

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND JEWISH EVANGELISM

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Introduction

The subject at hand is an interesting one to which I have given a lot of thought across the years since I have been a believer. Obviously, because of my own background, I have been intensely interested in Jewish evangelism and have been thankful for every effort where this project has been undertaken, either by a local church or by individuals. Where Jewish evangelism has lagged, I have tried to pinpoint reasons, but certainly not excuses. God will hold all believers everywhere accountable for the opportunity to reach people, and particularly, those of the household of Israel.

When I first became a believer, I remember sharing my experiences in a local church whereby the Lord used His servants to bring this one to a saving faith in Jesus the Messiah. After the meeting, a man approached me (and we will leave his denominational attachment unmentioned) and told me plain out that it was not necessary for anyone to talk to those God called. He will lay His hands upon the individuals who will respond and they will find saving faith through His Word. To this day, these words ring in my ears, and I am still at a loss as to how we can account for the Great Commission and still never say one word in an appeal to people to place their faith and trust in the Messiah.

One cannot begin to cover 1900 years of how theological perspectives have either abetted or have been detestable regarding Jewish evangelism. On one hand, we say that a specific and particular eschatological stance and even appropriately, a contextualized theology and lifestyle, can create a better climate for a Jewish person to hear and respond to the gospel. Yet, on the other hand, Jewish people have also responded to love of believers who were and are amillennial and not even culturally attuned to Jewish culture.

Let us therefore explore, in outline form, the theological statements and resultant ethic and evangelistic interests of various Christians through the ages.

The Early Church

The church of the first century was predominantly Jewish with some prodding (Acts 8:1f), Jewish believers also confronted Gentiles with the gospel message. The use of the word prodding is not to disparage anyone; it is just in recognition of human nature which can settle into a mutual admiration society and never break beyond its own group. Eventually, however, Jewish believers not only did a tremendous job in evangelizing their own brethren, but also carried the message of the gospel into Samaria, Antioch, and from there to the rest of the known world at the time. The churches in the first century were founded by Jewish believers, and much of what the church has today should be held as a sacred trust of what those believers have provided.

In the second and third centuries, the church began to take on more and more of a non-Jewish face because of the universal appeal. This

period represented primarily a peaceful relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers and a witness was carried on between Gentile believers and Jewish people. One of the most famous of the Church's dialogues of this period was Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew, in which Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) sought to prove the Messiahship of Jesus and also discuss the place of the law within the New Testament context. He complained of how Jewish believers in Jesus the Messiah were treated by some of the Jewish religious leaders. Nevertheless, he was peaceful and courteous although he pushed hard in his discussion the redemptive fulfillment of Jesus and therefore, declared a new day had dawned in God's program. However, we must always make a distinction between sharing theology which might cause embarrassment to the Jewish person and being hateful of the Jewish person. Justin Martyr reflected the former.

In a document of the third century, the Didascalia, Christians were enjoined to pray and fast for Jewish people during the Passover. Jewish people were to be called brothers, not in the spirit, because there was a recognition that they needed to be born again, but in a fraternal sense. In spite of the attack on the Judaizers (has anything changed?), there was an attempt on the part of many in the church to reach out and touch the hearts and lives of Jewish people.

There were also ominous rumblings, however, within the church in this period. Some church fathers were impatient with Jewish people and expressed their hostility toward them. Hippolytus declared, "They (Jews) will always be slaves. For their past sins, they have found pardon, but are now left desolate because they killed the son of their benefactor."¹ Cyprian in the 200s had also declared that "He who does not have God as his father cannot have the church as his mother," and he with others dominated the third century anti-Judaica. Origen, in his Contra Celsum

stated, "They (Jews) will never be restored to their former condition for they committed a crime of the most unhallowed kind, in conspiring against the Saviour of the human race."²

What is interesting, however, is that most of the church fathers were Pre-Millennial and gave direct support to the Chiliastic belief. Lewis S. Chafer provides statements in outline form concerning the Chiliastic views of the church fathers, e.g., Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Papias, Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, to name just a few, who serve as a tremendous testimony of the early church's position on Chiliasm.³

By the 300s, in the first general church council, the first official blow was struck at Jewish believers (and Gentile believers who followed Jewish customs) in particular and the Jewish people in general. After the theological pronouncement concerning the dual personhood of Jesus Christ at Nicea (325), there was also the desire to settle the Easter question. In fact, this was the issue next of importance at this council. The decision by this council was that Easter henceforth should always be celebrated on a Sunday and never on the day of the Jewish Passover. Easter was to be a festal occasion, always after the 14th of Nisan, on the Sunday after the first vernal full moon. Schaff indicates that "the leading motive for this regulation was opposition to Judaism, which had dishonored the Passover by the crucifixion of the Lord."⁴ As late as 400, however, there still were many of those who observed the resurrection of Jesus on the date of Passover and Schaff again, in quoting Epiphanius, about A.D. 400, stated that those who follow this practice were orthodox in deed, in doctrine, but in ritual were addicted to Jewish fables and built upon the principle: 'cursed is everyone who does not keep his Passover on the 14th of Nisan.'⁵ Future councils continued to increase the pressure for the Sunday observance of Easter.

