

*“From Time to Time a New Shipment of History Arrives”
The Church, the Synagogue, and the Dilemma of the Middle East*

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Introduction

In 1987 the 16th General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted a statement on “The Relationship Between the United Church of Christ and the Jewish Community.”¹ The statement included a call to repentance for the history of Christian anti-Semitism, a theological affirmation of God’s enduring covenant with the Jewish people, and a call to action which included attentiveness to the image of Jews and Judaism presented in curricula at local church and seminary levels, sensitivity in liturgical materials, the establishment of Jewish Christian dialogue groups locally, regionally, and nationally, and the development of relationships of trust that would enable a “joint witness against all injustice in our local communities and in the world.” Excerpts from the General Synod give a sense of the significance of this statement:

Christianity, developing its faith and identity, its life, and its creativity from a common heritage with Judaism, has a unique relationship with the Jewish people. . . . We in the United Church of Christ acknowledge that the Christian Church has, throughout much of its history, denied God’s continuing covenantal relationship with the Jewish people expressed in the faith of Judaism. This denial has often led to outright rejection of the Jewish people and to theologically and humanly intolerable violence. . . . The most devastating lethal metastasis of this process occurred in our own century during the Holocaust. . . . Faced with this history from which we as Christians cannot, and must not disassociate ourselves, we ask for God’s forgiveness through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Statement then went on to its central theological affirmation:

We pray for divine grace that will enable us, more firmly than ever before, to turn from this path of rejection and persecution to affirm that: *Judaism has not been superseded by*

Christianity; that Christianity is not to be understood as the successor religion to Judaism; God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been abrogated. God has not rejected the Jewish people; God is faithful in keeping covenant, (emphasis added).²

The Synod Statement received widespread media attention and was received with enthusiasm by the Jewish community. As the first official statement clearly rejecting supersessionism by a major Christian body since the Vatican II statement in its 1965 document, *Nostra Aetate* where the Council noted that “God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made,”³ the General Synod signaled a new era of Jewish Christian relations, one marked not only by communal and personal tolerance, and friendship, but also by a theological and biblical grounding that placed the relationship within the very faithfulness and providence of God. The 1987 Statement remains the official position of the General Synod and its officers. Its implications have found their way into seminary curricula, into the pedagogy of the church, into the liturgies and lectionaries of the church, and into the way the vast majority of members and ministers in the United Church of Christ and most other mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Christians relate to their Jewish neighbors, co-workers, and in many cases, family members.

Yet today, as we approach the 20th anniversary of this Statement, relationships between many Jewish and Christian leaders in the United States and elsewhere, including the United Church of Christ, are marked by deep tensions and suspicious. We find ourselves in an atmosphere of growing and painful antagonism, the hopes emerging from 1987, if not dashed, at least severely challenged as we approach 2007. What happened? While perhaps overly simplistic, the answer, of course, is the Middle East. As the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai puts it,

The air above Jerusalem is filled with prayers and dreams
Like air above cities with heavy industry
Hard to breathe
From time to time a new shipment of history arrives.⁴

I.

The 1987 Statement is set in its own historical context, a context in which the relationship of Christians and Jews in the United States had, over the past century, experienced a remarkable

transformation. While public opinion surveys in the 1950's and 1960's continued to report significant numbers of Americans and Protestants expressing misgivings about interacting with Jews,⁵ leadership initiatives from both Christians and Jews had, for almost three decades, been chipping away at prejudice and suspicion. In 1923 the Federal Council of Churches established a Committee on Goodwill between Jews and Christians, followed by the Central Conference of American Rabbis Committee on Goodwill in 1924. These developments led to the establishment of the National Conference of Christians and Jews in 1927. Emblematic of the changing attitudes was the growth of the number of rabbis serving as chaplains during the Second World War. While fewer than thirty had served as chaplains up until 1940, that number swelled to over three hundred after 1940.⁶

