

## AN EVANGELICAL VIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE OF EVANGELICAL-JEWISH RELATIONS

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One of the positive religious trends that have recently been building momentum in this country is that of evangelical-Jewish relations. Representatives of both communities are now making a conscientious effort to view each other seriously rather than superficially. The cartoon-like images and all-too-familiar caricatures that evangelicals and Jews so long held for each other have begun to disappear. A new era of interfaith relations now appears to be under way.

The genius of personal encounter has been the key to the realization of this new state of affairs. In this vein Martin Buber well stated, "All real living is meeting." Accordingly evangelicals and Jews are now entering each other's communities with greater frequency. There each is discovering a new and firsthand appreciation of the other. Evangelicals and Jews are having in-depth conversations on many of the deepest issues of faith and life.

It is clear that this new—and, I must add, delicate—dimension of interfaith dialogue has yet a long way to go. But the strides made since the late 1960s have been enormous. Church historian Martin Marty drew national attention to this matter well before the decade of the 70s had ended. Marty observed that for the year 1977 the deepening of evangelical-Jewish relations in this country and in regard to Israel was "the most significant religious trend in the United States."<sup>1</sup>

To many, this recent development on the interreligious scene may come as a surprise. Indeed, significant interaction with the Jewish community has never been one of the hallmarks of mainstream evangelicalism. History shows that both groups have largely remained aloof since Church and synagogue parted company centuries ago.

It is my purpose therefore to address the subject of the current state of evangelical Jewish relations. I fully concur that there is increasing evidence of a new evangelical-Jewish awareness in America. My aim will be to discuss the scope and shape that this interfaith activity is taking, then to explore the motivating factors behind it, and finally to develop a prospectus for the future. The main emphasis will be on the interaction taking place within mainstream evangelicalism, which is predominantly Gentile, rather than the activities of the so-called Jewish-Christian missionary movement.

It should be stressed at the outset that I do not speak for all evangelicals. We evangelicals, like Jews, are considerably diverse as a people. Neither is part of a fossilized or monolithic movement.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, though evangelicals hold to the

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<sup>1</sup>M. Marty, *Context* (January 1, 1978) 1.

<sup>2</sup>See my "What is Evangelicalism" in "An Evangelical Perspective on Judaism," *Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation* (ed. M. H. Tanenbaum, M. R. Wilson and A. J. Rudin; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 3-7.

historic "fundamentals of the faith" a good number are not comfortable with the label "fundamentalist." For these evangelicals the latter term has unfortunately all too often been associated with a largely negativistic subcultural group of Protestants, a separatistic people largely cut off from the dialogue taking place in the pulsating world of modern ecumenism. Thus those evangelicals open to and committed to the pursuit of interfaith activities represent but one segment of the combined fundamentalist-evangelical community.

What I have sketched in this paper is the result of the research and observations I have gathered in recent years from extensive personal involvement with the Jewish community. During this time my mind has been stretched and my personal faith deepened. In the following discussion I have chosen to address these questions: where we are, why we have arrived there, and where we are going. In these paragraphs I wish not only to survey the current scene but also to open up several pertinent issues that need to be addressed in depth in the future. Last, and most important of all, it is my desire to help set a positive yet candid tone for the ongoing of evangelical-Jewish dialogue in days immediately ahead.

## I. THE SCOPE OF RECENT INTERACTION

Formal dialogue between evangelicals and Jews is relatively new. The first denominational gathering between both groups took place in 1969 at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Contact had been sparse before that time. It was not until the last half of the 70s that the first major outbreak of interfaith discussion began to take place.

On both the national and local levels, and in both formal and informal settings, evangelicals and Jews are now interacting with greater regularity than ever before. At these gatherings, talk is proving for the most part to be rational, dispassionate and two-way. Discussions tend to avoid superficial themes and fair-weather niceties that would render such gatherings trite if not virtually meaningless. Rather, most formal conversation deals with various issues of mutual interest including the common Biblical heritage, Israel and the current moral crisis. Specific attention is also being given to problems of human rights such as religious liberty, racism, anti-Semitism and the role of women. Even topics that have historically divided both camps—the Messiah, the crucifixion and proselytizing—are being openly aired.

