



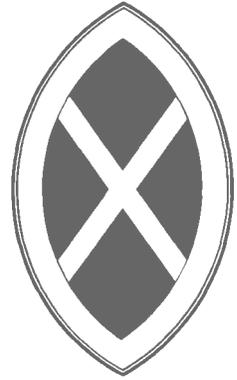
# *Bearing Faithful Witness*

## United Church–Jewish Relations Today

The 36th General Council (1997) authorized this document for study in The United Church of Canada. People of the United Church responded thoughtfully and prayerfully to the study document and the proposed policy statement. The final policy statement encompasses that response and seeks to be a faithful expression of our understanding of United Church–Jewish relations. It was overwhelmingly and enthusiastically approved at the 38th General Council in 2003.

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# *Bearing Faithful Witness*

United Church–Jewish Relations Today

## **PREAMBLE: WHY THIS PAPER?**

Because many of us grew up thinking that Jesus had invented the Last Supper;

Because in our churches Jesus is rarely referred to as a Jew;

Because there is rising anti-Judaism, antisemitism, white supremacy, and neo-Nazism in Canada and other countries in the name of Jesus Christ;

Because we are finally understanding that Christian denial of Jesus' Jewishness contributed to pogroms, the Holocaust, the refusal to admit refugees, and other horrors against Jewish people;

Because a Jewish friend visiting in our churches could feel attacked by some of our scriptures and interpretation of them;

Because there is little general knowledge of the context in which the scriptures were written and edited, and Bible study is not a priority for most United Church adults;

Because our language and interpretation of scripture have not kept pace with our evolving faith;

Because there is little reaction from the Christian community when synagogues and Jewish cemeteries are desecrated;

Because there is a growing interest in exploring other faith traditions, and Christianity has a special relationship with Judaism;

Because many of us make the erroneous assumption that, having read the Bible, we know much about Judaism, both historical and contemporary;

***THEREFORE*** we believe it is time to throw open the questions:

Is our handling of the Bible consistent with the faith of Jesus?

Is our handling of the New Testament consciously reflective of Christianity's Jewish roots?

Do our Sunday morning services bear false witness against our Jewish neighbours today?

## Contents

<b>Preamble: Why This Paper?</b> .....	3
<b>Contents</b> .....	4
<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
<b>Part One: Statement on United Church–Jewish Relations Today</b> .....	8
<b>Part Two: Where We Are</b> .....	14
A. The Relationship of the Two Testaments .....	14
B. The Old Testament .....	18
C. The New Testament .....	22
1. The Gospel according to Matthew .....	23
2. The Gospel according to Mark .....	27
3. The Gospel according to Luke and Luke’s Acts of the Apostles .....	28
4. The Gospel according to John .....	30
5. The Letters of the Apostle Paul .....	34
6. The Letter to the Hebrews .....	36
7. Revelation or the Apocalypse .....	36
D. Conclusion .....	37
<b>Part Three: Guidelines for the Use of Scripture</b> .....	39
A. Public Worship .....	39
B. Sunday School and Bible Study .....	45
C. Personal Devotion .....	48
<b>Part Four: Resources for Getting Started</b> .....	50
A. Glossary of Terms .....	50
B. Recommended Reading and Audio-Visual Resources .....	58
C. A Sermon for Good Friday (Sample) .....	68
<b>Appendices</b>	
A. From Petition 81 of the 32nd General Council, 1988, to the Present .....	72
B. What is Anti-Judaism? .....	75
C. What about Christian Jews or Jewish Christians? .....	76
D. Antisemitism: An Enduring Problem In Western Society, by Prof. Alan T. Davies .....	80
E. The United Church Record, by Prof. Alan T. Davies .....	85
F. Anti-Judaism in Feminist Writings and Theology, by The Very Rev. Lois M. Wilson .....	87
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	89

*Bearing Faithful Witness, The United Church of Canada*

<b>Bearing Faithful Witness: A Six-Session Study Guide</b> .....	90
Notes for the Leader .....	91
Session 1: Introductory Session .....	92
Session 2: The Relationship of the Two Testaments .....	95
Session 3: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.....	98
Session 4: John and Acts.....	102
Session 5: Paul’s Letters and Revelation .....	106
Session 6: Guidelines, Appendices, and Closing.....	110
<b>Bearing Faithful Witness: A Quicker Study Guide</b> .....	113
Notes for the Leader.....	114
Session 1 .....	115
Session 2 .....	117
Session 3 .....	119

## **INTRODUCTION**

Early in its history, the church came to see itself as the new Israel, displacing and superseding the Jews as the people of God. It took this stance from a narrow interpretation of its gospels and especially from its passion narratives. The Jews were portrayed as the enemies of Jesus, blind to his fulfillment of God's promises, stubbornly rebellious in the face of his work, and responsible for his death.

Since the 1960s the Roman Catholic Church and most of the larger Protestant churches have made statements revising their theology, saying unequivocally that God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been revoked through the appearance of Jesus. There is now wide recognition that the church's rejection of Jews was an act of disobedience to God. A number of churches have made changes in their confessional statements and in their constitutions to reflect this awareness.

Prior to the development of this document The United Church of Canada had, from time to time, clearly opposed antisemitism in its own ranks and outside the church. Voices had been raised in our church asking for an apology for lack of action before, during, and after World War II. Some suggested that the Basis of Union should make explicit reference to the Jewishness of Jesus and to Judaism. Nevertheless,

we had never made a theological statement about our relationship to Judaism;

we had not made an apology to the Jewish community;

we had not amended our constitution through changes to the Basis of Union.

Due to the lack of theological guidance there was still the danger of anti-Judaic teaching and preaching in our church. The United Church needed to begin to address these concerns through adopting theological guidelines to guard against anti-Judaism.

This document was originally mandated for study by the 36th General Council; in 2000 the 37th General Council invited further feedback to a revised proposed statement on United Church–Jewish relations. Responses from this study came from congregations across Canada. After a total of six years of faithful study and feedback, the final report and statement were approved by the 38th General Council in 2003. The final statement has been included as Part One with these study materials.

The United Church, in its support of multiculturalism, pluralism, and a more inclusive ecumenism, has an interest in interfaith dialogue with all religions. However, no other religion is as closely related to Christianity as Judaism. The Christian God is the God of Israel. Jesus and all the apostles were of Israel. Christian scripture includes the scriptures of Israel. The New Testament extends the concepts, forms, and even content of the scriptures of Israel. The hope of Israel is the Christian hope, too: earth under God's rule in peace, prosperity, and justice for all.

*Bearing Faithful Witness, The United Church of Canada*

This document provides guidelines for the relationship with Jews and Judaism and for the related interpretation of scripture within The United Church of Canada. Following consultation with Jewish rabbinic representatives of the Canadian Jewish Congress and others, as well as with representatives of the United Church, no apology, as such, has been made by the United Church at this time, nor have amendments to the Basis of Union been put forward. Part One of this document presents the final statement adopted by The United Church of Canada at the 38th General Council in 2003.

## **PART ONE: STATEMENT ON UNITED CHURCH–JEWISH RELATIONS TODAY**

*Approved at the 38th General Council of The United Church of Canada, August 2003*

The United Church of Canada is called to be faithful to Jesus Christ in worship, prayer, word and action in the midst of our neighbours and in the world. Accordingly, the 36th General Council, meeting in Camrose, Alberta, in 1997, authorized for the whole church a study of the document *Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church–Jewish Relations Today*.

People of the United Church responded thoughtfully and prayerfully to the study document and to the proposed policy statement. This statement encompasses that response, and seeks to be a faithful expression of our understanding of United Church–Jewish relations.

The 38th General Council, meeting in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, in 2003, overwhelmingly and enthusiastically approved this policy statement on The United Church of Canada–Jewish Relations Today.

We believe this statement reflects our faith in Christ and is consistent with our historic witness as part of the Body of Christ. We believe that the God whom we know in Jesus Christ is the One who called Sarah and Abraham, gave the Torah to Moses, and put passion for justice into the hearts of the prophets. We believe, above all, in the faithfulness of God.

Holy scripture teaches that the eternal Word became flesh in the person of Jesus, a Jew. The One who is “our judge and our hope” lives as a Jew, dies as a Jew, and is raised as a Jew. In making these affirmations we seek to bear faithful witness to the Jewishness of Jesus.

We believe that the Holy Spirit calls us to bear faithful witness concerning God’s reconciling mission in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God has opened the door in a new way to those previously outside the covenant.<sup>1</sup> Our understanding of the faithfulness of God would be at risk if we were to say that God had abandoned the covenant with the Jewish people. As Paul says in Romans 9–11, the covenant is irrevocable because God is faithful.

We believe that our faith issues in action. Jesus commands us to love our neighbours, but all too often Christians have treated Jews, our sisters and brothers, as enemies. We believe that our faith calls us to repent when the church has been unfaithful in its witness by not loving Jews as neighbours.

Therefore, as an act of repentance and in faithfulness to the commandment that we should not bear false witness against our neighbours, The United Church of Canada...

### A. ...ACKNOWLEDGES:

- a history of anti-Judaism and antisemitism<sup>2</sup> within Christianity as a whole, including The United Church of Canada

- a history of interpretation of New Testament texts which has often failed to appreciate the context within Judaism from which these texts emerged, resulting in deeply rooted anti-Jewish misinterpretation
- a history of insensitivity with respect to the importance of the Shoah<sup>3</sup> for Jews
- antisemitism and anti-Judaism as affronts to the gospel of Jesus Christ

B. ... REJECTS:

- all teaching of a theology of contempt toward Jews and Judaism
- the belief that God has abolished the covenant with the Jewish people<sup>4</sup>
- supersessionism, the belief that Christians have replaced Jews in the love and purpose of God
- proselytism which targets Jews for conversion to Christianity

C. ... AFFIRMS:

- the significance of Judaism as at once a religion, a people, and a covenant community
- that Judaism, both historically and currently, cannot be understood from knowledge of the Old Testament alone
- that the gifts and calling of God to the Jewish people are irrevocable
- the uniqueness for Christianity of the relationship with Judaism
- that both Judaism and Christianity, as living faiths, have developed significantly from a common root
- that the love of God is expressed in the giving of both Torah and gospel
- that the State of Israel has the right to exist in peace and security<sup>5</sup>
- our common calling with Jews and others to align ourselves with God's world-mending work
- the opportunity for growth in Christian self-understanding that exists through closer dialogue with, openness to, and respect for Judaism.

D. ... ENCOURAGES MEMBERS, CONGREGATIONS, PRESBYTERIES, CONFERENCES, AND THE GENERAL COUNCIL:

- to seek opportunities to meet with Jews and to learn about modern Judaism

- to continue to study the issues raised by the study document *Bearing Faithful Witness*, along with other issues of significance within the Jewish–Christian relationship
- to be vigilant in resisting antisemitism and anti-Judaism in church and society
- to create ongoing worship opportunities within the church for highlighting the importance of the Jewish–Christian relationship, such as at the time of Shoah Remembrance in April, or the high Jewish holy days in September/October, or Kristallnacht in November or Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week in February.

## **Glossary**

### **Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism**

The term antisemitism, derived from Antisemitismus, was coined in imperial Germany during the 1870s by propagandists who did not wish Jews to enjoy equal rights with Christians. The term had a modern scientific ring because it assumed the fashionable racial science of the late 19th century; this was advantageous to its proponents. However, because there is no integrity to the word Semitism (or Semite) unless one adopts the pseudo-science that divided Europeans into opposing races, Aryans and Semites, antisemitism is really a nonsense word; its true political meaning is “I am against the Jews.” For this reason, many scholars prefer to spell it without a hyphen. To spell it with a hyphen is to lend respectability to racial ideas that they do not deserve.

The term anti-Judaism should contain a hyphen because Judaism is a religion that really exists. However, the term is vague and should not be used without careful definition. It can mean intellectual dissent from Jewish precepts (in the same sense as “anti-Christian” or “anti-Christianity”). Or it can have a pejorative connotation, implying not merely an attack on Jewish ideas, but on the Jews themselves for other than racial reasons. In the latter case, it approximates antisemitism. Ultimately, the line between the two terms is blurred because anti-Jewish animosity existed in Western culture long before modern times, and it is clear that ancient and medieval religious cultural anti-Judaism became the foundation of modern antisemitism. Yet there is a historical distinction. Anti-Jewish elements are present in the Christian scriptures, but it would be false to claim that the scriptures are antisemitic.

### **Israel**

A Jewish view of the term Israel states that it contains within it three ideas—people, land, and state. When it refers to the people of Israel, the term traces the Jewish people back to the ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Noah, and Adam and Eve. It is believed that the people of Israel received two identity-forming calls: the first being the promise of descendants and the second being the covenant at Sinai. (It is also believed by some that the people of Israel are specially chosen to be a light, a bearer of justice and righteousness to the world.) When the term Israel means land it is believed that there was a promise of land given by God to

Abraham and through him to the whole Jewish people. The people have often been active in the acquiring and settlement of this land and while the promise is seen to be eternal, the boundaries have varied throughout history.

When the term means the State of Israel, it refers to the political form of the Jewish civilization in the land.

These three definitions of the term Israel and the tight interconnection amongst them are often difficult for Christians to understand. The connections between spirituality and bodies, and between religion and geography have no easy parallels in Christianity, which understands itself as a universal religion. Yet, these ideas are core and central to Jewish identity.

(This glossary item is taken substantially from the book *A Dictionary of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue* edited by Leon Kienicki and Geoffrey Wigoder, Paulist Press, 1995.)

### **Antisemitism and the State Of Israel**

Because of the powerful bond on many levels between the State of Israel and the larger Jewish world, and because of the sensitivities engendered by the Holocaust, severe criticism of the Jewish state is often regarded by pro-Israel Jews and Christians as a mask for antisemitism. Those who make this claim are not always wrong. For one thing, anti-Zionist language has served to disguise antisemitism since the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* at the end of the 19th century.

For another thing, real antisemitism does exist in the Middle East and its presence has coloured and distorted the geopolitical issues faced by Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Muslims, and Christians. For still another thing, old Christian beliefs that define the Jews as witnesses to God's wrath (the mark of Cain) and thus condemned to perpetual homelessness have not entirely disappeared, especially from the conservative churches. Israel, seen through certain theological eyes, has no right to exist.

Since attacks on the Jewish state can arise readily from antisemitic motives, some persons have argued that Christians at least, because of their highly compromised past, should refrain from criticizing Israel at all. But this position is untenable, although Christians must take special pains not to forget this past and its ideological legacy. As a modern nation-state, Israel, like all nation-states, is subject to the moral ambiguities of power which, by definition, is never innocent and never can be innocent. Even if Israel is conceived in religious and theological terms, as, for example, a land promised by God to the Jewish people, this fact remains true. Indeed, the faith component makes criticism even more necessary because of the dangers of self-righteousness inherent in any religious nationalism.

The problem is to distinguish legitimate criticism from illegitimate assaults driven by a concealed prejudice. Certain signs indicate the difference. Criticisms of Israel that dwell on its Jewish identity rather than the exigencies of power as the cause of its real or imagined

misdeeds are highly suspect. Any attempt to demonize Israel as intrinsically evil and thus a nation unlike other nations (although all nations are guilty of evil deeds) betrays its true nature. Certainly equations of Israel with Nazi Germany or the Star of David with the swastika suggest a sinister agenda, although Jews as well as Germans are not immune to immoral political temptations.

Legitimate criticism, on the other hand, concerns itself with specific policies and actions on the part of Israeli leaders and governments, as well as the enduring problems and tensions of Israeli society. Legitimate criticism is always able to distinguish between a regime and a people, between what is transient and what is enduring in the history of a particular country.

### **Covenant**

Literally, a covenant is a pact or bargain between two parties. In the Old Testament, “covenant” refers primarily to the bond between God and the people of Israel initiated by God and grounded in God’s grace and steadfast love. God promises life, land, prosperity, and attentiveness. The people promise to be God’s “own possession among all peoples” and to obey the divine instruction, Torah (Exodus 19:5); later this is understood to include being “a light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6; cf. Isaiah 2:2–4). The covenant is made with Moses at Sinai (Exodus 19 ff.), reaffirming the bond made with Abraham (Genesis 15, 17) and reaffirmed again later with David (2 Samuel 7) and Solomon (1 Kings:9) and in the restoration from exile (Isaiah 40–55). In the Old Testament, God also makes a covenant with Noah. In Jewish thinking, this covenant applies to all humanity, requiring only that people respect life and live by a codifiable rule of law that has integrity (Genesis 9:8–17).

In the New Testament, “covenant” is used to refer to God’s new and renewed bonding with all humanity through the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is seen as fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah about a new covenant written in the heart (Jeremiah 31:31–34; hence the use of the word “testament” (i.e. covenant), both “old” and “new” in the Christian Bible. [For an excellent treatment of “covenant” in the Old Testament, see Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), particularly the first section on “Sinai.” The great Christian Old Testament scholar, Walther Eichrodt, thought that “covenant” was the most important unifying and organizing concept for grasping the Old Testament’s presentation of God and God’s action with humanity. This understanding thoroughly informs his *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J.A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961 (vol.1) and 1967 (vol.2).]

<sup>1</sup> See glossary reference to “covenant.”

<sup>2</sup> See glossary reference to “anti-Judaism” and “antisemitism.”

<sup>3</sup> “Shoa,” which is a Hebrew term meaning “catastrophic destruction” is often the preferred term over the more-familiar “Holocaust.” This is because the word “Holocaust” comes from a Greek term which is used in the Septuagint to signify the Hebrew term for “burnt offering.” Many do not consider it helpful or appropriate to

refer to the destruction of most of European Jewry as an “offering.” The useage of these terms is not yet a completely settled question.

<sup>4</sup> The biblical covenant with the Jewish people includes the promise of land. Whether that means exclusive occupation and control is disputed.

<sup>5</sup> The United Church of Canada strongly affirms the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and in secure boundaries and the right of Palestinians to a homeland state. United Church of Canada support of specific United Nations resolutions implies support for the boundaries of Israel and the Palestinian state being approximately represented by the pre-1967 borders of Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, subject to mutually agreed negotiations on the transfer of land.

## **PART TWO: WHERE WE ARE**

### **A) The Relationship of the Two Testaments:**

It was important to the early Christians to see themselves as emerging from within an historical process that was ordained by God. Thus they could see themselves as *new* but also as authorized *from the beginning* (i.e. as having a long-standing heritage).

The earliest followers of Jesus were all Jews, as was Jesus himself. For them, “scripture” referred to the Torah and prophetic works that are in our Old Testament (OT), along with other writings of Judaism that were treated as authoritative. Jesus did not write any book or letter that has been discovered, and presumably for Jesus the Jewish scriptures were sufficient. Written works that did emerge within the early church were not intended to replace scripture or even to be added to scripture. They sought to interpret the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection, his life and teachings, for the day-to-day struggles of the emerging church. Their authors searched the scriptures to find interpretive clues that made sense of this death and of the frighteningly strange event of Easter. It was only in the fourth century CE that the church officially expanded the compass of scripture to include Christian writings, concluding a process that began at the end of the second century CE. From the beginning of Christianity, then, Jewish scripture provided the natural interpretive vehicle for understanding God’s intentions and acts; Jesus himself led the way in using these writings. The plan of God for Christianity was understood and affirmed as long-standing. The emerging Christian writings could focus on explaining the *new* things that God was doing in Christ.

***The Noahide Covenant.*** “Unlike Christianity, Judaism does not deny salvation to those outside its fold. According to Jewish law, all non-Jews who observe the Noahide laws will participate in salvation and in the rewards of the world to come.” (H. Revel, *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (N.Y., 1939–43), Vol. VIII, pp.227–8.) The Noahide laws derive from the covenant that God made with Noah (Genesis 8:15—9:17), a covenant that is thought by Jews to be universal in application. It requires seven things of everyone: not to worship idols, not to blaspheme God, not to kill, not to rob, not to commit adultery, not to eat flesh cut from a living animal, and to be people of law, establishing courts of justice. In this way, Judaism has always affirmed that God has a place in salvation for others: they come under the Noahide Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant to which the Jew adheres is simply more demanding. It is a different covenant. Both covenants serve the mysterious purposes of God for the redemption of the world in their own ways. Judaism has never officially had a dictum to parallel the one that the church affirmed for centuries (now widely rejected): “outside the church there is no salvation.” The view was put forward within the house of R. Shammai that the “goy” (non-Jews) would be cast into utter darkness, but this isolated opinion was never generally accepted.

Over time, especially after the destruction of the Temple in CE 70, friction grew between Christian groups and other Jews. John’s gospel reflects the bitterness of this internal struggle. Increasingly new Christian members had a non-Jewish background. **Christianity changed from being a sect within Judaism to become an independent faith.** The newness of

Christianity was accepted as obvious. The importance of its rootedness in Judaism seemed unnecessary. To some, the Jewish texts were quite alien. Marcion's canon, for example, ca. CE 145, excluded the OT, and Marcion argued that Jewish and Christian writings spoke of different gods. The church rejected these ideas. Marcionism was declared a heresy. Christianity's place within the intention and action of God was again affirmed using Jewish history and Jewish texts. Even so, the passage of time and the great evangelistic success of Christianity continued to give the faith its own increasing, independent authority. Christianity had not invalidated all things Jewish. Nevertheless there was room for thinking that the new had superseded the old and that the promises of God had passed from the Jewish faith community to that of the Christians.

***Torah, Written and Oral Torah, the Mishnah, and the Talmud.*** The word, "Torah" has two important meanings. Most widely, it can refer to all the teachings of Judaism; it is a legal and ethical system, a way of life, a covenant relationship, given in a narrative account, beginning with creation. More strictly, Torah refers to the first five books of the Jewish Bible, the so-called Books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy as Christians name them. In these five books, the prescriptive content ("halachah" or law) is embedded within a narrative context ("aggadah") that illustrates how God and the people put the law into practice. The whole content of these books is Torah, not just the 613 laws that have been identified within them. It is not correct to say that "Torah" is equivalent to "law."

The Books of Moses make up the Written Torah, understood as that which was given to Moses to be written down as directed by God. The foundation of the Oral Torah is everything that God and Moses talked about while they were together for 40 days on Mount Sinai. The story has it that rabbinic teaching through the ages has simply uncovered these conversations and collected them in the Mishnah and the Talmud and in the ongoing living expansion of teaching to this day. The Mishnah gathers together teaching of the Sages concerning the Books of Moses. The Talmud includes the Mishnah and adds commentary, clarification, and discussion about the Mishnah. There are two Talmuds, the Jerusalem and the Babylonian, the latter being completed by the sixth century CE. The Babylonian Talmud is an encyclopedic compilation of the Oral Torah and is the most authoritative source for Jewish scholarship and halachah. Normative Judaism requires an intimate knowledge of the Oral Torah as a basis for understanding the Written Torah.

Jewish scriptures, being retained, could be interpreted in ways that supported Christian ideas. For example, the church used the "new covenant" wording in Jeremiah 31, not only for interpreting God's action in and through Jesus (the one who inaugurates a new covenant written on the heart), but also for organizing the scriptures themselves into "old" and "new" testaments (literally, "covenants"). Again, the "Servant Songs" of Deutero-Isaiah were used to show that, contrary to Jewish expectations, since the suffering of the servant was preordained by God, the execution of Jesus did not invalidate his claims to Messiahship. The search for the right relationship between Jesus' teaching and Torah invariably drew on scriptural authority, no matter how that relationship was finally seen. Consider the sayings of Jesus about the Sabbath in Matthew 12:1-8: Matthew claims that Jesus retains the law and correctly reinterprets it rather than setting it aside; he quotes Hosea 6:6 as God's support for Jesus' view ("I desire compassion and not sacrifice," cf. also Matthew 9:13) consistent with

Matthew 5:1. Jesus is presented as a Torah-respecting and Torah-observing Jew, fulfilling the law through a true reinterpretation of it. Retaining the authority of Jewish scripture is a necessary part of Matthew's interpretation of Jesus.

**The "Servant Songs" of Isaiah.** Four passages in Isaiah are known as "the Servant Songs": 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. The author refers elsewhere to the whole of Israel as a servant (e.g. 41:8, 42:9), but the servant of the "songs" seems to be different. The passages could be speaking about an individual. They speak uniquely about the transformative power of suffering. Did Jesus understand his calling with reference to these passages? From early times the church interpreted Jesus' work in terms of them. Even though in Isaiah the servant is never called "messiah" (and Cyrus who is called "messiah" is not called "servant," 45:1-7), these passages were used to support the claim that Jesus was the Messiah awaited by the Jews.

- Remembering that these passages are within Jewish scripture and that the idea that they refer to Jesus of Nazareth is rejected by Jews, how do you think a Jew interprets them?
- Can we affirm truth in both the Jewish and Christian interpretations, or can only one be true?

**Jesus and Torah.** All indications in the NT would suggest that Jesus was a Torah-observant Jew. He kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16), he fasted (Matthew 6:16), possibly he wore fringes (Mark 6:56) and phylacteries (Matthew 23:5), he affirmed Torah as needful (Luke 16:17; Matthew 5:17), and so on. Eating with sinners did not violate Torah nor cause ritual impurity; it did not make a person a sinner. If Christians are guided by an approach to spirituality that seeks to follow Jesus and to value what Jesus would have valued, then understanding Torah must become an important undertaking for Christians, perhaps the most important biblical study. Believing that Jesus affirmed Torah would alter our interpretation of many of his teachings.

In the application of Torah, Jesus quite often makes a more rigorous demand than, on the face of it, Torah itself would seem to be making. Jesus stands within a particular Jewish tradition that would fulfill the law by going beyond its specific requirements. Jesus is confirming the Torah and its importance while at the same time, insisting upon the centrality of love, mercy, and generosity. Even in this emphasis on love, Jesus is not unique (Deuteronomy 6:4; Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:29-34, note that the scribe agrees).

The most prominent way of using Jewish scripture texts within Christian writings involved a promise and fulfillment motif. This motif also came to be the primary one for characterizing the relationship between the testaments themselves. Christian writers claimed that the Jewish scripture texts presented promises that Jesus and Christianity fulfilled. This view was and is an *interpretation* of the Jewish texts.

- 1) It is not the only interpretation that is possible, credible, and defensible. Many other groups within Judaism at the time also made claims to know and "fulfill" the plan and

intention of God. They used the (Jewish) scriptures to support their positions. Rabbinic scholars today continue to base their faith understanding on these scriptures without reference to Christ as an interpretive guide.

- 2) It is not obvious that God's promises to the Jews need fulfillment beyond that which is given in the Jewish texts themselves. Promises to give children, generations, land, and a great heritage are all fulfilled; only the end-time (eschatological) promises of communal peace with justice and of international reconciliation are not accomplished, but neither are they fulfilled in Christianity.
- 3) If the Jewish testament needs "fulfillment," it is not obvious that the Christian writings properly or best accomplish this. The Jewish testament, on different interpretations, leads to the Talmuds, the Christian writings, and the Qur'an. It must be emphasized that all of these are interpretive extensions.

The situation is complicated by the variety of ways in which "promise and fulfillment" language can be understood. In 2 Corinthians 1:18ff, Paul states, "As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been 'Yes and No.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, . . . was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes.' For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.'" Paul is saying that God's promises have found their confirmation (cf. Romans 15:8). In being confirmed, the reach of benefits of the promises has been extended to the gentiles (Romans 11:25ff). This is not the simple coming to pass of that which was predicted. It is not prefiguration and subsequent recognition/identification. A new thing has happened that was both within the scope of the promises and not previously known to be so. The pattern is important: the story of Christ is understood in the light of the stories of the Hebrew scriptures, but it is not that those stories were deficient or incomplete in any way, or that Christ adds something that people were missing. Rather, the story of Christ recapitulates the Hebraic stories, catching up the promises of God and newly revealing the content that God always saw was in them. "Fulfillment," then, is about revealing Torah and the content of the covenant that has been from of old. It is totally inappropriate to understand "fulfillment" in any way that would include ideas of abrogation, supersession, displacement, substitution, etc. The word "fulfillment" is used in absolute wonder over a God who can do old-new things! Nothing is taken away; what was always there is revealed again, and made available more widely to gentiles.

Each New Testament writer uses the "promise and fulfillment" motif in some way or other. It is so central to New Testament thought that it cannot be ignored. But **the purpose of the motif is to push us back into the texts** that the followers of Jesus knew to be scripture and to find language *there* that makes sense of Jesus' story. It was not to take us out of that scripture and into new texts that had pretensions of becoming scripture alongside the old texts. In time, to be sure, the church came to recognize Old and New Testaments (i.e. covenants), and to believe that there were two covenants, and that the new superseded the old. But originally the church knew that there is really only one covenant, fulfilled, "irrevocable" (Romans 11:29), renewed, because of which the gentile "too may now receive mercy" (Romans 11:31) having been grafted onto the rich root of Israel (Romans 11:17).