The publication of Will Herberg's book, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* in 1955, while undergoing sharp criticism in more recent years, was enormously influential in popular culture, elevating Judaism to a kind of "denominational" parity with Catholics and Protestants in what has been called the "tripartite settlement." As sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow puts it,

the most distinctive feature of the tripartite perspective that emerged in the 1950's was its treatment of Judaism as a kind of branch or denomination within the larger Judeo-Christian framework - a religion populated by believers who just happened to attend churches called synagogues, as Elia Kazan's 1945 film *Gentlemen's Agreement* had characterized it.⁰

There are, of course, major theological problems with such an approach, and Jews understandably have challenged this "settlement" and its implications for notions of Jewish identity. Nevertheless, the cultural and communal result of the attitudes reflected in Herberg's book were profound for the way in which people in the pews of the church and the synagogue viewed one another. Those of us who grew up in the 1950's and 1960's can recall the growing friendship of our pastors with rabbis, friendships that sometimes led to pulpit exchanges and significant forms of congregational sharing. Close personal friendships between Jews and Christians were no longer uncommon, and intermarriage, for all its challenge, became increasingly acceptable. Jewish and Christian leaders came to be seen as partners in issues of social justice; representative of this partnership was the close relationship between Abraham

Joshua Heschel and Martin Luther King, Jr.

A second contextual framework for the UCC's Synod Statement of 1987, along side of the altered cultural consensus, was the growing influence of the Holocaust on theological, literary, and political discourse. The popularity of books like Elie Wiesel's *Night* and *The Diary of Ann Frank*, part of a burgeoning production of literature related to the Holocaust, brought the horror of the Shoah into the center of church life. Theologians began to argue that the Holocaust was not merely the culmination of centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, but was a unique human event with fundamental theological significance. Growing interest in the theology and the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and popular interest in *Letters and Papers from Prison* prompted awareness of the "Christian" side of the Holocaust, and the ambiguities of Christian response even within the resistance movements of the Confessing Church. The growing awareness of Christian complicity, not only in Germany, but also in so-called "Christian" nations like the United States which refused to receive in any significant numbers Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust, moved many Christians to consider the need for, and the meaning of formal acts of repentance. Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, began to be added to the liturgical calendars of many denominations.

The academy was not inactive during this period. Biblical scholars began to reflect on a history of "anti-Jewish" readings of Scripture, and a growing sensitivity at the parish level to how "the Jews" are portrayed in the New Testament began to affect sermons as well as liturgies, particularly those related to the Passion. Historical research began to shape the academy's understanding of the dreary yet complex nature of Christian anti-Semitism, research that increasingly became available in popular literature. While written a number of years after the Synod Statement, James Carroll's monumental book *Constantine's Sword: the Church and the Jews*,⁰ is representative of the church's post-Holocaust introspective reflection, now available to informed persons in the pew. All of this led to the multiplication of Jewish Christian dialogue groups across the country exploring the nature of the relationship of these two communities. These groups forged deep friendships and in many cases created close bonds between local churches and synagogues.

Thus, the General Synod Statement was groundbreaking not in the sense that it signaled a new future for Christians and Jews in the United States. That future was already well birthed by

1987. What was groundbreaking was the formal disavowing of supercessionism, the belief that “God’s covenant with the Jewish people has been abrogated,” affirming instead that “God has not rejected the Jewish people, that God is faithful in keeping covenant.” The General Synod not only rejected the violence perpetrated against Jews throughout the centuries. It also challenged the fundamental theological underpinning of that violence. In so doing it declared that Christians and Jews are inextricably linked by more than shared origins, by more than a long and painful history of anti-Jewish violence leading to the Holocaust. The Synod declared that we are bound by enduring and indelible covenants with God. In the words of the Theological Panel convened to reflect on the Synod Statement,

Our commitment to the particular act of God in Christ is a word we hold as firmly as our avowal of God’s unrescinded covenant with the Jewish people. When we hear this twofold word, we overcome a distorted picture of the New Testament. To affirm that “God was in Christ reconciling the world. . .” (2 Corinthians 5.19), and to affirm, simultaneously, that the “gifts and call of God” to the Jewish people are “irrevocable” (Romans 11.13) is to witness to the faithfulness of God. . . . Our affirmation both of the continuing covenant of God with the Jewish people and of fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ appears to be a paradox. Yet through this double affirmation we are invited into a deeper understanding of our faith.⁰

III.