The scope of this current interaction between evangelicals and Jews is broad and varied. It involves a number of constituent groups—from professional to lay—within each community. Thus at the beginning of this paper it is important to point out some of the ways in which evangelical-Jewish relations are being built and some of the various levels on which this interaction is taking place. The sampling that follows is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. It aims primarily at being suggestive of some of the many contexts in which evangelicals and Jews are presently finding mutual benefit from meeting.

1. *Jointly Sponsored Area Conferences.* The first national conference of evangelicals and Jews took place December 8-10, 1975. It was in the deepest sense an historic event. It was the first time there had ever been held in this country an extended, interdenominational consultation of evangelicals and Jews on a national scale. That 1975 gathering gained the attention of the media when forty

scholars and religious leaders—an equal balance of evangelicals and Jews—assembled in New York for three days of structured dialogue. The consultation was co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and the Institute of Holy Land Studies.<sup>3</sup> The place of meeting alternated between the American Jewish Committee headquarters and the Calvary Baptist Church. The agenda<sup>4</sup> provided ample opportunity for an open exchange of perspectives on some of the weightier issues of Scripture, theology and history. The conference demonstrated that representatives from two of the great religious traditions on the modern American scene could meet irenically and in a spirit of mutual respect. While common concerns were voiced and age-long differences explored, lasting friendships were made. The overall result was a feeling of success. But there was also a strong sense for the immediate need of spin-off regional conferences by way of follow-up.

Since that New York conference of 1975, regional dialogues have been springing up in those parts of the country where both evangelicals and Jews have well-established communities. Many of these dialogues are spearheaded by the efforts of the American Jewish Committee and its national director of interreligious affairs, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum. By way of example, two follow-up regional dialogues held in 1977—one in the east, the other in the west—may be particularly singled out.

In Philadelphia, one dialogue was held at the staunchly evangelical Tenth Presbyterian Church. Religious leaders from both communities gathered under the sponsorship of the American Jewish Committee and *Eternity* magazine (The Evangelical Foundation, Inc.). In addition to major addresses and a kosher luncheon, the day was climaxed by a vigorous panel discussion on evangelical-Jewish relations. Later the same year, in Dallas, Texas, a dialogue was held on the campus of Southern Methodist University. This gathering was co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and the Southern Baptist Convention. "Agenda for Tomorrow: Baptists and Jews Face the Future" was the title of the theme for this three-day conference. Several hundred lay people, pastors and rabbis interacted in special-interest sessions focusing on such issues as human rights, world hunger and religious liberty. Key addresses were delivered by a number of national figures including Senator Mark Hatfield, an evangelical Baptist from Oregon. The conference ended with the informal adoption of a joint statement indicating areas where continued cooperation would be pursued between the two groups.

*2. Evangelical Institutions of Higher Education.* In addition to formally structured area dialogues, evangelical higher education is providing a second realm in which increased contact with the Jewish community is now being experienced. Evangelical colleges and seminaries are beginning to offer new or additional courses in such areas as Judaica, modern Jewish culture, rabbinic backgrounds to the NT, anti-Semitism, and the literature and history of the holocaust. Some of

<sup>3</sup>The Institute of Holy Land Studies is an evangelical school of higher education based in Jerusalem. It largely attracts students and support from the American evangelical community. The founder and first president of the Institute, G. Douglas Young (deceased in May, 1980), served as co-chairman with Rabbi M. H. Tanenbaum at the first national conference in New York.

