

~~Trembling Journey Through the Covenant~~
~~1948 and 1974: Trembling Journey~~
~~through the Covenant~~

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*I have been asked to express my views, past and ~~present~~ current, on the Covenant.
The question may be stated as follows:*

Is there any reconciliation between the divine demand, the divine judgment, on the one side, and the divine anguish, the divine protection, on the other side? ~~Here is the question of the Covenant.~~ In different language: What does it mean to speak of the people of God?

The present essay approaches this life-and-death question by means of a comparison-contrast between my thinking in the 1940s and my viewpoint in the 1970s. Reflection upon the all-decisive doctrine of the Covenant assures grave moral and theological risks. I have retained certain convictions from the beginning of my work, but I have also come to alter my position at salient points of both emphasis and substance. I reject certain of my erstwhile contentions and I offer certain new ones.

I

Beginnings. My initial full-length study of the Jewish-Christian relationship appeared in 1948 under the title Christianity and the Children of Israel.¹ I began to think about that subject and to

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This paper is dedicated to the memory of the children who perished in the ^{Nazi} death camps. (See Kiryl Sosnowski, The Tragedy of Children Under Nazi Rule, Warsaw: Agencja Prasowa, 1962).

¹A. Roy Eckardt, Christianity and the Children of Israel, New

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initiate research upon it in 1945; accordingly, the period involved in this paper extends to ^{some} thirty years.²

In my first book the concept of the Covenant is not explicitly analyzed. But the question of the Covenant lies at the foundation of that study and is there brought to the fore by means of other terminology.

At that early time I already maintained that the Christian's faithful acceptance of Jesus as the Christ does not insinuate any exclusion of Jews from salvation.³ If this conviction suggested support of the covenantal blessings of the Jewish people, I was also impelled to raise a question that can be identified with the covenantal misery of Jews (though it need not be so identified⁴): "What other

✓ York: King's Crown Press, 1948 (hereinafter identified as CCI). This work is my doctoral dissertation in the Department of Philosophy of Columbia University in conjunction with the Union Theological Seminary, New York. The area of Jewish-Christian relations was first suggested to me as a research subject by a friend, Harold A. Durfee.

✓ ² During the time from 1948 to 1961 my published work (other than some book reviews and a few articles) concentrated upon areas other than the Jewish-Christian relationship. My initial article in the latter field appeared in 1946 under the kind aegis of Reinhold Niebuhr, who was then directing my doctoral research ("A Theology for the Jewish Question," Christianity and Society, XI, 2 [Spring, 1946], 24-27; see my "Tribute to Reinhold Niebuhr [1892-1971], Midstream, XVII, 6 [June/July, 1971], 11-18). Dr. Niebuhr was editor of Christianity and Society, which was published by the Fellowship of Socialist Christians. The article in that journal outlined some of the ideas subsequently published in CCI (especially chap. 5).

³ CCI, p. xiii.

⁴ I emphasized that "Christians and Christianity are to be held responsible for much of Jewish suffering." I also stated: "It is probably true that one element in antisemitism is a psychological reaction on the part of Christians to the Jewish claim to be the chosen people." Again, in such an evil as hatred of the Jews "we are confronted with the terrible abyss of human sinfulness" (ibid., pp. 4, 10, 32).

people has been made to suffer over so long a period of time and to such a horrible degree?"⁵

A wondering and baffled concern with the demonic power of antisemitism has always been at the center of my theological effort. Thus, the opening words of Christianity and the Children of Israel reported the killing and burning of eighty thousand Jews, the entire population of the ghetto of Lodz, Poland, in a single night at the Oswiecim concentration camp, and the report was followed by the words: "The Christian church is confronted today with the Jewish 'question,' as epitomized in such figures, and the church must try to give an answer. Christian theology seeks for the meaning of the Jewish plight, if there is a meaning, not simply in order that the church may understand but that understanding will lead to Christian action."⁶

Thus is one caught up in a terrible dialectic: the dialectic of Covenant and antisemitism. What is the relation between these two realities? Is Will Herberg right in his conclusion, "Bringing God to the world, Israel must suffer the hatred and resentment of the world against God and his Law"?⁷ Is antisemitism the inevitable and destined incarnation of the Covenant? If so, how can the doctrine of the Covenant continue to be tolerated morally? Here is one poignant and unique case of a general dialectical condition that has plagued the Jewish community and the Christian church alike from the very beginnings: How, if at all, is the estrangement between religious faith and human righteousness to be overcome? If there is

⁵Ibid., p. 4.

