

TO: Israel Study Group,  
care of the Rev. John Sheerin

FROM: Alice and Roy Eckardt

SUBJECT: Possible materials to aid in the formulating of WCC  
guidelines on Jewish-Christian relations.

1. We rejoice in the new solidarity among Christians of many confessions that is being fostered in and by the presence among us of the Jewish people. The Christian ecumenical bond is being strengthened through our common celebration of oneness with the people of God, the Jews. We rejoice that, through Jesus, we have been made a part of the unbroken Covenant with Israel (Rom. 11:1-2; Ephes. 2:1-13). As Catholics and Protestants, we express thankfulness as well that we have been enabled, through the power of the Spirit and of historical truth, to recognize that the New Testament, which is anything but an antisemitic book, nevertheless contains some antisemitic propensities (cf. John 8, where, contrary to the spirit of Jesus, "the Jews" are said to have the devil as their father). This recognition respecting our written canon is of saving power in fostering our Christian prophetic vocation and witness. On the other hand, we have to acknowledge, sadly, that the very ecumenical developments noted here only serve to separate us from those Christians who retain anti-Jewish perspectives.

2. We are faced with the question of the reputed absoluteness or finality of one or another event that transpires within the historical process. The Christian world today cannot turn its back upon this question, for it is an increasingly shattering one, from the standpoint of human brotherliness as such and with special reference to our relations with our Jewish elder brothers. The all-decisive challenge is epitomized in a Christmas greeting received by one of our members from a Christian colleague, and designed by the latter. On the outside of the card the Jewish spokesman Elie Wiesel is cited: "The answers change; the questions alone are eternal." On the inside the words appear: "What questions are raised by the Incarnation?" We ask: How is it possible to assert that there is one answer which does not change, and at the same time agree, ostensibly, that all answers must change? The Christian colleague's own query is thus seen to be a question-begging question. On the very ground of his evident agreement with Wiesel, the colleague ought to have asked instead: "What does it mean to speak of the Incarnation?" If it is a truth that only the questions are eternal, it follows that the answers to the alternative question just listed must also change. For how could an absolutist, unchanging avowal of the Incarnation ever be saved from inhumaneness, in the presence of Jews? How could humanity and brotherliness ever be fostered apart from the Christian questioning of that absolutist avowal?

Grateful:  
adaptation of some  
proposals from office & me.  
There is one  
of primary relevance,  
it ventures to say,  
primarily because  
we are aiming at  
WCC.

2

3. We are called to confess the limitations and tragedies of our special historical condition. It is a fact that our fellow-Christians beyond Europe and North America have been considerably spared the moral fate of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christianity within the so-called Western world, a fate associated with the perennial sin of Christian antisemitism, which helped to make possible the Holocaust of the German Nazis. We must steadfastly avoid imputing to Christians outside our special situation our own historic hostilities to the Jewish people. We rejoice that Christians of the so-called Third World have been kept rather free of the lamentable antisemitic influences associated with, and made politically possible by, the traditional and entrenched social and cultural power of Western Christendom. However, we are constrained to take note of ~~two~~ <sup>three</sup> facts that point to human solidarity in sin: the current hostility within the so-called Third World toward the Jewish people of Israel; and the common possession by all Christians of the New Testament as their reputedly decisive written authority. <sup>Insofar</sup> as there are antisemitic proclivities within the New Testament, it is not alone Christians of the so-called West but Christians throughout the world who share the common challenge to reconcile the alleged "Word of God" with God's demand for unqualified brotherliness toward Jews. Toward this latter end, we are happy to take note of the zeal today within churches outside the West to proclaim and to foster the Word of God in the Tanach, the so-called Old Testament.

and the sharing of theological traditions which are implicitly and explicitly antithetical to these supersessionist and absolutist claims.

4. We must not lose sight of the stubborn truth that a non-proselytizing stance toward the Jewish people, however much it makes possible and contributes to brotherliness between Christians and Jews, does not of itself reduce obstacles to Christian brotherliness toward other peoples and faiths. The compelling affirmation that through Jesus we gentiles are enabled to become part of the Israel of God, serves to point up an unhappy division within humanity, the division between Israel (Jews and Christians) and all those who remain beyond the Covenant. However, the Christian record is so stained with sinful abuse of power and unloving behavior toward other peoples that we dare not absolutize the Church or the Christian message as the only means of entrance into a covenant with the Creator who above all is Love and Righteousness.