<sup>4</sup>The full text of the eighteen papers presented at this conference (nine by evangelicals, nine by Jews) is found in *Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation* cited in n. 2 above.

these courses involve field trips into the Jewish community for worship services, holiday celebrations, Passover seders, museum visits and lectures. Also included have been trips taken to view *mikva'ot* (ritual baths), Jewish day schools in session, and kosher meat-packing establishments. Of special note, however, is the fact that a number of these semester-long courses are taught by rabbis under Jewish sponsorship. For example, since 1976 an evangelical seminary in the west has taken part in an unusual ecumenical program put together by the center for Judaic studies at the local university. These evangelical seminarians are able to enroll on a scholarship basis in a number of courses taught by rabbis, including one titled "Judaism in the Time of Jesus." Other evangelical seminaries are now offering their students courses in Jewish studies through various theological consortium programs within their areas.

Evangelical colleges have a similar record of growing involvement. One institution in the east, a member of the Christian College Consortium, offers on its campus a full-semester course in Judaism taught by a local rabbi through funds supplied by the Jewish Chautauqua Society. At another evangelical Consortium school, students enrolled in a course in Judaism taught by an evangelical professor have been invited annually to several different synagogues. There they have put on programs for the Jewish congregants. These hour-long presentations are usually held at Oneg Shabbat gatherings immediately following Friday-evening worship services. At these occasions evangelical Christian students have made use of the Hebrew Scriptures, music, art, film, literature, drama and dance in presenting various themes relating to the common Biblical heritage. An open discussion on evangelicalism, led by the host rabbi, has often concluded the evening.

A very different example of interaction has taken place a number of times at one evangelical college located in a heavily populated Jewish area. At the invitation of the president's cabinet the local rabbinical association has come to campus for one of its monthly meetings. There these rabbis have joined with the cabinet, various faculty, and student leaders in a kosher luncheon provided by the college. At these gatherings a rabbi or an evangelical educator has usually spoken on the significance of some aspect of evangelical-Jewish relations. At one of these luncheons a student-made film on the history of the Jewish people was shown. After viewing the film the members of the rabbinic association greeted this evangelical student's celluloid interpretation of Jewry with a very positive response. An encouraging outgrowth of that occasion came in the months ahead: The student was asked to speak and show his film at three of the local synagogues represented by the rabbis who were present. It is clear that both communities can only profit from such mutually edifying endeavors growing out of the evangelical educational community.

3. *Evangelical Churches.* Another area where increased interaction is being experienced is in evangelical churches. Evangelical ministers and their congregations are beginning to open their doors more widely to the Jewish community. Today there seems to be evidence of a growing spirit of openness, helpfulness and trust, free from many of the suspicions that have daunted such efforts in the past. Let us look at the New England region for several cases in point.

For a number of years, one Conservative Baptist church has been providing its expansive facilities to a local Reform temple in need of more space for its High

Holiday services. Another church in New England—this one large, suburban and interdenominational—on a Sunday evening decided to set aside its regular worship service and experiment with a special community program called "Jewish Neighbor Night." Jewish friends and acquaintances were invited for a showing of the Graham-produced film, *His Land*, a picture one Jewish spokesman terms "the best loving film about Israel today." The coffee hour that followed climaxed a highly successful evening of evangelical-Jewish interaction and deepening of friendships. Because of the positive response shown this church by the Jewish people of their community, and because of the deepening of a friendship between the pastor of the church and a local Reform rabbi, an interesting return visit on a weekday morning was later arranged. This time the rabbi came with forty members of his Tuesday morning Bible class. After a tour of the church facilities (a new house of worship had just been dedicated) the pastor was asked by the rabbi to discuss the question, "What Is Evangelical Christianity?" Several months following this informative exchange the pastor and his people were invited to visit the rabbi at his temple. There they toured the building and heard him speak on "What Is Judaism?" Through these visits, both communities gained a new perspective on each other's faith and a deeper appreciation for the intricacies and privileges associated with religious pluralism in America.