⁶Ibid., p. 1 (slightly emended).

⁷Will Herberg, unpublished manuscript, as cited in CCI, p. 4.

justification in pursuing literary-theological analysis in personal, life-and-death terms rather than in purely objective fashion, that justification is seen in the present instance: the state and the fate of a man's soul lie in the balance.

In Christianity and the Children of Israel I concentrated upon the "transcendent mystery" of the Jews as the continuing people of God, adducing in support of this idea the biblical, and more especially the Pauline, witness (cf. Rom. 11:25-36). I interpreted Paul to mean that the Jews did not lose their chosen people status despite their rejection of Jesus as the Christ.⁸ (Later I came to question the correctness of this reading of Paul, although I was to disagree with the apostle's position as I newly understood it.⁹) The concept of the "mystery" of the Jewish people was applied to their genesis, present life, and destiny. All these stages were construed in theological terms. Under the influence of Paul Tillich, I set the "Lord of time," the God of universal justice, in opposition to the "gods of

⁸ CCI, p. 40.

⁹ "To Paul, the ancient Covenant with Israel had been fatefully interrupted. A spiritual breach had appeared respecting original Israel. The apostle supports a temporary but nonetheless decisive 'end of the history of Israel'. . . . [To Paul] the church has inherited the election of Israel. . . . [For] the present epoch -- the one that must count existentially for us -- original Israel simply has no positive theological status or function. . . . Israel's election is now a non-functioning election. . . . [The] apostle's overall position in Romans 9-11 is that original Israel gives birth to the Messiah, rejects him, and then enters a period of spiritual occultation from which it will reappear only at an end time" (A. Roy Eckardt, Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967, pp. 57-58). It is to no avail to cite the assurances that "all Israel will be saved" and that "God's choice stands" (Rom. 11:26, 28). For Paul, these assurances are wholly eschatological. To him, "Israel has effectively betrayed and lost its vocation" (Eckardt, Your People, My People: The Meeting of Jews and Christians, New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1974, pp. 60-61).

space." "The Jews are divinely preserved to represent the justice of the one God and to bring the Messiah to the world." Thus, it is not true that the Christian church has replaced the Jewish people in the intention of God. Hatred of Jews was seen as "a tragically accurate barometer by which to measure the spiritual idolatry of western culture." However, if justice is truly universal it can, perforce, turn upon the Jewish nation (cf. Amos 3:2). "The prophets threaten the elected nation as well; that it too will be rejected by God because of injustice is the final victory over the gods of space." On the other hand, "the elected nation is not called upon to sacrifice its existence. A soil, a holy land, an elected nation are never holy by their very being, but they may become holy if and when they realize truth and justice. . . . The Jewish people could justifiably become a nation in a given space after they had become a nation of time. The 'side by side of space' becomes insignificant before the historical process which moves in the direction of the divinely-established Kingdom of God."¹⁰

My point of view was affected markedly by certain emphases within neo-Reformation thought.¹¹ Yet I remained in a condition of theological and moral uncertainty. On the one hand, I was disturbed that the theological absolutization of Christ in neo-Reformation thinking,

¹⁰ CCI, pp. 38, 38-39, 40n, 159. These passages rely heavily upon an unpublished manuscript of Paul Tillich.

¹¹ "The purpose of this treatise is not that of showing that the 'school' of thought to which the writer belongs affords a 'better' means of approaching the Jewish question than do other modes of thinking, but rather of attempting to state in confessional terms the way that question looks from the point of view of neo-Reformation convictions about God and such phenomena as election, sin, and redemption, and the consequences one might expect to flow from this understanding" (CCI, p. x, slightly emended).

