

A Report: Responses to the Willowbank Declaration
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Introduction:

On April 29, 1989 the Consultation on the Gospel and the Jewish People, meeting at Willowbank, Bermuda, issued the Willowbank Declaration. Eleven months later, it's time for an evaluation.

How important has the Willowbank Declaration been to our movement and ministries? I propose an analysis based upon reactions and responses during these eleven months. It is also time to ask, "What is the value of this tool, and how should we be using it?"

I. Why Willowbank?

The confluence of four events in 1987 and early 1988 should have provoked alarm in all of us who minister in the name of Y'shua among the Jewish people. Three American Christian denominations and one individual representative adopted or were considering equivocal positions regarding the uniqueness of Christ for salvation to the Jewish people. What kind of equivocating statements?

In the middle of 1987, the 1.7 million member United Church of Christ, the 10th largest Protestant denomination in the U.S., adopted a declaration at their annual convention in Cleveland. It called for the church to acknowledge that the Jewish people have a unique role in the purposes of God. Specifically, they ask their membership "to affirm that Judaism has not been superseded by Christianity."

What was meant by affirming the validity of Judaism? It was quite clear to Rabbi A. James Rudin, National Director of Inter-Religious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee: "This new statement means that the whole question of Christian proselytizing, missionizing, and conversion is undermined, because they don't need to convert people who already have a covenant relationship with God."¹

In the Fall of 1987, the Episcopal Bishops Committee on Christian-Jewish Relations issued a report subsequent to their meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They wrote, "with special respect to the Jews, we note that the New Testament in several places affirms God's continuing covenant with the Jews through Moses, even as he establishes the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. We suggest, therefore, that any evangelistic focus on the Jewish people collectively may be inappropriate."

In February of 1988, George Sheridan, the East Coast Regional Director for the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board's Interfaith Witness Department was quoted as saying: "My position is

¹*Moment* magazine, November, 1987

that Jews do not require evangelization. We ought to leave them alone in light of their history."²

The next month, the *Baptist Courier*³ announced that after thirteen years, Rev. Sheridan would be departing their agency because of "theological differences concerning evangelizing Jewish people." The *Courier* reported that Sheridan "did not believe Jews need a personal faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved."

At the 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church/U.S.A. which met in 1987, a study paper was approved for consideration by their churches. After six years in preparation, they commended it under the title "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews." It was disseminated among the sessions for study with the responses channeled to the Global Ministry Unit. That committee was to make its report to the 201st General Assembly, meeting in Philadelphia in the summer of 1989.

The Study Paper included the issue of evangelism to the Jewish people. The College Hill Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati, Ohio sent a critique. They observed: "In essence, 'A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews' states that the Jewish people are already in a covenant relationship with God and, therefore, do not need evangelizing."⁴

²Dallas *Times-Herald*, February 27, 1988

³*Baptist Courier* 3/17/88

⁴College Hill Presbyterian Church special publication on "Christians and Jews," April, 1989; p.2

I reported at the Sixth North American Coordinating Committee Meeting of the LCJE that anti-missionary work has been taking place on at least four levels. In my opinion, the four positions just described were likely influenced by high level diplomatic activity on the part of leaders within the American Jewish community. The statements were characterized by the equivocation of Judaism and Christianity; an acceptance of the Two Covenant theory of salvation; and a sensitivity for the Jewish reaction to Christian evangelism⁵.

A response was warranted to address growing confusion about the need of Jewish people for Jesus. In early Spring of 1988, the Jews for Jesus Board of Directors initiated a task force to investigate what could be done. Their role was that of a "spark plug" to get something going.

By September of 1988, the World Evangelical Fellowship agreed to provide sponsorship for a gathering of international, world-class theologians. The LCWE also expressed its support of the project by letter from Bishop John Reid, of the Theology Working Group.

The special WEF committee purposed to meet as "The Consultation on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People." In respect for the prior work of the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization at their 1978 Willowbank "Consultation on Gospel and Culture," the WEF group also chose Willowbank to convene in April of 1989⁶.