The response to the General Synod Statement from within the church was lively, with particular criticism around the rejection of supercessionism from those who were uncomfortable with its implied rejection of a Christian mission to the Jewish people. As a result, the President of the United Church of Christ, Dr. Avery Post, appointed a “Jewish-Christian Theological Panel” which conducted hearings around the United Church of Christ, carried out theological research, listened to Jewish and Christian consultants beyond the denomination, and issued “A Message to the Churches” in May, 1990.⁰ The Panel included representatives of the Seminaries and persons from various theological perspectives within the life of the church. Jewish and Arab Christian voices were included in the work of the Panel. While much of the work of the Panel focused on the issue of supercession, atonement, Christology, the meaning of the Shoah, and

covenant, the report makes clear that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was never far from view.

The Theological Panel began its work in the context of the first Palestinian Intifada (an Arabic term meaning, literally, “shaking off”) which broke out just months after the Synod action in December, 1987. It was clear that conflict in the Middle East cast a shadow over its work. The Panel’s report turns to the issue of land in its final paragraphs, and reveals unresolved questions and tensions that would continue to haunt Jewish-Christian relations. “Biblical formulations of God’s covenant with the Jewish people include the promise of land. God’s concrete gift of land to one people” it said,

is a symbol of God’s grace in giving the earth to all people. The fulfillment of the promise of land is tied to the people’s faithfulness and the doing of justice in the land. Some Jews and some Christians consider the creation of the contemporary state of Israel to be the fulfillment of that promise. We do not see consensus in the United Church of Christ or among our panelists on the covenantal significance of the state of Israel. We appreciate the compelling moral argument for the creation of modern Israel as a vehicle for self-determination and as a haven for a victimized people; we also recognize that this event has entailed the dispossession of Palestinians from their homes and denial of human rights.⁰

Tensions over the relationship of the Synod Statement to the question of Israel and Palestine were present within the Theological Panel itself. The listing of signatories to the Panel’s Statement includes a disclaimer by one of the panel members who “disassociates herself from the panel’s message to the churches, considering it to be ‘Biblically, theologically, and dogmatically in error.’”⁰ Some within the United Church of Christ at the time of the Synod’s action, particularly directors and staff of the United Church Board for World Ministries who were anxious about the political interpretations the Statement would receive among Christian partners in the Middle East. And Jay Lintner, then director of the UCC’s Washington Office, reported that within 48 hours of press reports about the Statement, the Jordanian Embassy called his office to inquire “whether the UCC had now abandoned the rights of Palestinians to a homeland.”⁰

The General Synod Statement, and the Theological Panel that followed, were unable to resolve these thorny questions. In the Panel’s “Message,” and in the papers that accompanied

them, the question of the land was clearly left as the “open agenda” for the churches and for renewed Jewish Christian dialogue. One member of the Panel lays out the challenge:

For Christians, Jesus is the place of God’s revelation. For Jews, Israel is the place of God’s revelation. For Christians, Christ is the way of salvation, the model of what is truly human and the power to be truly human. For Jews, Israel is instrumental to the salvation history. It is the place where Jews have shown and will show what human community might be. After the holocaust and with the reclaiming of the land, it has also become theologically a power for salvation, a refuge where never again will genocide be allowed. . . . [But] Jews aren’t the only ones claiming the land. For Christians, it is a justice issue: Palestinians have had the land taken away from them, Palestinians are still landless, and Palestinians are victims of daily oppression. How can Christians respect the theological claim of the Jewish community when before them lies such oppression? Any time theology is used to oppress, a hermeneutic suspicion is only appropriate.⁰

Twenty years later, Jews, who celebrated the General Synod’s affirmations, understandably remain uneasy with the question of land and the rights of dispossessed Palestinians left hanging. Thoughtful Christians remain uneasy as well. And, of course, during those twenty years, “new shipments of history” have arrived with depressing regularity.