combined with its stress upon the Jewish non-acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, could serve to actualize latent Christian antisemitism. From my study of the Nazi period I learned how the Faith Movement of German Christians repeated ad nauseam the charges of the apostasy of the Jews, of their condemnation by God for "their crucifixion" of Jesus, and of their inferiority as a race. On the other hand, I learned how the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche) fought antisemitism in the church on the very ground of an absolute loyalty to God's revelation in Jesus as the Christ, in opposition to the German Christian Movement with its idolatrous subjugation of the Christian God to the State and the Aryan race.¹²

I was greatly impressed by the sacrificing Christian absolutism of the Reformed Church in Holland, whose members put themselves in mortal danger and stood up to the Nazis with such affirmations as, "How can we expect justice before the judgment seat of Christ if we have not sought justice here on earth?," and "The fact that the Jewish people is declared to be inferior contradicts the Word of God, for it has pleased God, in his marvelous and unfathomable mercy, to give redemption to all peoples and races through Jesus Christ who came from the midst of the Jewish people."¹³ I think it was the action of such groups as the Confessing Church in Germany and the Dutch Christians that enabled me to imply agreement with the neo-Reformation avowal of Jesus Christ as "man's only Saviour and Lord"¹⁴ -- or at least helped to hinder me from realizing the serious moral and theological troubles in such an avowal. I do remember being

¹²CCI, pp. 88, 98, 100, 101.

¹³Cited in ibid., pp. 98, 99.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 133.

exercised over a pastoral letter of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (September, 1941), which asserted that Israel's rejection of Christ led to a "judgment of blindness" and that "the true destiny of the Jewish people lies in its conversion to Christ, by joining the Christian church."¹⁵ Yet I myself spoke of the national pride that Jews may exhibit, as this is made possible by the affirmation that they are the people of God. I added: "The invectives of the biblical prophets would never have been necessary had the Jews fully comprehended the meaning of their election by the God of universal justice. The prophets themselves were never entirely devoid of nationalistic bias."¹⁶ However, I then turned around this kind of argumentation and applied the reality of human sinfulness to the interpretation of antisemitism itself. Seeking to grapple with the historical singularity of that phenomenon, I proposed the following hypotheses: (1) Generically speaking, hatred of Jews expresses the pagan-human war against the God whom the Jewish people uniquely represent. (2) Within a Christian frame of reference, antisemitism perpetuates the war that Christians wage against the eschatological demands of Jesus the Jew. We project upon the Jews our own rejection of the Christ. It is hardly a mere coincidence that Jesus was a Jew, that Christianity is a Jewish religion, and that no people on earth has ever been hated the way Jews have been hated -- especially in the Christian world. We are not able to crucify Jesus directly now but we can dispose of him symbolically by persecuting and even annihilating his people.¹⁷

¹⁵Cited in ibid., p. 101.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 38-43.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 50-65.

These hypotheses are explicated much more fully in Christianity and the Children of Israel than is possible or necessary here, and a number of criticisms of my argumentation are also developed there. I have never had reason to abandon the hypotheses; if anything, continuing reflection upon the dread tale of antisemitism has served to strengthen my persuasion. However, I have recently sought to refine and to go beyond these interpretations, as will be made evident below.

I further paid considerable attention to the Christian missionary dilemma.¹⁸ According to the normative missionary argument, the obligation to bring all men to Christ can hardly exclude the people from whom he came "as of the flesh"; any such exclusion is itself a form of antisemitism. In Christianity and the Children of Israel I adduced factors that call into question an out-and-out missionary policy. With indebtedness to Paul Tillich, I referred to the peculiar function that Judaism and the Jewish people perform in the divine economy: to testify, for the sake of the God of universal justice, against the demonic forces of paganism.¹⁹ In Tillich's words, "the people of time . . . by their very existence . . . break the infinite claim of the gods of space which expresses itself in will-to-power, imperialism, injustice, demonic enthusiasm, and tragic self-destruction." The Christian church is unable or unwilling to take over this function; the church remains the peculiar prey of pagan distortions. The church "is always in danger . . . of adoring the

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 145-151.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 146, 147.

gods of space in which she is ruling. . . . [The] prophetic spirit included in the traditions of the synagogue is needed as long as the gods of space are in power, and this means up to the end of history, as Paul seems to assume in Romans 9-11, the first Christian interpretation of the historical fate of Judaism." Indispensably, Judaism and the Jewish people serve as a corrective against the paganism that forever corrupts Christianity.²⁰ In alternate terminology, Adolf Hitler had to seek to kill all Jews simply because they were Jews, but the churches and any Christian could escape his wrath (though not of course a ^{Jewish} ~~Hebrew~~ Christian) through proper obeisance or just by not "making trouble."

