

Moving down our agenda list, the recent remark of Norman Cousins that "Jews and Christians have at least one thing in common: both have been unwilling to publicly live with the idea that Jesus was a Jew" leads us to a central question in the dialogue -- Christology. In line with Mr. Cousins' reminder, both of our faith-communities have to re-examine their traditional approaches to the significance of Jesus' appearance in history.

For Christianity today the question must be how it can articulate its self-identity without automatically denying the continuing validity of Judaism as a on-going expression of fundamental religious realities after the time of Christ against the traditional background of the "New Moses", New Covenant, "New Jerusalem" vocabulary. Coming to grips with this will not be easy for Christians because we are talking about faith statements which have been central to Christian theology from its earliest days. Some Christians have tried to solve the problem by appealing to Romans 9-11. Granted there are some sections in these chapters that convey a positive tone when taken by themselves and in fact these chapters do challenge simplistic Christian notions about the end of Judaism as a valid religion with the advent of Jesus. But ultimately Romans 9-11 ends on a conversionist note that I find unacceptable. More radical surgery is imperative, to my way of thinking.

Several contemporary theologians such as Rosemary Reuther,⁴ J. Coert Rylaarsdam,⁵ Monika Hellwig,⁶ Gregory Baum,⁷ and Peter Chirico⁸ have undertaken such surgery, reaching the conclusion that parts of our traditional Christology is severely inadequate and should in fact be discarded. As Christians we must come to view the Jewish "no" to Jesus as a positive contribution to the ultimate salvation of mankind, not as an act of unfaithfulness or haughty blindness -- that is a major thrust of this new theological search.

Let me try to elaborate a bit on this new theological perspective. To this end, permit me to briefly quote from the writings of some of these Christian scholars:

(from Gregory Baum)

We must recognize that while present-day Judaism is founded upon scriptural revelation and nourished by it, it has become, through an intricate history and a great variety of factors, a religion in its own right, not the immediate precursor of Christianity. . . The destiny of Judaism is not to disappear and give way to Christianity; Judaism continues to exercise a positive role in God's plan of salvation. The saving presence of God in Jewish religion is the source of its extraordinary vitality and its resilience against all its adversaries. 9

(from Monika Hellwig)

A doctrine of simultaneous and complimentary participation in the same covenant requires a restatement of some key concepts for Christians. Central to this enterprise is the assertion that the Messiah indeed came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and that those who recognized him followed him into the kingdom, while among his own people many refused to own him and are left in outer darkness. This is an oversimplification of the original Christian claim of the apostolic community for several reasons. A more cautious formulation would be that the cry of the early Christian community, "Jesus is Lord and Christ" was and remains a prophetic assertion by which Christians have pledged themselves to a task of salvation yet to be accomplished. Even to the Christian there is a most important sense in which Jesus is not yet Messiah. The eschatological tension has not been resolved. What may be expected in the messianic fulfillment has not yet become manifest in the world - that there shall be peace among men; that the weak shall have no cause to fear the strong; that a spirit of healing and joy shall be all pervasive. Logically, the messianic event should be seen as lengthy, complex, unfinished and mysterious. 10

(from Rosemary Reuther)

. the Christian must also reckon with the equally inescapable fact that the Messianic Age has not come. Human history from the time of Jesus until now remains as much and more than ever mired in ambiguity, sickness, sin and death. If the Christian is then to affirm that the term "Christ" refers to the Messiah of Israel's hope, then he must also understand that, from the standpoint of that faith of Israel itself, there is no possibility of talking about the Messiah having come (much less of having come two thousand years ago, with all the evil history that has reigned from that time until this), when the reign of God has not come. 11

What Christianity has in Jesus is not the Messiah, but a Jew who hoped for the coming of the kingdom of God and who died in that hope. 12

While the views of these theologians must certainly be viewed as provisional, they are beginning a process that will profoundly alter Christianity's self-definition and make possible a more realistic relationship to Judaism and to all other non-Christian religions. The recent document of the French Bishops, while not as radical as the views just quoted, would also serve as an excellent introduction to the new thinking about the Jewish-Christian relationship slowly emerging in Christian circles. The same holds true for the statement released last June by the Israel Study Group sponsored by the National Council of Churches Faith & Order Commission and the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. This latter document goes well beyond Vatican II in coming to grips with the issue of the basic relationship between Judaism and Christianity and it bears the signatures of some eighteen Christian theologians representing Protestantism, Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.¹³ Certainly the task of theologically re-interpreting the fundamental Jewish-Christian relationship still requires much work and research. But what the theologians we have just looked at, despite their many differences, are saying is that Christianity must re-examine its contention that the Messianic age, the time of fulfillment, far more crucial to Judaism than the notion of a personal Messiah, took place with the coming of Christ. However we may eventually come to explicate the uniqueness and mystery of the Christ Event, it has become obvious to them and to me that we can no longer simply say that the Jewish notion of the Messianic age was realized in the Death-Resurrection of Christ.