***Fulfillment and Promise.*** In the birth stories of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (ch. 1—2), several times we are told that something happens “to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet.” Understanding “fulfillment” here as recapitulation and confirmation accords very well with the writer’s purposes: Jesus relives the history of his people. That history is remembered, represented, and reaffirmed in Jesus’ own life; Jesus is shown to be immersed in and very much a part of the experiences that have shaped Judaism. Matthew does not intend that the earlier events are to be understood as foretellings of what would happen to Jesus. Those events stand in their own right as complete happenings. But just as they are formative events of his people Israel, they are formative for Jesus, too. The people were called out of Egypt by God’s grace; Jesus relived it (2:15). The people experienced the innocent suffering and death that accompanied exile; Jesus relived it (2:17–18). The people in time of hardship were told that events were already happening amongst them that would lead to deliverance; Jesus relived it (1:22–23). The past is full and complete. Jesus comes to it and it fills him full, too. He confirms his history as he recapitulates it, and he is confirmed by it. In the same way, the promises of the Old Testament are also full and complete. In the life of Jesus they are confirmed and recapitulated by God. Their benefits and blessings are made more widely applicable. The new thing that is realized is the breadth of God’s loving embrace.

## **B) The Old Testament:**

Today, Christians who want to move away from all appearance or suggestion of supersessionism, and who want to respect the sensitivities of people who see pejorative valuation in words like “old” and “new,” are trying to find another way of referring to what we have traditionally called the “Old Testament.” Without solving this problem, some suggestions and comments are offered:

- 1) *Referring to the OT as the “Older Testament”*: The NT would become the “Newer Testament.” “Older” and “newer” are comparative terms which imply a relationship with each other. They are not pejorative in the way that the absolute terms, “old” and “new” seem to be. (This way of naming retains standard short forms, OT = “Older Testament” and NT = “Newer Testament.”)
- 2) *Referring to the OT as “First Testament”*: The NT would become the “Second Testament.” Possibly the pejoratives and supersessionist tendencies that could attach themselves to an “old/new” designation would not apply to a “first/second” designation—but then again they might.
- 3) *Referring to the OT as “Hebrew Scriptures” or “Hebrew Testament”*: The word “Hebrew” here must be understood to refer to the original language of composition of the designated books. To be consistent and parallel, the NT would become the “Greek scriptures” or “Greek Testament.” These designations would be non-pejorative and accurate, and since they refer only to the language of original writing, nothing is implied that limits the authority, importance, and application of the books so designated. However, the impression may be created for Christians that the word “Hebrew” refers to the Hebrew people and that these texts have a lesser authority for those who are not Hebrews (i.e. not Jews); Christian readers and speakers would need to guard against this

false impression. (For this reason as well, “Christian scriptures” and “Christian Testament,” referring to the NT, are quite misleading, implying as they do that the other scriptures are of lesser or of no *Christian* import.)

4) *Referring to the OT as “Tanakh”*: Tanakh (or TaNaK) is the contemporary Jewish way of referring to the Jewish biblical texts as a whole. It is descriptive of the content and of the ordering of the collection, being an acronym formed from T (Torah), N (Nevi'im = Prophets) and K (Kethuvim = Writings). It has the advantage of being non-pejorative and accurate. It has the disadvantages of being a totally foreign designation for most Christians, and of having no obvious counterpart for referring to the NT. Whereas in Judaism this designation gives the ordering of the books, in Christianity the books of Prophets and Writings are ordered differently, being interspersed with each other.

5) Using any of the above, a Christian reader or speaker could make it a practice to refer to the text, as much as possible, by naming the book (rather than the testament) in which the text is found.

***The Order of Books in the Jewish Bible:***

(T) TORAH: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

(N) PROPHETS: Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

(K) WRITINGS: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles

How does this compare with the table of contents in your Bible? What do you think of the classification of 1 & 2 Kings, for example, as “prophetic”? What is so different about 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Chronicles that they should be included in different classifications? Why is Daniel classified as a “writing” and not as “prophetic”?

The books of the Tanakh/OT are ordered differently by Jews and by Christians. The different ordering reflects important theological concerns. The Jewish order seeks to emphasize the canonical priority of Torah over all other scripture. Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1, the first texts in the Prophets and Writings sections, respectively, stress the superior importance of the law and thus subordinate these sections to Torah. The Writings, ending with 1 and 2 Chronicles, stress the development of worship life and devotional practice in Judaism, and look forward to the true Jerusalem which will fulfill the hopes for a faithful kingdom. This ending affirms that continuing Jewish identity is located in the religious life of the people. The Christian order closes the OT with the prophetic promise and anticipation created by Zechariah/Malachi. It suggests that the Hebrew texts are all about the history of the promise of a Messiah, a promise that will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

***Septuagint***: The Septuagint is a translation from Hebrew into Greek of important Jewish texts. It was begun around 260 BCE to serve Jews throughout the world who might have

difficulty reading Hebrew. It also made Jewish texts accessible to non-Jews, and influenced a growing number of “God-fearers” who admired the ethics and teachings of Judaism (Acts 10:2,35;13:43). Legend has it that the translation was made independently by 70 translators (hence, “septuagint”), and that their work, when compared, was found to be identical. The Septuagint is often designated by LXX.

**Apocrypha:** When Jerome (d. CE 420) translated the Bible into Latin, he used the Septuagint. Not all of the texts in that collection, however, had been included in Jewish Scripture when Jewish canonization took place between CE 75 and 130. Jerome’s *Vulgate* contained more than the Jewish faith came to recognize as authoritative. At the time of the Reformation, Protestants accepted the authorized Jewish selection of texts in preference to the Septuagint selection. The extra texts in the *Vulgate*, accepted today as scripture by Roman Catholics but not by Protestants, are known as the books of the Apocrypha.

### **Problematic Passages**

In this paper, because we are concerned to help church members deal with anti-Judaisms in scripture, far more space is devoted to the Second Testament texts than to those of the First. This in no way reflects a view about the relative importance of the texts. In fact, we note the suggestion of Paul van Buren that, as an interpretive guideline for the church’s use of scripture, the First Testament should actually be given priority over the Second: “in the NT, what does not fit the OT should be challenged.” Use of such a principle could have saved the church from using anti-Jewish texts to construct a history of hatred toward Jews; applying it now may point a way out of the legacy formed from that hatred.

We need to know more about the Hebrew scriptures, and Jews can help us learn. These texts are important for Judaism, and Jewish scholars through the centuries have devoted considerable effort to understanding them. It is our book, too. We believe that we have been taken into the story of Israel. We are not outsiders. The story is not broken, though it has parts. Without this part of the story, we are not followers of Jesus. Jesus’ people, the Jews, can help us.

**A Note about YHWH.** This combination of four Hebrew consonants is the name of God (Exodus 3:14; called the “tetragrammaton” meaning “four-lettered name”). It is not to be said under any circumstances today by Jews. How exactly it is to be pronounced is not known anymore. In pointed Hebrew texts (i.e. ones to which vowels have been added), the vowels of “Adonai” (= “Lord”) have been included with these consonants in order to remind the Jewish reader to say “Adonai” in preference to anything else. From this combination of consonants and vowels, Christians have produced “Jehovah” as a divine name. Many English translations still follow the King James Version in rendering YHWH by “the LORD” (i.e. with all letters capitalized), thus allowing English Bible readers to know when the four consonants appear and also to respect their special sacredness. Increasingly today Christians are using the word, “Yahweh,” and even pretending to know that this formulation from YHWH is the correct one. It cannot be known whether it is correct. Whether correct or not, Jews believe that to use it is disrespectful and disobedient to God. Be that as it may, if we respect Jews, both “Jehovah” and “Yahweh” should be avoided. Even in Jesus’ time, YHWH was only pronounced once a

year on the Day of Atonement within the Most Holy place. Jesus probably never said the name. Today, without the Temple, it is not pronounced at all.

When we turn to problem texts in the Hebrew scriptures, we note that usually the problem is one of understanding the nature of God. **These texts can be just as problematic for Jews as they are for Christians.** For example, consider 1 Samuel 15. When God commands Saul to slaughter all the Amalekites, Saul allows Agag, the King, to live; Samuel, the prophet, acting for God, chastises Saul and “hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal” (1 Samuel 15:33). This passage marks the rejection of Saul and prepares for the emergence of David as King in Israel. The passage also remembers the unprovoked attack in the desert by the Amalekites on the vulnerable Israelite people (Exodus 17:8-16; 1 Samuel 15:2), and it holds the Amalekites to account for posing a genocidal threat. Kyle McCarter, (*1 Samuel*, The Anchor Bible, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1980, p. 269), wonders whether, given the language used, “Agag suffered a ritual death,...a punishment for covenant violation,” presumably over a covenant that would have predated the desert attack. (He notes “we have no knowledge” of such a covenant). From this, we might claim that we can see how this story fits into the flow of stories in the Bible. We can also see how it has functioned to warn Israel to be wary of genocidal threats and to help Jews think about what it means to retaliate in kind to such threats. What remains difficult for us is what this passage literally says about God’s directive of vengeance. But this is difficult for Jews, too. Jews have made the passage serve by coming to see genocide as a heinous crime for all involved, not just for its recipients but for its agents, too. They have consciously rejected genocide accordingly. Maybe this is enough, in the wisdom of God, for the passage to help accomplish.

When Rabbi Gunther Plaut (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981, pp.416–17) looks at the repeated hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 4:21—11:10; 14:17), he acknowledges the problem of Pharaoh’s apparent lack of freedom. He tells us, “The Midrash asks, ‘Does this not afford an opening to heretics?’” i.e. by bringing God into disrepute. This is a serious problem for Jews, just as it is for Christians. Plaut notes the easy solution that “God merely informs Moses of what God knows is bound to happen”; he leaves this statement for those who will be satisfied by it, but he does not accept it himself. He states that the will of God is “pivotal to the story, . . . all explanations attempting to ‘absolve’ God will remain forced.” But he also states his firm conviction that “Free will is never at issue, for to deny man his ability to make moral decisions would be wholly at variance with all biblical thought.” What then can we finally say about God’s action here in hardening Pharaoh’s heart? The story presents repeated occasions for showing God’s glory and reinforcing God’s redemptive power. Plaut suggests the story is “not concerned with theological contradictions,” but only with making God’s faithfulness to declared promises abundantly clear to everyone, especially to the people of Israel. “God’s freedom prevails over [human freedom].” Does this “solve” the problem? Probably not. Christian interpreters have had no easier time coming up with a solution. For Jews and Christians alike, God remains God, both with us and beyond us. (Maimonides in the 12th century noted that between the fourth and fifth plagues Pharaoh ceases to harden his own heart [Exodus 8:32] and God takes over [Exodus 9:12]. According to Maimonides the loss of free will becomes part of the punishment and not the crime. But already at Exodus 4:21, God

is intent on hardening Pharaoh's heart and is resolute about how the drama will unfold. Maimonides' suggestion did not end the search for understanding.)

We note the discomfort of Jews over the harsh treatment of Egypt in this story in spite of the claim that Egypt only received her due punishment. Despite all the oracles against the nations, calling for judgment for crimes committed, Isaiah's vision of redemption in the day of the Lord embraces the greatest of Israel's enemies, past (Egypt) and present (Assyria). "In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.'" (Isaiah 19:24-25).

Often, Jewish reflection on problem texts provides very helpful assistance for coming to terms with them. Jewish faithfulness to God, whether or not there is understanding, can be a marvellous example for Christians. We remember Elie Wiesel's story from the death camps about Jewish inmates putting God on trial for what was happening there, finding God guilty, and then joining in the daily prayers. There is not rejection of God here, but there certainly is questioning.

***What Books Were Authoritative for Jesus' Community?*** James Charlesworth states, "The books in the Old Testament are frequently cited as inspired and authoritative to the New Testament authors, but [this fact alone] fails to do justice to the other works cited as inspired by them." In a footnote at this point, Charlesworth adds, "the New Testament authors apparently quoted from (or alluded to the inspired or authoritative nature of) the Ascension of Isaiah (Hebrews 11:37), Testament of Moses (Jude 9), Baruch (1 Corinthians 10:20; Revelation 8:2), 1 Enoch (Luke 16:9, 21:28; John 5:22; Colossians 2:3; Hebrews 11:5; 1 Peter 1:12; Jude 14—15; Revelation 5:11, 15:3, 17:14, 19:16), 3 Maccabees (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 14:10, 17:14, 19:16, 20:10, 21:8), 4 Maccabees (Matthew 22:32; Romans 7:7), Psalms of Solomon (Matthew 6:26; Luke 11:21—22; John 1:14; Revelation 2:26—27, 21:24,26), many documents in the Old Testament Apocrypha, Aratus's *Phaenomena* 5 (Acts 17:28), Cleanthes (Acts 17:28), Epimenides *de Oraculis* (Titus 1:12), and Menander's *Thais* (1 Corinthians 15:33)." See "What has the Old Testament to do with the New?" in James H. Charlesworth & Walter P. Weaver (eds.), *The Old and the New Testaments: Their Relationship and the "Intertestamental" Literature*, Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993, pp. 55—56 & p. 81, n. 48. A wider literature was available to NT authors than we have been accustomed to considering, and this fact is significant, for example, when Paul says "according to the Scriptures" in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, what exactly does he have in mind?

### **C) The New Testament:**

Some scholars have claimed that the theological antisemitism of the church has no basis in the New Testament itself. Others have tried to prove the exact opposite. The debate between these opposing standpoints is not resolved. Both sides agree that the church has used conflict between Jesus and his followers and the Jewish leaders of the time to form its language and to justify its historical anti-Judaism.

In the section that follows (and indeed throughout this paper), a fundamental guideline for us is that we intend neither to censure biblical authors nor to censor biblical texts. Rather, we seek to identify anti-Judaic moments in the text and, through encouraging contextual understanding, to move United Church members toward a more respectful and informed exposition of the Bible. We note the comment of William Nicholls that “on the very central issue of the relationship of Jesus and Judaism, all but the most recent New Testament scholarship is out of date” (*Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate*, Norvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993, p. 10). This comment provides a warning and an encouragement to all Christians to investigate the new scholarship.

By the same token, it is not our intent to deny Jewish animosity toward the Jesus movement. Paul says, “Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received stoning.” (2 Corinthians 11:24–25) The anger of particular Jewish individuals and communities toward the followers of Jesus must have been real and intense. It is not unlikely that some followers died at the hands of some Jews (e.g. Acts 7:58,60). In no way, however, does this justify hatred or balance the scales of injustice. To indulge ourselves in vengeance against Jews blocks Christians both from understanding our own texts and from following Jesus who would have us respond to opposition with love.

***A Note on Language.*** The language we use influences us. It influences the way we see things, the way we think about them, and the way we act toward them. Sometimes, words that we think are merely descriptive, have connotations that others find hurtful. Sometimes, we are not aware of the damaging effects words can have on other individuals and groups. Just as sexist language is passed on from generation to generation until we are made aware of its damaging effects on women, so the language of anti-Judaism has been part of our transmitted heritage; when we are made aware of its effects on Jews we can change it. We may only find out about this when they tell us. To continue to use such words poses three problems: 1) we are disrespectful and hurtful to another individual or group, 2) we miscommunicate by using words that are heard in ways that we do not intend, and 3) our mistaken acceptance of the neutrality of the words may lead us to mistakenly and unconsciously accept larger prejudicial ideas that they convey.

Western languages and culture have been deeply influenced by the Bible. Biblical language continues to have an important impact on us. While celebrating this heritage, we must be mindful of some negative legacies (e.g. check the word “Pharisee” in any standard dictionary; see the discussion, Part Two, B, below). We do not want to continue using anti-Judaic language simply because we find it in scripture. It is important that we be careful, intentional, non-stereotypical, and respectful in our use of language.

## **1. The Gospel according to Matthew**

Matthew is so deeply rooted in Judaism that the author has been called a “Christian Pharisee.” Some scholars believe that his Jewish-Christian community is in conflict of interpretation with other Jewish groups, possibly strongly led by Pharisees. Having refused to participate in the disastrous war with Rome (CE 66–73) and angry toward those responsible for it, Matthew’s community believes it possesses interpretive insights that are superior to those of

other Jewish survivors. The author's major concern seems to be: what is the correct interpretation of Jewish teaching and tradition? He believes that Jesus is the right interpreter, authorized by God, and that in Jesus the promises of the Jewish scriptures are realized.

## **Problematic Passages**

According to Matthew, Jesus is sent to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6). If we took this seriously as one interpretive key for the gospel, then it might alter our understanding of some of the texts. Consider, for example, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (20:1–16). One interpretation would see the Jews, represented by the workers hired first, as grumbling about getting the same reward as the gentiles, represented by the workers hired later in the day. But if Jesus' concern really is for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," then the workers hired early might better represent Jews who readily see the importance of devotion to Torah, and the workers hired late as those who come late to this awareness. The point might be the same: neither group is condemned or cut off by the householder who represents God; both are drawn into God's loving bounty. But the text is no longer seen as being against Jews per se.

Towards the end of Matthew's gospel bitterness against Pharisees and other Jews seems to heighten. While Jesus is said to approve of the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees (23:2–3), immediately afterward he accuses them harshly in a very generalizing way for their practices (23:13–35). But perhaps it is some group of them and not *all* Pharisees nor *all* Jews who are criticized. **To see Jesus' critique as internal to Judaism, one Jew to others, changes our understanding of particular texts.** Jesus, then, is very critical of those *in the Jewish community* who are invited guests but do not come to God's banquet (22:1–13), i.e. they do not want to associate with the "lost sheep." Jesus is very critical of those without an active compassion for the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, those in prison, and so on (25:31ff). Even the parable of "the wicked tenants" takes on a different slant (21:33–43): following Isaiah 5:1–7, the vineyard is probably the whole of Judaism and the tenants are the Romans or the Roman-collaborating Jews; the tenants probably do *not* personify Judaism nor the vineyard the gentile church. We must be very careful with these texts because **we live in a time when Christians do not have the Jewish background that Matthew presupposes.**

In the Sermon on the Mount Matthew shows his mastery of Jewish thought and scripture (chapters 5–7). When one considers that Jesus' audience would have been Jewish, references to Jewish symbols (light of the world, salt of the earth) and interpretation of Torah (5:17–19) would not be a problem. Elsewhere, too, Matthew's criticism of Jewish leadership uses Jewish images (e.g. 9:36; compare Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 23:1–14, Zechariah 10:2–3). Debate internal to Judaism is healthy ("you have heard it said and I say . . ."). Matthew wants his community to be better at being faithful Jews than those that surround them (6:3,6,9,17). This is not a concern that gentiles be better than Jews. However, once the Sermon on the Mount is taken to be an address to Christians, these very Jewish symbols and scriptures give the sermon an air of being confrontational toward Judaism. We must remember that Matthew's (and Jesus') concern is for community faithfulness. The teaching to "love your enemies" is startling, unique, important, consistent with Jesus' understanding of God, and expressive of

that faithfulness. In fact, “love for the enemy” is another major interpretive key to the Matthean community’s understanding of Jesus’ teaching. This, together with its expectation of final (apocalyptic) vindication by God, led the community to be non-violent and to oppose war with Rome, a stance that set it at odds with other Jews. (Note that Jesus is represented as setting “love your enemies” beside the statement, “you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” This latter statement nowhere appears in Torah and has not been recommended by Jews. It is not being recommended by Jesus here either and should not be done. Quite possibly, the “wedding garment” that even some of the people of the streets lack as they come to the great banquet is this clothing of love for the enemy, cf. Mt. 22:1–14; it is that important.)

***Is Jesus the Messiah?*** We believe that the right answer is: for Jews, no; for many Christians, yes. Explaining how this can be so has been problematic.

There is a considerable variation of opinion about what would identify and verify the coming of the Messiah in Judaism. For most Jews, “Messiah” means a human figure who will start to bring in the reign of God. For many, a double transformation will provide evidence of this coming: there will be a new world order and a new natural order; peace will prevail (see Isaiah 65:17–25; also 11:7). Jewish emphasis is on the messianic expectation of social and natural perfection rather than on the messiah per se. There have been many messianic claimants before and after the time of Jesus. When they died without bringing the expected changes to the world, their claims were dismissed. Jesus fits into this category. He could not and cannot be the Messiah of Jewish expectation because the world did not change. The Romans knew the political implications of messianic fervour and undoubtedly considered all messianic claimants to be revolutionary insurgents. They probably killed Jesus simply to be rid of him. Crucifixion was Rome’s designated mode of death for such people. The inscription on the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” probably gives the reason for the execution as well as expressing Pilate’s derision toward Jesus.

“Mashiach” (in English, “messiah”) is the Hebrew word for “anointed.” It is a title like “king.” In the New Testament it is transliterated only twice (John 1:41 and 4:25). The word “christos” (i.e. “Christ”), used in the Septuagint, is used in the NT instead; it always refers to Jesus. “Christos” is not a title. In the whole history of the church, only in our century have some theologians begun to speak of “Christ” as a title. In Paul’s letters, the word “kurios” (i.e. “Lord”) is his title for Jesus. He uses “Christ” in the manner of a name, either alone or in combination with “Jesus” (as in “Christ Jesus” or “Jesus Christ”). He never uses “Jesus the Christ.” The significance of this is that the words “mashiach” and “christos,” although being counterparts for each other, already function differently as we move from the OT to the NT. It is not surprising that the *ideas* they express came to be different as well. The new thing that God is doing in Jesus is inextricably part of the person of Jesus. Its designation, “Christ,” has a power to access blessing for the one who knows and calls upon it. Thus “Christ” functions in the manner of an OT (divine) name rather than as a title. God has been wondrously open about making this designation known, and investing it with the power of a name that can be called upon. For Paul, this change is an indication of the new thing that God is doing. In spite of this, some modern translations of the NT into English have rendered the Greek word

“christos” as “Messiah.” This creates confusion by implying that the Christian concept is the same as the Jewish one, and this is not at all clear.

For Christians, the word “Christ” has taken on new and cosmic meanings that do not attach to “mashiach.” Jesus is the risen Christ of Christian faith. The transformation that he effected is spiritual. It is amongst us. It is revelatory of the being, nature, and intention of God, of the compass of God’s grace and the mode of God’s acting to achieve God’s purposes. “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3), something that a Jewish Messiah does not do nor need to do (as Jews understand it). Christ has brought gentiles into covenant with the God of Israel and thereby effected a transformation in understanding and in reality that is monumental. In this sense, Christians speak of Jesus as “the Messiah,” and look forward to the accomplishment, through Christ, of the other transformations on earth that Jews, as well, expect. With these qualifications, neither Jewish denial nor Christian affirmation of the Messiahship of Jesus invalidates the other.

Did Jesus think of himself as Messiah? Probably not. Mark’s treatment of the discussion at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27–33; followed by Luke, see 9:18–22) could be understood as Jesus’ horrified denial of messianic claims and directive to the disciples not to promote such an idea. It could only lead to his death. Matthew expands this discussion to explicitly include an affirmation by Jesus of Messiahship (Matthew 16:13–23). Of course, the texts we consult here are Christian post-resurrection texts that present the views of the church. To use them to go behind the church’s affirmation of Christ, seeking to discern the mind of Jesus, is perhaps expecting too much. It makes sense, however, given Jesus’ Jewishness, to imagine that he thought of himself as a prophet but not as Messiah. He would know the diverse meanings of “mashiach” and know that this was not what he was about. Perhaps the disciples interpreted Jesus’ life in the way that they did because he died under the charge of messianic pretensions and was vindicated in all things by being raised by God. Perhaps they thought that God was doing more than even Jesus knew, that Jesus had been the Messiah in quite unexpected ways.

Matthew’s treatment of the passion story provides the highest potential for anti-Judaism in the whole of his gospel. The Jewish high priests and elders conspire to have Jesus killed (26:3–4, 47, 57–68; 27:1, 20–25; note, however, that the Pharisees are not included!). Pilate is portrayed as being weak and almost in sympathy with Jesus. Pilate washes his hands, a Jewish symbolic act, to declare his innocence (27:24). Blame is shifted to the Jewish crowd, the Jewish people. They shout, “His blood be on us and on our children!” (27:25) This horrible saying, undoubtedly a creation of the writer, repeated in thousands of Christian passion plays, sermons, and anti-Judaic propaganda throughout history, has been used to justify the murder of countless Jewish men, women, and children. In all probability, it was an attempt to make some sense out of the overwhelming devastation that had already befallen Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Jewish people in the Roman war; it was not intended to apply to future generations of Jews as an open-ended curse.

It is hard to imagine that Jews, who hated the Romans and the cruel Roman punishment of crucifixion, would mock one of their own hanging in agony on a cross. We are told that the high priests and elders did this (27:41). Their antagonism is said to have continued even after the resurrection (28:11–15). Perhaps Matthew told the story in this way out of anger over leadership that he perceived as misguided; he hoped that more Jews would adopt his

interpretation of events. He was deeply committed to his vision of a renewed Judaism through Jesus. He would be surprised and hurt by the anti-Judaic sentiment inspired by his gospel. He stresses the importance of forgiveness, of living by an honourable code, and of love even for the enemy (5:21–26; 18:10–35).

## **2. The Gospel according to Mark**

Most scholars (not all) believe that Mark's gospel was the first of the canonical gospels to be written. Matthew and Luke probably used Mark as a source in formulating their gospels. Mark does not know the Jewish Scriptures as well as Matthew; he makes some mistakes in attributing passages to the prophets, for example. In the main, Matthew and Luke follow Mark's chronology and itinerary for Jesus' movements; the odd twists and turns of Jesus' travels suggest that no one really knows the correct chronology of events for Jesus' life. Mark's gospel is important in shaping the literary form of story telling known as "gospel." He presents Jesus as a courageous and charismatic "son of man," a purposely elusive way of referring to Jesus' humanity (as in Ezekiel 2:1) while suggesting more than humanity (as in Daniel 7:13). Jesus' importance is recognized by metaphysical beings and guessed at by humans. Mark's gospel as a whole presents "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," and leaves it to Jesus' followers to become the next part of the story with the same courage, charisma, and awareness of the new age that Jesus showed.

### **Problematic Passages**

There are different ways of reading Mark's gospel. In The United Church of Canada, we tend to downplay references to the demonic. We think that the "unforgivable sin" (3:28–30) cannot be clearly identified. We believe that the opposition to Jesus serves as a foil to raise the question for us, "how strong is *our* commitment, how courageous *our* discipleship?"

Another way of reading Mark, one that has a more anti-Judaic tone and history, would begin by noting that in Mark's gospel history is divided. The old age, ruled by Satan and demons is invaded by Jesus, who announces the new age, the kingdom of God. The Jews and especially their leaders seem to belong to the old age and are therefore under the influence of demons.

The stories of Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders begin very early in the gospel (2:6–3:6). Already Jesus has been in conflict with demons; this conflict has been linked to the synagogue so as to suggest that the synagogue is a place that is full of demons (1:21–27; 1:39). The authority and new teaching of Jesus defeats these foes. We are prepared for a confrontational presentation of the relationship between Jesus and other prominent Jews. Jesus is accused of being himself possessed by demons (3:22). In response, he indirectly charges the Jews with being a house of Satan, divided and coming to an end (3:23–27). He declares the accusation about him to be a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and an unforgivable, eternal sin.

The Jews are already "outside," not able to understand Jesus' message (4:11–12). Jewish traditions and practices are declared obsolete (7:1–23). When the Pharisees "tempt" Jesus (8:11; 10:2), the same Greek word is used as in the story of Jesus' temptations by Satan

(1:13). He warns his disciples against “the leaven of the Pharisees” (8:15) and predicts his rejection and death by the Jewish elders and high priests (8:31; 10:33).

The cursing and withering of the fig tree (a Jewish symbol) has been interpreted as symbolizing that the Temple and Israel are under God’s curse (11:12–14 and 20–21). In the parable of the vineyard the former tenants (Israel?) will be destroyed and the vineyard given to others (the church?) (12:1–12).

In the passion stories the Jews and their leaders are painted as urgently seeking the death of Jesus (14:1,43—15:38). Mark uses the same Greek word for the “shouts” of the crowds as he used for the cries of the people possessed by demons, indicating that Satan has control over them (compare 15:13,14 with 1:24,26; 3:11; 5:5,7; 9:26; for other “cries” Mark uses another word: 6:49; 9:24; 10:48). In Mark, as in the other gospels, the chief priests and scribes mock Jesus at the cross (15:31) and the final blow to Judaism seems to be given by the rending of the veil in the Temple (15:38). Again in this gospel, however, Pharisees have no role in the passion of Jesus.