⁵For evaluation of the Two Covenant Theory, see "Two Covenant Theology - One Way?" - Murdo A. MacLeod, from the LCJE Third International Consultation; August, 1986 and "A Critique of the Two Covenant Theory" by Mitch Glaser published in *Mishkan* Issue 11, 1989, pp. 44-70.

⁶For a more detailed discussion of the background to the Willowbank Consultation, see Tormod Engelsen's article in *Mishkan* Issue 11, 1989, pp. 71-84.

Consultation and Declaration

Twelve scholars from nine countries met during four days. Three more participants submitted written contributions, but were not able to be present for various reasons at the last minute.

The Planning Committee had commissioned ten papers. They considered the subject of the Gospel and the Jewish people from five perspectives: biblical, theological, historical, psychological, and missiological. After considering the papers at Willowbank, a drafting committee was appointed and the Declaration was developed. On the last morning of the Consultation, Saturday, April 29, the final draft was unanimously approved and adopted by the participants⁷.

It was issued as the Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People. The voice of J.I. Packer stands out in the preamble as he wrote, "This declaration is made in response to growing doubts and widespread confusion among Christians about the need for, and the propriety of, endeavors to share faith in Jesus Christ with the Jewish people. Several factors unite to produce the uncertain state of mind that the Declaration seeks to resolve."

In a subsequent interview, co-drafter, Dr. Kenneth Kantzer, now the Dean Emeritus of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois said, "We Christians have not been true to our convictions at many points. We should take our responsibility to evangelize seriously, and not withdraw because of a sort of inferiority complex, or our own guilt feelings, or the seeming impossibility of the task."⁸

⁷The three scholars who were not present subsequently added their votes to make the approval unanimous.

⁸*Christian Week*, 5/16/89, from a wire service report in Canada.

Clarity and precision of thought were paramount. Each article contained an affirmation and a denial. The result is a marvelously structured statement of biblical truth, without equivocation. This is not a document that is left open to interpretation.

The eleven short paragraphs in the preamble were followed by 27 Articles put forth under five headings:

- I. The demand of the Gospel, Articles 1-7
- II. The Church of Jews and Gentiles, Articles 8-11
- III. God's plan for the Jewish people, Articles 12-18
- IV. Evangelism and the Jewish people, Articles 19-24
- V. Jewish-Christian Relations, Articles 25-27

Co-drafter, Dr. J.I. Packer said at the conclusion of the Consultation, "the Lord has certainly had his hand in this matter." I believe that all of us who work in the field of Jewish evangelism, upon examining the Declaration, owe a debt of gratitude to those who produced it.

This group of international theological scholars will have to wait for the judgement seat of Christ before they are "reimbursed" for their time at the Willowbank Consultation. Meanwhile, they have extended their integrity and stature to support the field of Jewish mission. They have presented us with a top flight evangelical forum to be referenced in reply to the question "Is Jesus the only way?"

The Willowbank Declaration reads:

WE AFFIRM THAT it is unchristian, unloving, and discriminatory, to propose a moratorium on the evangelizing of any part of the human race, and that failure to preach the Gospel to the Jewish people would be a form of anti-Semitism, depriving this particular community of its right to hear the Gospel.

WE DENY THAT we have sufficient warrant to assume or anticipate the salvation of anyone, who is not a believer in Jesus Christ."⁹:

II. Reaction and Response

Jewish Reaction

There is no doubt that the Willowbank Declaration came as an effective blow against the high level anti-missionary diplomatic efforts of leaders in the Jewish community. Rabbi Rudin called the Declaration a "blueprint for spiritual genocide that is shot through with the ancient Christian 'teaching of contempt' for Jews and Judaism."¹⁰ Willowbank participant, Dr. David Wells of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, said he believed that Rudin was "over-reacting" to the statement. It should be noted that David Wells was one who had participated in Jewish-Christian dialogues with the rabbi previously.

⁹Article IV.23, "Evangelism and The Jewish People"

¹⁰"Evangelical Statement Stresses Importance of Witness to Jews" by Darrell Turner, Religious News Service, May 9, 1989.