I was led to insist that the integrity of the missionary vocation of the church in the world is in no way subverted by a non-missionary stance respecting Jews.²¹ "Synagogue and church should be united in our period in the struggle for the Lord of time, a period in which more than ever . . . the gods of space show their power in men's souls and in nations."²² To argue that the exclusion of Jews from Christian missionary endeavor compromises the church's evangelical task is to violate the peculiar relationship between the church and Judaism.²³

²⁰ Unpublished manuscript of Paul Tillich, slightly emended.

²¹ CCI, p. 148.

²² Unpublished manuscript of Paul Tillich.

²³ CCI, p. 148. I qualified this judgment by a recognition that "the conversion of individual Jews to the Christian faith is to be distinguished from the destruction of Judaism" (ibid., p. 148n).

On the other hand, I went on to place the missionary question within the context of a claim that Judaism is part of the "latent" Christian church. (Here too Professor Tillich influenced me. In later years, as explained below, I came to reverse this contention, ^{now} apprehending the Christian dispensation ^{under the aspect of} ~~within~~ the Jewish dispensation.) While acknowledging that Jews must reject any Christian effort to subsume the synagogue under the church, I stipulated that "neo-Reformation theology is absolute at the point of affirming that Jesus is the Christ" and that "to surrender this affirmation is to surrender the whole Christian faith." Once the Christ appears, the covenanted assembly of God becomes the assembly of Christ (ecclesia); before his appearance, it is the assembly that awaits him.²⁴ As Tillich expressed the matter, "in Judaism the church is latent in a national theocracy and its representatives. It becomes manifest fragmentarily in individuals and groups who struggle against the national limitations of Judaism without being able to overcome them. This refers to the prophetic and universalistic attitude towards Jewish nationalism." Before the coming of Jesus as the Christ the church is manifest only by anticipation; after his appearance it is also manifest by reception. "The latent church always engages in the quest to become manifest, while the manifest church is continually exposed to criticism by the latent church. The latent church within Christian civilization is a negative as well as positive challenge to the manifest church. The acknowledgment of the latent church undercuts ecclesiastical and hierarchical arrogance without rejecting

²⁴ Ibid., p. 148.

the claim of the Church to be the community in which the New Being in Christ is actual."²⁵

The foregoing paragraphs involve us in a baffling enigma: The Jewish community and the Christian church together face the paradox of universal claims amidst human fragmentariness and sin. In Christianity and the Children of Israel I tried to live with the assertions of both Christian absolutism and Christian relativism. I distinguished between "loyalty to Christ as the transcendent Truth who stands above the relativities of history" and Christianity, a religion which sinfully participates in those very relativities and has in truth "placed itself in the forefront among forces persecuting the Jewish people." And yet, in declaring that reconciliation to God ultimately takes place through Jesus Christ, for Jew as for gentile, I was hardly showing consistency with any out-and-out rejection of the Christian missionizing stance. Nonetheless I concluded that a radical rethinking of the missionizing view is demanded, with special attention to the welfare of Jews as human beings. And within one crucial moral context -- the struggle against anti-semitism -- I persisted in the judgment that Christian absolutism excels Christian relativism. In behalf of "orthodoxy," I engaged in a polemic against the latitudinarian kind of "liberalism" that undercuts the motivations of distinctively Christian social action: Orthodoxy "maintains that in the purely pragmatic question of an effective Christian ethic, the conviction that the Cross means the suffering of the only Son of God (John 3:16) and hence that in

²⁵ From lecture manuscripts of Paul Tillich, slightly emended.

gratefulness for God's gift we must remedy the sufferings of other sons of God incarnate in our Jewish neighbors affords the basis for true Christian love." I subscribed to the affirmation of my great teacher Reinhold Niebuhr: The claim that Christ reconciles men to God is ^{authenticated} ~~validated~~ when Christ has the power to end human idolatry. Christ becomes the final truth about human life insofar as he is able to negate our egoistic corruptions of life, particularly those that involve hatred and derogation of our fellows.²⁶

A final question considered in Christianity and the Children of Israel is one I at the time referred to as the ethnic quality of Jews.