The utmost of insults regarding Jewish people came from Chrysostom who in A.D. 386, delivered eight homilies in which he castigated the Jewish people, and no doubt, he had in mind the Jewish believers as well, for their role in keeping the 14 Nisan date for Passover. These homilies were Chrysostom's diatribe concerning the personhood of Jewish people, their lifestyle, and their beliefs. Having struck so hard at Judaism in general and the Jewish person in particular, calling them the most detestable of Christ killers and their synagogues dens of prostitutes, it would not be difficult to see why he also took aim at the date of observing the resurrection of Jesus on the Passover.⁶

With men like Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Jerusalem, and even Jerome making such statements from pulpits, we can understand the effect of this irresponsibility. The door for a flood tide of anti-Jewishness was opened, hate was sown in the heart and lives of Christendom, which was to bear evil ethical fruit as it passed from generation to generation.

Even Augustine, as he evaluated Jewish-church relations, had two views. He felt that he had to be faithful to the teaching of Paul, and therefore he called upon the church to have a loving concern for Jewish people. On the other hand, as he tried to solve the problem of the survival of the Jews as a people, he expounded his "theology of the witness people" in which he emphasized that Jewish people were like Cain, having a divine mark of judgment on them.

As to Augustine's views on Chiliasm, we note a decided shift in the official view of the Church. While this church father waffled on the concept of the millennium, there was no question as to what he declared in his City of God:⁷ 1) The church visible was the Kingdom of God on earth; 2) therefore, the millennium was to be interpreted spiritually; and 3) the greatest objective for the Christian was

to seek the Lord within the church as the city whose builder and maker is God. There is no doubt that he was influenced by the allegorical school in Alexandria as early as Origen (185-254) who fiercely "assailed it (the millennarian doctrine), for it was repugnant to his theology..."⁸

Did the allegorical position of Alexandria serve to kill Chiliasm as a viable view for eschatology? Did the allegorical position take place because of people's antipathy for the Jew who rejected the claims of Jesus the Messiah? In reply to the first question, there is no doubt that it served to put away Chiliasm as a doctrine to be held by the Church. In reply to the second question, it is difficult to say. Certainly as time went on, Christendom had more and more adherents who could hardly be classified as genuine Christians in the New Testament sense of the word.⁹

Theodosius II, reigning from 408-454, lent substantial support to a number of restrictive guidelines concerning Jewish people in the eastern part of the Roman empire, as follows:¹⁰

1. There were to be no conversions to Judaism.
2. Jewish owners could not circumcize their servants.
3. A Jew was forbidden to buy a Christian servant.
4. Construction and care of synagogues were under strict regulations because the synagogues could not look better than the churches.
5. Jews were barred from public functions and the legal profession.
6. Marriages to Jews was considered adulterous and prohibited under penalty of death.
7. Jewish artists and merchants could not compete on an equal basis with their Christian counterparts.

By the time of the Theodosian Code, the Jewish person had become a second and

perhaps a third class citizen in the empire. His life and limb were to be protected, but he was to be severely curtailed. The primary attitude was hatred for the Jew, and it accounted for the outright attack upon him and for the fact that he was seen as a Christ killer. The Chiliast issue appeared to be a minor one, however, in the concern of relating to Jewish people.

Jewish believers in particular were caught in the middle, between their willingness to demonstrate a contextualization of theology and lifestyle with their background and the prevailing culture of the church which had become Hellenistic-Roman. The church fathers, because of their anti-Jewish pronouncement to discredit the Jewish people, drove the wedge between them and Jewish believers in the Messiah. It was no longer possible for Jewish believers to even stay within their own cultural context, and as time went on, they melted into the church-at-large where no distinction was made between any other culture except the Hellenistic-Roman one. All theology and lifestyle was contextualized into this very culture, and to be Christian meant that one had to take on the culture as well as the lifestyle of the church.

What had happened to evangelism? The answer is not very quick in coming. How could Jewish people join a body which was not only different in culture, but at the same time was regarded by and large the enemy of Jewish people? As we move on from the 400s, the church had, to a great degree, lost its possibility to be a witness to the household of Israel.

The Church of Middle Ages

From the 5th to the 19th centuries, Jewish people experienced reprehensible conditions in countries within Christendom:¹¹

"The tragedy is that the Jew fared better in non-Christian situations than under the church in this period. Was this some quirk of cruel circumstances? As a rule, non-Christians had more of a regard for the Jew than those who called themselves a Christian. In Spain, Jewish people had more privilege under the Muslim (711-1300s). The Jews were better off in the Persian Empire at the hands of non-believers than they were in the land of Israel under the Byzantine influence."