The original report, put out by the Religious News Service ten days after the Consultation, might have died without being noticed had it not been for Rabbi Rudin's hot denunciation. On May 20, *World*, a Christian magazine, reported, "Evangelism to Jews Supported by Gathering, But Blasted by Rabbi." The next day, an article finally appeared in a non-Christian periodical.

The Consultation had been ignored by the secular press for nearly one month. Then in the Sunday edition of the New York *Times*,¹¹ May 21, 1989, writer Peter Steinfels allowed the fire of Rudin's continued over-reaction to amplify the issues. The rabbi described the Declaration as "wrong-headed" and "arrogant."

Ecumenical Reaction

Another reading of the impact by the Willowbank Declaration can be taken from the ecumenical community. Three weeks after the Willowbank Consultation, the World Council of Churches held a conference on mission and evangelism in San Antonio. The Rev. Eugene Stockwell of Geneva, Director of the Council's Commission of World Mission and Evangelism, addressed the timely question: "Is Jesus the Only Way?" He suggested that Christians might best respond like British ecumenist Dr. Pauline Webb, who answers, "Yes, no, and I don't know."¹²

¹¹"Evangelical Group Urges Conversion of Jews" Peter Steinfels May 21, 1989, New York *Times*.

¹²*International Review of Mission* "An Evangelical Perspective on the San Antonio Conference" by Susan Perlman, January, 1990 pp 6-16.

Reports of the work conducted by the seven hundred delegates at the WCC meeting in San Antonio were sometimes overshadowed in the press by the simple statement released earlier at Willowbank by the fifteen evangelical theologians.¹³

Eugene J. Fisher, Director of Catholic-Jewish Relations for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, was called on to comment regarding the Willowbank Declaration. It was reported that he said it "shows how much more ecumenical discussion is needed among Christians."¹⁴

The World Council of Churches' view of Jewish evangelism was not a precipitating factor in calling for the Willowbank Consultation. The thinking in that camp, regarding Jewish mission, had long since passed being called "confused". In November of 1988, the WCC's Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People met in Sigtuna, Sweden. They adopted a position paper on "The Churches and the Jewish People: Towards a New Understanding."¹⁵ Esteemed scholar, missiologist and Willowbank participant, Arthur Glasser described the WCC document as "indulging in theological schizophrenia."¹⁶

The Willowbank Declaration is proving to be a watershed statement. The Sigtuna Report and other position papers on Jewish mission are going to be measured against the Willowbank Declaration.

¹³"Ecumenical Debate: Preaching Jesus While Respecting Other Faiths" Los Angeles *Times*, Saturday, May 27, 1989, Section 2, Page 7.

¹⁴New York *Times*, Sunday, May 21, 1989, Steinfels article.

¹⁵For the Sigtuna document and an excellent critique, see the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 13 No.4, October, 1989.

¹⁶*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, cited above, p. 158

Eugene Fisher wrote in response to the evangelical critiques of "Towards a New Understanding" adopted at Sigtuna. He said, "though your responders appear to already have all the answers, I would argue that the Christian community has yet to agree on how, precisely, to frame the questions. This phenomenon may help to explain the disparities of views between the Sigtuna and Willowbank statements."¹⁷ The Willowbank Declaration is highly regarded and is becoming an evangelical high-water mark for comparison.

Jewish Response to Reversals

While the clarity of the Willowbank Declaration has caused the ecumenical community to reexamine its position, Jewish leaders are stung by it. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, gave evidence that anti-evangelism efforts of the Jewish community leadership have been reversed by the work of the Willowbank Consultation. He referred to the Declaration as "retrograde and primitive."¹⁸

From his earlier comments it can be presumed that Rabbi Rudin too must have seen his pain-staking efforts among evangelicals unravelling. Some Willowbank participants contributed to the two

¹⁷ *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 14:1, January, 1990: "Readers' Response," p. 30.