IV.

Running like a parallel stream to the very positive developments in Jewish Christian relations both in the church and the broader culture has been a steady witness on the part of the United Church of Christ, and many others of its ecumenical partners, to the rights of Palestinians as well as a commitment to solidarity with the Palestinian Christian community, a community shrinking in numbers at an alarming and relentless pace. Since 1967, the General Synod has spoken no less than seventeen times on issues related to the Middle East in general, and to Israel/Palestine and Jerusalem in particular. While these statements differ in particulars, the common thread running through them is spelled out in the 1980 Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA, affirmed by the General Synod in 1981.⁰ The Statement calls for the cessation of acts of violence by all parties, the recognition by Arab states and Palestinians of the “state of Israel with secure, defined and recognized borders,” and by Israel of the right of national self-determination for Palestinians, including a sovereign state. The

Statement challenges unilateral actions that “inflame attitudes and reduce the prospects of achieving peace,” including settlements, calls for addressing the problems of refugees and displaced persons, and for negotiations leading to agreement on the status of Jerusalem. Implicit in this vision is an end to the nearly forty-year old Occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, as well as the dismantling of Israeli settlements throughout the West Bank and Gaza. While subsequent General Synod actions and letters from Officers of the church have addressed new realities, a two-state solution and a negotiated sharing of Jerusalem by two nations and three religions has been the consistent policy of the United Church of Christ, a policy largely shared by its ecumenical partners.

United Church of Christ support for the rights of Palestinians within the broad framework of the 1981 Statement has been a prominent part of its global advocacy work. It has been done in collaboration with the Middle East Council of Churches, the National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA, the World Council of Churches, and other U.S. advocacy groups like Churches for Middle East Peace. Regular contact has been maintained with the leaders of the Palestinian Christian community, comprised of Evangelical (Protestant), Catholic, Anglican and Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Christians. Advocacy efforts have been directed at the State of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the United States government which, during the course of these years, has generally offered Israel unqualified support in its maintenance of the Occupation as well as massive foreign aid and military support amounting to nearly \$3 billion annually.

The years since the General Synod Statement on the Relationship with the Jewish People have coincided with the first Intifada (1987-1993), the hope and then collapse of the Oslo peace process (1993 and after), the second Intifada (2000 to 2004), and Israel’s building of the Separation Barrier (beginning after 2002). As a result, the period that many had hoped would be a time for deepening dialogue and cooperation among Jews and members of the United Church of Christ, has instead been marked by an increasingly urgent plea by the United Church of Christ and other partners for justice in the US and the Middle East, a plea that falls on many Jewish ears as an attack not only on the policies of Israel, but on its very legitimacy, a plea that sounds to many in the Jewish community as a rejection by the United Church of Christ of its own groundbreaking action in 1987. The growing frustration and despair within the Occupied Territories resulting in suicide bombings, ultimately erupting in the second Intifada in the fall of

2000, and Israel's devastating military response; increasing restrictions on Palestinian life; and the construction of the separation barrier has led to an intensifying of rhetoric and to the sharpening of advocacy positions that leaves Jewish Christian relationships in a very vulnerable, even volatile place, far from achieving the hopes of twenty years ago.

In the past four years two significant "shipments of history" have arrived which have brought Jewish Christian relationships in the United States to a point of severe tension: the building of the separation barrier and all that it symbolizes, and the rise of the so-called "divestment movement" which seeks to challenge the Occupation itself. The separation barrier adds a new element to what was already a "separate but unequal" life for Palestinians. In East Jerusalem alone, for example, annexed by Israel after the 1967 war, there are twelve public parks compared to nearly 1,500 in Jewish neighborhoods in West Jerusalem. There are three public libraries in Palestinian neighborhoods compared to thirty-six in Jewish neighborhoods. There are twenty seven sport facilities for Palestinians compared to two hundred and fifty eight for Jewish communities.⁰ Travel through the West Bank and Gaza reveals similar disparities and, with travel restrictions increasing, there is a steady decline in the possibility for the economic viability of Palestine. The building of an essentially parallel road and tunnel system through the West Bank linking settlements with Israel further reminds Palestinians of their isolation in an increasingly oppressive occupation.