The Roman Catholic Church

Father Flannery, speaking as a Roman Catholic priest declared that the period from 1000-1500 A.D. was a vale of tears for the Jewish people. It is a "scandal of Christian history" that while the church and the Christian state were at the peak of their power and influence, the sons of Israel reached the depths of affliction.¹² In 1000, the situation of Jewish people was fairly stable; in 1200, the Jewish people were almost paupers; at 1300 the Jewish people were terrorized.¹³

Some of the blackest pages of the history of an ethic of evil are recorded concerning Jewish people as a result of what had been perpetrated by the attitude of the ancient church. We cannot begin to deal in detail with the long list, but some of the more blatant actions are enumerated:¹⁴

1. The crusades. The first crusade was a time of horror for Jewish people in Europe before the so-called "Christian" knights left for the Holy Land to rid it of the infidel. In France and Germany, hundreds if not thousands of Jews were killed and the soldiers' battle cry was, "We are doing this whole thing backwards. First get rid of the Jews (in Europe)."¹⁵

2. The charge of ritual murder. At Passover time a charge was circulated by so-called Christians, claiming that some Jewish person had gone out to kill a Christian child so as to appropriate its blood for Passover usage. Such claims sound almost incredible in our day, but it was difficult to stamp out the practice

even though there were leaders in the Roman Catholic church who attempted to exonerate Jewish people.

3. The abominable distinctive dress, the badge, and the hat served to mark Jews so as to set them apart from the rest of the population.

4. The Black Death of Europe in 1447-1450 was blamed on Jewish people who were accused of poisoning the water wells to bring on the plague. Mobs of so-called "Christians" were set free to attack Jewish people, killing countless numbers.

5. Compulsory periodic attendance at preaching sessions was another form of degradation beginning in the 13th century. The Dominicans, the theological custodians of the Roman Catholic church, forced Jewish people to sit for an hour, two hours, sometimes three hours at a time and listen to sermons, attempting to make them believe in the church doctrines.

6. The ghetto was another form of depravation of human dignity. Every major city in Europe had its enclosure which confined the major numbers of Jewish people, once again making sure that they did not mix with the rest of the "Christian" population.

7. The experiences in eastern Europe wherein one of the greatest slaughters of Jewish people took place in 1648-58, the Chmielnicki massacres. The best estimate is that at least from 100,000 to 250,000 Jews were killed within the decade.

So affected were the minds of many within the Roman Catholic church that even the Roman Catholic evangelical, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) declared to Innocent II of the Antipope, Pietro Anacletus II, a descendant of a Jewish family, "to the shame of Christ a man of Jewish origin was come to occupy the chair of St. Peter."¹⁶ Even though Bernard was friendly to Jewish people and protected them in the second crusade (1147), he still could not rid himself of

the prejudice for Jewish people that even should they become believers in Christ, they could have positions of importance within the Roman Catholic church.

The Reformation

Did attitudes change within the Protestant churches after the Reformation? Certainly there was a revival of interest in the Scriptures once more with the emphasis upon justification by faith. Many of the reformers took to the study of the biblical languages. Luther in particular, at the beginning of his ministry, was kindly disposed toward Jewish people; he studied Hebrew under a number of masters, including the great Hebraist, Reuchlin, and was able therefore to translate the Hebrew Old Testament into German. Hayim Ben-Sasson has documented from a number of sources as to how Jewish leaders felt concerning the early Luther and others of the Reformation:¹⁷

"In the fact and vision of scholars...excited hopes and expectations in Jewish quarters that changes in the Christian camp would materialize in (more of a) true Judaic creed...one likewise recalls the sympathy evoked in a much earlier and less clearly committed Jewish scholar, by the account of the burning of Jan Hus because of his beliefs."

But Luther changed as he realized that no great numbers of Jewish people were going to respond to the emphasis upon the Scriptures as championed by the Reformation. Possibly the one writing which clearly distinguished his attitude in Jewish eyes was and is his lengthy tract, "On Jews and their lies."¹⁸ So vitriolic was Luther's reaction against Jewish people that to this day the reformer is viewed as one of the worst attackers on the Jewish life and person, alongside that of the Roman Catholic Spanish Edict of expulsion of all Jewish people from Spain in 1492.

Chiliasm of the Middle Ages

Chafer declares that "the Papacy took to himself, as a robbery, that glory which is an object of hope, and can only be reached by obedience and humility of the cross. When the church became a harlot, she ceased to be a bride who goes out to meet her bridegroom; and thus Chiliasm disappeared. This is a deep truth."¹⁹

We can only begin to cite a few of the statements on Chiliasm by two of the chief reformers, Luther and Calvin.

The first of them, Luther, has stated concerning the second advent: "This is not true and is really a trick of the devil, that people are led to believe that the whole world shall become Christian...therefore it is not to be admitted, that the whole world, and all mankind shall believe on Christ."²⁰

Luther's assessment on Roman 11:26, 27 is also interesting.²¹ At first he wavered with regard to the conversion of "all Israel." In Romans, he at times speaks as though he believed in the final conversion of all Jews, though he also declared that only the elect will be saved. Later he definitely accepted the opinions of Origen, Theophylact, Jerome, and others, who identified "all Israel" with the number of the elect, to which corresponds the expression "the fullness of the Gentiles." The leading Lutheran exegetes have followed this interpretation and taught that while the elect from among the Gentiles are being brought in through the preaching of the gospel before Judgment Day, so also are the elect from among the Jews.