¹⁸ "Ecumenical Debate: Preaching Jesus While Respecting Other Faiths," Los Angeles *Times*, 5/27/89, Section 2, page 7.

books that he co-authored in 1984 and in 1987 to develop the basis for Evangelical-Jewish dialogue.¹⁹

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein of the Holy Land Fellowship of Christians and Jews went so far as to call the Declaration "disheartening." In a letter dated July 18, 1989 to Vernon Grounds, Chairman of the Willowbank Consultation, Eckstein complained that his critics in the Jewish community were saying that all of his work "explaining Jewish beliefs and attitudes, and sensitizing evangelicals to Jewish concerns, seems to be for naught."²⁰

Barely a month after the Willowbank Declaration, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) released an article by Susan Birnbaum. It was circulated out of New York on June 8, 1989. In it, the strategy of the Jewish leadership became apparent. They desperately wanted to press evangelicals to line up on one side of the Willowbank declaration or another. Yes, and so do we!

"Jewish Leaders Call on Evangelicals to Repudiate Their Conversion Goals," read the headline for the piece in the Chicago *Jewish Sentinel*.²¹ Rabbi Schindler was quoted as labelling Willowbank as "a desperate attempt to stop the clock of progress in inter-religious

¹⁹Evangelicals and Jews in an Age of Pluralism, Marc Tannenbaum, Marvin Wilson, and A. James Rudin, Baker Book House, 1984; and A Time to Speak, A. James Rudin and Marvin Wilson, Eerdmans, 1987 - copyright held by The Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, Austin, TX

²⁰Eckstein's letter was a platform for posturing, not a personal communication. His post script said, "I wanted you to know that I am submitting a copy of this letter to Christianity Today for publication."

²¹Chicago Jewish Sentinel, June 8, 1989, page 23

relations." Rabbi Rudin's reaction was to call it "the worst kind of Christian religious imperialism." Both called on Christians everywhere to repudiate the statement. They expressed appreciation for those who already had done so.

The Willowbank Declaration hurts their work in the very area where they had been making "progress." As hard as they have tried to denounce the Declaration, they continue to encounter esteemed leading evangelicals who would support it. Vernon Grounds, Dean Emeritus from Denver Seminary; Arthur Glasser, Dean Emeritus of the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission; Kenneth Kantzer, Dean Emeritus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; and J.I. Packer, from Regent College in Vancouver Canada and Senior Editor for *Christianity Today* with Ken Kantzer are anything but evangelical "lightweights."

As Willowbank participants, they have all spoken in behalf of the Declaration. Packer, in the JTA article, "voiced particular concern over churches that espouse the 'two-covenant' theology, saying it is 'galloping through the larger churches.'" The Willowbank Consultation was constituted to clear up confusion. It has done that with resounding success.

Christians Must Respond

While the Willowbank Consultation provided focus and clarity to issues of Jewish evangelism, it has also sparked discussion among Christians. George Cornell, Senior Religion Writer for the Associated Press in New York City, portrayed the Willowbank Declaration as

controversial. His nationally syndicated article hit the wire services on June 2, almost a month after the Consultation.

He described the work of Willowbank as an evangelical "backlash" to an "evolving concord between Judaism and Christianity." This concord, he said, was expressed 'lately' in official statements among a growing list of mainline denominations, Protestant and Roman Catholic. Cornell suggested that the evangelical declaration from Willowbank was in "contrast" to the shifting tide among mainline churches.

"Backlash" is a reactionary term. However, Cornell could not overlook the credentials of the fifteen world renown and highly respected scholars who assembled in Willowbank. Neither could he dismiss the endorsements and support of such established organizations as the L.C.W.E. and the World Evangelical Fellowship, which he reported, "estimates its global adherence at 100 million."

When responsible, theological thinkers of that calibre speak up, followers of Jesus Christ must pay attention. Cornell had to report to religion readers that the Declaration "repudiates past persecutions of Jews and condemns anti-Semitism" while describing evangelizing the Jewish people as a "priority" which "discounts dialogue without that purpose." Cornell also quoted from the preamble of the Declaration that "the biblical hope for Jewish people centers on their being restored through faith in Christ to their proper place as branches of God's olive tree, from which they are at present broken off."²²

²²"Document on Converting Jews is Termed Damaging to Jewish-Christian Cooperation," by George Cornell, Associated Press, St. Petersburg *Times*, Saturday, June 3, 1989.

The writers of the Willowbank Declaration have taken a clear and definitive position. In doing so they have demanded that all others define themselves by comparison.