The stated goal of the separation barrier is to protect Israelis from Palestinian suicide bombers. In the past six years 171 people have been killed in 38 bombings in Jerusalem alone.⁰ Israel has legitimate security concerns. But, as B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization points out,

the route of the Barrier defines all security logic and appears politically motivated. In Jerusalem, the Barrier roughly follows the municipal boundary, set when Israel annexed East Jerusalem. This boundary ignores urban planning considerations; it cuts through Palestinian neighborhoods, at times literally running down the middle of busy, urban streets. Leaving 220,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites on the Israeli side of the Barrier, it is hardly consistent with the State's own security logic; does the State of Israel consider Palestinians living on one side of the street dangerous, but not those on the other side?⁰ Visitors to other parts of the West Bank can see the barrier intruding far beyond the Green Line,

clearly designed to do far more than protect; the map of the barrier's route reveals the larger agenda of accommodating current and future settlements. Meanwhile, Palestinians find themselves separated from schools, farm land, hospitals, and each other.

Outrage at this new reality, growing frustration with the U.S. administration's lack of interest in even listening to alternative voices from the churches on the issue of Israel and Palestine, the sense that previous advocacy efforts have been of little avail, and the growing despair among Palestinian partners, has led churches to consider a new strategy for advocating peace with justice in the Middle East: Economic leverage or, more popularly though less precisely, "Divestment." The divestment movement had its origins in the academic community, where universities were challenged by faculty, students, and alumni to divest from corporations that do business in Israel and from companies that sell arms to Israel. The Presbyterian Church (USA) was the first mainline denomination to consider divestment, adopting a resolution at its 2004 General Assembly that called for "a process of phased selective divestment" of funds from companies "whose business in Israel is found to be directly or indirectly causing harm to innocent people, Palestinian or Israeli."

Response to the Presbyterian action was two-fold. First was an intensified discussion of divestment as a strategy within other Christian denominations. The second was a passionately negative response from the Jewish community reacting with both anger and bewilderment. While the Presbyterian action, and others that followed, including the United Church of Christ's General Synod action in 2005, focused only on companies that profit from the violence and the Occupation, the frequent media portrayal of this strategy as "boycotting" or divesting from Israel itself made it reasonable for many in the Jewish community to perceive this action as targeting Israel itself, including its right to exist, rather than more narrowly addressing the policies of Israel related to the Occupation. As a result, since 2004 there have been numerous tense exchanges and dialogues between Christian and Jewish leaders at the local, regional, and national levels. A formal dialogue process established early in 2004 -- before the Presbyterian General Assembly -- between major Jewish organizations and some of the member churches of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA, found itself preoccupied with these tensions. While participants have invested much time and energy in the dialogue, struggled to listen with care to one another's narratives and perspectives, and took the bold step of visiting

Jerusalem and Israel/Palestine together, the dialogue itself seems to have lost much of its momentum.

Particularly troubling to Christian leaders are an increasing number of initiatives by both national and regional leadership of Jewish organizations toward their counterparts in regional and local church bodies in an effort to rally opposition to divestment and dissent from their own national governing bodies. Prior to the 2005 General Synod many delegates found themselves the object of organized email lobbying campaigns and during the Synod a full-page paid advertisement sharply critical of proposed General Synod action on divestment was published in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. In June, 2006, in an unprecedented move, the leaders of all the major national Jewish organizations, (twelve in all) including the American Jewish Committee and the Anti Defamation League, as well as the synagogue and rabbinic organizations, sent a letter to each of the commissioners to the Presbyterian Church General Assembly calling on them to reconsider the 2004 action. This well organized “anti-divestment” campaign has included sharp criticism of key Palestinian church leaders. The Rev. Naim Ateek of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, a close partner of many mainline U.S. churches, has been particularly singled out. In addition, the Jewish press has significantly increased its coverage of the actions and statements of Christian leaders and governing bodies, often portraying their actions in the most unfavorable light. Following the UCC General Synod in 2005, for example, headlines in the *Jewish Times* accused UCC leadership of “hijacking” the Synod in order to pass its economic leverage resolution. Letters and public statements directed at church leaders, and some published articles, regularly accuse the church of being anti-Israel, of insensitivity to the history of anti-Jewish violence and the Holocaust, even of anti-Semitism.