It is no wonder, according to Ben-Sasson, that Jewish leaders could only see in Luther one of the worst Anti-Jewish influences spawned in the Middle Ages:²²

"Subsequent disappointment with Luther was therefore all the more harsh and bitter. The Jews of his time and country witnessed his transformation and self-revelation as that of a coarse-grained and cruel persecutor...He had shown the reverse side of his nature, his lack of restraint and refinement, qualities that were rather to be found among those nurturing tradition and inclining to adhere to the old ways."

We do not fare better with John Calvin. He felt that the judgment of Christ is the last judgment and is the culmination of the kingdom of God. He rejected the Chiliasm of the fanatics who would make the kingdom of Christ a purely temporal and transient one. Concerning his view of the millennium:²³

"Anyone who prescribes for the children of God only a thousand years enjoyment of their inheritance in the future does not see what a disgraceful implication this is for Christ and His Kingdom...These people (the exponents of Chiliasm) are either entirely inexperienced in all heavenly things or with secret malice are trying to shake the grace of God and the power of Christ."

The great Protestant leaders are classified clearly as amillennial. It would appear that, since they went back to Augustine as their fountainhead for biblical emphasis, they could not shake loose from the amillenarian influence of the classic, City of God. For this reason, they were closely aligned with the Roman Catholic eschatology and saw no reason to change it, although their emphasis on Scripture exegesis was to encourage others later on to reexamine the entire Chiliastic thought.

An Assessment of the Middle Ages regarding Jewish People and Evangelism

We cannot begin to provide a full conclusion as to the situation in the middle ages. Volumes have already been written on the subject, but perhaps we can make a few observations. The Middle Ages, both Roman Catholic and Reformers

had adopted some of the worst of the attitudes regarding Jewish people from the early church. The tragedy, however, is that they went a step further, and we see the outworking of the attitude of the ancient church into a deplorable ethic of evil perpetrated against the Jewish person. What is interesting is that most Jewish scholars and rabbis today want Christian leaders and ministers to know the Jewishness of their faith in their New Testaments, but when many Jewish leaders think of Christianity, the Middle Ages becomes the model of what Christianity is all about. When Gentile Christians today seek to witness to Jewish people concerning Jesus the Messiah, the attitude and ethic of the Middle Ages is the hurdle which must be overcome before any further testimony can be shared.

And yet, was there evangelism in the Middle Ages? Could Jewish people, in the face of what had been perpetrated against them, really believe in Jesus as their very own Messiah? The answer to the question is, Yes. The Spirit of God worked in spite of what Christendom had done to Jewish people. In Spain alone, during the period of the disputations between rabbis and the Dominican priests (1200s B.C.) and afterward, at least some 10,000-12,000 Jewish people confessed Jesus as their Redeemer.²⁴

The record also indicates as compiled by Rev. A. Bernstein that there were scores of Jewish people who had become believers and entered both Roman Catholic as well as Reformed churches. Therefore, it would appear that the Jewish people, in times of dire pressure, did not respond so much to the Chiliastic proclamation, but rather to love and compassion by individual Gentile believers. Even nations, Holland in particular, after she fought off the Spanish conqueror in 1568-1648, became a haven for Jewish people who fled from countries of persecution, and as a result, Jewish people were able to hear the gospel in a more friendly context.

And yet, we wonder. If there had been more of an emphasis by major groups of Christendom upon the pre-millennial concept, along with the sharing of the love and compassion of the Messiah, could many more Jewish people have responded to the gosepl?

The Modern Period

Beginning with the French Revolution and the social upheavals in Europe in the 1800s, Jewish people began a long and torturous emancipation. What is tragic, however, is that it was largely made possible by optimistic humanistic influences. After the French Revolution, Jewish people were offered the possibility of becoming full citizens in France, provided they would give up their long dream of a return to the homeland. Most French Jews therefore restructured their community and the assimilation process began, and they became French of Jewish persuasion. This pattern was repeated in many other of the northern and eastern European countries.

The birth of the German Reform Jewish movement was also at the expense of any hope of return to the land of Israel. Rather, the kingdom was to be brought in through the efforts of both Jews and Christians, and other peoples of well meaning attitudes, all working together for the common good.

Regardless of how we assess the humanist influence on Jewish people and its resultant breakdown in Jewish thought, it would appear that the emancipation and the Jewish Haskalah counterpart all fell out for a greater possibility of evangelism. Jewish people could be better exposed to all kinds of influences once they were able to leave the ghetto, and it also included the influence of the gospel by Christians who shared their love and compassion of the Messiah.