Rev. A. Roy Eckhard, a United Methodist specialist on Christian-Jewish relations, spoke of the trend among the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal and Presbyterian (USA) churches. He referred to Christian recognition of the continuing validity of God's covenant with the Jews as "the wave of the future." He described the group from Willowbank as the "other side."²³

Provocative or controversial as it might be, the Willowbank Declaration is a sharply focused evangelical position that Christians must either line up behind and support, or find themselves being contrasted against. It does not represent "the wave of the future." Rather, it clearly restates the ancient plan of God for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles, as revealed in the Scripture. The Willowbank Consultation was constituted not to say something new, but to affirm the preaching of Messiah, and the message of his earliest followers.

III. The Specific Impact of Willowbank

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

The trend toward equivocation had already been established in the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the

²³"Document on Converting Jews is Termed Damaging to Jewish-Christian Cooperation," by George Cornell, Associated Press, St. Petersburg *Times*, Saturday, June 3, 1989.

Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church and as one element within the Southern Baptist Convention. As the Disciples of Christ in Oregon were preparing for their General Assembly in Indianapolis during late July of 1989, they found Willowbank to be a force in their path.

Like the others, they were considering the equivocation of Judaism with Christianity based on God's covenant with the Jewish people. Movement was building to call upon the denomination to promote continuing inter-faith dialogue, and to examine Jewish stereotypes in church literature. In addition, it asked for a "reconsideration of Christian efforts to evangelize Jews."

Reporting about the preparations of the Oregon Disciples of Christ in the *Oregonian*, an article dated May 20, 1989 was written by Sura Rubenstein.²⁴ The direction of the denomination could not be mentioned without having to sharply contrast it with the events that took place barely three weeks previously at Willowbank.

I don't know what happened in Indianapolis at the Disciples of Christ General Assembly. I do know that they could not move without defending their stance regarding the Jews in opposition to the Willowbank Declaration and its group of highly regarded evangelical scholars.

²⁴"Disciples of Christ Ponder Ties to Judaism," Sura Rubenstein, 5/20/89, the *Oregonian* religious section.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, (USA)

At the 201st General Assembly of the PC/USA in Philadelphia during late June of 1989, the Willowbank Declaration was widely circulated. This was its first denominational test.

Much credit needs to be given to Herb Links, of the Messianic Jewish Center in Philadelphia. Under the auspices of the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews, within the PC/USA, he lobbied hard to provoke the Commissioners to the General Assembly to rethink the direction in which they were being led by the study paper called "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews." Herb, along with a group of volunteers, personally distributed copies of the Willowbank Declaration on the floor of the General Assembly.

After two years in committee, the Global Ministries Unit had to take a vote on whether the position of the "Theological Understanding" study paper should be recommended to the General Assembly for adoption. I can tell you with great joy that the Global Ministry Unit could not recommend it. They tabled the issue in committee without a vote. In effect, the 1987 "Theological Understanding" has been killed, at least for now.

LAUSANNE II, MANILA

As news of the Lausanne International Congress filtered out of Manila last summer, one of the prime issues surfacing in the press focused on the uniqueness of Christ and the Jewish people. Drawing from an International News Service report datelined Manila, the

Washington *Post* gave its lead on the Lausanne II story to the Jewish issue: "Leaders at Manila Determined to Evangelize Jewish People".²⁵

At the conclusion of Lausanne II the L.C.W.E. issued the Manila Manifesto. In a subsection on the "Uniqueness of Christ" it spoke to the question of Jesus and the Jewish people. The *Post* reported that the manifesto "specifically rejected the belief of most liberal Christians that because Jews have their own covenant with God, they should not be pressed to convert to Christianity." The exact language of the Manifesto said in essence that for any Christian to determine not to continue to evangelize the Jewish people "would be a form of anti-Semitism, as well as being disloyal to Christ."²⁶

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS

Most evangelical Christians have found the Willowbank Declaration helpful in sorting out their thinking regarding Jewish evangelism. Alan Johnson of Wheaton College, an active participant in Christian-Jewish dialogues reportedly said, "Evangelicals will have to continue to differ with other Christians who propound the two-covenant view, as well as with the Jewish people who have adopted it."²⁷

In the fall of 1989, the National Association of Evangelicals reported on the Willowbank Consultation.²⁸ No commentary was

²⁵"Leaders at Manila Determined to Evangelize Jewish People" International News Service, Manila; Washington *Post* 7/29/89.