One further example involving an evangelical church will be cited. The Boston Center for Christian Studies is an adult evening school of the Bible drawing several hundred lay people from churches in the Boston area. Classes are held in a large evangelical church in the inner city. A new course was set up so that evangelical students and their teacher were able to interact every other week of the term with a different guest rabbi. The response on the part of these visiting rabbis was most encouraging as they lectured on topics of vital interest to both communities. As for the lay people, for most it was the first time they had been exposed to any articulate authority within contemporary Jewry. Once again it was proven that people come to understand another faith best not by reading its theoreticians but by personally interacting with its practitioners.

4. *Jewish Institutions.* There is a fourth area that reveals an increase in interfaith activity. This concerns evangelical Christians who are being asked to address Jewish institutional gatherings. Evangelicals who are supportive in friendship to the Jewish community are being called upon to speak at synagogue services, brotherhood breakfasts, Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee gatherings, and community center lectureships. Topics have centered around such issues as self-definition, Judeo-Christian ethics, brotherhood and the nature of religious pluralism. On occasion, however, less formal and more personal presentations are being made. One such address receiving considerable publicity was given by Corrie ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place*, at a Conservative synagogue in the south. There this elderly woman was honored by the host Jewish congregation for her efforts and those of her family in courageously hiding Jewish people in Holland during World War II.

Perhaps the most celebrated single address ever given by an evangelical leader at a major Jewish gathering occurred on October 28, 1977, in Atlanta. There, before 200 Jewish leaders, Billy Graham chose to address the topic, "The Evangelical Christian and the Jew in a Pluralistic Society." After speaking about his

own Christian commitment, Graham proceeded to outline six areas<sup>5</sup> where evangelicals and Jews—despite theological differences—may work together for the making of a better America. Recipient on that occasion of the American Jewish Committee's first National Interreligious Award, Graham was cited for his contribution to human rights, support of Israel, combating anti-Semitism, and "strengthening mutual respect and understanding between the evangelical and Jewish communities."<sup>6</sup>

The kinds of evangelical-Jewish interaction we have cursorily mentioned above are but a partial sampling of what is going on. But one final observation must be made: The future shape and scope of evangelical-Jewish dialogue remains to be seen. Despite the fact that evangelicals are not being asked by the Jewish community to renounce their deepest faith convictions in the name of ecumenical broadmindedness, there are those within the evangelical movement who remain hesitant—even fearful—about the whole notion of dialogue. (We might hasten also to add that many within Orthodox Jewry have strong reservations as well.) This element in evangelicalism unsupportive of dialogue is substantial at present. Thus the growth of dialogue in the future will likely be closely related to how many of these currently resistant evangelical leaders and their organizations—church, parachurch, educational and other—will be open to change their minds and provide the impetus, direction and financial backing needed to further interfaith activities with the Jewish community.

## II. MOTIVATION FOR MEETING

One of the first questions currently being asked about this new venture in dialogue concerns what is behind it all. What prompts evangelicals and Jews at this point in time to seek each other out? Why are evangelicals and Jews engaging in this interaction? In short, what is their motivation for meeting?

Although history seems to indicate that most evangelicals have had but one motive in mind—witness to their faith—when meeting with Jews, the new dialogue is making evangelicals and Jews both aware of other things as well. What are some of these other contributing factors and motives that lie behind current evangelical-Jewish encounter? We will begin the second main section of this paper by noting two important reasons why evangelicals are now reaching out to Jews.

1. *Factors motivating evangelicals.* First, there is a genuine interest on the part of evangelicals to deepen their understanding of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. "The single most important contact between Judaism and Christianity," writes Jewish scholar Michael Wyschogrod, "is the centrality of the

<sup>5</sup>A condensed version of Billy Graham's address is found under the title "Be Strong," *Decision* (June 1978) 6. The six areas where Graham called for evangelical-Jewish cooperation are these: (1) working and praying together for the peace of Jerusalem; (2) working together for improved race relations among black and white; (3) joint honoring, supporting and undergirding of our nation; (4) hammering out together a common agreement so that moral law may be taught to the young people in our public schools; (5) working together for world peace, freedom and justice; (6) working jointly for a national, spiritual and moral awakening.