The Lutheran church in Germany in the 1800s, through its mission societies was able to have a strong appeal upon enlightened Jewish people. The record indicates:²⁵

"Dr. Kuntze, who was a resident clergyman at Berlin, was instrumental in leading many young Jews to Christ. He baptized 80 in 8 years (1820-36), while the Society's missionary, the Rev. W. Ayerst, baptized 42 adult Jews in 3 years (1834-37)...A few years later (1844) the Rev. C. W. H. Pauli, the Society's missionary, reported that there were about 1,000 converts resident in Berlin: and in 1850, as many as 2500. They filled all ranks and stations, and were to be found in all the ministerial departments, and in the university."

These were just a few of the efforts which went on in Germany, largely from an amillennial viewpoint. Once again, we must understand that it was not so much the millennial viewpoints which convinced Jewish people of the claims of the Messiah, but certainly, love and compassion are the basic ingredients for the touch and appeal of the Messiah.

The British missions, the London Jew's Society, the Propagation of the Gospel to Jewish people and others, had a very fruitful time during the 1800s, working in Great Britian as well as on the continent, from western Europe to the land of Israel whereby numbers of Jewish people became believers. All together, according to Bernstein, citing Pastor de le Roi, "summed up the whole number of being 224,000 in the 19th century, but he has also furnished us with a great deal of information concerning the history and many of these converts."²⁶ Bernstein also indicates that a great number of Jewish people were reached through Roman Catholic sources in the modern period. One principal influence was through the two brothers Ratisbonne. One of them, Thedor (1802-1884), founded the Order of Notre Dame de Sion, an organization instrumental in reaching Jewish people in

France, and his brother, Alphonsi (1812-1884), went to Israel where he founded the Order of the Sisters of Sion where he conducted a school for Jewish children.²⁷

It must be pointed out, for the most part, that those involved in reaching these Jewish people were amillennial and once more, we note that it is the appeal of love and compassion of the Messiah which primarily touches Jewish hearts.

World War II and afterward

We shall skip over many of the basic attitudes of the church, which were ambivalent, either pro-Jewish as well as anti-Jewish prior to the World War II and shortly afterwards. There are possibly three major events which drastically changed attitudes within the church-at-large after World War II: 1) the holocaust where some 6,000,000 Jews were killed, simply because they were Jews; 2) the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, where for the first time since 586 B.C., Jewish people had a country of their own; and 3) the discovery of the Qumran literature. The Dead Sea Scrolls reopened the entire question of Old Testament study, theology, and in particular, the Hebrew Old Testament where the Massoretic text was considered the more authoritative as over against the Greek Septuagint which had been adopted as the official correct text by the liberals prior to World War II.

These considerations, including also the expanded opportunities to do archaeology in the State of Israel. All combine to focus a heightened interest upon Jewish people in general, and the land of Israel and Israelis in particular.

As a result, many denominations felt that they had to once more reassess the entire Jewish question, anti-Jewishness, the meaning of the land of Israel,

and possibly bring up the millennial issue as well as a consideration of the presence of a free Jewish state. A number of the statements are included, and again, we can only be highly selective. The evangelism statements are divided: 1) some groups feel that because of what has happened to Jewish people in the holocaust, it is not right any more to evangelize. Dialogue is the only way, however, that we can talk with Jewish people; and 2) others, however, feel that Jewish evangelism cannot be dropped, but the entire issue of church-Jewish relations must once again be explored.

Church Statements Where Apparently No Jewish Evangelism is Encouraged

1. Statement by the Vatican authority

In the reflections and suggestions for the application of the directives of *Nostra Aetate* (which was the Vatican II statement on the Jews, the Declaration on the Relationship to the Church of non-Christian religions), the following is recommended on dialogue:²⁸

"Relations between Christians and Jews have for the most part been no more than a monologue. A true dialogue must now be established...the condition of dialogue has respect for the other as he is, for his faith and religious convictions. All intent of proselytizing and conversion is excluded.."

In October 1974, Pope Paul the VI set up a Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews stated in January 1975:²⁹

"Lest the witness of Catholics to Jesus Christ should give offense to Jews, they must take care to live and spread their Christian faith while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty, in line with the teaching of the second Vatican Council."

From the statement, it would seem, therefore, that no active evangelism is to be encouraged.

The National Catholic Commissions for Relations between Christians and Jews in Belgium, in 1973, stated:³⁰

"The Jewish people is a true relative of the church, not her rival or a minority to be assimilated. The descendants of Abraham and the Christian people must not enter into competition in the history of salvation. In the dialectic of divine grace and human liberty, Christians and Jews fulfill their specific roles and stimulate each other regarding the salvation of the nations (Rom. 9-11)."

As a summation of many of the Roman Catholic statements, the church must once again realize that the gospel does have Jewish roots. It also emphasizes that Roman Catholics should not make Jewish people culpable for the death of Jesus, but rather, all mankind is responsible for His death. Furthermore, Roman Catholics as much as possible, should gain an understanding of Judaism and therefore, many rabbis have been teaching courses about Judaism in Roman Catholic institutions. The end result, however, is that Roman Catholics and Jewish people are to be regarded as fraternal brothers and consequently, no Jewish evangelism is actively promulgated.