### **3. The Gospel according to Luke and Luke’s Acts of the Apostles**

Luke’s gospel and Acts are two parts of one work by one author. According to Luke, Christianity and its mission clearly originated within the Jewish community. God’s plan called for the message of Jesus Christ to be taken to the ends of the world before Christ would come again. This delay gave time for mission to Jew and gentile alike, seeking their conversion. Because the Jews did not accept and continued to not accept Jesus, and later rejected Paul’s message, Luke sees them finally as rejected by God.

#### **The Gospel**

Luke is familiar and in sympathy with the Jewish tradition. Mary, a young Jewish woman, and several other Jewish figures at the beginning of the story, faithfully respond to God’s intentions (Mary or Miriam 1:38; Elizabeth 1:42ff; Zechariah 1:67; the Jewish shepherds 2:8ff; Simeon 1:27; Anna 2:36). Jewish teachers in the Temple are presented in a positive light (2:46).

#### **Problematic Passages**

The purpose of Jesus’ mission shines through when he participates in the synagogue service in Nazareth (4:14-30): He applies the word of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 60:1–2) to gentiles, and he uses gentiles as examples—one gentile is a woman and a widow(!) (4:25ff.) and another is a Syrian soldier (4:27). Luke lets the wrathful crowd foretell the conclusion of his story: Jesus is rejected by the Jewish community, driven out of the city, and almost killed (4:28–30).

Luke accuses the Jewish leaders of rejecting God’s initiatives, not allowing themselves to be baptized by John (7:30). In Luke’s account, Jewish leaders become more hostile to Jesus

when he comes to Jerusalem. According to one interpretive approach, many parables seem to extend this accusation and rejection to the whole of the Jewish people, contrasted with gentiles who accept Jesus (the prodigal son 15:11–32; Lazarus and the rich man 16:19–31; the Pharisee and the tax collector 18:9–14; the talents 19:11ff. especially v. 27; the tenants of the vineyard 20:9–19). However, there is another way of understanding these parables. Take the prodigal son, for example: the amazing father is God, the elder son is the Torah-respecting and Torah-observing Jewish community, the younger son represents those Jews who have not respected Torah; God still cares deeply about the whole of the Jewish community and wants to hold together the beloved family, the Jewish people. The word of Jesus from the cross is forgiveness: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” (23:34) This word gives us Luke’s vision of the gospel; it is a word addressed both within the Jewish community and then to the world.

In comparing the passion stories scholars have observed that Luke lessens Jewish participation in Jesus’ death. Again, the Pharisees take no part. The assembly trial is abbreviated (22:66–71). Herod, who is disliked by most Jews, including the Pharisees (13:31), plays a larger part in causing the death (23:6–12). Though the Jews still participate in the actions that lead to Jesus’ death (chapters 19–20, 22–23), **Luke offers the least anti-Judaic passion story in the gospels.**

## **Acts**

In Acts anti-Jewish expressions occur in two ways: in speeches of the apostles and other Christians, and through narrations of adverse Jewish responses to Christian preaching and life.

As in his gospel, so also in Acts, Luke starts out with a typical Jewish concern: the disciples ask Jesus about the time of the restoration of Israel (1:6–7). The founding of the church on the day of Pentecost is portrayed as a renewed offer to the Jews to accept Jesus (2:1–13). In the beginning thousands of Jews join the Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem (2:41). They do not “convert” to a new religion; they join a renewal movement within Judaism. This new community has the respect of the population (2:47).

When the gospel is carried from Jerusalem to “all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the [gentile] world” (1:8), Luke shows that the offer to join the Christian communion is always made first to the Jews in each new city. Although it is accepted by some individuals, it is mainly rejected by the Jewish communities. Church membership comes to be made up mostly of gentile Christians.

## **Problematic Passages**

The strongest anti-Jewish expressions in Acts are found in the sermons. Peter declares the people of Israel to be responsible for crucifying and killing Jesus, even if “by the hands of those outside the law” (2:23,36). Later, Peter accuses all Jews of killing Jesus, “the Author of life” (3:15), allowing that they did it in ignorance (3:17). After having been imprisoned together with John and defending himself before the family of the high priest, Peter again

declares that “the rulers of the people and elders” crucified Jesus (4:9–10). He repeats the same thing at a later trial: “the God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree” (5:30).

These sermons admit that the Jewish authorities did not have the power to kill Jesus. However, they claim that all Jews are responsible because they wanted it done and got others “outside the law” (i.e. the Romans) to do it for them. They seek to impose guilt on Jewish people to move them to become Jewish-Christians. This whole representation of the case is not credible with regard to the Roman motivation for killing Jesus; it serves the self-interest of the Christian church which wants to be on the good side of Rome; and it is eventually anti-Judaic in its effect when the accusations remain and the church is no longer Jewish in its membership. **The Jews did not kill Jesus and we must point that out when we read these texts.** This concern applies also to the impression created by other speeches in Acts such as those of Stephen and of Paul.

Another statement ascribed to Peter about Jesus requires comment: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (4:12). Is this so? Our understanding of the nature and being of God is the fundamental doctrine of faith to which all other doctrines relate. Christians claim that Christ shows us what God is like in the clearest way possible for us to grasp. What Christ shows us is a God who desires fullness of life for all. The core of our faith is that “Christ died for our sins . . . and was raised,” revealing God’s triumph over all sin and failure (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). If Peter’s statement means that God rejects all humans except for professing Christians, then it seems to contradict the fundamental understanding of God that Christ reveals. Instead, we should see it as the speech of an enthusiastic preacher claiming the specialness of God’s self-revelation in Christ and speaking out of the depth of his devotion to Christ.

Shifting to Paul, the picture we get of him from Acts differs from the Paul of the letters in many respects. To cite only one here, we note that Paul always claims to be the apostle to the gentiles; Acts portrays him as adding gentiles to his churches only after trying to attract all the Jews in whatever city he visits. Once the church has separated from the synagogue, the lesson from Acts for Christians is that the relationship with Judaism is one of rivalry, animosity and conversion. Acts never mentions Paul’s conviction that God’s covenant with Israel continues unbroken (Romans 11). **Acts presents a different picture of Paul than his self-presentation in the Letters.**

On the positive side, when Peter through his vision comes in conflict with Jewish dietary laws (chapters 10—11), no negative word is said against these laws. The validity of Jewish practices is recognized when the apostles meet to discuss Jewish–gentile relations (15:1–35).

#### **4. The Gospel according to John**

The worldview of John’s gospel is similar to that of Mark: the cosmos is divided into heavenly and earthly spheres that are opposed to each other. Heaven is ruled by God and earth by Satan. There are elements in the spheres that contrast: grace to law, spirit to flesh, truth to falsehood, light to darkness, belief to unbelief, the church to “the Jews.” Judaism belongs to the earthly sphere and to the rule of Satan.

The Jewish-Christian community which is addressed by this gospel almost certainly had been expelled from the synagogue. This seems to be implied in the story of the man born blind but healed by Jesus (chapter 9), who was formally excommunicated (9:34). Others around Jesus feared the same fate.

The gospel sees the Jewish-Christian community that it addresses as the true Judaism. Jewish spiritual life has been passed on to the (Jewish) believers in Jesus: “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (1:11–13). Moses is the greatest person in Jewish history, but Jesus is greater: “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17). “No one [not even Moses] has seen God,” but Jesus has made God known (1:18). In fact, Jesus Christ is the Word that, in the beginning, “was with God and . . . was God” (1:1); the divine claim is extended through use of the divine name, “I AM,” applied repeatedly by Jesus to himself (6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

### **Problematic Passages**

Jesus enters into conflict with “the Jews” almost immediately: at the beginning of the story he drives the merchants and money changers out of the Temple (2:13–21). The signs of Jesus signify the powerful presence of God which changes Judaism and overturns the old practices. In place of the old water of purification (Judaism) there is substituted the new, best wine kept until the last (Christ, possibly meaning the wine of the eucharist) (2:1–11). This portrayal of Judaism is superficial, argumentative and denigrating; it is not likely that it represents the view of the historical Jesus.

**“The Woman Taken in Adultery.”** (See John 7:53—8:11; manuscript evidence shows that this story is a late addition to the text; it is sometimes printed as a sub-text (NRSV, TEV) or as a footnote (RSV) or even as an appendix (NEB) to the Gospel of John.) In the story, a woman adulteress (but no adulterer) is brought to Jesus by scribes and Pharisees. “Should she be stoned?” is the question they ask. Jesus is compassionate; no one presses the case; the woman finds new life where life could have been denied.

Christians must guard against anti-Judaism in interpreting this story. It is easy to make the scribes and the Pharisees the bad guys, the poor woman the victim, and Jesus the rescuer. But we do not know what the scribes and Pharisees intend to do with the woman; they only cite what the law allows, not what they intend (8:5; see Lev. 20:10); in the end, they do not stone her, presumably because they agree with Jesus’ position; maybe they “are dissuaded from stoning the woman, having made Jesus’ position their own” (so Luise Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, p. 266, n. 19; also see pp. 180ff. and 267, n.32.); or maybe that was also their position all along; maybe the woman knows this. We are told only that they want to “test” Jesus (8:6) and, it seems, he passes the test. Christian feminists and others sometimes exhibit anti-Judaic interpretations of this passage by claiming that Jesus is presented in radical discontinuity with his Jewish roots. But everyone in the story is Jewish; Jesus is a Jew. His

attitude to the woman in the passage represents the possibility of renewal *within* Judaism, and this is recognized by everyone in the story.

Rabbi Gunther Plaut, talking about what became Talmudic teaching on Leviticus 20:10, says:

The talmudic rabbis, with their great concern for the sanctity of human life, were openly opposed to capital punishment. But, since they had to recognize the letter of the Torah law, they sought a variety of means to render these penal laws inoperative. Thus, in some instances, they held that the Torah referred to death by divine intervention, not to death imposed by a court. They further devised a system of technicalities to prevent the conviction of a defendant for a capital crime. This somewhat offhand approach was relatively easy for them, since the Roman government denied Jewish courts jurisdiction over capital cases. (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981, p. 907.)

As one reads from Plaut, one remembers again the popular biblical story of Esther which celebrates finding creative space for humanity in the midst of irrevocable (Persian) law. Feminist scholar Danna Fewell states, “This text [Esther], like rabbinic commentary [itself], keeps the canon from becoming a law that cannot change; it helps to keep the canon alive and talking.” (Quoted in Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women’s Stories in the Hebrew Bible*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994, p. 215; see the whole discussion pp. 215–16.) This “finding of space” for life has traditionally been a Jewish endeavour in the attempt to understand and apply Torah. Perhaps that is what the “testing” of Jesus is all about. At any rate, Plaut’s comments on capital punishment surely help us “Judaize” the story of the woman taken in adultery. (They also give us additional perspective on the death of Jesus itself.)

While the other gospels distinguish between different Jewish groups: Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, elders, scribes, etc., the fourth gospel eliminates all the historical distinctions and uses the phrase “the Jews” about 60 times in a generalizing way. Many of the occurrences depict Jews very negatively. Was the writer of the gospel not a Jew? Was his community not Jewish? “The Jews” persecute Jesus (5:16), disapprove of him (6:41), and seek to kill him (7:1). They are blind to his teaching (7:35), guilty of unbelief (8:24) and even accused of being the offspring of the devil:

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (8:43-44)

Because of this some Jews in dialogue with Christians have called John’s gospel, “the gospel of Christian love and Jewish hatred.”

Commentators have pointed out that the term “the Jews” could have a variety of meanings: it could mean the people of Judea (7:1) or the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem (7:13); perhaps it described things unfamiliar to gentiles (7:2) or was used as a cipher for all who did not believe in Jesus (8:22ff.). We know that these passages reflect an intra-Jewish struggle, a family feud in very difficult times. The frustration and antagonism that they express should

not be carried on beyond this time of struggle and separation, i.e. we cannot read “the Jews” uncritically and without comment once John’s community has ceased to be Jewish; to do so gives new, anti-Judaic meaning to texts in which the designation appears.

John’s gospel contains wonderful confessional passages. Jesus says, for example, “the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . . salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” (4:21–23) Here the hope of Jeremiah is renewed; John sees a new day when the new covenant, new in that it is now written on the heart, issues forth out of human truthfulness and spirit beyond all liturgical forms and places in praise to God. How can a writer with such a hope be so narrowly exclusive in other passages?

Consider another important confessional passage found in John’s gospel: Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.” (14:6) This passage is not anti-Jewish per se, but it can be used to insinuate the exclusiveness of Christianity and the rejection of all who do not believe in Jesus, including Jews (see comments on Acts 4:12, above). The context suggests that Jesus wants the disciples to remember that he and the Father are together always; where one is, the other is. It is a matter of fact, not of necessity, that finding the way to the one means finding the way to the other. Some Christians, citing this passage, claim that God does not hear and answer the prayers of a Jew who comes to God through God’s revelation of Torah. The Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig (*The Star of Redemption*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), a pioneer of Jewish–Christian dialogue in the 20th century, pointed out that Jews are already with the Father; they don’t have to come through Jesus. Jesus is God’s way for Christians. Finding our way to God, we will also find the Jew there.

To emphasize believing in Jesus in order to be saved is reassuring for Christians. It does not necessarily imply the exclusive claim that *not* believing in Jesus prevents a person from being saved, whole, or “good.” Perhaps we are being encouraged to come into Jesus’ way of being, thinking, and acting i.e. to come into Jesus’ model of living as the guide for our lives. If this is what believing in Jesus means, then it might be that people can *be* this way and be saved, regardless of what they know or think about Jesus. Knowing Jesus helps us find this way of being. Jesus comes to us as a gracious and loving presence from God to help us. “God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believe in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (3:16)

Turning to the passion story, we find that John’s gospel states the historically accurate fact that Jews did not have the legal authority to kill Jesus (18:31). However, John again presents “the Jews” as pressuring Pilate for execution (19:1–15). Pilate is shown as an incompetent and weak administrator, manipulated by “the Jews.” The chief priests even claim, “We have no king but Caesar.” (19:15) “The Jews” alone are made responsible for the death of Jesus. Pilate identifies Jesus correctly, albeit mockingly, as the King (19:15) and stands by the title that he writes to hang over Jesus on the cross (19:21–22). The picture painted of Pontius Pilate is historically incorrect. He was, in fact, a ruthless murderer of thousands of Jews.

## **5. The Letters of the Apostle Paul**

For the churches that have grown out of the Reformation the doctrine of “justification by grace through faith alone” formed the central part of the gospel. The opposing position is “salvation through works of the law.” This position was often seen to be represented by Jews and Paul’s judaizing opponents, which in turn led to accusations of Jews as advocating legalism and self-righteousness.

Through a better knowledge of Judaism, through scholarly Jewish–Christian dialogue and a new understanding of Paul, the simple polarization between Christianity’s grace and Judaism’s law can no longer be defended. **For Jews the Torah is supremely the gracious gift of God. To keep the law is not a burden but a delight.**

A Christian theology after the Holocaust points to chapters 9–11 of Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he clearly states that God’s covenant with Israel has not been abrogated (Romans 11:1–2) and that the church continues to be in relationship with Israel.

Paul was never “converted” from Judaism to Christianity; he was called to be the apostle to the gentiles (Galatians 1:11–17). He first served God within Judaism and after his call he served the same God among the gentiles. He was proud of being Jewish (Philippians 3:4–6) and he understood the significance of the Torah for Judaism. This Jewish background undergirded his understanding of God’s purpose for gentiles.

Since Paul did not see himself as a teacher to Jews (Galatians 2:1–9), the opponents with whom he struggled cannot have been Jews or Judaism. His writings about Jewish matters are directed largely or even completely to gentile congregations, assuring them of their acceptance by God without adhering to the Torah of Israel. Jews come to God through Torah, gentiles through Christ. Paul claims that in Christ the “goal” (not end) of Torah is reached (Romans 10:4) by bringing the gentiles to the God of Israel (Romans 15:8–12). God is righteous and faithful to his promise in a new act, by bringing gentiles to God through Christ, apart from Torah, but not in contradiction to it (Romans 3:21).

Scholars have pointed out that Paul uses “law” in two ways: positively as the Jewish covenantal relationship with God (Galatians 6:2; the Torah of Christ) and negatively as the “condemnation,” under which the gentile world lives in a condition of disobedience to God (Romans 6:14; not under law [= condemnation] but under grace). Gentiles (non-Jews) live under condemnation until, in Christ, they are set free to do God’s will.

### **Problematic Passages**

In the first letter Paul wrote, he accuses the Jews of killing Jesus, opposing the church, and opposing God. He encourages church members by telling them that they are not alone in suffering for the faith:

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the gentiles

so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last. (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

This statement is unique in Paul's letters for its vindictiveness. We leave it to scholars to explain, noting only that some scholars are convinced, on purely linguistic grounds, that this has been added by a later editor.

It is certainly true that Paul was a creative thinker. His innovations sometimes change the meaning of concepts that are basic to Judaism (e.g. Paul expands the Jewish notion of sin beyond that for which one is personally responsible through action or inaction; in "saving" us from this sin, Christ does something that Jews see as unnecessary). Paul's argumentative style includes playing with the old biblical stories, a Jewish technique called "midrash." Some Jewish commentators are sometimes exasperated by Paul's arguments, but as Jewish scholar Jon Levenson says, "It is no small irony that to argue [his positions], Paul had no alternative but to rely on the Jewish scriptures—the only Bible he knew or could imagine—and to utilize exegetical [i.e. interpretative] procedures that the rabbis would use, with at least equal dexterity." (*The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 219.) Paul often reshapes stories to present conventional Judaism as a foil for Christ (e.g. Galatians 3:21ff re Hagar and Sarah; 2 Corinthians 3:12ff re the veiling of Moses). Although Paul understands God as having a joint purpose in working through Judaism and the church, at times he seems to forget the connection and his style of argument becomes confrontational and divisive. Over all, Paul thought that God was using the church to fulfill the promise to Abraham that lies at the root of Judaism's reason for being: "through you all nations of the earth shall bless themselves" (Genesis 12:3); Judaism may not think that this is necessary, but the truth of the claim resides with God and the clues to its truth or falsehood reside in the degree of blessing that Judaism and Christianity actually are to the nations of the world.

***Paul's Letters and Scripture.*** Paul did not intend to write deathless "scripture." The Hebrew scriptures were sufficient for him. He wrote letters that dealt with specific concerns arising in specific churches. Sometimes the church felt the strong presence of the Holy Spirit in Paul's writings (e.g. 1 Corinthians 13) but Paul did not always feel it (e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:25).

- Does this tell us something about the nature of scripture?
- If someone told Paul that they were going to take his letters, written to support, guide, and encourage churches, and give them the designation "scripture," what do you suppose his reaction would have been? Would he rewrite them? Would he allow some to be included but not others? Would he write something else?

## **6. The Letter to the Hebrews**

Reading the letter or sermon to the Hebrews one cannot avoid getting the impression that the Christian faith supersedes the Jewish faith. Jewish matters are here mentioned more than in any other of the Christian writings. However, Jewish scholars have pointed out that Hebrews

deals with Judaism as it was before the Temple was destroyed. Many Jewish groups of the time would have agreed with the things said about the Judaism of the Temple (e.g. the Jewish commentator and philosopher Philo of Alexandria, the Samaritans, the people of northern Galilee, the Essenes, and some Pharisees).

Hebrews was perhaps written to a Jewish-Christian community greatly threatened in their faith and hope (as were all Jews) by the destruction of the Temple. Jesus and the Christian faith are constantly compared with parts of the Jewish religious system. Judaism is not vilified, but it is presented as inferior to Christianity.

### **Problematic Passages**

Perfection, the goal of life, is not possible through the law or Torah (7:19; 9:9; 10:1), but only through Christ. Even for Christians it is only possible because Christ has entered upon his high priestly work of conveying the prayers of the church to God and interceding on its behalf.

Comparisons are made throughout Hebrews between heavenly things that are perfect and real and earthly things that are only the shadow of the heavenly. (Heavenly: Jesus Christ as mediator; perfection; immediate presence of God. Earthly: the things pertaining to Judaism and lesser intermediaries; imperfection; question of whether there is any way into God's presence.)

Jesus' ministry is more excellent than that of the priests. He is the mediator of a better covenant with better promises than that of Israel (8:6). The first covenant of God with Israel is faulty (8:7–8). Therefore God has established a second or a new covenant (8:8). Jeremiah 31:31–34 is quoted and given a supersessionist interpretation, typical of the way Christians treat the covenant of Israel: "In speaking of 'a new covenant', he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear." (8:13)

Christians have come "to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant". (12:24) This is the only place in the Christian writings where, referring to a new covenant, a Greek word is used for "new" that cannot be translated as "renewed."

## **7. Revelation or the Apocalypse**

The seven churches that are the recipients of this document suffered terrible persecution by the Roman authorities. Under the emperor Domitian, Jews, as an established religious group, were exempted from emperor worship, while Christians, as a new minority, had to choose between bowing to every statue on the street or suffering cruel persecution.

In Revelation, Christians are in conflict mainly with the emperor (13:1–18) and with rival Christian teachers (2:20–23). In two of the letters, however, opponents include "the synagogue of Satan." This may refer to Christians who were regarded as hypocritical by the author because they claimed Jewish identity in order to avoid persecution by the Romans; in this case they are not Jews at all. Or it may refer to some particular Jews, known to those receiving the letter, who have denounced Christians to the authorities and have thereby shown

that they are not true Jews. In either case, the intent of the author does not seem to be to attack Jews. The author's choice of the phrase "synagogue of Satan" (as opposed to, say, "church of Satan" or "following of Satan") is unfortunate and reflects a residual animosity to and suspicion of the synagogue and Jews. We should be careful not to subconsciously imbibe this attitude.

The passages in question are the following:

"I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (2:9–10; letter to the church in Smyrna)

"I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you." (3:9; letter to the church in Philadelphia)

#### **D) Conclusion:**

1. The anti-Judaic language in NT texts is mixed with the gospel message and with pro-Jewish expressions. Jesus is often shown as a true Torah-believing and observing Jew, and sometimes as detrimentally opposed to Judaism. The same applies to Paul. Whichever picture of Jesus or Paul we choose is interpretive; the best data that we have today suggests that neither rejected Judaism or their own Jewishness; quite the opposite. We should choose to interpret on that side of the dichotomy.
2. Most biblical scholars agree that the gospels and Acts, which were written at least a generation after Jesus' death, are not biographies of Jesus and Paul. They are comprehensive sermons or narrative theologies that tell the Christian story to the churches for whom they were written. They address the concerns and circumstances of their time. They reflect the growing enmity between the early Christian and the Jewish communities in the late first century. As such they are argumentative and often present a skewed picture of Judaism as a foil for the positive things they want to say about Jesus and his movement. We must adjust the picture of Judaism that they present with information from the Hebrew scriptures, from other sources of the time, from discussions with modern Jews, by whatever means we can. To do so is respectful of these texts in their role as scripture; it clears away potential cause for disrespect.
3. The apostle Paul hinted that God may have used the estrangement between synagogue and church to initially protect the Jewish community from abandoning its own covenant. Paul struggled to define the relationship between church and Israel: "I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the gentiles has come in." (Romans. 11:25) Be this as it may, the development of anti-Judaism could not have been in the purpose of God. It certainly has no place in the church more than 50 years after the Holocaust.

4. This paper recommends leaving scripture texts intact, not censoring them, and speaking to the issue of anti-Judaism when the texts raise the concern. Many passages need not be anti-Jewish when interpreted with understanding. Those passages that are definitely so (e.g. John 8:43–44) should be used to teach the damage that Christians have done to Jews over the centuries. Such passages can help us to appreciate problems of understanding the authority and interpretation of scripture. We affirm that God’s guiding wisdom and grace enable us to do justice and to reject the language and practice of anti-Judaism.

## **PART THREE: GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF SCRIPTURE**

### **A) Public Worship**

The art of preaching involves the dynamic interplay of biblical text and contemporary life. Sensitive understanding of both are essential if preaching the gospel's good news is to take root in the life of the Christian community. How does the Bible inform and illuminate life as we actually live it? What is the basic message of the living Christ, revealed in scripture and subsequent history, to our own age? Understanding the context of scriptural development as well as our own world are equally important. For our purposes this means appreciating strains of anti-Judaic rhetoric in the ancient world and today.

The guidelines which follow are intended for the use of anyone engaged in planning and/or participating in public worship within The United Church of Canada. They are particularly important for preaching, reading scripture, use of symbolism, music selection, dramatic presentation, children's stories, and prayers. Of necessity, these guidelines are brief, and each one could contain a whole subset of concerns. Our idea is to alert people to the issue and begin the search for understanding.

### **Guidelines**

1. *Jesus was a first century, Palestinian Jew.* We begin by remembering this fact. Jesus cannot be understood apart from the Judaism of his time and place. He was raised, rooted, and nurtured in Jewish scripture and traditions. He identified with Israel and was concerned for the various movements and groups within Israel (e.g. the Pharisees). Any argument he had with his tradition was always "within the family." When considering his sensitivity to women or his views on the law or whatever, NT criticism has too often viewed Judaism as monolithic and presented Jesus as being at odds with it. Jewish views are presented as a foil to clarify the views of Jesus. But this is not fair to Judaism, nor to Christianity either. Jesus lived in a pluralistic age and adopted positions consistent with some streams of Jewish thought and opposed to others. The Christian affirmation of the divinity of Christ does not mean that, on certain matters, Jesus spoke with the mind of heaven and his human context became irrelevant. When "the Word became flesh" it truly became flesh, i.e. in this Jewish, culturally nurtured and communally shaped human being. The magnificent pluralism of Jesus' day provided all the diversity that was needed for the Divine to present itself within and through the truly human. We must not solve problems that we have in understanding Jesus' teaching and action by moving too readily to an assumption that Jesus was at odds with his traditions. Rather, we need to explore those traditions, in all their diversity, deeply and thoroughly and with respect, operating from the position that Jesus' Jewishness is very important for the shaping of his views and actions.

2. *We must always be ready to revise our understanding of the context, both physical and intellectual, in which Jesus lived.* Scholars engage in debate over such matters as Jewish religious diversity, social and economic stratification, the true nature of gender relations, the degree of Roman oppression, the real power of Jewish leadership, the true nature of Jewish

expectation and hope, and so on in first century Palestine. They debate what is historical fact and what is prophetic shaping in the writings that have come down to us. They search archeological data. They read newly discovered, non-biblical source material numbering in the hundreds of documents. Conclusions drawn often involve inferences that need revision. Understanding the context in which Jesus lived is an ongoing, evolving study. It is not done once and for all. (And the results are startling.)

*3. Changing circumstances have changed the meaning and significance of biblical texts.* Christianity began as a sect within Judaism. As time went on, especially after CE 70 when the Temple was destroyed, the struggle between Jewish sects became bitter. One of the sects, Christianity, moved apart from Judaism proper. It was an extremely painful time for everyone. (John 9:22, 12:42) The New Testament writings reflect this time of growing separation. They were written in a style in which vilification of opposing groups is used to help define one's own group identity. They do not attempt to be fair to opponents. They seek, by any means, to undermine the legitimacy of opposing points of view. When Christianity had separated from Judaism, these arguments assumed a different significance, seeming to validate Christians in their animosity toward Jews. This was not the intent of the texts as originally written. It cannot have been Jesus' intent.

Consider the words "the Jews" in the Gospel of John. Which Jews are referred to in the different occurrences? Is it always the same group? Is it ever the whole of Judaism? Since the Johannine church community was made up of Jews who had become Christians, "the Jews" must refer to those other Jews still in the synagogues. When the church had separated and was no longer itself Jewish, "the Jews" came to mean something else, something more sinister: those stubborn infidels, those sinners, those opponents of Jesus. Should we substitute other more specific words in place of "the Jews" when we read John? There is always a danger when we change words of scripture, even if we do so in the interests of clarity. How can we understand the sorrow, frustration, and rage that must have been felt when the separation took place? How can we finally bring it to an end?

*4. Stereotypical slogans about Judaism are, more often than not, inaccurate and unhelpful and should be avoided.* For example, we might say, "Judaism is legalistic while Christianity is about grace." However, Judaism understands and extols the providential grace of God very well; it understands grace in the life of both community and individual; it sees the greatest expression of that grace actually being the giving of Torah. Conversely, Christians value moral and ethical norms that the faith gives them; Paul repeatedly provides lists of "dos" and "don'ts" to his churches for their guidance and he draws these from his knowledge of Jewish scripture; Jesus reinforces commandments: e.g. "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) and the Ten Commandments. Emphasis on Torah does not contradict the importance of grace, nor does emphasis on grace make Torah irrelevant.