²⁶For a full reading of the Manila Manifesto from the Second Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, July, 1989, see *Mishkan*, Issue 11, 1989, page 85.

²⁷"Document Angers Jewish Community", Pamela Pearson Wong, in *Christianity Today*, pg. 48, 11/22/89.

²⁸"WEF Document Upholds Witness to Jewish People," *Action*, September-October, 1989; page 7.

needed by the NAE. A one page report was enough to embrace and support the findings of the Willowbank Consultation.

In November, I encountered Alan Johnson at the Evangelical Theological Society meeting in San Diego. He made me party to a verbal report that he passed along to Dr. Arthur Glasser.

Evidently, the Anti-Defamation League approached Dr. Billy Melvin of the NAE, perhaps as a result of the *Action* magazine article two months earlier. The ADL wanted to bring six of their representatives to Chicago to meet with a committee drawn from the NAE membership in mid-November. At the last minute, the ADL cancelled the meeting. One must wonder if this was an aborted attempted at yet another high level diplomatic incursion. The incident is included for its illustrative value.

IV. Individual Responses to Encourage

May 17, 1989: Donald A. McGavran, Dean Emeritus and Senior Professor of Mission, Church Growth, and South Asian Studies at the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission, wrote to Vernon Grounds. His reaction: "It has just been my privilege to read the significant findings of the Willowbank Consultation on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People. I felt that the 27 findings were in every sense truthful. All 27 of them needed to be said."

In his enthusiasm, he affirmed that "what your Willowbank Declaration is doing is making perfectly clear what the Christian position

is." He advocated that an entire issue of *Christianity Today* be devoted to the whole subject.

May 31, 1989: Helge Aarflot of the Norwegian Israel Mission wrote to report that Ole Christian Kvarme was already being interviewed in the Norwegian newspapers regarding the Willowbank Consultation. He also reported that the Declaration was being translated into Norwegian for distribution to the churches.

June 3, 1989: Father Marcus Brown Hall of Stowe, Vermont requested copies of the Willowbank Declaration for distribution to the Ecumenical Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. He reported that his intention was to distribute further copies to the bishop and other members of the commission at their meeting that summer. He anticipated further distribution of the Willowbank Declaration to all the clergy in their diocese, or about fifty in total.

June 5, 1989: For those who monitor the activity of the Christian Reconstruction Movement, please note that Dr. Gary North, president of the Institute for Christian Economics, wrote to request permission to reprint the Willowbank Declaration. Whatever his reason, he asked to reproduce it verbatim.

June 16, 1989: Dr. Arthur Glasser shared his correspondence from Richard C. Halverson, Chaplain of the United States Senate. Chaplain Halverson responded, "your letter was of special interest

because of the enclosed report, 'The Consultation on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People' at Willowbank. I wish I could have been there." In response to a report of the Fuller Seminary Master of Arts in Missiology, concentrating in Jewish evangelism, Halverson wrote, "I am thrilled to hear that Fuller has this ministry, and especially grateful for the Willowbank Consultation."

January 30, 1990: Murdo MacLeod, LCJE President, Executive Director of Christian Witness to Israel and Willowbank participant, reported further translation of the Willowbank Declaration. It has been published in Chinese in Hong Kong through the efforts of Peter Kan. Dr. Henri Blocher, another participant at Willowbank, made translation of the Willowbank Declaration into French. In July 1989, he published it in *fac-reflexion*, at the Free Faculty of Evangelical Theology near Paris.

Spring 1990: Paternoster Press in England will publish a book of the Willowbank Consultation papers, with the Declaration. The World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission has been overseeing that project.

V. Evaluation and Future Use

A. The Willowbank Consultation was convened to provide Biblical clarity and to challenge theological confusion regarding the issue of the Gospel and the Jewish people. An apparent confusion was beginning to infect the evangelical Christian movement.