2. Protestant Denominations

In particular, one statement contained in "Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations," the general conference of the United Methodist Church issued a statement in Atlanta, Georgia, 1972, where no clear-cut word calls for any active evangelism.³¹ Sharing a biblical message with mutual respect is encouraged instead.

Protestant Statements which do encourage Jewish Evangelism

1. First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam, Holland, 1948.

Of a number of statements regarding evangelism the following is mentioned:³²

"It should be made clear to church members that the strongest argument in winning others for Christ is the radiance and contagion of victorious living and the outgoing of God's love expressed in personal human contacts...There should be no difference between a converted Jew and other church members, all belonging to the same church and fellowship through Jesus Christ. But the converted Jew calls for particular tenderness and full acceptance just because his coming into the church carries with it often a deeply wounding break with family and friends.

To the member churches of the World Council we recommend that they seek to recover the universality of our Lord's commission by including the Jewish people in their evangelistic work."

2. The Department of World Mission of the Lutheran World Federation, and the Church and the Jewish people, in Denmark in 1964.

The statement regarding mission and dialogue declares:³³

"The 'witness to the Jewish people is inherent in the content of the gospel, and from the Commission received from Christ, the head of the church,' and recommends that it be 'pursued in the normal activity of the Christian Congregation, which reflects itself in the Christian witness of the individual members.'"

3. Report of the consultation held under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation, Oslo, Norway, 1975.

Under the statement of Christian witness and the Jewish people:³⁴

"The coming of Christ and the challenge of His gospel placed Judaism in the situation of crisis. No Christian witness can be unsympathetic with that, seeing how Christians themselves face a similar crisis before the same Christ. Having done so as Christians, however, they cannot abandon the New Testament proclamation even though they must recognize that that proclamation continues to put contemporary Judaism under the same original challenge. Yet there is only one way for Christian witness to share in that ordeal, namely, in the same compassion and solidarity with the hearers that Christ has displayed toward Christians themselves, and with the same concern He has for every aspect of the hearers' entire well-being."

4. The Acts of The Synod of Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions Report.

In several drafts of a statement, regarding "Guidelines and principals for the mission to the Jews," the following basic statement is made:³⁵

"The church must recognize that the provocation to "jealousy" and "emulation" in Romans 11 stands out as God's provision for pressing the claims of the gospel upon the Jew, and that this provocation does not imply a specific method other than confronting the Jews with a personal and collective witness to the saving grace of God in Christ by the church."

5. Statements on Anti-Jewishness and the State of Israel and the Land of Israel.

In every document by both Roman Catholics and Protestants, there is a basic statement regarding anti-Jewishness. In no way, shape or form must Christendom express any statement or action derogatory to Jewish people. In this sense, the Holocaust has left its indelible mark upon the church-at-large.

In particular, The Metropolitan New York Synod of the Lutheran Church in America adopted a statement on the writings of Martin Luther, September 1971:³⁶

"a) Repudiates the anti-Semitic writings of Dr. Martin Luther;

When it comes to the state of Israel and the concept of the land of Israel, many denominations had nothing to say or when they did, they were ambivalent. There is no clear-cut statement regarding a premillennial stance. The closest one comes to such a concept is the Lutheran "theology of the land," perhaps reflecting some premillennial view regarding a place for the people of Israel in its land as well as what will occur in the future when the Messiah returns to earth. On the other hand, there are other Lutherans who think in terms of the Arab refugees and have therefore the concept of "the theology of the poor," and would be safe to assume that this concept doesn't arise out of any premillennial considerations.

The closest any Reformed document came regarding the land of Israel is the statement by the Synod of the Reformed Church, Holland, 1970, on Israel: People, Land and State, which suggests:³⁷

"As matters are at the moment, we see a free state as the only possibility which safeguards the existence of the people and which offers them the chance to be truly themselves. The former hope for some for bi-national state in the full sense of the word, seems in the present situation not possible to realize...the state... took place in a human, all too human way, as is the case with practically every other state; all kinds of political means and often means of violence have been used..."

Millennial Considerations

The church for the most part still remains amillennial, Reformed churches, the bulk of Lutheran churches (although individual Lutheran churches do espouse a premillennial concept), Presbyterian churches (although again, there are some who hold to a premillennial position) and many of the Baptist and other churches. There is no doubt both an extreme position as well as a more mediating one in the amillennial camp.