***An Eye for an Eye.*** (Exodus 21:23–25) How often have we heard Christians say that "The Jewish God calls for revenge: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!"

Many of us have interpreted "an eye for an eye" as meaning God wants us to knock out someone's eye if that person is responsible for knocking our eye out. The passage actually means "don't kill him if he knocks out your eye. You can't take any more than his one eye." It is preventative. It puts a ceiling on revenge. If an injured person can be more gracious than

this, so much the better. This law was prescribed during the tribal era when extended families were responsible for maintaining just relations between themselves. No more hurt could be exacted in penalty than had been suffered. People were not to be vengeful; they were not to allow conflicts to escalate. Over time, the rabbis came to interpret this directive as referring to monetary compensation.

Jesus understands the Exodus passage very well. When discussing it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38–42), he encourages us to lower the ceilings of retribution that we seek. “Do not resist evil.” “Turn the other cheek.” Jesus knows that God alone claims the right of vengeance (Deuteronomy 32:35), does not give it to others (nor to us), and exercises it with forgiveness and extreme restraint.

In the Tanakh, there are many, many passages emphasizing the compassion and love of God. It is curious that this “eye” passage is so often quoted; it even has its own name: *lex talionis* (literally, the law of retaliation). What does it mean that Christians are so hung up on it?

Sometimes it is said, “The God of Judaism is a god of wrath but the God of Christianity is a god of love.” Such generalizations should be avoided. They ignore both the love in Judaism (e.g. Psalm 23) and the wrath in Christianity. (e.g. Acts 5:1–11; Revelation 19:11–16) The God of Judaism, the God of the Tanakh, is described over and over in the Psalms and elsewhere as the God of “steadfast love.” (e.g. Psalm 100:5; Deuteronomy 7:12-13; Hosea 11) This God also encourages us in the way of steadfast love, compassion, and justice. (1 Samuel 20:8; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 58) Our whole understanding of forgiveness is shaped by the Hebrew Scriptures.

***Is the God of Judaism a Different “God of Wrath” from the Christian “God of Love”?***

Consider the following quotation from Jewish scholar Claude Montefiore’s 1909 commentary, *The Synoptic Gospels* (rev. 1927). It is cited from James Parkes, *Prelude To Dialogue* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 170–72). Parkes says, “Examining a description of the Day of Judgement put into the mouth of Jesus, and particularly the verse, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ [Matthew 25:41], [Montefiore] wrote:

Such passages as Matthew xxv,41 should make theologians excessively careful of drawing beloved contrasts between Old Testament and New. We find even the liberal theologian, Dr. Fosdick, saying: “From Sinai to Calvary—was ever a record of progressive revelation more plain or more convincing? The development begins with Jehovah disclosed in a thunderstorm on a desert mountain, and it ends with Christ saying ‘God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth’; it begins with a war-god leading his partisans to victory, and it ends with men saying ‘God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him’; it begins with a provincial deity loving his tribe and hating its enemies, and it ends with the God of the whole earth worshipped by ‘a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues’; it begins with a God who commands the slaying of the Amalekites, ‘both man and woman, infant and suckling,’ and it ends with a Father whose will it is that not ‘one of these little ones should perish’; it begins with God’s people standing afar off from His lightnings and praying that He might not speak to

them lest they die, and it ends with men going into their inner chambers and, having shut the door, praying to their Father who is in secret' (*Christianity and Progress*, 1922, p. 209). Very good. No doubt such a series can be arranged. Let me now arrange a similar series. From Old Testament to New Testament—was ever a record of retrogression more plain or more convincing? It begins with 'Have I any pleasure at all in the death of him that dieth?'; it ends with 'Begone from me, ye doers of wickedness.' It begins with 'The Lord is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy,' it ends with 'Fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in gehenna.' It begins with 'I dwell with him that is of a contrite spirit to revive it'; it ends with 'Narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there be who find it.' It begins with 'I will not contend forever; I will not be *always* wrath'; it ends with 'Depart, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire.' It begins with 'Should not I have pity upon Nineveh, that great city?'; it ends with 'It will be more endurable for Sodom on the day of Judgement than for that town.' It begins with 'The Lord is good to all, and near to all who call upon Him'; it ends with 'Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, there is no forgiveness for him whether in this world or the next.' It begins with 'The Lord will wipe away tears from off all faces; He will destroy death forever'; it ends with 'They will throw them into the furnace of fire; there is the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.' And the one series would be as misleading as the other."

5. *We must respect the continued development of Jewish tradition.* It is best to think of modern Christianity and modern Judaism as having emerged from a common root. Both have developed tremendously. Today, our understanding of Judaism needs to come from Jews themselves; that is, we must respect their right to tell us who they are and not impose our presuppositions upon them. We Christians cannot simply read the Hebrew scriptures and think that we understand modern Judaism. The diversity of Jewish groups that characterized the Second Temple period has been lost. Two thousand years of development, including Mishnah and Talmud, have intervened. We are fortunate that Jews are willing to share with Christians their rich development of thought and reflection on biblical texts. This is proving to be very important. Many Christian scholars are aware, for example, that a knowledge of Jewish midrash is essential for understanding Christian parables, stories, and the gospels themselves. Jewish insights on apocalyptic literature help us understand the apocalyptic milieu of Jesus' times and teachings.

***Worshipping with Jews.*** If you live in the neighbourhood of a synagogue, you have a wonderful opportunity to attend Jewish worship from time to time. Most Jewish communities would welcome you, especially when they learn that you come to listen and to pray and that you have no hidden conversion agenda. You will find that Christians can pray any and every Jewish prayer. (The reverse is not true because Christian prayers that refer to the divinity of Christ or that pray "in the name of" or "through" Jesus cannot be said by Jews. This needs to be remembered, as well, if you are leading a prayer in a mixed Jewish-Christian gathering, e.g. at Rotary or the Literacy Society breakfast.) Attendance at special Jewish services such as on Yom Hashoah (Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust) build understanding and solidarity. The highest Jewish holy day is Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement); the service is always crowded and you will need a pass, arranged with the rabbi in advance; the beautiful Kol Nidre is sung and the Yizkor prayer is said remembering all who have died in the past.

Confirmation classes always benefit from meeting the rabbi in the synagogue. In setting up a meeting, ask the rabbi to tell the class “what we need to know about Judaism in order to be better Christians”; this gives the rabbi plenty of scope. Leave plenty of time for questions.

Knowledgeable Jews are delighted to come and speak with Christian groups who are interested to learn about Judaism. Most will even deliver a sermon in Christian worship. Many rabbis are great biblical expositors and have studied the New Testament as well as Tanakh. On such occasions, avoid using the names “Yahweh” and “Jehovah”; read scripture from a translation that does not use them; select the hymns to emphasize praise to God, avoiding a Christological focus and avoiding these names as well. Kosher Jews can always eat uncut fruit and this should be available for refreshment/coffee time. If proper protocols are not known, simply ask your guest. Be aware, however, that Orthodox rabbis may not be willing to come into a Christian sanctuary where the cross is prominently displayed. Conservative and Reform rabbis will not usually be deterred.

6. *We should, as much as possible, understand and respect both Jewish and Christian interpretations of the texts we share.* The Tanakh (the Jewish Bible) should be understood on its own terms. If we would honour the integrity of the Hebrew scriptures and the activities of God to which they witness, we would not seek to diminish them by simply “Christianizing” them. During the Advent season, for instance, our common lectionary uses many passages from Isaiah to point specifically to the coming of Jesus. This furthers our *Christological* interests but can lead us to miss the *theological* interests of the Isaiah passages themselves. On their own merit within the story of Israel itself, these texts do speak and what they say needs to be heard, not just by Jews but also by Christians.

Nevertheless, these texts are Christian scripture. The followers of Jesus first discovered within them how to speak of Jesus as their crucified and ascended Lord. They reinterpreted and extended the scriptural content. Even so, this did not and could not alter the concrete situations that gave rise to the formulations that appear in the Tanakh. Today, while understanding Christ as a key for interpreting all of scripture, Christians should also understand that there are multiple layers to God’s purpose. We should not diminish our heritage by ignoring the significance of the Jewish context.

Our hymns and church music provide many examples of the dangers of simply “Christianizing” texts: Consider the wonderful hymn, *Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun*. Starting with Psalm 72, Isaac Watts replaced all future hopes about the king of Israel with references to Jesus, the King. It makes for a masterful hymn, but it limits the range of interpretation of the original psalm. Liturgically, to follow psalm readings with a trinitarian “Gloria” is also distorting. Even the greatest works (Handel’s *Messiah*, for example) can lead people to believe that one interpretation of the Bible (that all its parts point to Jesus) is the only true way to understand the texts. Such a belief, conceived in faith, is finally unfaithful because it limits the glorious, mysterious, wide-ranging, wonderful, awful self-revelation of God.

7. *Use the many resources available to assist with the interpretation and understanding of scripture.* Excellent commentaries exist on some books of the Bible. Increasingly, Jewish commentaries are available in English (e.g. the Anchor Bible Series has commissioned Jewish

scholars to prepare commentaries on some books of the Torah). Join a lectionary group to exchange ideas and to check attitudes and perceptions; if possible, include a rabbi, cantor, or other knowledgeable Jewish person. Join with a Jewish Bible study group if you get the chance. There is a growing number of resources from the best scholarship around that confronts anti-Judaic texts. Seek them out and learn how to use them.

8. *Make a practice of preaching from the Older Testament on a regular basis.* We would all be better informed about Jesus and about the “good news” that he proclaims if we developed a better understanding and appreciation for the Hebrew scriptures that shaped him. Torah in particular warrants additional attention.

***Standing for the Gospel.*** In order to honour the gospel lesson, many congregations stand during its reading. Too often this can be interpreted as saying that the gospel lesson is far more important than other readings from scripture. Instead, we want to emphasize that all of the Bible is sacred for us. Our liturgical practice should be to adopt a uniform manner of approach for all scripture passages. We could have people sit for all lessons, stand for all lessons, or stand after all the readings of scripture and make an affirmation of faith. We want to honour our total scriptural tradition, and not emphasize one part which may be interpreted in an anti-Judaic fashion.

9. *Make a practice of praying publicly for the well-being of Israel and for peace and justice in the Middle East.* Psalm 122 directs us, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers.” (Psalm 122:6-7)

10. *Intentionally examine words used in worship—spoken, written, or sung—to guard against misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Jews, Judaism and the Jewish–Christian relationship.* How will our words be heard? Are they capable of being misunderstood? Do they perpetuate false stereotypes? Do they remove barriers or erect them? There is no excuse for anti-Judaic prayers, children’s stories, art, or anything else that we create ourselves. We can choose not to sing certain hymns or anthems, or if copyright permits, we can change the words. We can choose not to use certain scripture lessons; we can provide an explanation of the context in which they were written; we can emphasize interpretations of them which are not anti-Judaic; we can disagree with them. We always have three choices with respect to problem texts: let them stand as they are, never read them, or read them and interpret them in a fashion which will educate people about their complexity.

***Seder Suppers.*** During Holy Week many Christian congregations are now holding Seder suppers to help give them a better understanding of Passover and various Jewish traditions concerning that season. Although these are very interesting and can help us in our understanding, we must also approach them with caution. We must be wary of “appropriating” other traditions and forcing them to serve our own purposes. It is inappropriate to sing Christian hymns or insert other Christian liturgies (e.g. communion) into the celebration of a Seder meal. It is always far better to have a Seder supper conducted by a Jewish friend who can bring required authenticity to the event and can eliminate inadvertent mistakes. Keeping the event authentic for the Jewish tradition is important if we are truly to learn from and participate in such a holy event.

## **B) Sunday School and Bible Study Leaders**

The guidelines for leaders and participants in public worship (above) apply to Sunday school teachers and Bible study leaders, as well. Some further considerations and expansions are given here.

### **Faithful Education**

Perhaps the best opportunity for faithful interpretation of the story of Jesus is in an educational setting. Here the context can be most fully developed. Although teachers of young children may not present all the details about Jesus' world to their classes, they should know and understand the scriptures that show "Jews" in opposition to Jesus. The comfort level of the teacher will be communicated, whether or not the teacher actually addresses these issues.

For teachers and leaders, learning about biblical passages need be neither daunting nor intimidating. Increasingly, books, articles, guides, curriculum supports, and commentaries are available which are not anti-Judaic and are written specifically for teachers and leaders, whether they are theologically trained or not.

***Who Killed Jesus?*** The gospels present different accounts of the death of Jesus, sometimes conflicting, none of them very complete. None of the New Testament writers were eye witnesses to the trial or execution. Crucifixion was a Roman punishment for insurrection. John Dominic Crossan has suggested that the Romans could have had a policy of "zero-tolerance" for those who created disturbances in the Temple area during high holidays. Arrest and execution could have been automatic, and without trial. The agreement of Temple authorities to the policy would have been long established. The Romans would not have taken any time to investigate about Jesus; he was an annoyance and not important. Can we really believe that the Romans were not responsible for executing Jesus?

From the earliest time, the church sought to legitimize itself in the eyes of the Roman Empire and to shift the blame for the execution of Jesus away from the Romans and onto the Jewish community. The strange charge of deicide ("Christ killers") has pursued not merely some Jews (e.g. the high priest, Annas, and those dependent for their offices upon Rome) but all Jews, not merely the contemporaries of Jesus but the generations of Jews down through the centuries. This idea has had a pernicious history. Why this legacy? Why not an anti-Italian legacy instead? Why an ongoing legacy of hatred against any people or group?

"The public reading of the passion, trial, and death narrative, without explanation of some of its intricacies and difficulties and its highly dramatized character, and the proclamation of it without consideration of the ongoing religious and political context...[perpetuate attitudes which cause nothing but] great anguish and suffering within the Jewish community." (*Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth*, Victoria, Australia: The Council of Christians & Jews Inc., 1995, p. 13.)

Depending on the curriculum used, reference to "the Jews" or "the Pharisees" may be explained or ignored. Teachers discussing these references will want to discuss their context of conflict long after the time of Jesus (see above, Part Two: C.4, The Gospel according to

John). There is danger in ignoring passages: the tendency is to automatically identify “the good guys” and “the bad guys” and then carry on trying to understand the rest of the passage. These identifications may seriously distort the meaning of the text. When dealing with especially difficult passages (the Passion story, for example), the leader will want to rely on a good commentary. One example of a helpful commentary passage follows. The author is discussing Matthew.

This “parable of the passion,” with its emphasis on the murder of God’s Son by Israel’s leaders (the Romans are nowhere in sight!) and the consequent transfer of Israel’s privileges to the church, must be treated with care by Christians. What began as a prophetic critique designed not to damn Israel but to provoke repentance became in the course of Christian history an anti-Judaism which was sinfully perverted into antisemitism. Jews were reviled with the hated nickname “Christ killers.” Popes and bishops taught that the Jews, because they had killed Christ and rejected his gospel, were a reprobate people, incapable of spiritual life and thus not fully human. It ought not to surprise us that the ultimate result of this kind of thinking was the “final solution” of the Nazi gas chambers. (Douglas A. Hare, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Matthew*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993.)

## **Use of Visual Teaching Aids**

Although it is astonishing, some of us are only vaguely aware of Jesus’ Jewishness. Part of this is due to the art we see in religious publications, in stained glass windows, and in paintings in Sunday schools and churches. In many of them, Jesus looks Caucasian! It is important to represent Jesus as someone that we can find in our own world, and as someone who understands us. However, this is never the whole truth. An African Jesus, an Oriental Jesus, a female Jesus, a European white male Jesus are all equally valid and invalid representations. In recent times, we have falsely emphasized the validity of one, and the invalidity of all others.

Art helps us discover and explore both universal truths and particular details. It does so in and through specific depictions. Using art increases the danger of fixing concrete images in the students’ minds and restricting the flow of imagination. Aspects of the truth about Jesus can be usefully presented without his Jewishness being highlighted, but he cannot be fully understood in this way. Today, in art, drama, guided meditation, and so on, people need to be helped to connect with the significance of Jesus’ Jewishness.

## **Jesus and Paul as Scriptural Teachers**

When Jesus speaks in the gospels, he often quotes scripture. He was, after all, an observant Jew. Teachers will want to point out when Jesus is doing this and where the passages that he quotes are located in the Hebrew scriptures. Study Bibles have footnotes and cross-references to help with this task. Often looking at the original passage helps clarify texts that are otherwise very difficult.

Consider the following commonly misrepresented quotation that Jesus uses. It is in the story of the woman with expensive perfume who bursts in on a dinner party and anoints him. (Mark 14:3–9) The men are angry at her and at Jesus for allowing this to happen. He responds that they won't always have him around, but that "you always have the poor with you." If we were knowledgeable about the scriptures Jesus used, we would know that he was referring to Deuteronomy 15:11: "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.'" Jesus' quotation has been used to explain away poverty and to justify doing nothing about it. But the original context suggests that the listeners should always be doing something about *that*. Now they have a unique opportunity to do something else as well.

Paul constantly quotes scripture, too, but this is often not noticed by those of us who lack Paul's biblical depth. The scriptures were such a part of Paul's life that his letters are saturated with allusions to them. Even when not quoting or referring directly to a passage, Paul is often using scriptural images and ideas. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:26–31 where Paul talks about wisdom, power, status, and boasting, he is "playing with" a passage from Jeremiah and doing so in a most delightful and creative way. (see Jeremiah 9:23–24) About almost any passage from Paul it is good to wonder whether he is drawing on a scriptural source, and if so, which one.

All of this suggests that teachers will want to use resource materials that help them learn more about the Hebrew scriptures as they teach about Jesus and Paul. Such resources are available.

## **The Importance of the Pharisees**

Besides the church, the most important Jewish group in the New Testament for Christians to understand is the Pharisees. We are told by Paul that he was a Pharisee. (Philippians 3:5) This may mean that he was formally trained as a Pharisee (Acts says this, 22:3, 26:5) or simply that his chosen and preferred methods of understanding scripture are those used also by the Pharisees. In any case, he is not upset or repentant about this; quite the opposite. It would seem from Jesus' treatment of scripture that he also drew on Pharisaic methods. Perhaps his closeness to them explains why he was so critical of them. (Matthew 23; Luke 12:1, 18:9ff.) The gospels tell us that Jesus was frequently a dinner guest of Pharisees (e.g. Luke 7:36, 11:37, 14:1); he defended their point of view on resurrection against the Sadducees (Matthew 22:23–33); when he was in danger, some of them tried to warn him. (Luke 13:31) There are different reports on Pharisees' involvement in plans to arrest him. (Luke 22:2; John 11:57) Obviously, they were interested in him (John 3:1) and he was interested in them. We also note that Acts 5:34–39 tells us of the tolerant and sympathetic attitude of the Pharisee, Gamaliel, toward the early church.

The Pharisees were mainly lay men who interpreted the scripture for the people. By the time of Jesus, they had been influential for about two centuries. Their interpretations helped Jewish people understand Torah. They made it possible for Torah to remain a way of life for new generations in changing circumstances. Rabbis were the successors of the Pharisees after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in CE 70. Modern Judaism develops from rabbinic teaching.

Because of the important New Testament associations with both Jesus and Paul, Christians today need to come to a special understanding of Pharisees. Because those associations are not uniformly positive or negative, Christians need to maintain an open attitude toward the movement as a whole. Because of the position of the Pharisaic movement within the history of rabbinic Judaism, Christians need to go beyond the New Testament presentation to come to a larger awareness and respect. The *Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary* (1980) defines a Pharisee as a member of an ancient Jewish sect that emphasized strict interpretation and observance of the Mosaic law (Torah) in both its written and oral dimensions. Unfortunately, a second definition follows: “a hypocritically self-righteous person.” Another dictionary uses “Pharisaic” and “sanctimonious” as synonyms. Within the history of our language, the name for a venerable movement of Jewish teachers has taken on disparaging and judgmental associations. Counteracting this prejudice of language is another reason why Christians must come to a clearer understanding of what it was to be a Pharisee.

***When Jesus Is in Conflict with Others***, we ask ourselves:

- What is it about the actions or attitudes of the others that Jesus criticizes?
- In what way are our actions and attitudes similar to those opposed by Jesus?
- If Jesus debated with us in a shopping centre downtown today, would his criticism of us be the same?

### **Then and Now**

Just as Christianity moved beyond its formation, so has Judaism moved beyond its Hebrew scriptures. To hold in our minds the image of Jews sacrificing at the Temple and not allow their religious practice to move beyond that, is as ridiculous as believing that First Nations on the Prairies only hunt buffalo for a living, or that The United Church of Canada doesn't allow women to speak in church. To think that we “know” about Judaism now because we have read the Bible is a half truth, and history has proved it is a dangerous half truth.

### **C) Personal Devotion**

Not many of us are biblical scholars; we do not come to reading the Bible for our private devotion with years of biblical study in our background. Our immense respect for the Bible makes us hesitate before reinterpreting seemingly straightforward biblical passages. We are afraid of twisting the scriptures for our own purposes. Yet, our knowledge of historical anti-Judaism and the Holocaust tells us that something has gone wrong with how we read and interpret some of the New Testament. Our respect for the Bible cannot blind us to the fact that we should be very uncomfortable with a literal interpretation of many of the passages in the New Testament that deal with the Jews.

Fortunately, there are three approaches to rereading anti-Judaic passages that still allow us to honour the word of God.

*As Informed Readers*: throughout this paper we have looked at “problematic passages” and have discussed how the political and religious conflicts of the first century CE have coloured

the writings of the Christian scriptures. Reading these sections helps us to understand why and how anti-Judaic passages were written, and how we might interpret them today.

*As United Church Members:* during 1989 and 1990, our church conducted a church-wide examination of a study document on the authority and interpretation of scripture. In 1992, the 34th General Council of The United Church of Canada passed, as part of a larger motion, the following: “The Word of God, in every case, is larger than the text of the Bible.”

The book that was written after the study expands this idea:

The Bible is our resource for faith and freedom if it inspires us to envision and embody relationships of justice and mutuality, of care and respect, and to resist domination, subordination, violence, and greed. The Bible is not the Word of God when it is used to justify structures and dynamics of unjust relationships. (*The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture*, Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1992, p. 68.)

We are not required to believe literally in every word of the Bible. Furthermore, we must never use the Bible to justify anti-Judaic thoughts or actions.

*As Christians:* quite simply, Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments were to love God and to “love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 and parallels; here Jesus was drawing on Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18, and conforming to Pharisaic attitudes of his time.) Love for God and for our neighbour leaves no room for anti-Judaism in our reading of the Bible. As well, our personal devotion should include prayers for the well-being of all people and for creation.

## **PART FOUR: RESOURCES FOR GETTING STARTED**

### **A) Glossary of Terms**

**antisemitism.** Literally meaning “opposed to Semites” (i.e. Jews, Arabs and other semitic peoples); usually used to mean hatred of Jews. The term was invented in Germany in the late 19th century to give Jew-hatred a scientific ring in the context of a pseudo-scientific study of the human races.

**aggadah, haggadah.** See midrash, Seder.

**apocalypse, apocalyptic.** Greek for “revelation.” A genre of literature (attested in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions) in which the author claims to have received revelation(s), usually about the end time, and expresses them in vivid symbolism. The final book of the Christian NT is called “The Revelation to John” or sometimes “The Apocalypse.”

**apocrypha, apocryphal.** Greek meaning “to hide, concealed away.” It is used to refer to Jewish books included in the Eastern Christian Bible and in the Roman Catholic Bible, but not in the Jewish or Protestant biblical collections.

**Auschwitz.** The German name of the Polish town where one of the largest Nazi concentration camps was situated. More than 1.5 million Jews were killed there. The name “Auschwitz” has come to be used symbolically to refer to Nazi death camps in general and to the holocaust (*Shoah*).

**canon, canonical scripture.** Books recognized as supremely authoritative for faith; the biblical corpus.

**CE** “common era.” **BCE** “before the common era.” An attempt to use terms that have no Christian reference to date events, thus respecting non-Christian traditions. CE and BCE replace AD and BC respectively.

**Christology** From Greek *christos* meaning “anointed.” The Christian study of the Christ concept in its various associations and applications. See messiah.

**Conservative Judaism.** See Orthodox Judaism.

**covenant.** Literally, a pact or bargain between two parties. Biblically, covenant refers above all to the irrevocable bond between God and the people of Israel, initiated by God and grounded in God’s grace and steadfast love. God promises life, land, prosperity, and attentiveness. The people promise to be God’s “own possession among all peoples” and to obey the divine instruction, Torah (Exodus 19:5); later this is understood to include being “a light to the nations.” (Isaiah 49:6; cf. 2:2–4) The covenant is made with Moses at Sinai (Exodus 19ff.), reaffirming the bond made with Abraham (Genesis 15,17) and reaffirmed again later with David (2 Samuel 7) and Solomon. (1 Kings 9) God also makes a covenant with Noah that applies to all humanity. (Genesis 9:8–17) Christians came to believe that God made a new or renewed covenant with all

humanity through the person and work of Jesus Christ; they saw this as fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34.

**decatalogue.** The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17; Deuteronomy 5:1–21).

**deicide.** Literally, the killing of God. As an accusation against Jews through the centuries, it derives from the death of Jesus being blamed on Jews and then being interpreted as killing the divine Son of God and thereby God. It is not a biblical concept.

**Deutero-Isaiah, Trito-Isaiah.** Those portions of the book of Isaiah attributed, respectively, to the otherwise unknown prophet of the restoration period ca. 538 BCE (Isaiah chapters 40—55; sometimes also chapters 34 and 35) and to the student or school of this prophet (chapters 56—65). Names given to these prophets.

**diaspora** From Greek meaning “scattering.” Used to refer to the Jewish communities living among the gentiles outside the land of Israel/Palestine.

**dietary laws.** See *Kashrut*.

**dispensationalism.** A modern conservative Protestant view that divides all history into “dispensations,” i.e. periods of time during which people are tested with respect to different, specific revelations of God’s will. The Scofield Bible popularized a seven-fold pattern: innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace (the present church age), and the Kingdom.

**election.** A term used theologically in Judaism to indicate God’s choice of Israel to receive the covenant, a choice not based on the superiority or previous accomplishments of the people but on God’s free grace (see covenant). Election does not bring special privilege to the elect; rather it brings special responsibility and task. In Christianity, the concept of election is applied to the church and even to individual Christians.

**eschatology, eschatological.** From Greek *eschaton* meaning “last things, end time.” Refers in general to what is expected to take place in the “last times”; thus the study of the ultimate destiny or purpose of humankind and the world, how and when the end will occur, what the end or last period of history will be like. See apocalypse, messiah.

**exegesis.** The interpretation or exposition of scripture. See hermeneutics.

**festivals (Jewish).** Jewish ongoing faith observance is built around *Shabbat* (see sabbath). Special festivals include New Year’s Day, *Rosh Hashanah* (literally “head of the year”), which is followed by 10 days of repentance and renewal of commitment to Torah culminating in *Yom Kippur*, the day of atonement. These are the high holy days, *Yom Kippur* being the most important day of special observance in the Jewish year. Five days later, *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles, begins and is observed for seven days. *Sukkot* commemorates the time in the wilderness when the Jews lived in flimsy huts; after entry into the land and the building of the Temple, it became an agricultural/pilgrimage festival as well, celebrating the second harvest (the basis for Christian Thanksgiving). At other times of the year there are two more historical/agricultural/pilgrimage festivals: Passover (*Pesach*) celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt (see seder); it also commences the first

planting of the spring; 50 days after the second night of passover, the Feast of Weeks, *Shavuot* (called Pentecost in Greek) is observed commemorating the giving of Torah by God at Mount Sinai; agriculturally, it is also the Festival of First Fruits of the harvest. There are two minor festivals in the Jewish year: *Chanukah*, the Festival of Lights, commemorating military victory during the successful Maccabean revolt (168–165 BCE); and *Purim*, celebrating deliverance from persecution as recounted in the biblical book of Esther.

**gentile(s).** From the Latin for “people,” “nation(s).” In Hebrew, *goyim*. Refers to non-Jews.

**halachah.** From the Hebrew verb *halach*, “to go”; thus “the way to go.” The collective body of Jewish religious law that observant Jews follow. It is derived from the Oral Torah (decrees of the sages) and from the 613 precepts (*mitzvot*) set forth in the Written Torah, many of which can only be observed in the land of Israel (248 laws are positive commandments; 365 are prohibitions). See Orthodox Judaism, Oral Torah, Talmud.

