man
under his vine and
his fig tree, from
Dan even to
Beersheba, all the
days of
Solomon." This
security means a
real peace without
being threatened by
foreign enemies,
without fear of
terror. But it is also
connected with the
possession of one's
own land—as
modest as that
piece of land might
be. Solomon, the
king of peace —
whose very name is
synonymous with
the Hebrew word for
it — once guaranteed
this peace. How can
Israel, after 50
years of
independent
existence, find
peace again? In any
case, Christians
ought to do all they
can to help. Not
until this forthright
striving toward
Turning has also

produced a basis of trust on the part of one's partner can one slowly but surely open up a dialogue with that partner. This dialogue, however, has preconditions which I will briefly outline here.

1. Pluralism and openness as important preconditions for dialogue

One of the central preconditions for an interreligious dialogue is the acceptance of the diverse movements and groups within one's own community of faith. As long as inquisitorial means are used to proceed against those within one's own ranks, the spiritual maturity required for a dialogue with "others" is not at hand. An open and sincere dialogue with critical factions among the various denominations is a prime necessity in creating a climate of understanding from which we may dare to take the first steps outside. This certainly does not mean that religious communities ought not to defend themselves against forms of extremism and fundamentalism; the

opposite is the case. It is precisely this fundamentalism that distinguishes itself by its exclusive claim to the truth which it is prepared to defend by the use of violent means. One's readiness to engage in dialogue and one's willingness to repeatedly allow one's own attitudes to be called into question possibly constitute an actual criterion of differentiation and exclusion. The openness of the Catholic Church to internal criticism and reform efforts will thus serve as an indicator for its readiness to carry on a dialogue with other faiths and not to merely pay lip service to this concept.

2. Clarification of "language" and the terms to be employed

A conversation between two partners calls for an agreement on the auxiliary means it makes use of to even allow a dialogue to occur. It requires a number of issues to be settled: hermeneutics, overall conceptions, and terminology. A particularly striking feature of the

interreligious dialogue is that the participants frequently talk at cross purposes because they define one and the same term in completely different ways, or have no idea of the basis on which a discussion might take place. Once again, a single example suffices: a high-ranking Moslem representative attending the above-mentioned religious conference in Cordoba in February 1998 could equate the term "dialogue" with the process of bringing the peoples of the world to Islam and to its principles, just as he traced the term "Islam" back to its root "slm" — that is, peace — in order to conclude that peace and Islam were identical. This would, in turn, imply that mankind need only to turn to Islam in order to attain world peace. Particularly in a church in which it is slowly becoming clear that saving the world cannot be equated with missionary work, and baptism no longer represents the sole admission ticket to civilized society, such words ought to make us sit

up and take notice. Thus, before the actual conversation takes place, basic issues must be settled. The matter up for discussion, the preconditions, and the preconceptions of each respective side must be clarified before they can be communicated to others or the effort to achieve a consensus can be made. If dialogue is not to become a struggle for domination, the participants need a tremendous amount of understanding for one another, which brings me to my next point.

3. Listening to and learning from others as the third step in a dialogue

Once the process of coming to terms with one's own history has begun, once there has been an admission of one's own faults and a sincere endeavor to change one's ways, time and tranquil reflection are necessary to come to an understanding of the partner's preconceptions and his specific ways of approaching issues, to listen to the partner's point of

view, and to perceive how he perceives himself. Such a learning process can take place passively, but it can also go hand in hand with an initial exchange of fundamental conceptual approaches and hermeneutic principles in order to establish a common basis of speaking and listening. This process of learning from others is, for Christians in a Christian-Jewish context, not least of all a reacquisition of one's own roots, a process of involvement with a neglected portion of one's own identity. Thus, it is also something like an act of self-discovery. Especially problematic and particularly essential, it seems, is an involvement of this kind with Islam, about which we have a shocking lack of knowledge whose consequences are prejudices and misunderstanding. But gaining understanding of and more knowledge about Judaism also continues to be a difficult matter for Christians. Many prejudices are

based on ignorance and on a completely erroneous basis of understanding — for instance, when the concept of Torah is continually misinterpreted in the context of "slavish conformity to laws" and not regarded as a source of life, liberation, and identity, or even as a revelation.

Once this learning process has taken place and it has taken on the nature of a reciprocal exchange that makes a genuine dialogue possible, a substantive elucidation of positions can occur that leads not only to demarcations — some of which are necessary—but also to an important process of reflection, a new consciousness, and perhaps even a revision of some of one's own preconceptions. Dialogue also modifies one's own position, without making us all the same. The goal is not to establish one unitary religion or a "world ethos"; rather, it is a renewed and reconsidered plural Christianity, an open and trusting Judaism, and an Islam that must no

longer experience western culture as "Big Brother" and can open itself up to "what is not so bad" about that culture.

These steps that I have just described are, of course, just an outline of a difficult, circuitous path for which there is no set of easy-to-follow directions. The way has its highs and lows, and can lead to wrong turns and dead ends, but we must never lose sight of our goal. And this goal — as I have alluded to in my title — is not "tolerance."