Does this mean that our total Christology must be discarded? By no means. But this Christology needs restatement and clarification. Permit me to outline just briefly the directions in which I feel this renewed Christology must move.

In a very recent essay entitled "Anti-Judaism is the Left Hand of Christology" Dr Rosemary Reuther hits upon a vital point, in my opinion, in the following statement:

Originally Christians also linked Jesus' messianic role intimately to this final salvation of the world. But as this event failed to materialize, Christian theology pushed it off into a vague future--i.e., the "second coming"--and reinterpreted Jesus' messianic role in inward and personal ways that bore little relation to what the Jewish tradition had meant by the "coming of the Messiah." 14

Dr. Reuther is generally correct, I believe, in her description of the gradual change from an historical, very Jewish-based, interpretation of the life and mission of Jesus to a much more inward and "mystical" explanation. But I would place a much higher valuation on this process than Dr. Reuther seems to do. But her negativism is correct in this sense: Paul and John never made clear the fundamental changes they had made in the church's Christological understanding. This would lead as a result to confusion for centuries as Christians utilized the older fulfillment language which continued to perdure up into our own time, especially in the liturgy, side-by-side with the more inward language. It is incumbent upon Christian theologians to work for the removal of this confusion by forthrightly acknowledging the basic change in viewpoint introduced by Paul and John and ceasing to pretend that the earlier Messianic Christology and the later Christology can be simply dovetailed. Such admission would go a long way in stripping Christology of its anti-Judaic bias.

The actual Christological transformation process, as I see it, went something like this. After the early gospels and the initial Pauline writings had proclaimed Jesus to be the expected Jewish messiah, problems arose for the primitive church. The signs and realities that were to accompany the coming of the Messiah were nowhere to be seen. Hence eventually the later Paul and especially John began to re-examine the earlier Christologies and came, it seems to me, to appreciate a totally new and potentially more important aspect of Jesus the Christ. Through him and his work man had come to glimpse more profoundly the intimate link that exists, that has always existed, between God and man. Humanity and divinity were more closely linked than man had ever realized before. And their linkage had deep implications for the understanding of people's relationship to one another and to God as well as for the dignity enjoyed by each human person. This realization, I would argue, was in part a development of the heightened sense of the dignity of the individual person that had emerged as one of the hallmarks of the Pharisaic revolution within Judaism during the Second Temple period. In this sense, and I know many of my Jewish colleagues may be taken back by this statement, I do not believe that the notion of the Incarnation, the presence of God's divinity in man, is as foreign to the soul of Judaism as is usually maintained. But nonetheless the Christologies of John and Paul do represent a quantum leap when compared to the understanding of Second Temple Judaism.

Obviously all this needs much greater elaboration, something I hope to do in a future book. But some tentative conclusions are still forthcoming at this point for Christian theologians. First of all, it is imperative to recognize that Christianity in and by itself does not contain in their fullness all the ideas necessary for a complete

understanding of man's religious dimension and that only through inter-faith sharing can a person even begin to approach such an understanding. Such recognition is demanded now even though we cannot as yet articulate in any complete fashion a new definition of Christianity's role vis-à-vis Judaism and the other world religions. Humble acknowledgment that our previous viewpoint was shortsighted is the call of the hour for Christians.

Secondly, such a Christology as that I have sketched above, in no way invalidates Judaism, its covenant and its distinctiveness. Despite their shared biblical heritages and other similarities, Judaism and Christianity are essentially distinct religions, each emphasizing different but, I would argue, complementary aspects of man's religious dimension. This would support the contention of such Jewish scholars as Arthur Cohen and Hans Jonas that reference to a single Judaeo-Christian tradition represents a basic distortion of reality.¹⁵

Lastly, this new Christology will force Christian theologians to probe non-Christian religions to see whether it might not be possible that the fundamental reality to which our religion has applied the term "Christ" may not in fact be present under some other name or symbol.