In his report for *Mishkan*, Tormod Engelsviken wrote, "The Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People, and the Manilla Manifesto have both served to clarify the evangelical position on Jewish evangelism."²⁹

The challenge has been laid to those who have suggested that Christians ought not to be so smug about the lack of possible alternatives to salvation through other world religions. This was the point made by Dr. Clark Pinnock at the 41st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in November 1989.³⁰ In counterpoint, Dr. Bong Rin Ro, Executive Secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, cited the Willowbank Declaration as a paradigmatic document on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the Jewish people. That was not an insignificant forum in which to make such an assertion.

George Cornell had it wrong when he suggested that a contemporary rapprochement between Judaism and Christianity has marked a watershed in religious annals.³¹ In my opinion, the Willowbank Declaration sets forth the accurate biblical watershed. By contrast, the "evolving concord" among mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jewish leaders that was touted by Cornell must be viewed as an opposing current to the stream of biblical truth.

²⁹"The Willowbank Declaration," by Tormod Engelsviken, *Mishkan* No. 11, 1989, pg. 76.

³⁰"Inclusive Finality or Universally Accessible Salvation," Clark Pinnock, 11/17/89, at the Third Plenary Session of the Evangelical Theological Society Forty-First Annual Meeting, San Diego, on the theme of: "The Gospel and World Religions."

³¹"Document on Converting Jews is Termed Damaging to Jewish-Christian Cooperation," George Cornell, AP, St. Petersburg *Times*, Saturday, June 3, 1989.

B. A group of world class theological thinkers have put their reputations on the line. They've taken a lot of heat from our fire, and they are endured criticism from Jewish and Christian circles. They have endorsed our right to dual-identity, remaining Jews while believing in our Messiah. They have affirmed our need to preserve our Jewish heritage, even to the unique cultural expressions of our faith.

For all of this, we owe them our appreciation and our support. The elements of the Messianic movement that are committed to Jewish evangelism would be foolish to throw away so great a tool that has been handed to us.

No one can successfully assail the integrity or scholarship of any of the signers of the Willowbank Declaration. It is an enormously powerful implement to answer our detractors and to validate our evangelistic mandate. A proper response to the Willowbank Declaration is to embrace it enthusiastically, with appreciation for those who have so warmly supported us and our cause.

C. The Willowbank Declaration offers Messianic Jews and missions to the Jewish people an opportunity to go on the offensive. The Willowbank Declaration is a positive, affirming, and highly lucid enunciation. Let us labor tirelessly to put it in front of as many Christian people as we possibly can.

This is a time to call the Church to answer. Which one of us hasn't encountered a pastor, a denominational leader or an individual Christian who wondered about the "advisability" or the "necessity" of confronting Jewish people with the salvation message of Y'shua? May I urge

everyone to keep ample copies of the full Willowbank Declaration on hand for distribution.

Be reminded that the document was written specifically for Christians. When Jewish community leaders challenge the Willowbank Declaration, they mix into an intramural discussion that is none of their business. Yechiel Eckstein was correct when he wrote "Certainly it is not my role to advise Christians how best to win Jews over to Christ."³² The discussion ends there, even though he added, "nonetheless."

D. It should be noted that the Willowbank Declaration does not dismiss the value of Jewish-Christian dialogue. It affirms any dialogue that "seeks to transcend stereotypes" and to "find common ground and to share common concerns" as an expression of Christian love. Dialogue without explaining Christian faith and seeking to be evangelistically persuasive is neither lovingly Christian nor worthy dialogue.³³

With the Willowbank Declaration in hand, we ought now to be pressing for more Jewish-Christian dialogue. Am I really proposing this? We ought to be talking with those who have been actively involved in dialogue, and asking for two things. First, reject all preconditions whereby Jewish Believers in Jesus are to be excluded from Christian-Jewish dialogues. Second, propose that the Willowbank Declaration become a topic among Christians engaged in Christian-Jewish dialogue. Make it the pre-condition for any Christian engaged in such a program. Those would be the set of responses that I would love to report next!

³²Personal letter to Vernon Grounds, July 18, 1989

³³Willowbank Declaration, Article V.25, "Jewish-Christian Relations"