5. We are called to ask ourselves and our Christian brethren everywhere: In what specific ways can the two all-important events of recent Jewish history, the Holocaust and the reestablishment of the State of Israel, be taken with total and decisive seriousness by the Christian churches and within Christian theology? (a) The Holocaust confronts us with the terrible question of the contribution of traditional Christian preaching and teaching to the murders of the people of God in the period 1933-1945. That event presents as well momentous challenges to traditional Christian christologies, and especially the Christology of suffering. (b) The historical renewing of Jewish sovereignty in the State of Israel poses anew the entire question of the utilization of political power by the people of God. At the very

least, the regaining of sovereign power by the Jewish people must be welcomed, particularly by Christians who have through the centuries exploited its absence through the harm we have brought to Jews. And we are required to face honestly and humbly the demolition in our time of the historic Christian ideology according to which the Jewish people must forever wander the face of the earth deprived of a homeland. (c) Minimally speaking, no living dialogue or relationship with Jews can fail to keep the above two events at the forefront. Otherwise, we Christians do not honor our Jewish brothers in their own self-understanding.

6. Finally, we address ourselves to the issue of Christian assessment of God's supposed "judgment on a faithless Israel." The European Holocaust must put to eternal shame any theology which affirms that mass suffering by the Jewish people is ultimately to be seen as God's judgment. The torment imposed on Jews (along with others, to be sure) in our own time makes us see with new clarity the dreadful sin of the early Church when it affirmed that the suffering of Jews at the hands of the Romans in the first two centuries of the Common Era was to be identified as God's punishment. It was exactly this theological stance that supported and even initiated centuries of Christian abuse of God's people Israel, thus demonstrating with an awful decisiveness the terrible consequences that can follow from an ideology such as this. Indeed, the consequences were also felt by masses of self-confessed Christians, at the hands of other Christians during these same centuries, simply because the former were adjudged heretics and thus subject to God's wrathful judgment. Surely the time has come for the Church (along with other human institutions) to cease presuming the authority to pass ultimate judgment on other faiths and peoples, and directly or indirectly giving sanctity to ill treatment of others by holding to an absolutist theology. Humaneness alone requires such a change. But beyond concern for human beings is the fateful question of the nature of the God we proclaim. Do we believe in His all-pervading compassion and love? If so, how dare we attribute to His will agonies of body and mind that are in fact inflicted by men?

(AEC critique of Israel Study  
Group "guidelines"  
alternative Proposal for Paragraphs  
on WCC Guidelines)

1977-6

[4/77]

Alise Eckhardt

## I. COMPLEMENTARY VIEWS OF SALVATION

We rejoice in our new-found awareness of the distinctive relationship we have with the people God chose as his own in the days of Abraham. as a consequence of this We recognize with thankfulness that we benefit in spiritual richness, ecumenical growth, and historical and moral insights. As Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Christians, we are grateful for the new consciousness of our unity with the Jews despite the diversity of our faiths. Our Christian theology can maintain the uniqueness of the Christ-event without detracting from the continuity of Jewish faith and the Jewish covenant. The concept of "uniqueness" must be carefully distinguished from "superiority" and "totality."

Successful Christian-Jewish dialogue demands that we re-examine the implications of the death and resurrection of Christ in relation to the Jewish longing for the Messianic age. In the light of history, a reappraisal of the Christian claim that the looked-for Messianic age was Totally fulfilled in the Christ event would have x profound implications not only for this dialogue but also for dialogue with other faiths, and, potentially, for a theology of politics. The Christian concept of a personal ~~Messiah~~ Messiah has led to a soteriology that is inclined to be individualistic, other-worldly, and productive of "cheap grace." The Jewish yearning for a Messianic era has often stressed peoplehood, sometimes with a communitarian, sometimes with a secular, orientation. The dialogue should recognize, without detriment to the salvation claims of either, the diverse emphases of the two religions, each containing different but complementary aspects of salvation theology. At the same time, we acknowledge that we share with many Jews a continuing hope for the fulfilment of the Kingdom in history, and a necessity to work for a just society.