In a few instances, some Jewish organizations have joined forces with conservative renewal groups within denominations to generate dissent from the actions of national governing bodies. In one case, the Simon Wiesenthal Center sponsored a joint press conference with the Institute for Religion and Democracy during the 2005 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The IRD is an organization that regularly seeks to discredit mainline church leadership and clearly sees the question of Israel and Palestine as a “wedge issue” by which to advance its assault on the mainline churches. While the issue in this case was a resolution against the Separation Barrier and not any form of economic leverage, and while most

Jewish organizations have thus far avoided such an alliance, this partnership is disturbing to Christian leaders who must deal with the divisive attacks of IRD and its denominational affiliates on a regular basis.

Adding an additional layer of complexity is the growing influence of Christian Zionism among politically and religiously conservative Christian supporters of Israel in the United States. Christian Zionism offers a reading of Scripture that sees the secular state of Israel as an essential harbinger of the second coming of Christ through the ingathering – and eventual elimination – of the world’s Jews. It uses a particular eschatology to encourage unwavering support for the policies of Israel, and increasingly finds a hearing among policy makers closely aligned with the religious Right. The delicacy of criticizing the theology and the agenda of a fundamentalist Christian Zionism is apparent in the background materials prepared by the submitters of the 2003 United Church of Christ General Synod statement:

We are hesitant to voice our concerns about Christian Zionism, since we fear that our position might somehow be perceived as anti-Jewish. We fully endorse the longstanding efforts of the United Church of Christ to combat the terrible legacy of anti-Semitism. We deeply deplore the Palestinian suicide bombings that target civilians. . . .⁰

Objectively speaking, the path from criticizing a particular version of Christian eschatology to being accused of anti-Semitism is a long and torturous one. In the highly charged context of today’s discourse about the Middle East, however, the road becomes a shortened one indeed.

V.

In 1990 the Theological Panel concluded its reflection on the issue of “land” with hope: “In the land called Holy, prophets heard the word of God and, Christians believe, the incarnation of God’s love took place. Can not the Holy Land become for our time a symbol of hope, a community of peace for the whole world?”⁰ Tragically, the ensuing fifteen years have brought many “new shipments of history” overshadowing the prayers and dreams for Jerusalem. In the process, the hopes for deepening the relationships between Jews and Christians found in enduring covenants with God, a hope expressed both in the General Synod resolution and the “midrash” of the Theological Panel that followed, have been left largely unfulfilled. Instead we find the old fault lines intensified, rhetoric more and more divisive, ancient suspicions rekindled, personal and collegial relationships deeply strained. The events of this summer in Gaza,

northern Israel, and Lebanon have only been the most recent shipment of history, and they add heavy weight to the already demoralizing burden. This is not where we expected to be.