O. T. Allis appears to hold to the more extreme position. He defines the amillennial interpretation in these words: "For the gospel age in which we are living is that day foretold by the prophets when the Law of God shall be written in the hearts of men (Jer. 31:33)"....and concerning the New Testament quotation in Hebrews 8:5-12 he declares "the passage speaks of the new covenant. It declares that this new covenant has already been introduced and that by virtue of the fact that it is called 'new' it has made the one which it is replacing 'old,' and that the old is about to vanish away. It would be hard to find a clearer reference to the gospel age in the Old Testament and in these verses in Jeremiah.³⁸ He feels that the New Testament is the complete fulfillment of the Old Testament. Jewish people, if they wish, can enter into the church, but there is no special place for Israel after the flesh. Allis does not interpret Romans 11:26 whereby

one day, all Israel after the flesh will become believers. His interpretation of the passage is that the church is New Israel. When Christ returns, the church will be caught away, the general judgments will occur and the eternal state will commence. Anthony Hoekema reflects this view when he defines "The Israel of God is a description of the entire New Testament Church...The New Testament Church is now the true Israel."³⁹ Furthermore, he declares regarding the interpretation of Romans 11:26: "Though Israel has been hardened in its unbelief, this hardening has always been and will continue to be only a partial hardening, never a total hardening...Israel will continue to turn to the Lord until the Parousia, while at the same time the fullness of the Gentiles is being gathered in and in this way all Israel would be saved: not just the last generation of Israelites, but all true Israelites."⁴⁰

John Murray, however, takes a more mediating position in his comment on Romans 11:26, 27: "It is of ethnic Israel Paul is speaking and Israel could not possibly include Gentiles...the main thesis of verse 25 is that the hardening of Israel is to terminate and that Israel is to be restored. This is but another way of affirming what had been called Israel's 'fullness' in verse 12, the 'receiving' in verse 15, and the 'grafting in again' in verses 23, 24. To regard the climactic statement, 'all Israel shall be saved,' as having reference to anything else than this precise datum would be exegetical violence."⁴¹

We turn now, however, to many in the church who do espouse a premillennial concept, calling for the return of Israel to its land, and then one day, the Messiah is to return, and all of Israel living at that time will become believers and a Messianic Kingdom will commence. We cannot begin to refer to the great number of authors who espouse this view except to mention perhaps only a few:

1) Chafer discusses the regathering of Israel to their land when there will be a future repentance at the return of the Messiah and the commencement of a messianic kingdom;⁴² J. Barton Payne also discusses how Israel will be returned to its own land, come to know the Lord at the coming of Messiah, and where in a Messianic Kingdom, the curse is removed from the earth and all people will finally be at rest.⁴⁴ Other authors are only mentioned here: Charles L. Feinberg,⁴⁵ Alav McClain,⁴⁶ Charles Ryrie,⁴⁷ and so on.

What is interesting is that many of the missionaries and directors of missions have attended schools which predominantly are pre-millennial. The men mentioned in the previous paragraph have taught in schools which espouse a pre-millennial eschatology. As a result, the missions involved with Jewish work in North America hold to pre-millennialism. On the other hand, most missionaries and directors of missions reaching Jewish people in Europe are amillennial. Both, however, do reach Jewish people.

Another aspect of the pre-millennial thrust in North America is the appeal which literature has had in the Jewish outreach. Jews for Jesus conducted a survey of Jewish believers in 1983 when some 8,000 questionnaires were sent to them. The response rate was 16% or 1,014 and statistics are based on them. The Bible accounted for 56% of all literature used in reaching these Jewish people. The two sets of literature which were important in the outreach with the people were: 1) 13% of all literature used were various books on messianic prophecy, and 2) the book, The Late Great Planet Earth, accounted for 9%. Obviously, these two specific sets of literature are from a pre-millennarian persuasion. These statistics could be meaningful in reaching Jewish people and all Jewish missions might want to consider this response for their work.

Do theological perspectives in the modern period affect Jewish evangelism? After surveying the scenes since the end of World War II, perhaps it might. And yet, the missions which are amillennarian do reach Jewish people. A local church, however, whether amillennial or pre-millennial, appears to be able to carry on a ministry of reaching Jewish people as long as there is an expression of love and concern and a willingness to understand and relate to Jewish people. This writer knows particularly of Lutheran churches who have reached many Jewish people for the Messiah in heavily Jewish areas.

Conclusion

What can therefore be our final assessment of how theological perspectives affect Jewish evangelism? Does it really matter whether a church does or does not have an amillennial or pre-millennial approach to Scripture as it seeks to reach out to Jewish people?

It would appear, first of all, that the Scriptures asks us to have a compassion for all people, wherever they might be; Jewish, Gentile, black, etc., and that our love and compassion must cut across all racial and social lines. To the degree that we are unable to do so, the evangelistic effort will therefore be hindered accordingly.

Secondly, to the degree that we cannot learn how to contextualize our message of love and grace in the Messiah Jesus, our message will also be hindered. I would not say that if we are unable to contextualize, we therefore cannot be the witness to Jewish people which our Lord has commanded us to be. It would

appear, however, that in contextualization, we can create a climate which will make make it easier for Jewish people to listen to the gospel message in the spirit of love and compassion.