## II. THE COVENANT



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Ancient Israel was chosen by God as his bearer of salvation, and Israel agreed to accept the role and function. Being finite, Israel at times broke some of the terms of the covenant, but the infinite God never broke it on his side. As Isaiah wrote, "The word of our God will stand forever" (40:8). Were this not so, none of us as Christians could be assured of salvation for the church has often broken its own covenant.

As bearer of salvation, Israel plays a role in salvation history as representative of the whole human family. This covenant cannot be replaced by an second covenant. Christianity ~~with~~ without the Jews is incomplete for the Jews are partners of God in the covenant.

they are both partners of God in the covenant.

*depending  
on meaning  
intended*

They survive to this day as a people who still recite the Shema, study the Scriptures of their ancestors and the aggadic and halakhic additions that make Scripture applicable to new situations, offer prayers and praise to God, strive to fulfill the commandments to create a just society, and continue as bearers of salvation.

The Christian Church . . .

Something went wrong . . .

## III. MISSION

Against the deplorable background of nineteen centuries of Christian teaching of contempt for the Jews, and against the primacy of the on-going role of Israel in salvation history, it is incongruous for us proclaim that we Christians have a mission to the Jews. A true Christian witness should strive to (imitate Jesus by) respecting the Jewish people, welcoming their presence, helping them in sickness and health, sharing their joys and sorrows. Such a witness has seldom been taken seriously in nineteen hundred years. God has not abrogated his covenant with the

Jewish people and we do well to revere the values . . . . loves.

It is sometimes . . . salvation."

*(this is from last p.)* → Proselytism is an abuse . . . personal conscience. Proselytism also ignores the biblical witness that it is God the Holy Spirit who converts.

Antisemitism of any kind is . . . New Testament.

#### IV. THE HOLOCAUST

It is frequently said -- and we judge, correctly -- that Christian teaching of contempt for the Jews and Jewish theology was the spawning-ground for the evils of the Holocaust. We must ourselves: How can we change our teaching so that never again can it be used by enemies of the Jewish people? In what specific ways must the experience of the Holocaust be decisive for Christian churches and theologians? The Christian response to the Holocaust should be a firm resolve that it must never happen again, and that the Christian churches should be in the forefront of any efforts to prevent another slaughter of the people with whom God formed his covenant.

*from 12/28/80 draft* → The Holocaust must lay to rest forever the Christian fable that the sufferings of the Jewish people are a judgment of God. The time has long since come for the Church to cease passing judgments on other faiths and people by holding an absolutist tradition or theology that in any way appears to sanction persecution of others. God's love and compassion do not permit us to attribute to him the wounds of body and mind that have been inflicted on the Jews.

The Holocaust is also a challenge to our traditional Christology, especially to our Christology of suffering. This is an issue which requires prayerful re-thinking.

#### V. THE STATE OF ISRAEL

That a Jewish state exists today, thirty years after the Holocaust, may ~~can~~ be seen as a sign of God's love for the Jewish people. It is

a challenge and a plea addressed to Christians to work for those conditions of peace -- especially recognition of its moral and legal right to exist -- that will help Israel to live a normal existence. The very existence of Israel should be welcomed by Christians as a clear refutation of the old Christian fable that God had condemned the Jews to wander forever over the face of the earth, never to have a homeland. But above all, Christians should celebrate the opportunity the State ~~proves~~ provides for the Jewish people to live in a situation where they are no longer a minority.

#### VI. CHRISTIANS PERCEPTIONS OF JEWS AND ISRAEL.

As is -- except on p. 6, line 4 -- would "intertestamental period" be better and more accurate than "first centuries"? and line 8, use "C.E."

Need conclusion; propose:

#### CONCLUSION

With penitence for our centuries of misunderstanding, calumnies, and persecution of Jews and their faith, we Christians affirm our intention to follow a new path. With gratitude for the openness of many in the Jewish community to us, we look forward to a ~~risky, uncharted~~ new relationship in which we work together to make ourselves and all creation responsive to the will of the Creator, our God.

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GENERAL COMMENTS: Suggest we not use headings for each section.

However, if headings or topic sentences are used, section III must have one.

I can't agree with the implication of sentence 2 in III. (I changed it in my version.)

The Holocaust section is much too short. We had talked of using some more of the material, and I have re-inserted some of it.

re State of Israel, p. 5: we should <sup>not</sup> impose on the State any  
"special calling."

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