<sup>6</sup>*Newsweek* (November 28, 1977) 126.

Bible in the two faiths.”<sup>7</sup> Wyschogrod is correct in that it is this common Biblical heritage in which evangelical and Jew share that enables both communities to lay claim to being “People of the Book.” Evangelicals have come to understand the message and background of the Bible in much greater depth through the archaeological, cultural and linguistic insights provided by the pens of Jewish scholars. Especially in such areas as the Psalms, the wisdom literature, the history of Israel, and the social and ethical teachings of the prophets, both communities have found a mutually beneficial common ground whereby jointly the ancient Biblical heritage may be studied.

For nearly two thousand years Christianity has been debtor to Judaism for the sharing of her rich literary legacy. The Hebrew Scriptures, which make up about eighty percent of the Bible, were used extensively in the first century by the Jewish authors of the NT. Through quotation, paraphrase and allusion, these writers drew heavily upon the OT for the development of their theological arguments. One written document was normative for Jesus, Paul and the primitive Christian community: They lived their lives “according to the [Hebrew] Scriptures” (see Matt 5:17-20; John 5:39; 1 Cor 15:3-4).

These same Scriptures were used for spreading the Christian message (see Acts 8:26-40; 18:24-28). In addition the book of Psalms became the hymnai of the early Church (see 1 Cor 14:26). It was a Church that began with Jewish believers, not Gentiles. So Paul had to caution the Gentile believers of his day not to “boast” (Rom 11:18) or become “proud” (11:20), for they were but wild branches grafted in (11:24), allowed by God’s kindness to “share the richness of the olive tree [Israel]” (11:17). He further adds, “It is not you that support the root [Israel], but the root that supports you” (11:18). Such teaching by Paul should be an ever-present authoritative reminder to all evangelicals: As a community we must never forget that the roots of evangelical Christian faith run deep into the soil of Judaism.

Karl Barth once stated, “One has either got to be a Jew or stop reading the Bible. The Bible cannot make sense to anyone who is not ‘spiritually a Semite.’”<sup>8</sup> Of late, evangelicals are being drawn more and more to explore the implications of the above statement. They are being impressed anew that the Biblical view of reality is profoundly Semitic and that Hebraic and rabbinic background materials are absolutely essential to hermeneutical studies. Especially through recent dialogue activities, evangelicals are becoming alert to the personal benefits that may accrue to them by being able to discuss the Scriptures face to face with those people whose ancestors produced this book before it was passed on to them.

A second factor influencing evangelical outreach to Jews is the growing effect of relational theology within evangelicalism. For centuries there have been evangelicals who have so emphasized the propositional dimension of truth that they have all but forgotten its existential impact. In recent years this lopsided emphasis has been changing. Propositional truth is being balanced—some fear overbalanced at times—through an attempt to personalize theology. There is a serious effort to relate theology to people in the context of their life situation. Biblical doctrine is being brought down to earth where it touches man. Relational

<sup>7</sup>M. Wyschogrod, “Judaism and Evangelical Christianity,” *Evangelicals and Jews* 35.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in T. Merton, ed., *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968) 14.

theology is no ivory-tower theology. Rather it seeks to communicate with people in the marketplace of human experience.