It would appear, also, that if the church does see a place for the restoration of Israel in a pre-millennial concept, then the people of the congregation can be exposed to God's program for the people Israel; He is not through with Israel, and that it is necessary to evangelize the Jew to reach him with the Gospel of the Messiah, and if he does not accept the message, he is at least prepared for what will yet come in the prophetic program.

And yet, there are two considerations to keep in mind: 1) a believer who espouses the pre-millennial approach could also be prejudiced to the Jew and find it difficult to face him. This writer has had too many experiences of this nature; 2) the pre-millennial concept in itself is no guarantee that a Jewish person will finally make a decision to receive Jesus as his Redeemer and Messiah. The message of the gospel is in the last analysis a heart message which calls upon the Jewish person to deal with sin, repentance, and the necessity to be born again. While the Christian who is pre-millennial might be able to attract the attention of the Jewish person and get his ear, yet the Christian of either millennarian persuasion still has to, in love and compassion, face the Jewish person and call upon him to deal with the sin question and the necessity to repent of his sins. It is only with the heart that man believes and is justified.

We have said nothing as to how a Jewish person, once he becomes a believer, will fit into an amillennial church, given the presence of the State of Israel today. We have to also consider that Jewish believers do wish to identify with their background and be in a more ethnic church context. But, these concerns

need to be treated in another paper.

Regarding the statement by Paul in Romans 1:16 as to whether the message is to the Jew first, there are many opinions as to its exegesis. Perhaps the best that can be said is that every believer and every congregation must have a heart beat for Jewish evangelism, but no every individual believer and congregation will have opportunity to do so. With his heart beat, Paul, the apostle, has laid down the guidelines concerning attitude toward Jewish evangelism: "Great sorrow and unceasing prayer to God for Israel that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1); and "at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (Rom. 11:5). The guidelines are clear. We may use whatever means at our disposal, including the pre-millennial concept (and certainly this writer is committed to this view), but our theology must be one of love and compassion to touch the heart of God's people Israel.

Endnotes

- ¹Father Flannery, The Anguish of the Jews (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 37, citing Hippolytus, Demonstratio Adversus Judaeos, from a line of Psalm 69
- ²Ibid., p. 38, citing Contra Celsus
- ³Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, IV (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), pp. 271-277
- ⁴Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 405
- ⁵Ibid., pp. 405, 406
- ⁶Father Flannery, Op., Cit., pp. 48, 49
- ⁷J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1958), pp. 381-82
- ⁸Chafer, Op., Cit., p. 274
- ⁹Father Flannery, Op., Cit., p. 45
- ¹⁰Ibid., pp. 54-55
- ¹¹Louis Goldberg, Our Jewish Friends (Neptune, Loizeaux, 1983 rev.), pp. 34, 35
- ¹²Father Flannery, Op., Cit., p. 89
- ¹³Ibid., pp. 89, 90
- ¹⁴Bernard Martin, A History of Judaism, II (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 141ff
- ¹⁵Father Flannery, Op., Cit., pp. 90, 91, citing a Christian chronicler of the period, Guibert of Nogent (1053-1124)
- ¹⁶A. Bernstein, Some Witnesses for Christ (London: Operative Jews' Converts Institution, 1909), p. 31
- ¹⁷Hayim Ben-Sasson, The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1970), p. 77
- ¹⁸Luther's Works, Vol. 47, Franklin Sherman, ed., The Christian in Society, IV (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 123-306

¹⁹George N. H. Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom, I (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), p. 499

²⁰Ibid., III, p. 175

²¹Luther's Works, 25, Letters on Romans, H. Oswald, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), pp. 101, 102, 428-431

²²Sasson, Op. Cit., p. 77

²³Jean Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 5, 25

²⁴Margolis and Marx, A History of the Jewish People (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), pp. 440-469

²⁵Bernstein, Op. Cit., p. 124

²⁶Ibid., p. 12

²⁷Ibid., pp. 60, 61

²⁸Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations, An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents, compiled by Helga Croner (London: Stimulus Books, 1977), p. 7

²⁹Ibid., p. 12

³⁰Ibid., p. 58

³¹Ibid., pp. 114-17

³²Ibid., p. 71

³³Ibid., p. 85

³⁴Ibid., p. 129

³⁵Acts of the Synod of Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions, 1971, p. 59

³⁶Stepping Stones, Op. Cit., p. 109

³⁷Ibid., pp. 102, 104

³⁸Oswald Allis, Prophecy and the Church (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945), pp. 42, 154

³⁹ Anthony A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 327

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 145

⁴¹ John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981, repr.), pp. 96, 97

⁴² Chafer, Op. Cit., pp. 318ff

⁴³ John Walvoord, Israel in Prophecy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), pp. 118-120

⁴⁴ J. Barton Payne, Theology of the Older Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), pp. 492-495

⁴⁵ Charles L. Feinberg, Premillennialism or Amillennialism? (Wheaton: Van Kampen, 1954, fourth ed.)

⁴⁶ Alva McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959)

⁴⁷ Charles Ryrie, The Basis of the Premillennial Faith (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1953)