**hasidim, hasidism.** Hebrew meaning “pious ones.” The term may refer to Jews in various periods: (1) a group that resisted the policies of Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BCE at the start of the Maccabean revolt; (2) Jewish pietists in the 13th century; (3) followers of the movement of Hasidism founded in the first half of the 18th century by Israel Ba’al Shem Tov.

**Hebrew.** A name denoting the people of Israel (also their language), dating from the early biblical era. Its origin is unclear. Associated with Abraham, it might refer to descent from Eber, a descendant of Noah and Shem, or to Abraham’s status as one who came from “the other side” (of the Jordan R.? of the Euphrates R.?).

**Hellenism, hellenistic.** Greek civilization spread through much of the ancient world from 333 BCE (Alexander the Great) to 63 BCE (dominance of the Near East by the Roman Empire). Hellenism, the synthesis of Greek and Near East cultures, influenced names, language, philosophy, thought, athletics, architecture, etc.

**hermeneutics.** From Greek “to interpret, translate.” The principles or methodology of interpreting the scriptures.

**Herod.** The NT mentions four Herods (rulers through the grace of Rome): 1) King Herod called “the Great” because of military prowess, skill in retaining power, and building genius (the Second Temple, Masada, etc). A vicious ruler, offspring of Idumean converts to Judaism, supported by Rome, he was hated by many Jews. He died ca. 4 BCE, around the time Jesus was born. (Matthew 2:1 ff.) He is said to have ordered the murder of the infants in Bethlehem. 2) Herod Antipas was the second son of Herod the Great. (Matthew 14:1; Luke 3:1) He killed John the Baptist (Mark 6:14 ff.). 3) Herod Agrippa I, was a grandson of Herod the Great. He is mentioned in Acts 12:1ff. 4) Herod Agrippa 2 was a son of Agrippa I. He is mentioned in the passage Acts 25:13—26:32 (Paul defending himself against accusations of some fellow Jews).

**holocaust.** From Greek for “entire burnt offering.” A term used in recent times to refer to the Nazi German attempted extermination of the Jewish people. See *Shoah*, Auschwitz.

**intertestamental literature.** A Christian term for writings from the period between the last book of the OT (Daniel, written before 160 BCE) and the first book of the NT (1 or 2 Thessalonians, written after CE 40). It is a rough designation only, including some non-canonical items that pre- or post-date this period (e.g. 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra, respectively). It numbers hundreds of items including most of the OT Apocrypha, much literature of the Dead Sea scrolls, and very many Jewish apocalyptic writings. It provides important background for understanding Christian origins. The Tanakh per se not being fixed in this period, the literature reflects much creativity, fluidity, and development of thought. Having no second testament, Jews refer to it generally as literature of the Second Temple period.

**Israel.** A name given by God to the Jewish patriarch, Jacob (Genesis 32:28). In the Bible, this name is used variously for the entire nation, the northern tribes, and the northern state in the divided kingdom (i.e. after Solomon). Historically, the name refers to the Jewish people and culture. Today, it also names the political State of Israel. Christians came to consider themselves to be the new and “true” Israel in continuity with the ancient traditions, an idea that promoted Christian anti-Jewish supersessionism.

**“Jehovah.”** An attempt by Christians to vocalize the divine name (Exodus 3:15). The Jewish medieval convention was to write the Hebrew consonants, YHWH, with vowel pointing from another word, “adonai” (Lord), so that the divine name would not be spoken. Hebrew readers would see this and automatically say “Lord.” “Jehovah” is thus an artificial hybrid construction. See YHWH.

**Judaism, Jew.** From the Hebrew name of the patriarch, Judah. The name came to designate one of the 12 tribes of Israel, its tribal area (including the city of Jerusalem), and the southern state in the divided kingdom (i.e. after Solomon). David was a Judahite and Jewish kingly expectations were attached to his lineage. During the exile, the word “Judahite” gave rise to “Jew” and “Judaism.” Some groups within Judaism today are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Hasidic, and Reconstructionist.

**Khethuvim, Ketuvim.** Hebrew for “writings.” A Jewish collective designation for biblical books included in the third and last major division of the Jewish Bible. See Tanakh.

**Kashrut, kosher.** *Kashrut* are the Jewish dietary laws. (Hebrew *kasher* became adopted into English as kosher, “ritually fit.”) These laws are largely derived from the book of Leviticus. Only certain animals, birds, and fish are acceptable as food; others are not kosher. Eating and drinking blood is prohibited; therefore ritually fit animals have to be slaughtered in a precise way, the blood drained quickly, and any remaining blood removed by soaking, salting, and rinsing the meat. *Kashrut* laws prohibit cooking or eating meat and milk together. Observant Jews wait for up to six hours after having eaten meat or poultry before eating dairy products. *Kashrut* transcends the concept of hygiene: it demands discipline and is intended to lead to spiritual cleanliness. Christians should not expect Jews to participate in a non-kosher meal or snack. In planning Christian–Jewish encounters kosher food or uncut fruit should be provided.

**Maimonides.** The greatest Jewish rabbi, thinker, and teacher of the medieval period. Also known as Rabbi Moses ben Maimon or Rambam (RaMBaM), 1135–1204.

**Marcion.** A second century Christian considered heretical by his opponents. His teaching was supersessionist and dualistic, and separated Jesus from Judaism and from the God of the OT. Independently wealthy, first to formulate a Christian canon, and a great organizer, his highly successful movement stimulated Christianity to develop orthodox views, becoming better organized, focused and decisive. Excommunicated ca. CE 144.

**messiah.** Hebrew *meshiach*, “anointed one”; in Greek *christos*. Ancient priests, kings and sometimes prophets of Israel were anointed with oil. “Anointed one” came to refer, most often, to a hoped-for royal descendant of the line of King David, who would restore the united kingdom of Israel and Judah and usher in an age of peace and justice. The concept developed in many directions over the centuries. For some Jews, the messianic age would be a time of perfection of human institutions; for others, a time of radical new beginnings (new heaven and new earth) after divine judgment and destruction. Followers of Jesus applied *christos* to him and came to be called “Christians.” Jesus is also called “Messiah” in Islam.

**midrash** From Hebrew *darash*, “to inquire.” Exposition of scripture and tradition through imaginative storytelling, commentary, wisdom sayings, aphorisms and lore, intending to entertain while instructing. Midrash may focus on *halachah*, directing the Jew to specific patterns of religious practice, or on *aggadah*, dealing with theological ideas, ethical teachings, popular philosophy, legend, allegory, etc.

**Mishnah.** From Hebrew “teaching,” “oral recitation.” A digest of Jewish oral *halachah* as it existed at the end of the second century CE; collated, edited, and revised by Rabbi Judah the Prince. The code is divided into six major “orders” (agricultural laws, Sabbath and festivals, marriage and divorce, civil laws and property, the sacred and Temple sacrifices, ritual cleanliness) and 60 “tractates” (later subdivided to 63). Considered the most authoritative legal tradition of the early sages, it is the basis of the legal discussions of the Talmud.

**Mosaic covenant (Sinai covenant).** See covenant.

**Nevi'im.** A Jewish collective designation for biblical books that are named after prophets. See prophet, Tanakh.

**Noachide covenant.** See covenant.

**Oral Torah.** In Pharisaic/rabbinic thought, God reveals instructions for living both through the written scriptures and through a parallel process of orally transmitted traditions, the “Oral Torah.” See Mishnah, Talmud.

**orthodox.** From the Greek for “correct opinion/outlook”; as opposed to heterodox or heretical. The judgment that a position is orthodox depends on what are accepted as operative norms and authorities at the time. “Orthodoxy” denotes the dominant surviving forms that have proved themselves and become “traditional,” “classical” or “mainstream.” Reinterpretations within orthodoxy constantly emerge (and often disappear).

**Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism, Reform Judaism.** The three major divisions within modern North American Judaism, listed here in order of greater to lesser stringency of symbolic observance. In Israel orthodoxy is the primary recognized religious authority.

**Palestine.** From “Philistine.” A designation adopted by the Romans for the area between Syria (to the north) and Egypt (to the south), between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan; roughly, modern Israel.

**Passover.** In Hebrew *pesach*. See festivals (Jewish), Seder.

**Pentateuch.** From Greek for “five books/scrolls.” The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, known in Jewish tradition as the teaching of Moses or Torah.

**Pharisees, Pharisaic.** In Hebrew *perushim*, lit. “separatists.” The name given to a group or movement in early Judaism, the origin and nature of which is unclear. The designation probably resulted from their special stringencies in matters of diet and purity, which limited their social interactions with people outside their movement. Many scholars connect them with the later sages and rabbis who taught the oral and written law. According to Josephus and the NT, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, in a balance between predestination and free will, in angels as active divine agents, and in authoritative oral tradition.

**phylacteries.** From Greek “protectors.” See *tefillin*.

**pogrom.** From Russian “devastation”; an unprovoked attack or series of attacks upon a Jewish community.

**prayer shawl.** In Hebrew called *talit* from *l'talel*, “to cover.” Worn by Jewish male worshippers in private and congregational morning prayers, and in the evening only on *Yom Kippur*. Its principal importance lies in the “fringes” (*tzitzit*) attached to its corners (see Numbers 15:38–41).

**prophet.** From Greek “speaker, to speak for.” Designation given in the Bible to recognized spokespersons for God who emerged from time to time starting in the period of the monarchy. See *Nevi'im*.

**proselyte.** From Greek *proselytos*, “convert.” The work was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew term *ger* (“stranger,” i.e. non-Israelite living among Israelites). Since the fourth century Jews have not engaged in organized missionary activities. Individual proselytes are still welcomed into the community after intense study, baptism and (for males) circumcision. Today most conversions happen because of mixed marriages, where one partner converts in order to avoid potential conflicts.

**Qur'an.** In Arabic *Al Qur'an* means “The Recitation” and is the name for the sacred scriptures of Islam, dictated to Muhammed by the Archangel Gabriel. (Qur'an is to be preferred to Koran.)

**Reform Judaism.** See Orthodox Judaism.

**Sabbath.** In Hebrew *shabbat*; the seventh day of the week recalling God's rest at the completion of creation (Exodus 20:11) and God's deliverance of the people from servitude (Deuteronomy 5:15). Its observance is one of the Ten Commandments. It is a day given by God to the people for physical and spiritual replenishment. It is symbolic of new beginnings, celebrated through prayer, Torah study, and family observance. See festivals.

**Sadducees.** A Jewish group prominently mentioned in the NT, often in conflict with the Pharisees. Its origins are uncertain: it probably arose early in the second century BCE and ceased to exist when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in CE 70. Sadducees supported priestly authority and rejected traditions not directly grounded in the Pentateuch (e.g. the concept of resurrection as personal, individual life after death).

**Seder.** A special Jewish meal in Jewish households on the night of Passover. *Seder* means "order"; the meal progresses in 15 ordered parts and follows a basic text. It represents the Passover in Egypt as a present reality (Exodus 12). The seder text is called the Passover *Aggadah*.

**Septuagint.** Often denoted LXX. After Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE) conquered the Middle East, Jews came under syncretistic influences of hellenism. To help protect Jewish thought and practice, the High Priest Eleazar chose 70 (Greek *septuaginta*) of the most educated Jews and sent them to Alexandria, Egypt, to translate important books of Judaism from Hebrew into Greek. The translation (called "Septuagint," made ca. 260–100 BCE) was used by Jews living in the diaspora, by the apostle Paul (who quoted from it more than from Hebrew sources), and by the emergent gentile church. It includes books which later were not included in the Hebrew canon, and it has a different order of books from that adopted later. The Protestant Bible contains only the books of the Hebrew Tanakh but uses the order of the Septuagint. See apocrypha, canon, hellenism, Tanakh.

**Shoah.** Hebrew for "destruction." See Auschwitz, holocaust.

**skull cap.** Also called *kippah* (Hebrew) or *yarmulke* (Yiddish). In the days of the Temple the priests wore a turban during sacrificial services and the Jewish sages covered their heads most of the time. Today's traditional Jewish males wear the skull cap especially while at prayer, during meals, and in the synagogue. Non-Jewish male visitors to the synagogue are offered skull caps at the entrance and are asked to wear them.

**supersessionism.** Christian teaching that the church has replaced or superseded Israel in God's plan of salvation; after the destruction of the Temple Judaism demonstrates to the world the effects of God's wrath (God's grace being demonstrated through the church).

**synagogue.** From Greek "gathering." The central institution of Jewish communal worship and Bible teaching.

**synoptic gospels.** A collective designation for the first three gospels of the NT (Matthew, Mark, Luke) which have much substantive material and wording in common. From the Greek word meaning "to see together."

**Talmud.** Hebrew for “study, learning” (also known by its Babylonian Aramaic equivalent, “Gemara”). Rabbinic Judaism produced two Talmuds: the “Babylonian,” completed by the sixth century CE, has prominence in the Western world; the “Palestinian” or “Jerusalem” was completed earlier. Both contain the Mishnah collection of the early sages and commentary and debate by the later sages. See Mishnah, Oral Torah.

**Tanakh, TaNaK.** A relatively modern acronym for the Jewish Bible, made up of the names of its three parts: Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings)—thus TNK, pronounced *Tanakh*.

**tefillin.** From Hebrew *tefillot*, “prayers.” Refers to the small leather cubes worn by traditional Jewish males during morning prayer service, except during Sabbath and festivals. In ancient times they were worn all day. They contain small parchments of scripture and are worn on the forehead and the left (usually) upper arm (see Deuteronomy 6:8). They remind the wearer to love God with his mind and emotions (left arm close to the heart), indeed with his whole being.

**Temple.** In traditional Judaism, the legitimate Temple can only be located on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The First Temple was built by King Solomon (ca. 950 BCE) and destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (587/6 BCE). Following the return from exile, it was rebuilt under Zerubbabel and dedicated (515 BCE). It was enlarged and improved considerably by King Herod the Great (beginning in 26 BCE; not completed until 63 CE). This Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in CE 70. The site of the ancient Jewish Temple is now occupied, in part, by the “Dome of the Rock” Mosque. In recent times, “Temple” has come to be used synonymously with “synagogue” in some liberal or Reform Jewish usage.

**testament.** A word meaning “covenant,” used to name the two major segments of the Christian Bible. See covenant.

**tetragrammaton.** From Greek meaning “four lettered [name].” See YHWH.

**Torah.** Hebrew for “teaching, instruction.” “Torah” can be the name for the whole of Jewish teaching, or more narrowly, for the first five books of the Bible. (In the Qur'an, “Torah” is the main term by which Jewish scripture is identified.)

**Vulgate.** From Latin meaning “common, popular.” The official Roman Catholic version of the Bible in Latin, prepared or edited by Jerome ca. CE 400. See Septuagint.

**YHWH.** The sacred name of God which was revealed to Moses together with its meaning (Exodus 3:15). Also known as the tetragrammaton. Since Hebrew was written without vowels in ancient times, the four consonants YHWH contain no clue to their original pronunciation. In ancient Israel the name was only spoken in the Temple and only on certain occasions (e.g. on *Yom Kippur*). Today most Jews do not speak the name; instead, other designations for God are substituted, e.g. Lord (in Hebrew, *Adonai*). In some English versions of the Bible the tetragrammaton is represented by “LORD.” This is most acceptable to Jews. However, in contemporary scholarship and in some Bible translations (e.g. Jerusalem Bible) the tetragrammaton is rendered “Yahweh.”

To speak this word is regarded by many Jews as presumptuous and arrogant; they believe it should not be done.

**Yom Kippur.** Hebrew meaning “the day of atonement”; also called the Sabbath of Sabbaths. See festivals (Jewish).

**zealot.** From Greek “to be enthusiastic.” A radical and warlike Jewish perspective advocating independence from Rome. A member of a Jewish group of political rebels called Zealots.

**Zionism.** A political movement to re-establish a Jewish state in the traditional land of the people; from Mount Zion, a hill in the city of Jerusalem. Since biblical times (Isaiah 1:27) Zion has been a symbol for a reconstructed Jewish homeland which gathers its exiles around a rebuilt Temple. The “return to Zion” was expected as God’s work. Zionism of the 19th century used some of the earlier rabbinic motifs, but its definition of peoplehood (i.e. that Jews are a people like the French or the English etc.) was taken from a contemporary European context rather than from traditional understandings of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. Many of the early Zionist leaders were atheists or agnostics. Growing antisemitism and, finally, mass murder by the Nazis, led to more acceptance among religious Jews for human action to create a Jewish homeland (as opposed to waiting for God). Now, apart from some Reform and Orthodox fringes, Jews of all persuasions support the State of Israel founded in 1948. “Christian Zionism” has arisen in evangelical and fundamentalist churches: the founding of the State of Israel and the in-gathering of Jewish exiles are seen as the first stage of fulfillment of OT prophecies; the second stage would be the return of Christ and conversion of Israel to Christ.

## **B) Recommended Reading & Audio-Visual Resources:**

[\*items particularly recommended]

**Website** (Jewish–Christian Dialogue website, and other sites linked there)  
[www.jcrelations.com](http://www.jcrelations.com)

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*The Word in Anguish: Wrestling with Anti-Judaism in the Lectionary*. RC Archdiocese of Cincinnati, July, 1989. An hour-long videotape which examines problematic texts from Jewish and Christian perspectives. Available from: Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations Office, 100 East Eighth St., Cincinnati, Ohio. 45202

Many novels by Sholom Ash, Chaim Potok, Leon Uris, Elie Wiesel and Herman Wouk can help Christians understand Judaism. Particularly influential has been Leon Uris, *Exodus*. Also see James A. Michener, *The Source*.

**C) A Sermon for Good Friday (Sample):**

It is Good Friday somewhere near Kiev in the waning years of the 19th century. A father rushes home before church lets out. He scrambles his family to get them together in one place. He has them pile their furniture and belongings against the door and windows. His little girl, Golda, wonders, “Why?” He has no time until the job is finished. Then, after praying to God for mercy, he turns to face his daughter. He responds that it is the day that the Christians in their community are being told in church that Jesus was killed. It is the day every year he fears the most. He is fearful because he knows from previous experience that in all likelihood his Christian neighbours will take out their wrath on people like him—a Jew. On other Good Fridays pogroms have broken out in Russia, Poland, the Ukraine, Galicia, and Ruthenia. Jews have been indiscriminately hauled out of their homes and beaten or murdered, all in the name of the crucified one—Jesus Christ. So on this Good Friday Golda’s father is afraid. Good Friday indeed!

The scene changes to a sanitorium in Denver, Colorado, during the Roaring Twenties. Golda and her family have moved to America. Golda’s health is precarious—a touch of tuberculosis. She has gone to Denver for her health. She meets other Jews in the community. She learns from one particular young man about the religion of those who pounded on the door of her family’s home back in the Ukraine. During one of their conversations, the young man comments about how Jesus died on a cross. He ponders the irony of how Christians have taken the cross down from the walls of their churches and turned it around, making it a sword. Ironic, indeed. Lethal, too, if you have been on the wrong end of it throughout history.

Many passages in the New Testament inform us that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. History informs us that his means of death—crucifixion—was a Roman punishment for insurrection or a capital crime that only Romans could mete out. The gospels have Jesus speak about forgiving those who are enemies or those who are crucifying him. The history of the church has Christians alienating, persecuting, ghettoizing, forcing baptism upon, scapegoating, expelling, and murdering Jews because they supposedly are to blame for killing Jesus and even for murdering God. Much of what Christians have done to Jews in the name of Jesus has been done because of interpretations of certain portions of Christian scripture that describe Jews as the opponents and enemies of Jesus. Some go further to describe Jews as those who, by their denial of Jesus as Christ, have been replaced as the people of God’s favour. And further still are those which depict Jews as those who continue to pose a threat to the church because of their stubbornness and hard-heartedness.

The gospels come to us out of a polemical period of a church in its infancy. In the early decades the nascent church competed with a synagogue attempting to redefine Judaism following the destruction of the Second Temple. Competition was fierce at times because both were living under the imperial threat of Roman law and military might, and both were seeking protection based on their adherence to the First Commandment. When uncritical interpretations of gospel texts are allowed to paint Pharisees as legalistic and hypocritical, when Jesus’ death is blamed on Jews in general for which contemporary Jews are still culpable, when the church is understood to replace the People Israel in God’s affections, then the leap to Christians ignoring Jews as societal outcasts like Cain is easy. Attempting to convert Jews from their supposedly dead and empty faith becomes an option. Blaming Jews

and only Jews for Jesus' crucifixion becomes possible. Then Christians might do, "in the name of Christ," something that Jesus would never do. Such leaps have been taken over and over again by generations of Christians throughout the ages.

For almost 20 centuries now the church and synagogue have shared a common foundation in the Hebrew scriptures. Both have recognized to greater and lesser degrees, at various times in history, the Jewishness of Jesus. Yet the writings of the New Testament assert that Jesus is the Messiah who Jews are still awaiting. Paul argued successfully within the emerging church that gentiles could become Christians without first becoming Jews and with that insight the wedge between Jew and Christian was irrevocably driven. The Jewish Christian movement waned, while the gentile Christian movement flourished even in times of Roman persecution. By the fourth century, Christianity had become the religion of the empire itself. Texts that had informed powerless and persecuted Christians prior to Constantine's embrace of Christianity were soon interpreted in ways that turned the cross of Christ into a sword of vengeance. This vengeance fuelled Christian responses: repudiation of Jewish religious practices, Crusades, pogroms, and ultimately the murder of a third of Europe's Jews in the 1940s. Hatred of anyone is contrary to Jesus' central message of loving God, and one's neighbour as oneself. Any interpretation of any Christian scripture that purports to inspire Christians to hate anyone is in direct opposition to the teachings of the One we accept as Christ.

Christianity, as depicted in the New Testament, is a way of love for those who work for the coming of that great and wondrous day when there is peace, harmony, justice, and compassion for everyone. To embrace Jesus as Lord, Saviour, Redeemer, and Light of the World, and then to snuff out that light with hatred, Crusades, pogroms, persecutions, and death camps is not the Way of Christ.

Christian antisemitism and anti-Judaism have been largely unacknowledged within The United Church of Canada. On this side of the Holocaust, it is imperative that references to Pharisees need to be informed by Jewish sources that speak about Torah as good news. Torah is good news for Jews because of the joyous responsibility they are given by God to live it out day by day. God blesses the people with laws that they might be faithful. The Law comes to them as a faithful expression of the covenantal relationship they have with the God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam even to this day. On this side of smoking ovens that cremated the bodies of one million Jewish children, understandings of the Passion narratives that lead to further atrocities toward Jews are a further sign of Christian cruelty and apostasy. On this side of the church's story we need to re-examine our New Testament scriptures that have led us to treat Jews as other than our neighbours, other than Jesus' brothers and sisters and cousins, and other than our relatives within God's household of faith. We need to do this in ways that allow us to discern their significance for us in our day and age. However we interpret them, to be faithful to Christ, we must never do what he would not. It is time for us to take seriously the context out of which so much of the New Testament was written. The alienation and repudiation of both the church and the synagogue created a tension that has allowed uncritical interpretations of scripture to distort the gospel in ways that Christ would not recognize. We cannot change our ways until we recognize what we have done in the past and what we continue to do when we allow New Testament texts to inform us to perform acts of evil against our Jewish neighbours. No more can we blithely bear false witness against our fellow brothers and sisters within the household of God—to do so could mean another time

when Jewish refugees are turned away, another time when Christians stand idly by while hooligans desecrate synagogues and cemeteries, and another time when Christians allow hate-mongers to displace the gospel with vile words and acts.

Jesus was Jewish. His scriptures were Jewish scriptures. His words and deeds are preserved for us in what we call the New Testament. Jesus preached good news. If Christ is to become good news again for the Jews, then Christians are going to have to change the way we have portrayed them in our sermons and Sunday school lessons. We will need to reconsider what we have been told in the past about Jews, about scribes and Pharisees, and about the supersession of Israel if we are to refrain from our former abuses. Texts that are polemical with regard to Jews and Judaism need to be recognized for their contentious nature. They will need to be interpreted in ways that bring the good news of a faithful and persistent God at work in Jesus of Nazareth whom we proclaim as Christ to a world needing good news, not hateful, hurtful, spiteful, vengeful news. Jesus came that we might all have life—life in its fullness, life in relationship with God, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Peter and Paul, Mary and Martha, you and me. This life is needed to help us right our relationship with our nearest cousins in the faith. The task of reconciliation of Christian to Jew is not an easy one, but until we recognize that the roots of Christian anti-Judaism are contained in the interpretation of certain New Testament texts, then we cannot even begin to find a better way.

Golda was not finished moving when she arrived in Denver. One day she was able to go to Palestine where she changed her name and eventually became Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel. She fought for peace and security for her people; she worked for peace and security of all people in the region of Israel. The little girl who had shrunk in fear behind a barricade of dressers and tables learned about the Jesus who preached love and taught compassion. She remained a Jew. Yet, she also was willing to work with Christians, Muslims, and others to reach for an accord in Palestine and Israel. Her work was not finished in her lifetime and still remains unfinished years after her death.

We proclaim that Christ came that there might be peace on earth, justice and right relationships between all peoples. How can we continue to preach Christ crucified and risen when Jews of all generations continue to be blamed for the death of Jesus? Jews continue to fear Christians because they do not know when we might scapegoat them again for something that a few Jewish leaders and collaborators did along with the Romans so long ago. Never again should Jews or other non-Christians be fearful that Christians might persecute them or murder them “in the name of Christ.” The message of Jesus is one of peace and reconciliation for the whole world he was sent to love. May we follow his way to peace and reconciliation for a suffering and hurting world. On this day when we mark Jesus’ crucifixion, may we ponder the depth of his love and compassion for us. May we perceive his concern for the whole world. May we discern how we might participate with him today in making this a caring and compassionate world. This is why he came and this is what he continues to strive for with people like us. To God be the glory this day and forever more. Amen.

**This sermon could be adapted to fit those Sundays when John 20:19–31 is part of the lectionary (i.e. the second Sunday of Easter in all three years of the Common Lectionary) and when John 20:19–23 is an alternate lection (Pentecost, Year A). This**

**passage, in particular, has the disciples in a locked room for “fear of the Jews.” The comparison of one group of Jews hiding behind locked doors for “fear of the Christians” makes for a stark contrast.**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **FROM PETITION 81 OF THE 32ND GENERAL COUNCIL, 1988, TO THE PRESENT**

In Victoria, B.C., in 1988, the following petition was passed by the General Council of The United Church of Canada. It had originated within Alberta & Northwest Conference in response to an Alberta court case involving Jim Keegstra, a high school history teacher who taught that the Holocaust did not happen.

That this 32nd General Council, having heard Petition 81:

1. re-affirm The United Church of Canada's previous statements concerning antisemitism and racism;
2. review our actions and acknowledge the silence of our church during the years 1933–45 in relation to the Holocaust in Europe;
3. request the Canadian Government to implement Article 4(b) of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with the view to ensure that Canadian civil law reflect the full intention of Article 4(b) of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
4. prepare a church-wide study to develop awareness of the Christian roots of antisemitism with a view to seeking ways of becoming more sensitive to our Jewish sisters and brothers in our teaching and practice today;
5. urge the Conferences, in consultation with the Jewish community, to express to Provincial and Territorial Ministries of Education the United Church's support for the provision of adequate education for elementary school students on the facts of the Holocaust, its significance in history, and its role in modern Jewish opinion and thought; and
6. request the theological schools to ensure that an opportunity is provided for students to wrestle with the issues surrounding the Holocaust and antisemitism (R.O.P., p. 163).

The Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee (ICIF) of the General Council office reviewed this petition at its regular meeting of Nov. 3–5, 1989. Preliminary investigations were begun to determine what was needed to fulfill the petition. Following a report received in September 1990, ICIF decided that a reaffirmation of past statements on antisemitism was not a sufficient response to Canadian antisemitism in the present. A task group was asked to draft a statement in the nature of an apology concerning The United Church of Canada and Canadian antisemitism. By May 1991 it was decided that an apology would not be as valuable as a continuing commitment to educate the United Church about anti-Judaism and antisemitism. The task group was then asked to formulate a statement for ICIF that would express to the church this need for education on antisemitism. On September 26, 1992, the following "Response to Petition 81" was adopted:

The ICIF Committee is hereby committed to attend to the following concerns and challenges.