This changing emphasis in present-day evangelicalism has brought about a new freedom and openness in interpersonal relationships. Accordingly evangelicals are now impressed with the importance of relating to others first and foremost as people, not as mere random repositories into which bags of proof-texts may be emptied with abandon. To say this does not mean evangelicals now feel they must stop proclaiming and start denying what they have considered to be the uniqueness of the Christian message. Rather it indicates a new awareness of what can be gained, rather than lost, from those whose faith may differ. In the words of evangelical leader Leighton Ford: "As Christians we ought to be open to talk with anybody and to learn from anybody, provided that we don't give up the center of our faith. Christians can enter into conversation with Jews, Muslims, and others on a basis of friendship, of sharing common concerns we have as human beings, of witnessing to our knowledge of the true God."<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately evangelicals have not always been anxious to know Jews simply as persons, as human beings. Instead, Jews have too often been viewed as scarcely more than targets—trophies to be bagged on an evangelistic safari and proudly displayed on a "spiritual scalp belt." The evangelical community is now coming to realize that to initiate thoughtful, loving relationships with Jews means that one begins by coming to know and understand them as people. Without this respect for his person, a Jew may feel he amounts to little more in the Christian's eye than being a key piece to his cosmic, Israel-focused, Jew-centered, eschatological jigsaw puzzle. Can an evangelical honestly call a Jewish person "my friend" when he has never really taken the time to get to know him first by listening? This is where Biblical teaching on communication begins (see Jas 1:19).

As a whole, evangelicals are becoming increasingly conscious about holding to an incarnational theology that truly affects relationships. They are learning that they must first earn their right to be heard. But this only happens when they spend much time coming to know Jews and learning especially about the last two thousand years of their painful yet brilliant history. Thus many evangelicals are coming to understand that communication with a Jewish person must be more than a brusque one-way conversation. Such meetings usually have a similar pattern: They abruptly end as soon as it is apparent that the Jewish party fails to understand certain theological issues the "evangelical" way. Indeed, evangelicals are now being awakened to ponder the sensitive yet provocative admonition of William S. LaSor, who writes:

Until we know the Jew, and love him as a person, until we share something of his memory of the Holocaust, until we sincerely believe that we are in his debt and that there are still many things which he can teach us about the religious heritage which was first of all his, and now is ours too, it seems to me that talk about "evangelizing" the Jew is only empty rhetoric. At best he will overlook what we say, and at worst he will be offended by it. Mutual understanding can only come through mutual trust—and that can come only after we have earned it.

LaSor concludes with this penetrating question addressed to his own evangelical

<sup>9</sup>"A Conversation with Leighton Ford," *Reformed Journal* (November 1976) 14.



community: "What have you—or I—done today to help some Jew trust us?"<sup>10</sup>

2. *Factors Motivating Jews.* The motivation for conducting interfaith dialogue does not come exclusively from evangelicals. It cuts both ways. Jews are prompted to seek out evangelicals for a number of reasons. We will consider but two among what appear to be the most important factors.

In the first place, there is the seemingly ubiquitous character of anti-Semitism. Within the Jewish community there are those who believe that anti-Semitism is the most important single motive as to why Jews enter into dialogue with Christians. Among them is James Yaffe, who states that

the Jew's motive is much simpler [than the Christian's]. He wants Christian anti-Semitism to come to an end. He wants the Christian to admit the harm he's done and stop doing it. He may not be conscious that he has this motive. He may sincerely believe that he has joined the dialogue in order to exchange ideas, broaden his horizons, learn more about Christianity. But once the formalities are over, anti-Semitism is the only subject he really wants to discuss.<sup>11</sup>

Whether or not Yaffe's analysis is fully accurate could be debated. Nonetheless he draws attention to a painful sore of the Jew that remains unhealed after centuries of history and that makes him willing—even desirous—to talk about it.

The pages of history reluctantly point to the horrendous Crusades in Europe that started at the close of the eleventh century and the infamous Spanish Inquisition at the end of the fifteenth. Remembrance of these seemingly distant events, however, appears all but gone. To most modern Americans the recollection that these tragedies happened seems to be now lost in the smog of antiquity. We ask, then, will the twentieth century also be forgotten? Will the modern Haman, Adolph Hitler, be forgotten? Some six million Jews were slaughtered in the holocaust—just because they were Jews. If this could happen but forty brief years ago in our modern and supposedly enlightened world, who is to say it could not happen again?