Is there legitimacy in calling upon the universal, anti-pagan function of Jews as ground for denying their particularity as a people? I adhered to Reinhold Niebuhr's negative answer to this question, and have continued to do so. Absolute religious demands must not be permitted to ^{eliminate} ~~asphyxiate~~ human life in this world; we are obligated morally to foster a creative tension between those demands, and historical possibilities and necessities. To ignore or underestimate Jewish ethnic reality is to violate that aspect of the prophetic tradition which understands the earthly basis of human existence. The Covenant, because it is entered into with a people, can never be reduced to a purely "religious" dimension. It is inherently political and social in character. There is no possibility that a covenanted people can fulfill a divine mission apart from the maintenance of its individual integrity. Again, justice for

²⁶ CCI, pp. 149-151, 152-155, 177.

human beings extends to aggregate, as well as to individual, rights. The teaching of the goodness of the "orders of creation" validates the collective will-to-live of any people (which is not to say that this survival impulse is exempt from human corruption or will-to-power). The counsels of the Christian church in this whole area have been despoiled by the temptations of mystical universalism. Christians have no right to demand that the Jewish nation become a church, for this is, in Niebuhr's words, to require "the highest idealism of a people which is least secure in its survival." "How can the 'particular' be a servant of the universal, if the life of the particular has no security?" There has to be a political solution to the problem of Jewish survival "without reference to the final religious problem." The denial of historical particularities is a species of utopianism. In truth, Jews have even been obliged morally to use their religious faith in behalf of survival in a hostile world.²⁷

The foregoing interpretation is paralleled in Professor Tillich's judgment that it is illicit for someone "who has not been subjected to a tragic fate to ask those who are in it to remain in it for the sake of an eternal idea. . . . No human being can demand that a nation as such become a holy nation. No one can demand that the majority of a group live without a space and sacrifice their homeland again and again for the sake of the ultimate purpose of mankind."²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 166-170.

²⁸ Substantially reproduced from an unpublished manuscript by Paul Tillich.

The above reasoning was fulfilled in my support of Zionism. (The analysis here summarized was engaged in before the rebirth of Israel as a state. My thinking on Zionism and the potential reestablishment of Israel was still quite rudimentary.) The right of collective existence is threatened whenever it is deprived of a political base. This state of affairs is especially serious when the group involved has been perennially subjected to persecution or mere "toleration." In further citation of Reinhold Niebuhr, Jews "long for a place on the earth where they are not 'tolerated,' where they are neither 'understood' nor misunderstood, neither appreciated nor condemned, but where they can be what they are, preserving their own unique identity without asking 'by your leave' of anyone else."²⁹

I concluded that the Arab-Jewish conflict^{of the 1940s} and decisions respecting Jewish sovereignty^{would have to} ~~must~~ be approached from the perspective of moral relativism. Every principled argument for a state for one people (such as the Jews) is an implicit argument for a state for another people (such as the Arabs). But in the 1940s Arabs were not in the same plight as Jews and were not deprived of a place of their own. While I was prepared to ask "why the Arabs must be made to suffer for the Jews lack of a homeland," and although I^{cautioned} ~~continued~~ that the church must be careful not to further "the welfare of Jews at the expense of that of other peoples" -- a caution that raises the question of whether I had really taken the reality of the Holocaust into my^{own} life -- I proposed that a workable decision respecting

²⁹ CCI, p. 168.

Palestine would have to be made, at least in part, on the basis of the relatively "greater need of one people over another, recognizing that it is impossible to find a completely just solution for one or the other party." But I contended that since absolute claims within history are at variance with the Christian faith, neither Jews nor Arabs nor anyone else possess an exclusive or ultimate divine right to any particular land. There is a point at which prophetism comes into conflict with nationalistic messianism; the Jewish prophetic spirit has to be ever alert against nationalist idolatries. Finally, I said that we must not assume that the Zionist solution can be a cure-all for antisemitism. Among the things I failed to include was any reference to the continuing historical rights of the Jewish people to the land of Palestine. All in all, I saw as "the real problem" the transcending and converting of manifestations of human particularity without threatening the right of the individuals involved to live a free, collective existence.³⁰

This is where I stood shortly before the reemergence of the State of Israel in 1948.