Tolerance as a misleading concept in interreligious dialogue

In the dialogue with other religions, mention is continually made of "tolerance." But this is a concept that is totally inappropriate for an undertaking of this kind. From its literal meaning, to tolerate simply means to put up with or to suffer. It is the tolerance of an inferior by a superior who possesses the power to grant this tolerance and, likewise, to withdraw it when

that suits him. Tolerance is usually limited both with respect to content and time, and often has conditions attached to it. Examples of such conditions in the history of Christian tolerance of Judaism were the payment of certain taxes, the renunciation of a specific religious or cultural identity, the assumption of new (German) names, the loss of a language and independence in matters of child rearing, the ban on constructing synagogues and providing religious instruction, or the forced allegiance to the Monarchy as a means of countering nationalist tendencies. Tolerance was meant in this way to bring about assimilation. This sort of tolerance proceeded under the assumption that Jews were "worthy of improvement" and thus had to be "improved" in order to become a "more reasonable" component of bourgeois (Christian) culture. Most frightening is the fact that the Shoah had its beginnings in precisely that place

where this project had progressed the furthest and displayed the most success: in Germany.

The opposite of tolerance is intolerance, which certainly no one strives for in the context of coexistence. What would be desirable is to get along with one another "beyond" tolerance, amiable dealings with one another whereby there are not stronger or weaker but only equally entitled partners — that is to say, between human beings who carry on discussions on the same level and accept each other. Acceptance and coexistence would be much preferable to tolerance as a precondition and as a goal to strive for — the coexistence of partners enjoying equal rights and working together for a better future.

We ought to reject every form of monopolization by means of embrace as is currently being practiced by certain fundamentalist Protestant groups and, to a lesser extent, in Catholic churches as well.

Such movements, that explicitly recall their "Jewish roots" by celebrating Shabbat or increasingly integrate elements of Jewish liturgy into their religious service, only seem at first glance to be contributing to a dialogue. Their ultimate goal is missionizing and conversion, the dissolution of Judaism in Christianity. These groups are not striving toward religious coexistence of two independent partners who also display differences and reflect distinct theological developments, but rather are attempting to put into effect a very fundamentalist reading of Romans 11:25f.: "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery -- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation — that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, the deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob." Here,

models of
tabernacles are
displayed and there
is much quoting of
the Old Testament
and even the
Talmud;
nevertheless, this
ultimately is done to
prove that "the
reality that confronts
us in Jesus Christ is
so much more
glorious than the
ineffectual Old
Testament
predecessors"
(Alfred Edersheim).

Jewry must be
extremely cautious
with acts of
embrace, since it
has frequently
happened before
that an intense
embrace has led to
someone getting
smothered. Only in
this sense can we
properly understand
the Talmud in
Sanhedrin 59a,
which states: "A
heathen who
studies the Torah
deserves death, for
it is written, Moses
commanded us a
law for an
inheritance; it is our
inheritance, not
theirs. Then why is
this not included in
the Noachite laws?
— On the reading
morasha [an
inheritance] he
steals it; on the
reading me"orasah
[betrothed], he is
guilty as one who
violates a betrothed
maiden, who is

stoned."

According to the rabbinical view, a non-Jew has absolutely no need to study the Torah and thus to undergo conversion in order to be blessed with final salvation. It "suffices" to lead a life of righteousness. Seen in this way, a life dedicated to following the example of Christ — if it were actually possible to live such a life — would be the very quintessence of an existence in which non-Jews could act justly vis-à-vis Jewry without laying claim to it. Of course, immediately after the above-cited passage from Sanhedrin, it is said in the name of R. Meir: "Whence do we know that even a heathen who studies the Torah is as a High Priest?" He bases this position on Leviticus 18:5: "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD." The text explicitly says "man (adam)," and not priest, Levite, or Israelite.

One can see from this example the difficulties that Jews

have had over the years with the issue of Torah study on the part of non-Jews. Nowadays, we see once again the necessity of finding a way in which increasing interest in Judaism does not turn into egocentric monopolization which is quite justifiably to be rejected. On the other hand, the efforts of men and women to study Judaism, to listen and to learn, deserves to be supported when this is a process of learning to understand another people. Only then will this study serve the purpose to which R. Meir referred. When Christians speak of the "people of God," they should be aware that they do not simply mean themselves, but rather always have in mind the people of Israel through whom they came to approach this God. This consideration binds us Christians together, and it also binds us to Judaism, but it does not bind Judaism to us.

Theologically speaking, Christians remain dependents of the people of

God, and our identity will eternally contain a reference to Judaism. This reference, however, ought not to be taken to a theologically abstract extreme; rather, it should manifest itself in solidarity with Jews living here and now, in the struggle for freedom and self-determination for Jewry, in committed involvement against antisemitism, anti-Zionism and hostility towards Jews in general. Religious coexistence should replace centuries of persecution and destruction of a people and the attempt to appropriate their heritage — the mutual acceptance of two partners who approach one another under divergent assumptions but bound together by a shared history. And ultimately, it is precisely this religious coexistence that can lead to concerted action against a loss of values and for a renewed consciousness in a secularized world. Esoteric beliefs, new gnosis and the all-devouring Molech of consumption

constitute a challenge common to all religious forces, just as the problems of dealing with suffering and injustice affect us all. Thus, the final question ought not to be how we can demarcate ourselves from one another, but rather how we can work together to provide this society with an impulse for renewal that it so desperately needs.

Translation from the [German](#): Mel Greenwald)

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