The dilemma of the Middle East for the church is that we find ourselves caught between two valued and precious relationships, each with its own compelling yet seemingly competing narratives of vulnerability, victimization, and loss. Criticism of the policies of Israel, including the Occupation and the security barrier, leads to charges of betrayal from many, if not most in the Jewish community and to a near paralyzing introspective anxiety among Christians born of our awareness of complicity with centuries of anti-Semitism. Silence in the face of injustice in Palestine for the sake of the future of our relationship with the Jewish community here leads to charges of betrayal on the part of our Christian partners in the Middle East who ask whether we care sufficiently for the viability of an indigenous Christian presence in the land of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. What are we to do or say in the face of this?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous admonition in his 1943 New Year's Letter to his co-conspirators is apt: "The ultimate question for the responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair but how the coming generation is to live."⁰ There is no responsible extrication for Christians from the dilemma posed by both the violence and the injustices of the Middle East. The future of Palestinian and Israeli children must be our ultimate question, not how we might make life more comfortable or congenial for ourselves in today's charged and difficult American Jewish Christian context. Two viable states with secure and internationally recognized borders, two people living if not in harmony, at least at peace and with dignity, two nations and three religions sharing a capital that is sacred to each. This remains the only viable future for the children of Israel and Palestine, the only way these children will be able to live. And, as this summer showed us, this vision is constitutive of the only viable future for the children of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, and Egypt as well. The church must remain resolute in advancing this vision, and any act or policy by Israel or Palestine or the United States that denies or distorts this future calls for the church's clear and courageous critique. In the words of Isaiah, "For the sake of Zion, I will not be silent. For the sake of Jerusalem, I will not be still" (62.1). This means the condemnation of terrorist bombing and kidnappings. But it also means a clear challenge to the Occupation and the separation barrier and all that they mean for an increasingly desperate Palestinian people. No form of non-violent

advocacy can be ruled out of bounds, including the use of economic leverage and, potentially, divestment. And no threat of protest from the Jewish community should intimidate the church's witness.

At the same time, Jews and Christians remain, even in moments of deepest tension, inextricably linked to one another by the God whose covenants with each community have not been and cannot be broken. It is the witness of the General Synod's Statement twenty years ago that it is God's faithfulness, and not our own comfort with each other or our agreement on the Middle East, that binds us together. Borrowing from Paul, albeit in a different context, the church and the synagogue do not have the luxury of saying to one another, "I have no need of you." Neither ghetto nor pogrom, in either their historic or contemporary manifestations, reflect the will of God either for Christian or Jew. The current state of our relationship, stretched almost to breaking by the dilemmas of the Middle East and the depressing regularity of new shipments of history, does not offer an encouraging atmosphere within which to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the 1987 General Synod's groundbreaking theological affirmations. Yet it is those very affirmations that offer the promise that this precious relationship cannot ultimately be broken and impels us, amid all of today's challenge and confrontation to find ways to embody the unbreakable covenants that bear witness to the faithfulness of God.

1. The text of the Statement, and several other accompanying documents, can be found in "God's Unbroken Covenant with the Jews," *New Conversations*, (United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, Summer, 1990).

2. "The Relationship Between the United Church of Christ and the Jewish Community," in *New Conversations*, p. 67.

3. "Nostra Aetate," in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY, 1987), p. 741.

4. Yehuda Amichai, cited in *A Wall in Jerusalem: Obstacles to Human Rights in the Holy City* (B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Summer, 2006), p. 3.

5. Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, 2005), p. 31.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

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7. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
 8. James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*, (Boston, 2001).
 9. "A Message to the Churches" in *New Conversations*, p. 4.
 10. See Jay Lintner, "Conversation Piece: God's Unbroken Covenant with the Jews," *New Conversations*, pp. 2-5.
 11. "A Message to the Churches," pp. 6-7.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
 13. Jay Lintner in *New Conversations*, p. 3.
 14. Jay Lintner, "Final Reflections and Issues for Dialogue," in *New Conversations*, pp. 62-63.
 - 0.15. "Minutes of the Thirteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ," p. 77, and "The Middle East Policy Statement" adopted by the Governing Board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA, November 6, 1980,
 16. "A Wall in Jerusalem: Obstacles to Human Rights in the Holy City," (B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Summer, 2006), p. 19.
 - 0.17. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
 - 0.18. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
 - 0.19. The action of the Synod itself is found in *Minutes of the 24th General Synod of the United Church of Christ*, pp. 35-36.
 - 0.20. "A Message to the Churches," in *New Conversations*, p. 7.
 - 0.21. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (New York: 1972), p. 7
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