II

For present purposes and because of ^{space}~~time~~ limitations, the period from 1948 through 1973 is largely omitted.³¹ In the

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 168, 170-172,

³¹ The major work I did in the interim within the realm of Jewish-Christian relations involved two volumes: Elder and Younger Brothers, op. cit., reissued as a paperback by Schocken Books, 1973 (hereinafter cited as EYB); and, in joint authorship with Alice Eckardt,

following pages I emphasize my current position. With respect to published ideas, I concentrate primarily upon relevant parts of ^{some of} my writings from 1974: one book, Your People, My People,³² and three articles, "The Devil and Yom Kippur,"³³ "Is the Holocaust Unique?,"³⁴ and ^{"Theological Implications of the State of Israel: The Protestant View"} ~~"The Land of Israel in Contemporary Religious Thought."~~³⁵ The time gap is not as great as it appears, because some of the materials in Your People, My People are adapted from, or carry forward some ideas in, writings by me that appeared in the 1960s. (One analytical problem is that I have already grown restive

Encounter With Israel: A Challenge to Conscience, New York: Association Press, 1970 (hereinafter identified as EWI).

³²A. Roy Eckardt, Your People, My People, op. cit. (hereinafter cited as YPMP). References here made to that volume are restricted to the subject of the present essay. Much of the book deals with other matters. Major aspects of Jewish-Christian relations are there discussed, including the recent and contemporary predicament of the churches respecting the Jewish people, the meaning of the State of Israel for Jews and Christians, Israel and the Middle East conflict, moral and theological changes within Christian thinking, and recent encounters between Jews and Christians in this country and abroad. Much current literature in the field is summarized.

³³Eckardt, "The Devil and Yom Kippur," Midstream, XX, 7 (August/September, 1974), 67-75 (hereinafter identified as "DYK").

³⁴Eckardt, "Is the Holocaust Unique?" Worldview, XVII, 9 (September, 1974), 31-35 (hereinafter referred to as "IHU?").

~~³⁵Eckardt, "The Land of Israel in Contemporary Religious Thought," 1974 Yearbook of the Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem, forthcoming; hereinafter cited as "TLI").~~

³⁵Eckardt, "Theological Implications of the State of Israel: The Protestant View," 1974 Yearbook of the Encyclopaedia Judaica, Jerusalem, 1975 (hereinafter referred to as "T.I").

with some of the emphases in my ^{most recent} ~~current~~ book -- and particularly with its omissions. The three articles indicated may have some compensating value here.)

Self-critique. The Christian faith that I have affirmed and defended helped to make inevitable the worst crime in human history: the technological-systematic murder of the European Jews.³⁶ The contribution of Christendom and Christian teaching to anti-semitism and indeed to the death camps has at last been acknowledged. A chapter in Your People, My People entitled "The Churches, Anti-semitism, and the Holocaust" is devoted to this matter, with emphasis upon the New Testament and the history of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.³⁷ But Christianity and the Children of Israel made only passing reference to the antisemitic proclivities of Christian Scripture.³⁸ In Your People, My People it is asserted:

Without Christendom's . . . decision to transubstantiate the human words of the New Testament writers into the Word of God, the evil would have been infinitely less. Because the New Testament is the primordial Christian authority, . . . [it] remains the major dogmatic and existential barrier to any victory over antisemitism. However, it is most doubtful that the Christian church will ever surrender the claim that the New Testament and the "events" it recounts, constitutes the unique history of salvation and indeed the Word of God, and, accordingly, that it comprises the "gospel truth" which stands in judgment upon all other alleged truth. . . . Every instance of Christian antisemitism in postbiblical history is directly or indirectly traceable to the events or reputed events

³⁶"Worst" is a relative term that cannot be separated from quantitative considerations. There is a sense in which the killing of one human being (or other living thing) is as terrible as the killing of an infinite number.

³⁷YPMP, pp. 7-28.