1. The history of Christian antisemitism has been largely suppressed and unacknowledged in The United Church of Canada. Some members of the church have come to recognize the roots of anti-Judaism in the New Testament and have learned to discern expressions of anti-Judaism in theology and liturgy. They have come to understand the causal relationship between anti-Judaism which is religious and theological and antisemitism which is racist and national. The United Church as a whole, however, failed to understand and acknowledge the anti-Judaism and antisemitism in our Christian tradition.

2. Although the annual reports of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service in 1944 and 1946 included statements condemning antisemitism and expressing a “deep sense of horror” at the Holocaust, these statements were and are insufficient to address the ongoing history of Christian complicity in antisemitism in Canada and elsewhere and the failure of The United Church of Canada to influence the Canadian government to accept Jewish refugees, before, during and after the Second World War. Vigorous and ongoing opposition to all forms of antisemitism must be strengthened and upheld throughout the whole church.

3. The United Church of Canada has been an active participant in the Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation since its inception. This and other channels of Christian–Jewish dialogue must be continued and strengthened. Broadening the spectrum of subjects and concerns addressed in Jewish–Christian dialogues, wherever they occur across the country, should be encouraged in any ways possible.

4. Dialogue, to be genuine, must include a commitment to justice and must include forthright discussion about divergent political positions. Justice and security for all people in Israel and the occupied territory are a necessary concern in Christian–Jewish dialogue.

5. If Christians were to understand better that Jesus was Jewish that would provide a sound basis for developing an appropriate theological perspective on Judaism. We believe that such understanding and such perspective should be promoted wherever possible in The United Church of Canada.

A sub-committee of ICIF was established in Calgary to make this statement known in the church and to receive responses from church groups and members concerning it. Also, the sub-committee was to create a network of individuals and groups who would be ready and willing to respond to emergent issues of antisemitism anywhere in Canada. While working away at this task, the sub-committee, later named The National Task Group on United Church–Jewish Relations, has undertaken to produce a “guidelines” paper for clergy, Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders, and others in the United Church. The purpose of the paper is to help identify and contextualize anti-Judaisms in Christian scriptures and to help the life and practice of the United Church to be respectful of Judaism; the task group believes that this latter purpose will be furthered, in part, by the adoption of a clear statement of

*Bearing Faithful Witness, The United Church of Canada*

relationship vis-à-vis Judaism. This paper, with Appendices D and E by the Rev. Prof. Alan T. Davies, attempts to fulfill the General Council directives of Petition 81, sections 2 and 4. *Bearing Faithful Witness* is given to the church for study.

Membership on the National Task Group on United Church–Jewish Relations: the Rev. Don Koots (chairperson), the Rev. Clinton Mooney, Linda Payne, the Rev. Bill Phipps, Carolyn Pogue Phipps, Fritz Voll. All members had a part in writing the paper. Clint Mooney did rewriting, editing, and compiling. Linda Hunter, DM, was a member of the sub-committee in its early stages.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **WHAT IS ANTI-JUDAISM?**

Anti-Judaism and antisemitism can arise in a variety of ways. It happens, for example, when we

- emphasize and illustrate Christian teaching by negatively contrasting it with Jewish teaching
- use scripture to illustrate behaviour that is sinful for Christians by using Jews as examples
- apply Jewish self-criticism (in the psalms or prophets) to condemn Jews rather than to stimulate our own self-examination
- speak of the church as having displaced or superseded Israel in its election, as in speaking of the church as the “New Israel”
- regard Jews as being concerned only with the well-being of Jews, and thinking of God as sharing this attitude
- blame Jews for the death of Jesus
- deny historical events such as the Holocaust
- speak of Jews as children, pawns, or servants of the devil (cf. John 8:42–46)

***To Make a Distinction:*** We realize that a strict distinction between anti-Judaism and antisemitism is difficult to make. However, we want to address errors that can be challenged and corrected, and we believe that such a distinction has some practical value toward that end.

“Anti-Judaism” (as we are using it in this paper) is the negative stereotyping of Jews and Jewish beliefs. It is still current in Christian thinking and teaching and found in many approaches to the New Testament. It includes the idea of supersessionism which says that the Jews were rejected by God and replaced by the church. It singles out some Jewish leaders as the killers of Jesus. A person who is anti-Jewish would see conversion to Christianity and baptism as a “remedy” for Jewishness.

“Antisemitism” (as we are using it) is hatred of Jews. (More broadly, the word means “opposed to Semites,” which includes Arabs and other semitic peoples as well, but primarily it is used with reference to Jews.) Conversion and baptism are not enough to “remedy” Jewishness, according to an antisemite. Jewishness is a permanent, inborn characteristic which cannot be removed. Denial of the Holocaust, thinking of Jews today as responsible for the death of Jesus, transforming the execution of Jesus into a metaphysical act of decide for which Jews are culpable, claiming that Jews (just by being Jews) are demonic—these are all acts of antisemitism.

This paper is only indirectly about antisemitism. It is more about combatting ignorance than about directly combatting prejudice (or myth, see Appendix D). It is about confronting anti-Judaism in the way we interpret Christian scriptures and in the way we use the scriptures in the church.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIAN JEWS OR JEWISH CHRISTIANS?**

**The Jewish community is adamantly opposed to the idea that one can convert to Christianity and still remain a Jew. Jews converting to Christianity are no longer considered part of Jewish life. In the past, such converts have been mourned as if they had died.**

**The United Church is bound by the principle of accepting the self-definition of other religious groups. Groups that call themselves Messianic Jews, Hebrew Christians, or Jews for Jesus are accepted in their own right. The United Church would not consider such groups to be representative of the Jewish community. Such groups are uniquely specialized and representative only of themselves even within the Christian community. The United Church–Jewish relationship depends upon direct relations between the United Church and Jewish groups and individuals.**

**The United Church does not seek to convert Jews. However, it welcomes into its membership individuals of all other faith backgrounds who, desiring membership, make a sincere and informed confession of Christian faith. This includes people with a Jewish heritage. It is recognized that conversion from Judaism to Christianity is not needful for salvation.**

**In recent years the churches associated with the World Council of Churches have moved away from mission and conversion in interfaith relations, seeking dialogue between equal partners. Some evangelical or fundamentalist churches still seek to evangelize Jews or they support groups that do so. The United Church does not support this activity. The United Church dialogues with Jews for purposes of mutual understanding, not conversion.**

### **THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CONSIDERS CONVERTED JEWS TO BE CHRISTIANS**

For Judaism, the matter of conversion is quite clear: a Jew who joins the Christian church can no longer be a member of the Jewish community. If a Jew comes to accept the divinity of Jesus, or a trinitarian understanding of God, or initiation into the Christian community through Christian baptism, these things are seen as antithetical to Judaism. Many Jews who convert to Christianity do not agree that the essence of Judaism is contradicted by faith in Jesus Christ; they believe that they can be both Jews and Christians at the same time; they believe that such a position was possible in the first century CE and it should be possible now. While agreeing that such a position might have been possible in the first century, Jewish

leaders affirm that both Judaism and Christianity have developed considerably since then: in part, Christianity has extended its claim that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human; in part, Judaism has clarified its rejection of a divine-human incarnation. The two religions have grown apart, and it is not apparent that they can be conjoined now. Furthermore, the history of the relationship between the two religions has been one in which Jews have been extremely persecuted by Christians; to suggest that the religions can now be (and presumably always could have been) easily conjoined is an affront to the blood that has been shed. This view holds that Judaism and Christianity are distinct religions; at best, they can be equal dialogue partners, recognizing a shared ancestry and assisting each other in the search for understanding and truth. This is the view of the United Church. Self-defined Christian Jews are accepted by the United Church in their own right as a separate religious grouping, not as representative of Judaism nor of mainstream Christianity, nor as a bridging group between the two religions.

## **THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSION TO JEWS**

In past centuries Jews were often forcibly baptized under threat of torture or death. Jewish children were taken away from their parents to be brought up in Christian homes. Jewish congregations were sometimes ordered to listen to Christian preachers in their own synagogues. Debates between Jewish and Christian scholars were arranged to prove the superiority of the Christian faith over that of Judaism.

The (Christian) Great Awakening of the 19th century spawned many associations that were concerned with “mission to the Jews.” The momentum from that movement extended into the 20th century and, among other things, influenced the work of the International Missionary Council (IMC). Beginning in 1927, the IMC formed the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews (IMCCAJ) drawing together diverse associations and societies concerned with this mission work. This committee was influential in the pre-war years, participating in the gatherings that eventually led to the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The committee recognized that many converts continued to follow Jewish traditions; it recognized that many did not feel fully accepted in church congregations where anti-Judaic teaching and preaching was never questioned. It wondered “what to do with” converted Jews. After much debate, the committee opposed the establishment of a separate church made up only of converts. It encouraged existing churches to work harder at integrating converted Jews into their congregational life. It continued to encourage churches to work at converting Jews to Christianity. For the history of the committee, see Allan R. Brockway, *For Love of the Jews: A Theological History of the IMCCAJ, 1927—1961*, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, England: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1992, published on the Internet: [www.abrock.com/LoveFrame.html](http://www.abrock.com/LoveFrame.html).

In Europe in the 1930s and ‘40s, the antisemitic racial policies of the Nazis were applied equally to Jews, to Jewish converts to Christianity, and to the descendants of Jewish converts. All were regarded as being Jews and were persecuted accordingly. The churches were forced to dismiss their pastors who were of Jewish origin. While officially churches did little to help their members who were Jewish converts, individual Christians and congregations tried to assist them to flee from countries under Nazi rule. The Jewish community considered the

converts to be Christian and offered them no assistance either during the war or afterward. Converted Jews still face racial discrimination as do Jews themselves.

## **FROM MISSION TO DIALOGUE**

The Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews continued to operate after World War II. With the founding of the State of Israel, the emergent WCC was pressured by the churches in the Middle East for political support against actions of the Jewish state. The representatives of the missionary movement pointed out to the World Council the special theological issues that the church has to deal with in relation to Israel. Some even began to say that Jews should not be included in Christian mission: “Are the Jews included in ‘all the nations’? No. Indeed, in the Old and New Testaments, the expression ‘all the nations’ designates non-Jewish peoples, ‘gentiles.’ Israel is distinguished from all the nations by the fact that God has elected it and called it ‘my people.’” (Wilhelm Vischer in 1956, quoting the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19, cited in Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 147 n.3) The missionaries themselves paved the way for a new understanding of the Christian–Jewish relationship. In 1961 the IMCCAJ was fully integrated into the World Council of Churches together with the International Missionary Council. The IMCCAJ became the Committee on the Church and the Jewish People. A new approach to the Christian–Jewish relationship found expression in the 1982 recommendation of the WCC Executive Committee that mission be abandoned in favour of dialogue.

## **CONVERTED JEWS: MESSIANIC JEWS, HEBREW CHRISTIANS, JEWS FOR JESUS**

Even in the first two centuries CE, congregations of Jewish Christians (e.g. the Nazarenes, the Ebionites) faced opposition from both the Jewish community and the gentile church. They did not participate in the development of rabbinic Judaism nor in that of the Christian church. Some Jewish–Christian congregations in Syria lasted into the seventh century, but vanished with the rise of Islam. Groups of converted Jews today may share the fate of this early Jewish Christianity: rejection by the Jewish community and uneasy acceptance amongst Christian groups.

Some evangelical and many fundamentalist churches, not associated with the WCC, are still committed to evangelizing Jews. Instead of being automatically integrated into existing Christian congregations, converted Jews are supported if they want to form their own communities. The theology behind these relatively new movements is dispensationalist and eschatological. (For the idea of dispensations see *The Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 5[4] or *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 195.) The eschatological hope is that Israel as a whole will one day be “saved,” this being interpreted to mean that Judaism will accept Jesus as Messiah. Dispensationally, it is believed that the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) are now coming to an end and that the conversion of Israel is beginning with movements like the “Messianic Jews” (Romans 11:25–26). In Israel such groups face official rejection. Evangelists associated with them are accused of taking advantage of those Jews who have grown up in atheistic environments or have little knowledge of Judaism. Conversely, interpreting the same passages

(especially Romans 9—11) , many of the churches associated with the World Council recognize that God’s covenant with Israel as a whole has not been abrogated; Judaism (i.e. all of Israel) is seen as an equal sibling of Christianity.

**WHERE DO WE STAND?**

The United Church of Canada is a member of the WCC. It has benefited from the learnings of the WCC’s consultations with representatives of the Jewish community. It approves the statement by the Executive Committee of the WCC entitled “Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish–Christian Dialogue.” Here evangelism and conversion are clearly abandoned in favour of dialogue and mutual witness. While dialogue can bring the two communities closer together for cooperation on common goals, it also tends to deepen the knowledge and prior faith commitments of the participants. With many Jews we share hope for a better world under the rule of God; we work together here and now for justice, peace, and the preservation of creation. We seek a friendly relationship with Judaism that will help us learn from each other and correct the distorted images that have arisen during a long history of animosity.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **ANTISEMITISM: AN ENDURING PROBLEM IN WESTERN SOCIETY**

Prof. Alan T. Davies

In 1985, Canada witnessed the trials (under different sections of the Criminal Code) of two resident antisemites, Ernst Zundel in Toronto, Ontario, and James Keegstra in Red Deer, Alberta. Some years later, in Moncton, New Brunswick, another vocal antisemite, Malcolm Ross, was removed from his teaching position in the local public school system, following a board of inquiry investigation. In my own university, a psychotic professor of Celtic studies (now deceased) was suspended because of his antisemitic writings and aberrant behaviour. Obviously, antisemitism, although not rampant in Canadian society, is not dead either, despite all the lessons of history and despite the horrendous events of the 20th century. Canada, in fact, spawned antisemites in earlier eras, notably the Quebec fascist, Adrien Arcand, during the 1930s and, perhaps surprisingly, the famous figure of Goldwin Smith, once the idol of the Toronto intelligentsia and the mentor of the young William Lyon Mackenzie King at the turn of the century. Our history in this regard is not as pure as most Canadians are inclined to believe. Moreover, both Anglo and French Canada have long contained nativist strains that, when the social fabric is torn by economic and political gales, soon show their dangerous side.

The exclusion of Jewish refugees during the Nazi era was only one example of what even democratic nations are capable of when they feel threatened. After World War II, there was a great revulsion in Western society against Nazi-style antisemitism but, as the French writer Pierre Paraf has remarked, the power and complexity of the ideology of race, the dominant modern form of antisemitism, “does not allow us hope that it was totally effaced, even in the most crushing of defeats” (Pierre Paraf, *Le Racisme Dans Le Monde*). In such men as Zundel, Keegstra, and Ross, the melody lingers on. If it lingers on in Canada, a country in which, in spite of the examples I have mentioned, antisemitism has been more the exception than the rule, it certainly lingers in countries in which it has been the rule rather than the exception, although usually beneath the surface and usually intermingled with other discordant “isms.” Few would dispute this claim; there is too much evidence to support it. Synagogues still have swastikas painted on them, Jewish cemeteries are still desecrated, Jewish communities are still victimized by terrorist attacks (not only in Israel). A new generation of antisemites dedicated to Holocaust denial has arisen, and they are on the Internet. The disputes arise when we seek to understand why what has been called the world’s oldest hatred continues to endure in the twilight of the 20th century, indeed, to replant itself in the soil of a changing civilization, a civilization far more cosmopolitan than it was 50 years ago.

I wish to reflect on this strange fact. One reason, I believe, has to do with the peculiar nature of antisemitism which, contrary to popular belief, is not a prejudice or species of prejudice, but a complex negative myth that took a long time to evolve in the history of the West. As soon as one uses the word “myth” one places the subject in a new dimension. A myth is a story, sometimes a fable, either good or bad, about the great questions of human existence. Hence myths have cosmic implications; they are about life, yet are larger than life; they deal with good and evil, especially the origins of evil, and this makes them a source of perennial

fascination. I have been reading recently Elaine Pagels' new book, *The Origins of Satan*, which is really a study of the rise of the idea of cosmic evil in ancient sectarian Judaism and early Christianity, remembering that Christianity was one of the "Judaisms" of antiquity. The sectarians demonized their enemies and bestowed on them cosmic motivations. "Your father is the devil and you choose to carry out your father's desires" declares the Jesus of the fourth gospel to the "Jews" of the fourth gospel, whoever they are. This is a mythic definition of the Jews, and it is not without reason that John has sometimes been called the "father of antisemitism." Whether this is a fair assessment of John is a question that I will beg for the moment. The point is that antisemitism—real antisemitism—begins as soon as the mythic dimension raises its head, and the history of antisemitism is the history of the mythologization of the Jews.

Myths, of course, need not be religious; they can also be secular, even scientific. The great race myth of the white Europeans, the Aryan myth, a construct of the 19th century, was both a historical and a scientific myth, and all the more dangerous for that reason. The very term "antisemitism," which was coined in Germany during the second German Reich, was chosen because it had a scientific ring, and the language of science in the modern age is the language of truth. As the great German Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich, once said, myth in the modern age is believable "only in scientific guise" (Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*). Only a few generations ago, the doctrines of race were accepted as good science, allowing the antisemites of our day to demonize the Jews far more effectively and with far more horrendous results than the antisemites of past ages. "I am an antisemite" means literally "I am against the Semites." "I am against the Semites not merely because they are inferior but also because they are evil." So, as Jean-Paul Sartre observed long ago (*Anti-Semite and Jew*), the Jew conjured up in the imagination of the antisemite is a cosmic figure, and it is this cosmic element in antisemitism that explains its perennial appeal and allows the oldest hatred to renew itself and dress itself continually in new garb. Myths are not easily destroyed. They have a way of coming back in new forms. We are both creatures of myth and myth-making creatures, and the question is not whether we will live with or without myths, but whether we will live with good myths or bad myths. Antisemitism is based on a bad myth that we have lived with too long already, but its mythic foundations help to explain its strange persistence in the post-Holocaust world.

Another reason for the durability of antisemitism, not unrelated to the first, has to do with its many-layered character. Technically, antisemitism is a product of modernity because it presupposes modern racial science; in fact, it is like a great snowball that has been rolled from antiquity to the present day. The snowball has its beginnings in the pre-Christian Hellenistic world. Ancient Egyptian xenophobia, rekindled by the Roman conquest of the Greek kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean, started the trouble. The new rulers showed some favouritism toward the local Jewish population in Alexandria, causing resentment on the part of the local Greeks, which in turn churned the waves of violence and bred a line of literary Jew-haters.

The names of Posidonius, Apollonius Molon, and Apion (a contemporary of Jesus) are associated with the new genre. The Jews, according to Apion, whom we know through Josephus, the Jewish historian of antiquity, kidnapped hapless Greeks, fattened them secretly in their Temple in Jerusalem, and sacrificed them while swearing an oath over their entrails of

perpetual enmity with the rest of the human race. Apion also accused the Jews of atheism, sedition, parasitism, and the worship of gold. These charges infected the Roman upper classes, colouring Latin poetry and prose with anti-Judaism before and after the birth of Christianity. Later, when the church baptized the Graeco-Roman world after the fourth century, it also baptized pagan animosity, creating a permanent deposit in the subterranean memory of the West. That was the first layer. Jews were perceived as haters of humanity.

Because Christianity was a strain of Judaism that emerged prior to the disastrous war with Rome (CE 66–70), the New Testament, which is largely a collection of Jewish writings, contains the marks of intra-Jewish religious conflict both before and after (but especially after) the Roman war. For example, the Matthaean image of the Pharisees as legalistic, hypocritical, thieving, impious, fanatical and murderous (Matthew 23)—an image much exploited by later antisemites—obviously reflects the angry state of Jewish-Christian relations in the post-war era when the Pharisees (the apparent ancestors of rabbinic Judaism) and the (Jewish) Christians confronted each other following the national disaster. Similarly, the Johannine image of the Jews as the children of the devil (John 8:44f.)—also much exploited by later antisemites—reflects the final stage in the deterioration of these relations, as well as the rivalries of the diaspora and a nasty local situation in Ephesus, the probable site of the gospel. However, the anti-Judaism of the New Testament is still, for the most part (Luke-Acts is the important exception), a Jewish anti-Judaism, i.e. a sectarian rhetoric rooted in the polemical battles of antiquity and in the identity crisis of the apostolic church.

Unfortunately, the residue of these battles became the foundation of what historians call the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition of the post-New Testament church: Christian theological anti-Judaism. It was the second layer of the snowball. When ex-pagans rather than Jews began to write Christian theology, they changed the intra-Jewish argument into a gentile-Jewish one. This was not a change for the better. The ethnocentric pride of the gentiles, infused into the new religion, had an alienating effect: what Jules Isaac called a teaching of contempt developed, the result of which was the famous image of the deicidal, carnal, and accursed Jew, so familiar in Western folklore.

Each subsequent age added more layers. I cannot review the history of antisemitism in a single lecture, but I will summarize some of its highlights. During the Middle Ages, a burgeoning commercial economy forced the Jews into unpopular roles—huckster, middleman and money-lender. Already Cain, the murderer, the Jew, in the minds of insolvent Christians, also became Judas, the traitor who sold Christ for 30 pieces of silver: a dangerous fusion of religious and economic symbols. Recruitment campaigns for the Crusades stirred religious fanaticism and slaughter in Christendom, although the Popes did what they could to stem the violence. Discriminatory legislation followed the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), including the yellow badge (adapted, incidentally, from the Muslim world). The Talmud was attacked and, on one occasion, actually burned in Paris (1242), beginning a new tradition. Jewish converts often instigated these attacks, seeking to eradicate their former religion by destroying its sacred texts, which in their eyes prevented Jews from turning to Christ.

To this day, anti-Talmudism remains a persistent motif in the literature of antisemitism—read the transcripts to the various Keegstra trials! The strange charges of ritual murder and host desecration arose in northern Europe: the deicidal Jews, not content with having tortured and

crucified Christ once, torture and crucify him again and again in the form of a Christian child or the sacred wafer (so the story went). When the disasters of plague and famine swept the 14th century, the Jews found themselves vilified as well-poisoners and sorcerers, as well as conspirators against Christendom in league with the devil. The devil was a Christian addition, but the conspiracy charge had pre-Christian roots.

Humanistic strains in the 17th century—the “prelude to the Enlightenment”—modified traditional Christian images to some extent, and the great Protestant artist Rembrandt employed young Jews from the Amsterdam ghetto as models for his drawings of Jesus. Despite these hopeful trends, the end of the century saw the publication of one of the classics of modern antisemitism, Johann Eisenmenger’s *Entdecktes Judenthum* (i.e. *Judaism Unmasked*, CE 1700), a savage parody of rabbinic ideas much exploited by later antisemites. Paradoxically, the Age of Reason, that second renaissance of European culture, not only did not abolish Jew-hatred but, through its glorification of pagan antiquity, actually managed to revive it. To see the Jews through pagan eyes was to see them as haters of humanity and a people innately flawed. The ex-Christian philosophers of the Enlightenment despised Christianity partly because of its Jewish connections. They saw the Christian as only a corrupted pagan, but they saw the Jew as beyond redemption: in their eyes, Jewish nature and Jewish religion were one and the same. Obviously, a more sinister form of anti-Judaism was incubating. Racial fires had been stoked since the dawn of the modern era, partly as a result of the great Age of Discovery and the European encounter with large numbers of non-Europeans. The birth of the life sciences and the Enlightenment passion for the classification of data led to radical new theories about human origins and human nature. It required the 19th century, however, to turn these theories into a full-blown ideology of race, or the conviction that race explains everything. This is the proper sense of the word “racism” and the newly invented term “antisemitism” assumed this principle.

On the strength of these ideas, anti-Jewish demagogues, obsessed with Jewish emancipation in post-feudal Europe, lashed out at Christendom’s traditional enemies. Intermingling religious and racial images, they tried to force the Jews back into the ghetto. They also tried to turn back the hands of the clock by associating Judaism with everything else they disliked about the modern age, for example, capitalism and political democracy. In Germany, the great composer, Richard Wagner, wove nationalistic and racial themes into his operas, while prophesizing the birth of a new order and a new Siegfried-type of German “Prometheus.” Modern music, he believed, was a “corpse devoured by (Jewish) worms” (*Judaism in Music*). The voices of the left were fully as virulent as the voices of the right. Following the example of Karl Marx, they railed against semitic capitalism in the name of Aryan socialism. The Jews became convenient symbols of a world disoriented by economic, social, and political upheavals of every description. They were blamed for everything. Layer upon layer was added to the snowball. This capacity to add new twists to an old theme is an important reason for the strange durability of antisemitism. Today, after the Holocaust, a brand new layer has been added, that of Holocaust denial. A new generation of antisemites, building on old strata, has sought to revise history and rehabilitate Nazi Germany. No effort has been spared by the post-Auschwitz antisemites to deconstruct and reconstruct the past 60 years, and their fanatical labours continue.

At the moment, in Canada, according to a recently issued report on world antisemitism (*Antisemitism: World Report, 1996*), antisemitic activity is only marginal, appearing mostly on the social fringe. Canadian antisemitism, however, has not disappeared; it remains below the surface, ready to reappear if a major crisis should supply the occasion. The fires of nationalism currently burning in Quebec probably represent the greatest danger, but the elastic quality of antisemitism and its capacity to attach itself to any public discontent should never be underestimated. In other countries the situation varies, but even in countries with relatively clean records a hard core element remains.

Certain warning signs are constant: for example, a tendency to minimize the Holocaust rather than deny it outright (a particular danger in contemporary German historiography); the legitimation of exclusivist forms of nationalism (ultimately, in fact, all nationalism has an exclusivist quality; for this reason, I have never liked to call myself a Canadian nationalist); the general coarsening of public discourse in much of Western society; the strange revival in places of racial and quasi-racial language, sometimes direct, sometimes indirect (certain so-called anti-racist groups seem contaminated with racism themselves); the legitimation of violence on the part of anti-racist vigilantes and other ideologues. A puerile example of this tendency occurred on the Queen's University campus in 1994 when the anti-racist editor of a student paper suggested that whites should be savaged with insults, profanity, and even demands for their death because only in this way can racial minorities lay effective siege to the bastions of racial privilege and power in a white-dominated society (*The Toronto Globe & Mail*, March 11, 1994). One sociology professor evidently supported this position, saying that violent language attracts attention and is therefore beneficial; moreover, she added, excluded and subordinated groups have rights that dominant groups lack! In my opinion, this is a dangerous thesis, not only because of its obvious self-righteousness. Violent language begets violence, and thus undermines the basic foundations of social tolerance in a democratic nation.

This is part of what is meant by the coarsening of public discourse. It is not only *not* the way to defeat racism, it is the way to promote racism in a new key. And such coarsening is definitely the way to stoke the embers of any incipient antisemitism that may still be smouldering in the social undergrowth. The means we choose in order to combat social evils such as racism and antisemitism require as much attention as the evils themselves. If we are not careful, we may fall into boobytraps of our own making.

## APPENDIX E

### THE UNITED CHURCH RECORD

Prof. Alan T. Davies

In spite of its social gospel roots and its liberal image, including a general antipathy to social evils of every type, the United Church is not a stranger to anti-Judaism and antisemitism. For example, the 1927 *Yearbook* accuses Jews of wielding inordinate power and causing problems wherever they settle (pp. 116–117). Occasional pro-fascist letters and articles can be found in *The New Outlook* during the 1930s, some of which are quite anti-Jewish (e.g. see H.B. Hendershot, “The German Point of View,” August 9, 1933, p. 584). Even in the 1970s, *The United Church Observer* crossed the line that separates legitimate comment and illegitimate insinuation on more than one occasion (see especially, John Nicholls Booth, “How Zionists Manipulate Your News,” March 1972, and an antisemitic advertisement describing “official Judah” as controlling the money of the world, March 1974).

But these are largely aberrations. Antisemitism and fascism were frequently denounced in the pre-war period, both in the United Church press and in many pulpits. Prominent preachers such as Richard Roberts, E. Crossley Hunter, G. Stanley Russell, and Ernest Marshall Howse decried the Nazi persecutions in Europe and racial slurs against Jews in Canada. Especially commendable was Gordon Domm, the less well known minister of Bathurst United Church in Toronto. Two months before *Kristallnacht*, the General Council extended its empathy to the Jewish people in a moving resolution (R.O.P., 8th G.C., Toronto, September 1938, pp. 54–55). Following the Nazi pogrom, the church rang with denunciations, and the King government found itself swamped with pro-Jewish, pro-refugee resolutions from scores of Canadians. Claris Silcox, the secretary of the Christian Social Service Council of Canada, had called for Christian action as early as 1936. Now the cry for rescue arose with renewed force. *The New Outlook* added its voice, attacking the Canadian government for dragging its feet and criticizing the churches for their earlier silence: “To keep out others, when our own house is largely empty, is to be ‘guilty of a political immoralism as grave in its implications as the crude immoralism of the Nazis.’” (February 10, 1939) Presbyteries and Conferences issued statements and resolutions supporting the newly formed National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution. In 1939 pro-refugee resolutions were passed by virtually every Conference of the United Church from coast to coast.