³⁸E.g., CCI, p. 1.

recorded in the New Testament. The foundations of Christian antisemitism and the church's contribution to the Nazi Holocaust were laid 1900 years ago; the line from the New Testament through the centuries of Christian contempt for Jews to the gas ovens and crematoria is unbroken. This is why no responsible moral assessment of either the writer of John or of the other New Testament evangelists can turn its back on the calumnies they circulated. For the historical consequences of these slanders were persecution and, finally, mass murder. . . . [Nazism] gave practical application to the theological and moral findings of the church, with³⁹ the aid of a technology not previously available to Christendom.

In a chapter ^{called} ~~entitled~~ "On History's Greatest Perversion of Justice" I abandon the notion of partial Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus as that notion is given voice in Christianity and the Children of Israel.⁴⁰ The historiography and the ideology of the Crucifixion have passed through three phases: (1) "the Jews" as the singular culprits in Jesus' trial and death, resulting in the laying of an eternal curse upon them; (2) the allegation of joint Jewish-Roman responsibility, accompanied by a repudiation of the claim of collective Jewish guilt; (3) the historical finding that the Jewish people had nothing whatsoever to do with Jesus' fate.⁴¹ I am not a New Testament historian but I venture the judgment that future historiography will increasingly vindicate the third phase, within which Haim Cohn is a formidable pioneer. In the chapter indicated I represent Mr. Justice Cohn's argumentation in The Trial and Death of Jesus. In that work "the reductio ad absurdum of any and all Jewish responsibility for the trial and

³⁹ YPMP, pp. 13, 28.

⁴⁰ CCI, p. 157.

⁴¹ YPMP, pp. 29, 30.

death of Jesus is consummated, and upon a solid historico-jurisprudential foundation."⁴²

Authentic theology cannot be reared upon false history.

Every Passion Week the most evil prevarication of all time -- evil because of its consequences -- is recapitulated throughout ~~Christendom~~ ^{Christendom: the legend of deicide} ^{and legitimate} ⁴³ ~~Christianity~~. Yet there persist the all-decisive questions of the reputedly and uniquely salvational quality of Jesus and of the Jewish rejection-as-such of Jesus as the Christ, as these ideas were repeated in Christianity and the Children of Israel. True, I did express there the fear that emphasis upon Jewish non-acceptance can compound antisemitism.⁴⁴ But I failed to attain a constructive resolution of the matter.

For one thing, the attempt to make the issue of Jesus as the Christ into a vital question for Jews combines imperialism with exaggeration. The welcome or the denial of one or another messianic claimant has never been the all-crucial question for Judaism that it immediately became for Christianity.⁴⁵ Of infinitely greater import, the Jesus whom the church honors is not the Messiah of the Jewish people. The dominant messianic expectation that Jews have always had by virtue of their faith and the divine promises involves both the redemption of Israel through the overthrow of her

⁴² Ibid., p. 30. Haim Cohn's conclusions are paralleled within the ~~latest and most~~ ^{contemporary} responsible New Testament scholarship, e.g. in Joseph B. Tyson, A Study of Early Christianity, New York: Macmillan, 1973, pp. 373-380.

⁴³ YPMP, pp. 40, 41.

⁴⁴ CCI, pp. 88, 159.

⁴⁵ YPMP, p. 59.

oppressors and the coming of a reign of peace and justice in the world. This hope was totally contradicted in the actual fate of Jesus,⁴⁶ and its negation has been evident again and again through subsequent centuries of human misery. The world remains unredeemed, a condition that has only been aggravated by the very effort to force upon Jews Christian ideas of redemption.⁴⁷

More is involved ^{here} than a conflict between Jewish and Christian understandings. A fateful contradiction appears within Christian dogma itself. "Christian thought has been driven almost to distraction by the effort to affirm the divine authenticity of one constituent part of its canon in face of the truth that its Lord, the acclaimed guarantor of its own election, cannot be readily fitted into the canonical promises. . . . The only way the Christian claim could be 'proved' via the 'Old Testament' was by distorting the materials there."⁴⁸ A perfect illustration of the impossibility of vindicating revelationally while transcending christologically the so-called Old Testament⁴⁹ is the Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. On the one hand, the Declaration treats the "Old Testament" propaedeutically ("the plan of the Old Covenant was . . . to prepare for the coming both of Christ . . . and of the messianic kingdom. . . ."). But the only

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 59-60. The apostle Paul indirectly testifies to this truth in his declaration that Christ crucified was a stumbling block to the Jews (I Cor. 1:23); cf. also his pregnant disclaimer, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 12:3).

⁴⁷ YPMP, p. 67.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 73, 74.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

way to do this is to flout the authority of Scripture, as attested elsewhere. For, on the other hand, the Constitution affirms that "the books of both the Old and New Testament in their entirety have God as their author" and are "without error."⁵⁰ Had we only become Marcionite heretics, we should have been spared many problems! Whenever the church truly honors the "Old Testament" as the Word of God it will insist that original Israel's nonacceptance of the messiahship of Jesus is an act of faithfulness, of objective obedience to God and the Covenant. God remains true to his word and to his promises.⁵¹

In a ~~recent~~ critique of my work Levi A. Olan, former president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, maintains that I find Judaism "nationalistic and suffering from hubris," and that I suggest the answer of "God's mercy through Christ."⁵² Above I report references in Christianity and the Children of Israel to the national pride that Jews may manifest because of their chosenness. That I ~~should~~ ^{could} have spoken this way amidst the very years of the post-Holocaust agonies of the Jewish people remains a sin for which I may never be able to atone.

⁵⁰ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum), The Documents of Vatican II, ed. W. M. Abbott, New York: Guild Press-America Press-Association Press, 1966, pp. 118-119, 122. The United Presbyterian "Confession of 1967" is in the same predicament as the Vatican Constitution; see YPMP, pp. 75-76.

⁵¹ YPMP, pp. 76, 77, 224-225; EYB, pp. 135-136.

⁵² Levi A. Olan, "Christian-Jewish Dialogue: A Dissenting Opinion," Religion in Life, XLI:2 (Summer, 1972), 154-178. The words cited are on p. 170. Olan also takes to task Reinhold Niebuhr and James Parkes.

It is the case that most of Rabbi Olan's polemic involves deplorable misrepresentations.⁵³ But he is right in much of his critique of me and my past work. True, in Christianity and the Children of Israel I pleaded^{added?} that antisemitism be fought solely for the sake of Jews as children of God.⁵⁴ What I did not see was that this very plea is contradicted by the effort in the same book to comprehend the Jewish people in functional-theological terms. Thus, I remained the prisoner of Christian and gentile triumphalism. It is all too clear that Christianity and the Children of Israel embodies a certain spiritual imperialism. To a large degree, I was subjecting Jewish reality to Christian preconceptions, tending

⁵³ Olan's allegation that I ground Christian truth upon a denial of Jewish ~~of Christian~~ truth is a misstatement. I have always insisted that the Jewish people and the Jewish faith possess an integrity entirely independent of that of Christianity and the church. Olan distorts some of my more recently expressed views. I have never said that Judaism is "inadequate for man." The claim put forth in my study Elder and Younger Brothers that the Jews "stay with God" (while Christians "go out" into the world) is conceived in a functional, nonparochial way, and not in a derogatory one. The conviction is interpreted to mean, preeminently, that Jewish faithfulness to the Father must be honored against every external threat, including that of Christendom. In affirming a single, unfolding Covenant (as against a "double Covenant") I have categorically denied any subordination of Israel to the church (YPMP, pp. 235-237; see also EYB, pp. 145, 159ff.). (There is also the matter of the Christian missionizing position; this is further considered later in the present essay.) Again, Rabbi Olan totally ignores my repeated assertion that the great majority of believing Jews must find the Christian faith in essence false, whatever its moral or social "contributions" -- for the simple and stark reason that the Christ has not come and has not been raised from the dead. (This is how and why the relation of Jews to Christians is entirely different from that of Christians to Jews. As a Christian, I can avow, unreservedly, that the Jewish faith is true for me. The Jew, other than a "converted" one, could never do this with the Christian faith.) Finally, my testimony that in Jesus, the Covenant is opened to the pagan world is a strictly Christian confession; it implies nothing concerning what Jews ought or ought not believe or do (YPMP, pp. 238-239).

⁵⁴ CCI, p. 162.