During the war years, the United Church persisted in its efforts to bring Jewish escapees, especially children, to Canada. These efforts largely failed. The church only staged moral appeals, and the official agencies of the church could not arouse the larger national conscience. The United Church was not silent, if editorials, letters, resolutions, sermons, and lobbying activities are taken into account, despite claims to the contrary. In Canada, only the Quakers have a better record. The Anglicans, many Baptists, and evangelicals also raised their voices on behalf of Jews. Still, there was no mass outcry for rescue in Christian Canada, and such efforts as there were failed to move the Canadian government which held all the cards.\*

Serious tensions arose between the United Church and the Jewish community in Canada in the post-war era. These were prompted in part by the New Curriculum adopted by the church

in 1962, which, for example, continued to blame “the devil and all his hosts: the jealousy of the Pharisees, the scheming of the Sadducees, the treachery of Judas, the hysteria of the crowd” for the crucifixion of “the Lord of glory” (cf. Donald Mathers, *The Word and the Way*, Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1962, pp. 61–62). Also contributing were the increasingly hostile criticisms of the State of Israel featured in *The Observer*. While expressing concern for justice toward Palestinians, A.C. Forrest, the editor of the day, adopted a stridently anti-Zionist tone and revealed an insensitivity to anti-Judaism in Christian theology and Christian history. The Jewish community regarded his accounts of the geopolitical conflicts of the Middle East as distorted and unfair, and his insensitivity as deeply offensive. Under Forrest’s editorship, *The Observer* published the antisemitic Booth article, “How Zionists Manipulate Your News,” instigating a notice of libel from B’nai B’rith. Court action was averted, but United Church–Jewish relations have not been fully restored to this day.\*\*

\*See Alan T. Davies and Marilyn Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches? Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era*, Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1997.

\*\*There are several accounts of this conflict. Cf. Arnold Ages, *The United Church Observer and the State of Israel*, ADL Basic Documents, August 1969; Reuben Slonim, *Family Quarrel: The United Church and the Jews*, Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1977; David Taras, “A Church Divided: A.C. Forrest and The United Church’s Middle East Policy,” David Taras and David Goldberg (editors), *The Domestic Battleground: Canada and the Arab-Israel Conflict*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989; also, Jennifer Palin, “The United Church and the Jews,” unpublished paper, Emmanuel College, 1995.

## APPENDIX F

### ANTI-JUDAISM IN FEMINIST WRITINGS AND THEOLOGY

The Very Rev. Lois M. Wilson

Some Christian feminists give the impression, whether intended or not, that Jesus' approach to women in the Greek scriptures represents a radical discontinuity with the position of women in the Hebrew scriptures. This negative portrayal of Judaism is used as a foil to emphasize Jesus' own sensitivity and to illustrate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. These are not just minor lapses or misunderstandings by individual scholars (cf. documentation in Katharina von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994). Rather, they represent a body of material that contributes to anti-Judaism and to the religious teaching of contempt.

Christians (feminists and others) sometimes present Judaism as Christianity's prehistory—a quaint ancestor of the more enlightened church. It is not acknowledged that Judaism has developed as an independent alternative tradition. Instead Judaism is seen as the *prologue* to Christianity. As such, it can be claimed or rejected, appropriated or ignored, accepted or repudiated, at will. It is only the first act of a three-act play. In fact, many Christians are ignorant about Jewish culture, history, and religion. The phrase "Judeo-Christian tradition" is often used somewhat loosely. The "Judeo" reference is limited to the content of the Hebrew Bible, and the growth and evolution of Judaism that happened independently and contemporaneously to Christian development is neglected. A better understanding of "Judeo-Christian tradition" would include at minimum the Written and Oral Torah, the Mishnah, and the Talmud.

It is common among secular feminists as well as among Christian feminists to identify Judaism as the source of patriarchy and of a "male God." Judaism is thereby made an *historical scapegoat* for sexism. Ever since Eve was interpreted as symbolically responsible for death, sin, alienation, and evil by Christians (e.g. Ecclesiasticus 25:24, extended by Christian writings like 1 Timothy 2:13-14), androcentrism has created a world from which women are either absent or eclipsed by men. Judaism, as the antecedent of Christian history, is blamed. In response there are movements to completely abandon patriarchy and develop an equal counterpart to male history and theology by developing "her-story." Rather than accepting women's displacement, the lives of women are reconstructed in the public, social, and religious spheres without reference to Judaism, which is thereby rendered invisible.

The patriarchal God of Judaism is seen as the *antithesis* of a loving Christian God. The models of ancient Near Eastern goddesses, based on matriarchal religions, are preferred. An ideal utopian time in history is envisioned where peace and harmony reigned and where alienation between men and women, humanity and nature did not exist. Associations with Paradise are evoked. Efforts are being made by some Christian and goddess feminist scholars to raise awareness of the powerful and pervasive anti-Judaism lurking in this feminist consciousness. What is called for is more sensitivity to the issues, and radical changes in theology.

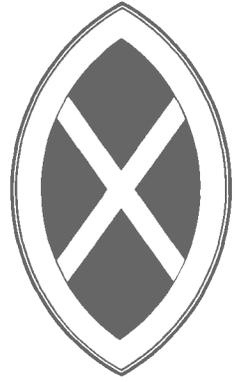
We know now that the women of the Jesus movement and of the early church did not suddenly and simply appear out of nowhere. Social change is not that easy. Feminist scholarship has revealed that within Judaism there were many openings and an emerging degree of freedom for women at the time of Jesus. The American scholar, Bernadette Brooten, for one (*Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), has researched the position of women in the early synagogue by analyzing memorial tablets; she finds reference to numerous women leaders, ranging from leaders in the synagogue to leaders in the cult. Women interacted with Jesus because they were already questioning their culture and they sensed in him someone who supported and strengthened them. He was a Jew and his perspectives emerged from and built upon more widely shared Jewish traditions.

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# *Bearing Faithful Witness*

Six-Session Study Guide

## **Notes for the Leader**

The following study guide provides suggestions for a six-session exploration of the material in *Bearing Faithful Witness* (BFW). At the end of each session there is a box identifying critical issues raised by BFW and questions for further in-depth exploration. On page 113 there is a “Quicker Study Guide,” which also can be used with youth and young adults.

You will need a copy of BFW for each participant and you are invited to make a sufficient number of photocopies. It will be helpful if participants can begin reading before the first session. Each session has suggested reading from the Bible and *Bearing Faithful Witness*.

Sessions are designed to be approximately one and a half hours in length, but your group may decide it needs more time. Don't panic if you don't get through everything. Discussion topics are suggestions to get the conversation going and there may be times when you decide to go with the flow of the group's interest and concerns rather than finishing every item in the session. Feel free to adapt questions and activities to suit your group.

There are a number of suggested resources at the back of *Bearing Faithful Witness*. Try to have on hand as many of these as possible for the group to look at. It will be helpful to have a copy of the Tanakh (the modern Jewish scriptures) on hand. Encourage members of your group to keep their eyes out for items in the media related to current anti-Jewish activity and to bring copies of articles to the group.

## **Session 1: Introductory Session**

### **Preparation**

- Read the following sections in *Bearing Faithful Witness* (pages 3, 6–7, 76–79, and 85–86): “Preamble: Why This Paper?,” “Introduction,” “Appendix C,” and “Appendix E.” If possible, contact participants and invite them to begin reading these pages.
- Read Matthew 15:1–7, 14; Matthew 19:13–14; Matthew 22:15–18; Matthew 26:47—27:26; Mark 12:28–34; Mark 14:43—15:15; Luke 7:30; Luke 9:46–50; Luke 12:1; Luke 18:9–14; Luke 20:39; Luke 23:50–51; and Luke 22:47—23:25.
- Write the passages for the debate activity onto separate sheets of paper for each group.
- Have available Bibles, a flip chart, and markers.
- Have name tags available if group members will not be known to each other.

### **Opening**

Welcome the group and invite people to introduce themselves if they do not already know one another.

Invite the group to read responsively Psalm 137:1–4.

### **Prayer**

*God of all exiled and suffering people, we remember in prayer the suffering of Jewish people in Babylon, in the European holocaust, in acts of hatred that still occur today. Forgive us our silence and our complicity. Restore us from our own exile of misunderstanding, ignorance, or fear, that all your people may find their song again. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

### **Introduction**

Invite people to find one other person with whom to discuss the following question:

- What is your main concern as you think about United Church–Jewish relations?

Invite the group to share concerns in plenary. Record key ideas on newsprint.

Invite each person to tell one story or experience about his or her own relationship with Jewish people (e.g. a visit to a synagogue, a friendship, participation in a celebration such as a seder meal with Jewish friends). If the group is large, this sharing may take place in small groups, with the key events summarized on newsprint to share with others.

Reflect together on the experiences that were shared. Does the group seem to have a lot of contact with Jewish neighbours and Jewish experience? What have these relationships been like? You might want to arrange for a visit to a nearby synagogue or invite a rabbi or cantor to come and meet with your group.

## **Discussion**

### ***Why This Study?***

If people have not already done so, allow a few minutes for people to read the “Preamble: Why This Paper?” on page 3.

- What are some recent examples you have heard of antisemitism or anti-Judaism?
- In what ways have Christian scriptures or teachings been used to justify antisemitism/anti-Judaism? What responsibility do we have to respond to this?

## **A Debate**

Divide into two groups. Give the groups the following passages with which to work:

Group 1: Matthew 15:1–7, 14; Matthew 22:15–18; Luke 18:9–14; Luke 12:1; Luke 7:30

Group 2: Luke 20:39; Mark 12:28–34; Matthew 19:13–14; Luke 9:46–50; Luke 23:50–51;  
Luke 13:31; John 3:1–10.

Explain that the two teams will present different sides of a debate and that individuals do not necessarily have to agree with their team’s assigned point of view.

Ask members of Group 1 to use their passages to develop arguments that defend the following statement: Be it resolved: that all parts of the gospels are inherently anti-Jewish and present a negative view of all Jewish people, especially the Jewish leaders.

Ask members of Group 2 to use the passages they are given to defend an opposing point of view.

Give time for each group to present its arguments. Invite participants to reflect on what they heard. Do you think that any or all parts of the gospels are anti-Jewish? If some parts of the gospels are anti-Jewish, how could they be interpreted in proclaiming the good news?

(If the style of formal debate is not comfortable for your group, please feel free to adapt in ways that are appropriate for you.)

## **Reflection**

Invite people to take a few minutes in silence to reflect on what they have heard during the session. Then return to the newsprint on which are written questions or issues raised during the introduction. Discuss significant questions.

- What is a question or concern you are left with at this time?

**Closing Prayer** (said in unison)

*May the strength of God lead us forth.*

*May the wisdom of God challenge us.*

*May the compassion of God empower us to love.*

*May the hope of God restore us.*

*May the love of God protect and nurture us, this day and always. Amen.*

In preparation for the next session ask the group to read the following sections of *Bearing Faithful Witness*: “The Relationship of the Two Testaments,” “The Old Testament,” and “The New Testament” (pages 14–38).

**Questions for In-Depth Conversation: One Covenant or Two?**

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34; 2 Corinthians 3:1–6, Hebrews 8–10; Romans 11

The language of “old” and “new” testaments (covenants) can be seen to arise from passages like Jeremiah 31 and 2 Corinthians 3. The Letter to the Hebrews offers an understanding of two covenants in which the first is displaced by the second. Paul’s argument in Romans, however, presents a different, one-covenant perspective. His metaphor of the olive root and its branches illustrates an organic, single-covenant understanding of the relationship between the church and Israel. John Calvin, the 16th century reformer, argued that the Old Testament saints participated with Christian believers in a single covenant insofar as they looked forward to the appearance of Christ in the flesh. It is this perspective that has been the inheritance of the United Church through its Presbyterian and Congregationalist roots.

*Bearing Faithful Witness* presents the view that there is one covenant with Israel, expanded through Christ to embrace gentiles; one covenant with different obligations for different participants (Jews and Christians). *What difference does it make to speak in this way of one covenant, as opposed to two separate but related covenants? Is there a third way, a single-covenant approach that allows for God’s faithfulness to Jews and Christians alike, but looks for some ultimate divine resolution (as Paul seems to hope in Romans)?*

*Bearing Faithful Witness* is focused on the Christian relationship with Judaism and is not directly concerned with relationships with other faiths. *Nonetheless, does the paper provide a model or guidance on how Christians could understand the relationships between Christianity and world religions other than Judaism?*

## **Session 2: The Relationship of the Two Testaments**

### **Preparation**

- Read *Bearing Faithful Witness* (pages 14–38): “The Relationship of the Two Testaments,” “The Old Testament,” and “The New Testament.”
- Have ready large sheets of newsprint and markers.
- Have on hand enough Bibles for everyone.
- On a flip chart, write the following:
  - Pair 1: Compare Jeremiah 31:15–17 with Matthew 2:17–18
  - Pair 2: Compare Deuteronomy 15:11 with Mark 14:7–8
  - Pair 3: Compare Exodus 24:5–8 with Mark 14:24
  - Pair 4: Compare Psalm 22:1, 2, 7, 8 and 18 with Mark 15:24, 29, 34
  - Pair 5: Compare 1 Samuel 2:1–10 with Luke 1:46–55
  - Pair 6: Compare Isaiah 42:6–7 with Luke 2:29–32
  - Pair 7: Compare Psalm 110:1, Psalm 8:6 with 1 Corinthians 15:24–27
  - Pair 8: Compare Daniel 7:7–9 with Revelation 3:1–22.

### **Opening**

Welcome any newcomers to the session.

### **Prayer**

*Author of the universe, Thank you for this time of exploration and learning. Thank you for the storytellers, scribes, and editors who gave us the gift of the scriptures. Thank you for today’s storytellers working at computers at home and in publishing houses to probe and listen for your Word. Be with them, and be with us as we speak the Word and listen for your will. Through your living Word we pray. Amen.*

### **Introduction**

Invite each person to share one insight or challenging new idea he or she encountered while reading the material in preparation for today’s session. Record key issues on newsprint. If the group is large, consider dividing into small groups for this. Don’t attempt to discuss issues that are raised at this time. There will be time at the end of the session to discuss significant questions that have not yet been addressed.

Distribute Bibles to everyone. Divide the group into pairs. (If there are more passages than people, double up the passages; if there are more people than passages, double up the people.)

Ask pairs to read their passages and compare them by discussing the following:

- In what circumstance was each passage written?

- Do you think the passages are connected? Explain.

After all pairs have finished their comparisons, invite them to report briefly to the large group what they discovered and what they conclude.

## **Discussion**

(If there are many people, divide into small groups)

- What is the Noahide Covenant, and what is its scriptural and current significance?
- Do you agree that Jesus was a Torah-observant Jew? What implications does this point of view have for Christians today?
- The document states that “the most prominent way of using Jewish scripture texts within Christian writings involved a promise and fulfillment motif.” What do you think might be the danger in this as the *only* interpretation of the Jewish texts?
- The document states that “the purpose of using the promise and fulfillment motif is to push us back into the texts that the followers of Jesus knew to be scripture and to find language there that makes sense of Jesus’ story.” Do you think that most United Church people would agree with that stated purpose? Do you agree? Explain.
- Compare the table of contents in your Bible with the order of books in the Jewish Bible noted on page 19 of *Bearing Faithful Witness*. Discuss the questions there.
- Many of us have heard negative comments about “the God of the Jewish Bible” that paint “that” God as harsh, judgmental, even cruel, while the God of Jesus and the early Christians is painted as compassionate and kind. In 1 Samuel 15:33, God commands Saul to slaughter the Amalekites. The document states that such texts “...can be just as problematic for Jews as they are for Christians.” Ask a volunteer to read Acts 5:1–11. What happened? How do we deal with it?

## **Reflection**

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on what you have heard during this session. Then return to the newsprint on which are written questions from the pre-reading. Discuss significant questions in the light of today’s session.

## **Closing Prayer**

*As we leave this gathering, may we walk in the footsteps of the faithful. May we live our faith in your light, O loving God. So may the story of Jesus Christ continue in our lives today. Amen.*

For Session 3, see the Preparation section. Ask people to read the biblical passages and the sections in *Bearing Faithful Witness* as noted.

**Questions for In-Depth Conversation: The Meaning of Fulfillment**

Read Luke 4:14–30; Acts 2:1–21; 4:1–12; 2 Corinthians 4:16—6.2

*Bearing Faithful Witness* presents the view that “fulfillment” in the New Testament is best understood by Christians as meaning a confirmation or recapitulation of history and scripture. “Fulfill” or “fulfillment” in the New Testament most commonly translates a Greek phrase that means “to make full.” *Bearing Faithful Witness* argues that the Old Testament (OT) scriptures were full of meaning already, and that the New Testament (NT) writers thought of New Testament events as “full-filling” these scriptures, over again, so to speak. There was, in other words, no deficiency or lack in the OT. A corollary drawn by *Bearing Faithful Witness* is that there are no unfulfilled promises in the OT that do not also remain unfulfilled in the NT.

The early Christian witness is that God has done something decisively new in Jesus Christ. The historic understanding of the church is that in Christ, Israel’s Messiah had come, been rejected as the prophets before, but had been raised from the dead by God. In his name the Holy Spirit descended on the small community of believers and in his name, finally, all things would be reconciled and perfected. In Christ a Saviour for the whole world had been given. Forgiveness of sin, peace with God, and the hope of life beyond the grave were now possible for all who accepted God’s gift in Jesus Christ.

*Does speaking of the extending of God’s covenant with Israel through Jesus to the gentiles adequately express the decisive newness of what God was accomplishing in Jesus? Is this new relationship applicable to gentiles only or does it relate also to Jews? As you examine NT passages that speak of fulfillment, does it make sense to understand them as *Bearing Faithful Witness* suggests, or in the traditional way, as the coming to pass of something promised beforehand? Are there other ways that these passages can be understood?*

## **Session 3: Matthew, Mark, and Luke**

### **Preparation**

- Read the following sections of *Bearing Faithful Witness* (pages 22–30): “The New Testament,” “The Gospel according to Matthew,” “Is Jesus the Messiah?” “The Gospel according to Mark,” and “The Gospel according to Luke and Luke’s Acts of the Apostles.”
- Read Matthew 26:47—27:31; Mark 14:43—15:20; and Luke 22:47—23:25.
- Read and compare Matthew 27:57 to Mark 15:42–43 and Matthew 22:34–40 to Mark 12:28–34.
- Bring copies of *The Hymn Book* or *Voices United*.
- Have available Bibles, a flip chart, and markers.

### **Opening**

Welcome newcomers. Invite someone to read aloud the following reflection, or you might read it together in unison from *Voices United* #275.

*It is not you who shape God:  
it is God who shapes you.  
If then you are the work of God,  
await the hand of the Artist who does all things in due season.  
Offer the Potter your heart, soft and tractable, and keep the form in which the Artist has  
fashioned you.  
Let your clay be moist, lest you grow hard and lose the imprint of the Potter’s hand.  
—Irenaeus, 2nd Century*

### **Prayer**

*Creator God, as we gather to reflect and learn together, keep our hearts open and soft and pliable. May we be ready to change, may we be ready to be challenged by the voices that have spoken your Word through many generations of faithful people. May we always be open to the new things you call us to understand and be and do. In the name of the Christ who makes all things new. Amen.*

### **Introduction**

Invite people to each share one insight or challenging new idea they encountered as they read the material in preparation for today’s session. Record key issues on newsprint. If the group is large, consider dividing into small groups for this. Don’t attempt to discuss issues that are raised at this time. There will be time at the end of the session to discuss significant questions that have not yet been addressed.

Read aloud or sing together verse two of “I Danced in the Morning” (*Voices United* #352 or *The Hymn Book* #106).

- What do you notice? What impression does the verse give of “the scribe and the Pharisee”? Record ideas on newsprint.
- Do you think this verse could leave listeners with a negative view of all Jewish leaders or even all Jewish people?
- Some people may hear this verse as though the disciples and Jesus were Christian like us, and the Pharisees, the Jewish “bad guys.” How would you revise this verse (don’t worry about rhyme) to give a different impression?

Discuss the following excerpt from *Bearing Faithful Witness*, in light of what you have just talked about:

Towards the end of Matthew’s gospel, bitterness against the Pharisees and other Jews seems to heighten... But perhaps it is some of them and not all Pharisees or all Jews who are criticized. To see Jesus’ critique as internal to Judaism, one Jew to others, changes our understanding of particular texts (page 24).

## **Discussion**

### ***Looking at Particular Passages***

If there are many people, divide into small groups.

Matthew’s gospel seems to reflect greater anger at the Pharisees than some of the other gospels. Compare Matthew’s telling of the following stories with the way the same story is told in Luke:

- The burial of Jesus: Matthew 27:57/Mark 15:42–43. Note how Joseph is described in each version.
- The greatest commandment: Matthew 22:34–40/Mark 12:28–34. Note the role of the Pharisees. Many scholars believe Matthew was a Pharisee or Jewish scholar himself. If this is so, how would you account for his strong indictment of the Jewish teachers and leaders?
- Is there an inconsistency when the same gospel account tells us to “love our enemies” (Matthew 5:44) and calls Pharisees and scribes “hypocrites” (Matthew 23:13)? Are the Pharisees and scribes “enemies”?
- When we take Matthew’s gospel out of its Jewish context, it can be heard as a Christian vs. Jewish text. How do you think we could encourage a different or fairer interpretation of this gospel?

### ***Is Jesus the Messiah?***

Spend a few minutes reviewing the material in *Bearing Faithful Witness* that deals with the question “Is Jesus the Messiah?” (box on page 25–26).

- In what ways do you think Christian understandings of “Messiah/Christ” are different from, or similar to, Jewish understandings of “Messiah”?
- In what sense, if any, do you think Jesus understood himself as Messiah? In what way do *you* understand Jesus as Christ or Messiah?

Encourage participants to listen closely to one another’s points of view rather than debating the rightness or wrongness of different faith perspectives.

### ***The Passion Narratives***

Imagine the following situation: A child comes up to you after worship one Sunday in Lent and asks, “How come the Jews killed Jesus?”

- How might you reply?
- What stories might you point to from the passion narratives to show that not all Jewish people disagreed with Jesus?
- What stories could you share that show how many of Jesus’ friends (who were Jewish, just as he was) took great risks to follow him and stand by him even at the time of his death?
- What would you most want that child to know about the relationship between Jesus and other Jewish people?

If time permits, you might take more time looking at the passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, noting some of the passages that have been used to justify anti-Judaism (Matthew 27:25; Mark 15:31, 38; Luke 23:18–20).

- What role did the Pharisees play in the crucifixion of Jesus?

### **Reflection**

Invite people to take a few minutes in silence to reflect on what they have heard during the session. Then return to the newsprint on which are written questions or issues from the pre-reading. Discuss significant questions.

- What is a question or issue you are still wondering about as you leave this time?

## **Closing Prayer**

*God of all the ages, your voice has spoken throughout the generations. Your voice of justice and compassion calls out to us in the voice of Jesus. May we hear your eternal voice in the words we use to bless one another.*

(Join together in unison in the Hebrew blessing, Numbers 6:24–27.)

*May God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May God lift up a countenance of light upon you and give you peace. Amen.*

In preparation for the next session ask the group to read the following sections of *Bearing Faithful Witness* on pages 28–34: “The Gospel according to Luke and Luke’s Acts of the Apostles” (continued from last session), “Acts” and “The Gospel according to John.” In addition, read the following Bible passages: John chapters 7, 8, 18, and 19:1–37; and Acts 3:13–20.

### **Questions for In-Depth Conversation: The Person and Identity of Jesus Christ**

Read Luke 24; John 1:1–18; Colossians 1:15–20

*Bearing Faithful Witness* focuses on what New Testament authors have written about the Jewish–Christian relationship, and what is said about Jesus insofar as it bears on this relationship. It tries to take Jesus seriously as a Jew of his time and place. It presents the view that God, through Christ, was making the benefits and blessings of the covenant with Israel available more widely in the world. *BFW* also suggests that for Christians, Jesus is made Christ/Messiah by God, but not so for Jews.

There is no question that Christians and Jews regard the person of Jesus in very different ways. The earliest Christian believers were Jews who believed that in Jesus, God had fulfilled the promise of a saviour for Israel. In Luke 24, the two friends on their way to Emmaus are gloomy with disappointment; they had hoped that Jesus “was the one to redeem Israel.” His execution seemed to make it clear that he could not have been the one. Their surprising encounter with the risen Christ began a revolution in understanding. The community of disciples came to see in the scripture of Israel testimony to the figure of a crucified and risen Messiah. John offers an additional perspective on the ultimate identity of Jesus, portraying Jesus as the incarnate Logos, the one through whom all things came to be. Colossians also affirms that through the pre-existent Christ all things came to be, and that through Christ’s incarnate work all things will achieve their redemption and intended perfection. The summary conviction of Colossians is that in Jesus Christ, “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Colossians 1:19).

*Is it possible in the purpose of God for Jesus to be Messiah for Christians, but not for Jews? Can there be two apparently opposed but nevertheless true answers to this single question? Or would it be better simply to acknowledge that synagogue and church disagree about the Messiahship of Jesus? What, then, might be the implications of this disagreement?*

## **Session 4: John and Acts**

### **Preparation**

- Read Chapters 2, 5, 6—8, 18, and 19:1–37 in the Gospel of John, and Chapters 2–5 in the Acts of the Apostles.
- Read the following sections in *Bearing Faithful Witness* on pages 28–34: “The Gospel according to Luke and Luke’s Acts of the Apostles” (continued from the last session), “Acts,” and “The Gospel according to John.”
- Have ready large sheets of newsprint and markers.
- Have on hand a variety of Bible translations.

### **Opening**

Welcome any newcomers to the session.

### **Prayer**

*Loving God, We give thanks for this opportunity to be together in our quest for understanding. Help us name our assumptions, and be with us as we explore the scriptures, ourselves, and each other. Inspire us with imagination that we might be creative witnesses to your all-embracing love. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

### **Introduction**

Invite people to each share one insight or challenging new idea they encountered as they read the material in preparation for today’s session. Record key issues on newsprint. If the group is large, consider dividing into small groups for this. Don’t attempt to discuss issues that are raised at this time. There will be time at the end of the session to discuss significant questions that have not yet been addressed.

### **Role Play**

Divide into groups of six for a role play. Invite three of those to enact the following parts: average Christian, average Christian’s sister, and average Jew (her spouse). Role play the following situation:

It is the Easter season. Your younger sister and new brother-in-law, who is Jewish, are visiting from out of town for the holiday. He is religious; your sister stopped attending church when she was 15. Every year you participate in the Good Friday worship service. Your brother-in-law says he would like to accompany you to church. Among other things, the passion story is read from John’s gospel. At home, your sister asks you both how it went.

Let this role play continue for about five minutes. When it has ended, without discussion, invite the other three people in the group to enact their version of the role play. Again, allow about five minutes. When it has ended, ask the players to debrief by discussing the questions:

- How did it feel to play the average Christian?
- How did it feel to play the average Jew?
- How did it feel to play the average Christian's sister?

In the large group, discuss:

- What can we learn from this role play that might be applied to how we observe Holy Week?

## **Discussion**

(If there are many people, divide into small groups that are different from the role-playing groups)

### *John*

The document states that passages in chapters 7 and 8 of John “reflect an intra-Jewish struggle, a family feud in very difficult times.”

- What were these difficult times for the early Christians and Jews?
- Why might this Jewish writer be so hard on his own people?

Recall a “family feud” or conflict in our own church. Imagine if one side in the debate wrote letters to the editor of *The United Church Observer* stating its viewpoint. Imagine that, in the year 4000, historians had access to only this one side of the debate.

- What would be the responsibility of historians?
- How might understanding about this “family feud” help United Church members relate to these scriptures? What comparisons can be made between their context and ours?

### *Acts*

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Acts 3:13–20. Quickly brainstorm all that you know about the disciple Peter. The document states that “the strongest anti-Jewish expressions in Acts are found in the sermons. Peter declares the people of Israel to be responsible for crucifying and killing Jesus...”

- In light of what we know about Peter, do you expect this passion? Why?
- What happens to us when we are told that someone does not want to be on “our team”? How do we feel? How did Peter and the writer of Acts respond to people who did not want to “join the new team”? Is this understandable to you? Explain.

## **Reflection**

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on what you have heard during this session.

Then return to the newsprint on which are written questions from the pre-reading. Discuss significant questions in the light of today's session.

## **Closing Prayer**

*May the Spirit of the living God of Israel go with us. May the love of Christ be our guide. May the comfort and challenge of the Holy Spirit lead us on our way. Amen.*

In preparation for Session 5, ask participants to read the following in *Bearing Faithful Witness* (pages 34–38): “The Letters of the Apostle Paul,” “The Letter to the Hebrews,” “Revelation or the Apocalypse,” and “Conclusion.” In addition, read 1 Corinthians 13:1–11; Romans chapters 9—11; 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16; and Revelation 2:9–10 and 13:1–18.

### **Questions for In-Depth Conversation: Christian Mission and Proselytism to the Jews**

Read Romans 1—3 (especially 3.21–31) and Galatians 2.13–14.

A major U.S. denomination recently resolved to direct its energies and resources “toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people” and asked its people to recommit themselves to prayer, “especially for the salvation of the Jewish people as well as for the salvation of “every kindred and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).” In contrast, *Bearing Faithful Witness* presents the view that Jews do not need to become Christians to be saved. The paper argues that the failure of Christians to convert Jews en masse to Christianity could have been anticipated (because of God’s continued covenantal relationship with Judaism) and has also proved to be fortuitous. It argues that the relationship between Christians and Jews not only assists but also is necessary for Christians to fully understand themselves and their scriptures. Furthermore, the failure of conversion efforts (including coercive and violent means) has opened Christians to a new humility before God and other world faiths, and set the stage for acknowledging the validity of other paths (or covenants) of salvation. The *Bearing Faithful Witness* statement approved in August 2003 states that “The United Church of Canada...rejects...proselytism which targets Jews for conversion to Christianity.”

The scripture passages above, however, point to the crux of Paul’s understanding of the gospel, namely that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” It is God, Paul says in Romans, who takes the initiative in justifying humans through the mercy offered in Jesus, and revealed to faith. Whenever we measure ourselves by the standards of divinely instituted law—whether the Mosaic law or the natural law—we all fall short and are guilty of transgression. Therefore all must be saved, Jew and gentile alike, by an undeserved gift: “They are now justified by (God’s) grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ

Jesus.” In Galatians, the division of missionary labour, Peter to the circumcised and Paul to the uncircumcised, points again to this Pauline understanding that all humans are linked in a common need for grace.

*Is this your understanding of the heart of the gospel and if so, is it responsible for Christians not to give witness to this common predicament and to God’s grace in Jesus Christ?*

Conversion shows itself to be a possibility in both directions, Jewish and Christian. United Church people have chosen to become Jews and Jews have chosen to become members and ministers of the United Church. Rabbis are careful to interpret the momentous nature of such conversions to inquiring Christians; Christians should do no less for inquiring Jews.

*Given the two-way nature of this passage, is it responsible to repudiate organized efforts aimed at converting all Jews to Christianity (proselytization) while at the same time being open to giving witness to the gospel to inquiring individual Jews?*

## **Session 5: Paul's Letters and Revelation**

### **Preparation**

- Read the following sections of *Bearing Faithful Witness* on pages 34–37: “The Letters of the Apostle Paul,” “The Letter to the Hebrews,” and “Revelation or the Apocalypse.”
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–11; Romans chapters 9–11; 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16; Revelation 2:9–10; and Revelation 13:1–18.
- Bring coloured crayons and drawing paper.
- Mark the following passages so you can refer to them readily: 1 Corinthians 16:21–24, 2 Corinthians 6:14–15, and 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16. These passages are to be read during the introduction. Practice reading them aloud.
- Have available Bibles, a flip chart, and markers.
- Write the following Bible verses on slips of paper: Romans 1:16; Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 15:9; 1 Corinthians 16:5–7; 1 Corinthians 16:8–9; 2 Corinthians 1:8–9; Galatians 1:13–14; Ephesians 3:1; Ephesians 3:6; Ephesians 3:8; Philippians 3:4–5; 1 Timothy 1:12–13; 1 Timothy 1:15; and 2 Timothy 1:8. Have them available to hand out to the group.

### **Opening**

Welcome the group and any newcomers.

### **Prayer**

*Welcoming God, We thank you for your love revealed in Jesus Christ, a love that goes far beyond the boundaries of our human understanding. Help us to become aware of the judgments and boundaries that we create, inadvertently excluding others and blocking our vision of you. Open us to hear anew the message of your affirming love for all people. Amen.*

### **Introduction**

Invite people to each share one insight or challenging new idea they encountered as they read the material in preparation for today's session. Record key issues on newsprint. If the group is large, consider dividing into small groups for this. Don't attempt to discuss issues that are raised at this time. There will be time at the end of the session to discuss significant questions that have not yet been addressed.

Give everyone wax crayons and a sheet of plain drawing paper. (An optional approach without crayons would be to move directly to the questions below.) Read aloud very slowly 1 Corinthians 16:21–24, 2 Corinthians 6:14–15, and 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16. Ask people to colour their feelings or impressions as they hear the passages read—their drawings can be abstract or free form. Now read 1 Corinthians 13:1–8.

- How did you feel as you read these passages? What ideas did you find disturbing?
- If Paul had known his writing would be preserved as scripture for future generations, do you think that he might have changed any of what he wrote?
- Can you recall a time when you wrote or expressed angry thoughts about a person or situation? How would it feel to have these widely circulated or published?

## **Discussion**

### *Paul—Messenger to the Gentiles*

Invite group members to brainstorm what they know about Paul. Record key ideas on newsprint. Hand out the Bible verses that you have written on slips of paper so that each person has one or two.

- Invite people to look up the passage(s) and read it silently to themselves.
- Invite people to share additional insights from the verses about who Paul was and how he understood himself and his ministry.

### *Paul and the Torah*

- In Romans chapters 1—3, 9—11 Paul lays out his complex understanding of the relationship between the Torah and faith in Jesus Christ. Look again at the following passages from the letter to the Romans: 3:21–31; 9:2–6, 9:30–32; 10:4; and 11—13. With what problems, dilemmas, and possibilities do these passages present us in our relationship with Jewish neighbours?
- What do you think it means to say, “Jews come to God through Torah, gentiles through Christ?” How do you think Paul understood the relationship between the law that he learned and followed as a Jew, and his faith in Christ?

### *The Book of Revelation*

Invite someone to read aloud Revelation 13:1–18.

- As you think about the context in which this passage was written (Christians being persecuted by Roman authorities), how does this help you to understand this passage? Have you ever witnessed this passage used as an indictment of Jewish people? How do you feel about that interpretation of these verses?
- Read Revelation 2:9–10 in a couple of different Bible translations. Look at the commentary on this passage found in the section “Revelation or the Apocalypse” (page 37) in *Bearing Faithful Witness*. Why might some people want to pretend to be Jews?
- The Contemporary English Version of the Bible translates this verse as “I also know the cruel things said about you by people who claim to be God’s people. But they are really not. They are a group that belongs to Satan.” How is the wording of the passage different from other translations such as the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)? How might *you* handle the challenges and complexity of translation?

## Reflection

Invite participants to take a few minutes in silence to reflect on what they have heard during the session. Then return to the newsprint on which are written questions or issues raised during the introduction. Discuss significant questions.

- What is a question or concern you are left with at this time?

## Closing Prayer

(from 2 Corinthians 13:12–13)

**Leader:** *May the God who gives love and peace be with you. Let us greet each other in the warmth of God's love.*

**All:** (Each person may turn and say this blessing to the person on his or her left.) *May God bless you and keep you and give you peace. Amen.*

In preparation for the next session ask everyone to read the following sections of *Bearing Faithful Witness*: “Guidelines for the Use of Scripture” (pages 39–49), the “Introduction” (page 6), Appendices A, B, D, E, and F (pages 72–75 and 80–88), and the final *Bearing Faithful Witness* statement on pages 8–13.

Ask two people to prepare a presentation by reading and summarizing key points in the various sections, as follows. (See Session 6 for more details.)

A) Part Three: “Guidelines for the Use of Scripture”

B) Appendix D: “Antisemitism: An Enduring Problem in Western Society” and “Appendix F: Anti-Judaism in Feminist Writings and Theology”

Ask everyone to reflect on the implications of the final statement for our life as a church, and as congregations and individuals.

### Questions for In-Depth Conversation: Supersessionism

Read Hebrews 8:1–13 (especially v. 13) and Romans 9—11 (especially 11:17–36)

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the development that took the church onto an unknown path was the acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Saviour by the gentiles. The book of Acts and some of the letters of the apostle Paul show the early church wrestling with the implications of this path. The experience of the early church that the new life in Christ overcame all kinds of divisions came to be expressed in such statements as: “There is no longer Jew or Greek (gentile), slave or free, male or female; for all of you are one in Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 3:28) This new intercultural and international community is characterized

by the First Letter of Peter as "...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people."

*Does this mean that the new community is superior to Israel and actually has bypassed and superseded Israel in the election and affection of God?*

The author of Hebrews clearly draws this conclusion. Jesus is the high priest who has offered himself once for all for all sin; the new covenant is necessarily better than the old. In fact, according to the author of Hebrews, the old covenant (with Israel only) is obsolete. However, in chapter 11 of the book of Romans, Paul asserts that God's covenant faithfulness to Israel can never end. "For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable." Gentile Christians belong to the household of God only because God has grafted them like wild branches onto the root that is Israel. They thus participate, derivatively, in the covenant that God has with the elect people, Israel. Like the author of Hebrews, Paul also believes that God's action in Jesus Christ has ushered in a new state of affairs, but he sees the church being joined to, rather than displacing, Israel. It is his hope and his perception of the intended plan of God that all Israel one day will be saved through Christ as the natural (Jewish) broken-off branches are grafted back in. According to Paul, the Jews and the gentile believers are bound together in a common destiny.

*So, who is right—the author of Hebrews or Paul, the author of Romans? OR are they both partially right or wrong? What are your thoughts?*

In the Christian tradition one well-considered understanding is that we are to take seriously the entire canon of scripture. The teaching, proclamation, and authority of one passage or book needs to be intentionally read in the light of the teaching, proclamation, and authority of the whole Bible. (To isolate the teaching of one passage or book and to regard it alone as authoritative on a particular question or issue is to deny the witness of the rest of scripture.) For many centuries, in many contexts in the church, the perspective of Hebrews that the old covenant is obsolete seems to have been determinative of Christian attitudes to Judaism.

*What if other passages are also taken into account, such as Paul's argument in Romans?*

*Is it therefore possible for Christians to believe that God has done something decisive for all humanity in Jesus Christ without the corollary that the Christian church has displaced Israel in the election and affection of God?*

## **Session 6: Guidelines, Appendices, and Closing**

### **Preparation**

- Read the following sections in *Bearing Faithful Witness*: “Guidelines for the Use of Scripture” (pages 39–49), “A Sermon for Good Friday (Sample)” (pages 68–71), the “Introduction” (page 6), Appendices A, B, D, E, and F (pages 72–75 and 80–88), and the final statement, approved at the 38th General Council, August 2003 (pages 8–13).
- Have ready large sheets of newsprint and marker pens.
- Bring any resources listed in the bibliography and display them prominently in the meeting space.
- Bring and display any newspaper or magazine articles that relate to anti-Judaism in North America and any articles about interfaith work between Christians and Jews.
- At the last session, two volunteers were asked to make presentations on specific parts of the document. Ask them if they need any equipment or material for their presentation.
- Bring enough pens for everyone.
- Option: If you would like to sing “Go Now in Peace” at the closing, bring enough copies of *Voices United* (#964) or *Songs for a Gospel People* (#67) for everyone.

### **Notes for the Presenters**

There are two presenters for this final session. Each presenter will have approximately five minutes to make a presentation, and approximately 10 minutes for an open discussion about the material. Please:

1. Briefly summarize the material you have been assigned.
2. Give your overall impression of the material.
3. Note anything you found to be new. Tell why you found this material to be interesting.
4. Note anything in the material with which you particularly agree or disagree.
5. **You do not need to be an expert!** Your purpose is to help people focus on the particular material, to remind them about what they have read during the past week, and to open the floor for discussion and comment.

### **Opening**

Welcome any newcomers to the session.

### **Prayer**

*Eternal Spirit, we give thanks for your presence among us. We ask for your gift of understanding, commitment, and energy. In the name of Jesus, brother, friend, and Jew of Nazareth. Amen.*

## **Introduction**

In pairs, discuss the following:

- If a 10-year-old child asks, “Why don’t the Jews believe in Jesus?” how do you respond?

## **Discussion**

Invite the first presenter to make his or her presentation on “Guidelines for the Use of Scripture.” This is meant to be a brief summary and then a personal comment on the material in *Bearing Faithful Witness*. The speaker makes a five-minute presentation, then opens the floor for general discussion for approximately 10 minutes. Note particular criticisms and comments on the flip chart.

Invite the other speaker to follow the same format for Appendix D, “Antisemitism: An Enduring Problem in Western Society” and Appendix F, “Anti-Judaism in Feminist Writings and Theology.”

- The *Bearing Faithful Witness* study did not recommend that the United Church should issue an apology to the Jews or make additions/changes to the Articles of Doctrine of the Basis of Union. The *Bearing Faithful Witness* statement approved by the 38th General Council in August 2003 (found on pages 8–13) is an official statement about the United Church’s theological understanding of our relationship to Jews and Judaism. In what way does this statement reflect/not reflect your insights and convictions as you complete this study?
- What other action do you think the United Church should consider taking with respect to the issues raised in *Bearing Faithful Witness*?
- What changes would you like to see in your congregational worship life?

## **Reflection**

Invite participants to take a few moments in silence to reflect on what they have heard during this session. Then, in the whole group, discuss the following:

- During Session 1, people were given the opportunity to discuss the question: What is your main concern as you think about United Church–Jewish relations? The question at the end of the sessions is: How has that concern changed? After rereading our scriptures, studying the document, and learning from the group, has that concern changed? Can you compare how you felt or what you knew six weeks ago to today?

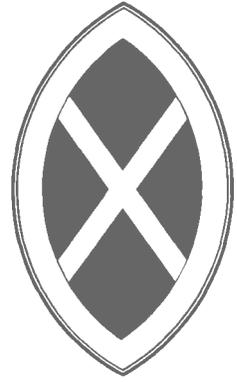
## **Closing Prayer**

This group has worked and studied together for six weeks. In recognition of this time, and in appreciation for a community of faith where it is safe and good to ask questions and also to have convictions, we invite you to speak your thoughts, prayers, concerns aloud during the following prayer:

*For the witness of all, throughout the world, striving toward your shalom, we offer thanks and honour to you, O God. For the questions we have raised, for the convictions we have shared, for the learnings we take away with us, thank you. Hear now our individual thoughts and prayers...(here, individuals speak)*

*In the name of Jesus Christ and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, we offer our prayer.  
Amen.*

Option: Sing “Go Now in Peace,” #964 in *Voices United* or #67 in *Songs for a Gospel People*.



# *Bearing Faithful Witness*

Quicker Study Guide

## Notes for the Leader

This second study guide provides suggestions for a quicker and less detailed exploration of the material in *Bearing Faithful Witness*. It will point to some of the essential elements of *Bearing Faithful Witness*, but it is not intended to lead a group through a complete and comprehensive overview of the material. The “Quicker Guide” is designed for adult groups seeking a brief and accessible examination of the contents of *Bearing Faithful Witness*. It can also be used with Grade 8 church school and youth study groups

The “Quicker Guide” is laid out to be used as a single session of two hours and 15 minutes. As a second option, the “Quicker Guide” can also be used with three 45-minute sessions. It is possible to use this in a church school in this time frame. When using the three-session format use all the text, including that which is shaded. When using the single-session approach omit from the process all the shaded text, including the session headings, the check-ins from Sessions 2 and 3, the opening prayers of Sessions 2 and 3, and the closing prayers for Sessions 1 and 2. These are all shaded in the text. Do not omit the rest of the openings in any session as they are integral to the study process. In either option the group may wish, where possible, to take more time. Don’t panic if you don’t get through everything. Go with the flow and adapt.

You will need a copy of *Bearing Faithful Witness* for each participant. While accessing and reading the document is encouraged with the “Quicker Guide,” there are no reading homework expectations. Preferred Bibles for the “Quicker Guide” are easy access Bibles with study aids such as the Good News Bible. Note the resources listed at the back of *Bearing Faithful Witness*. Try to have some of these on hand for the participants to view.

### Preparation Notes

**Preparation material is listed in order of its appearance in the guide. The three groupings of the preparation notes correspond to the three-session format. Three session leaders would prepare separately for each session.**

**Single-session groups would use the complete set of preparation notes below for the longer session.**

### Preparation 1

- For all sessions have available extra copies of *Bearing Faithful Witness*, Bibles, sticky notes, flip chart, and markers.
- Read the following sections in *Bearing Faithful Witness*: “The Preamble: Why This Paper?” (page 3), the text box “Jesus and Torah” (page 16), “The Relationship of the Two Testaments” (pages 14–18), Appendix B (page 75), and the first paragraph of Appendix D (page 80). From the Bible read Matthew 15:1–7 and Mark 12:28–34. Orient yourself to the “Glossary of Terms” (pages 50–58) and Appendix B (page 75).

## **Preparation 2**

- Read the following sections in *Bearing Faithful Witness*: the text box “Fulfillment and Promise” (page 18) and “The Old Testament” (pages 18–22).
- From the Bible read Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23, then Isaiah 40:3 and Mark 1:3. Optionally, read Joel 2:30–31 and Acts 2:19–21 and then read Psalm 2:1–2 and Acts 4:25–26.

## **Preparation 3**

- Read the following sections in *Bearing Faithful Witness*: Appendix B (page 75), the text box “An Eye for an Eye” (pages 40–41), the first two paragraphs of the “Introduction” (page 6), and the final *Bearing Faithful Witness* statement on pages 8–13. Check out the meanings of “election” and “supersessionism” in the glossary (pages 51 and 56). Also read the text box on “the Noahide Covenant” (page 14) and the text box on “Who Killed Jesus?” (page 45). From the Bible read Matthew 5:38–42 and John 19:4–12.

## **Session 1**

### **Check-in**

If this is not an ongoing group take the time to have the participants introduce themselves.

### **Opening**

### **Prayer**

*God of all exiled and suffering people, we remember in prayer the suffering of Jewish people in Babylon, in the European holocaust, in the acts of hatred that still occur today. Forgive us our silence and our complicity. Restore us from our own exile of misunderstanding, ignorance, or fear, that all your people may find their song again. Amen.*

### **Litany**

Invite the participants to take turns reading aloud the “Because” sentences found in the “Preamble: Why this Paper?” (page 3) as a litany. Ask that the “therefore statement” and questions be read in unison.

Hand out sticky notes or page-marking stickers and ask participants to use them to mark “Glossary of Terms” (page 50) and Appendix B (page 75). Indicate that these will be frequent reference points during the study.

The leader will need to discuss the study outline briefly with the group, referring to the “Preamble,” which was read as a litany by the group. Invite questions and comments about the purpose and direction of the session(s).

## **Activity**

Ask group members to move into pairs. If this is an ongoing group, the dynamics might be considered when pairing the individuals.

Indicate to the group that three statements have been selected from the “Preamble: Why this Paper?” that the group just read as a litany. Each pair discusses one of the “statement exercises” below. Assign statements to more than one group if number of participants makes for fewer than three pairs. As the leader/facilitator is required to circulate, odd numbers of total participants would necessitate one threesome rather than the leader pairing off with one of the participants. Remind group members to access the glossary for any terms they do not understand. Remind the pairs that they will be sharing their work with the group.

1. “Because in our churches Jesus is rarely referred to as a Jew...” (Read and discuss the contents of the text box “Jesus and Torah” on page 16.) How does this picture of Jesus as a Jew differ from the image you have been holding? Does anything surprise you about the Jesus described in the text box?

The document states, “...presumably for Jesus the Jewish scriptures were sufficient.” (Read and discuss the second paragraph on page 14.) Do you think the Jewish scriptures were sufficient for Jesus?

2. “Because a Jewish friend visiting in our churches could feel attacked by some of our scriptures and interpretations of them...” Why has the Gospel of John been called by some Jews in dialogue with Christians the gospel of Christian love and Jewish hatred? (Read the first three paragraphs under the box “The Woman Taken in Adultery” on page 31.) How else might this apparent anti-Jewish text be interpreted? (Read the next paragraph.)
3. “Because there is rising anti-Judaism, antisemitism, white supremacy and neo-Nazism in Canada and other countries in the name of Jesus Christ.” What is the difference between Anti-Judaism and antisemitism? (Read Appendix B on page 75.) Give a few examples of antisemitism in Canadian history. (Read the first paragraph of Appendix D on page 80.)

Come back as a group and share the reflections. The leader/facilitator in some groups may need to interpret some concepts.

## Scripture

Invite the group to open the Bibles and find and hold open two passages: Matthew 15:1–7 and Mark 12:28–34. Ask for volunteers to read the passages to the group in dialogue. The characters you need for the Matthew passage are: a narrator, a Pharisee, and an angry rebuking Jesus. (Really emphasize verse 7.) For the Mark passage you need: a narrator, a teacher of the law, and a gentle, patient Jesus.

Note the differences: one praising, the other criticizing the teachers of the law.

- Do we remember the rebukes and critiques directed at the Pharisees more clearly than the agreements? From the passages that are at odds do we think the Pharisees are the bad guys?
- Have you ever seen an argument between people who are close, such as friends, siblings, or couples? Might an outsider think that this pair is always at odds or are enemies? Do you think this applies to these passages?

### **Closing Prayer** *(Single-session groups omit this.)*

*As we leave this gathering, may we walk in the footsteps of the faithful. May we live our faith in the light of the loving God. And may we write new stories with our lives. Amen.*

## Session 2

### **Check-in**

Allow time for a brief discussion and orientation of newcomers. *(Single-session groups omit this.)*

**Use the following as an opening for Session 2 if using three-session format.**

### **Reflection Exercise**

The following exercise could be done as either a guided meditation or an intellectual reflection. In either case invite the group participants to close their eyes and make themselves comfortable. If choosing to do a guided meditation, prepare the centring, relaxation, and breathing before beginning.

The leader needs to read slowly pausing at the end of each line.

Close your eyes and picture yourself in Palestine in the year CE 75.

From a distance you are looking at a group of Jews in quiet but animated discussion.

Some are wearing fringes and phylacteries just as your brother does.

You know some of them but even so, you do not feel easy with them.

All of those you recognize you know to be good, Torah-observant Jews. But you have heard about their preoccupation with the life and teachings of Jesus. Some people have told you that they are subverting the teaching of the law. There has been so much tension with this group. Ever since the Temple was destroyed you have felt vulnerable. Do you wonder in these troubled times why it is not possible to stick together? Now they are breaking up. They are moving slowly in different directions—where are they going?

Bring the group back to the room and allow some discussion.

- What is this group we were just watching? Where do you think they are going?
- What might they be talking about? Invite the group to openly explore what this group might be. They may be the seeds of the Christian movement. Perhaps some of these Jews may be “messianic” and others not. Perhaps some of those in the group, whom you do not know, may not be strict Torah-observant Jews. Open the discussion to get some feel for this uncertain period. Use the glossary to look up and clarify unfamiliar terms. The leader may have to fill in some gaps for this exercise.

## **Activity**

Divide the group into two. Each group will tackle one of the two issues put forward below. (Each group will report in.)

### **Group 1**

- Read and discuss the section about the promise and fulfillment motif beginning below the text box on page 16. Also read the text box “Fulfillment and Promise” on page 18.
- Explain the promise and fulfillment motif.
- The document states that “the purpose of using the promise and fulfillment motif is to push us back into the texts that the followers of Jesus knew to be the scripture and to find language there that makes sense of the Jesus story.” Is this a new thought for you? Would you agree with this stated purpose?

### **Group 2**

- Read and discuss “The Old Testament” (pages 18–22).
- Which of the five options for naming the Old Testament would you prefer? Give your reasons.
- Is there a consensus? Are there other suggestions for naming the two testaments?

## **Scripture**

Invite the group to open the Bibles. Move into two “teams.” Each team is to dramatically read to the other team the two passages given to them in any order. The opposing team is to figure out, guess, or know which passage is the “New Testament” and which came from the “Old Testament” (the Septuagint in this case). The object is to confuse the other team into error. Try different approaches. For example, read one authoritatively and the other tentatively. Read together in unison or split the reading among the group.

Team 1 reads Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23. Team 2 reads Isaiah 40:3 and Mark 1:3.

If you feel you need to break a tie or want to try again use the next set of passages.

Team 1 reads Joel 2:30–31 and Acts 2:19–21. Team 2 reads Psalm 2:1–2 and Acts 4:25–26.

The point is that these texts are quite similar. The New Testament writers often quoted scripture. In what circumstance was each passage written? There are many such examples. Recall the promise and fulfillment motif discussion. What does fulfillment mean?

### **Closing Prayer** *(Single-session groups omit this.)*

*May the Spirit of the living God of Israel go with us. May the love of Christ be our guide. May the love, comfort, and challenge of the Holy Spirit lead us on our way. Amen.*

## **Session 3**

### **Check-in**

Allow time for a brief discussion and orientation of newcomers. *(Single-session groups omit this.)*

### **Opening**

#### **Prayer** *(Single-session groups omit this)*

*Creator God, as we gather to reflect and learn together, keep our hearts open and soft and pliable. May we be ready to change. May we be ready to be challenged by the voices that have spoken your word through many generations of faithful people. May we always be open to the new things you call us to understand and be and do. Amen.*

### **Litany**

Invite the participants to take turns reading, as a litany, the bulleted sentences found in Appendix B on page 75. Begin each of the sentences with “God, help our understanding when we...”

## Activity

Indicate to the group that three statements have been selected from Appendix B, which was just read in our litany. Each pair discusses one of the “statement exercises” below. Assign statements to more than one group if the number of participants makes for fewer than three pairs. As the leader/facilitator is required to circulate, odd numbers of total participants would necessitate one threesome rather than the leader pairing off with one of the participants. Remind group members to access the glossary for any terms they do not understand. Remind the pairs that they will be sharing their work with the group.

1. “When we emphasize and illustrate Christian teaching by negatively contrasting it with Jewish teaching.” Read and discuss the text box “An Eye for an Eye” (page 40) and answer the questions below.
  - What does the “eye for an eye” passage in Exodus normally mean to you when you hear it?
  - What does the text box suggest the meaning of this passage is?
  - What does Jesus make of this passage? Check out the reference to Matthew 5:38–42.
  - What does it say about our way of using scriptures that we use this passage as a licence for retaliation and frequently contrast it with the Christian “turn the other cheek”?
  
2. “When we speak of the church as having displaced or superseded Israel in its election, as in speaking of the ‘New Israel.’” Read and discuss the first two paragraphs of the “Introduction” (page 6). Check out the meanings of “election” and “supersessionism” in the glossary (page 50). Also read the text box “The Noahide Covenant” on page 14.
  - Do you think that many United Church people believe that Christianity displaced or superseded Israel?
  - What are the Noahide and Mosaic covenants?
  - What does the text box say about the covenant of the Christian church?
  
3. “...When we blame Jews for the death of Jesus.” Read and discuss the text box “Who Killed Jesus?” on page 45 and answer the questions below. (If there is time, read and discuss the last paragraph.)
  - What would it say about the passion drama in our gospels if there was, at that time, a Roman “zero tolerance policy” for Temple disturbances during high holidays?
  - Do you agree with *Bearing Faithful Witness* that the early church shifted the blame of Jesus’ execution away from Rome and toward the Jews?
  - Why did this blaming of the Jews persist through the centuries?

Come back as a group and share the discussion.

## **Scripture**

Find an older version of the Bible, for example, the King James Version or the Revised Standard Version, and contrast that with a newer version, for example, Good News or New International Version. Choose a good reader(s) to read a part of the passion story from John 19:4–12 first from a newer version, then from an older version.

- Discuss the differences. How would each version feel to a Jewish friend visiting your congregation when it was read?

We have come to the end of our study. Let's look together at the three questions at the end of the Preamble (page 3). Let's add our church school to the last question.

- How do we answer these questions now?
- How will we answer them in the future?

## **Closing Prayer**

Invite group members to stand in a circle facing one another. Ask group members to be prepared to turn 180 degrees looking outward from the group when you tell them.

*For the questions we have raised, for the stories we have shared, for the learnings we take away, thank you. Let us turn outward to the world. (Turn) For the work of faith communities throughout the world striving toward your shalom, we offer thanks and honour to you, O God. As we travel in our separate directions we also strive for your shalom. Amen.*