Education alone has not proven sufficient. Many of Hitler's SS officers held Ph.D. degrees from European universities. They proved, however, to be little more than barbaric technologists. Small wonder the discussion of anti-Semitism is absolutely essential to the Jew. As Arthur Hertzberg points out, "We must keep retesting the temperature of the waters in which we must swim and the indices of our own strength to survive, because these are everyday matters of the most profound personal concern."<sup>12</sup> Though unqualified and though seemingly insensitive in sound, there is reason why an old folk saying has continued to circulate for centuries among Jews: "Scratch a goy and you'll find an anti-Semite."

Lest we forget, there has been a dramatic rise in anti-Semitic incidents in both Europe and America recently. I am not referring to the so-called "polite variety" of anti-Semitism—namely, the discrimination and/or antipathy displayed toward Jews in the social, economical and educational realms. Rather I

<sup>10</sup>W. S. LaSor, *Reformed Journal* (November 1976) 14.

<sup>11</sup>J. Yaffe, *The American Jews* (New York: Random House, 1968) 47.

<sup>12</sup>A. Hertzberg, *Anti-Semitism and Jewish Uniqueness: Ancient and Contemporary* (Syracuse, NY: University Press, 1975) 17.

have reference to western Europe, where there has been a marked increase in synagogue smearings, desecration of gravestones, anti-Semitic graffiti, Nazi pamphlets and grotesque Jewish stereotypes in the press. For example, in France a growing wave of terrorism against French Jews culminated in the fall of 1980 with a Paris synagogue bombing that killed four persons and injured twelve. This was just one of more than a hundred separate incidents recorded in the previous five years.

Also here in America the ugly head of anti-Semitism continues to be reared. In the greater New York area<sup>13</sup> numerous incidents of anti-Semitic vandalism continue to be recorded. These include the painting of swastikas, anti-Semitic slurs and obscenities on buildings. Two garages owned by Jews have been burned. Explosives have been found taped to the window of a synagogue. Other homes, businesses and synagogues have been attacked or destroyed. At a KKK rally, propaganda was distributed that attacked Jews and appeared to exclude them from "the white race." With vicious, inhumane incidents such as these, dialogue with Christians is a must. For if Jews have no genuine Christian friends they can count on, who can they trust? The "Jews of silence" are no more.

What can evangelicals learn from all this? For one thing, they can be especially aware of the dangers that a certain kind of theological anti-Semitism potentially brings in its wake. Theological anti-Semitism comes about when the majority religion tries to suppress the minority faith. For centuries there have been those in the Church who have assumed a position of "triumphalism" regarding the Jew. In the view of these Christians, Jews did not accept the messianic claims of Jesus. So, as unbelievers they are now rejected by God. Their chosenness and uniqueness as a contemporary people is now passé. Jews remain "enemies of God" because of their responsibility for the death of Jesus. Bearing their guilt as "Christ-killers," Jews continue to survive only as a matter of divine decree. Hence as a living faith Judaism ceased to exist two thousand years ago. In its place the Church proudly stands as the new and true Israel, heir of all God's covenant promises to Israel.

There are other Christians who argue that the Jew is forever earmarked to be God's suffering servant. As such he is destined to undergo untold persecution in the future. In the end, however, God will put a hook in his jaw, direct him back to the land of Israel and there drive him to his knees in repentance and faith—just prior to the second coming of Jesus.

Unfortunately, over the centuries too few Christians have thought through the logic of such beliefs. Dwight Wilson has much to say about the relation of certain Christian theology to the issues of anti-Semitism. He charges that there remains in today's Church a theological perspective that makes Christians guilty of the charge of determinism. These Christians have "expected and condoned anti-Semitic behavior because it was prophesied by Jesus. Their consent makes them blameworthy with regard to American as well as Nazi and Soviet anti-Semitism. Neither as a body nor as individuals has their cry against such inhumanity been more than a whimper."<sup>14</sup> Though many of the author's fellow premillennialists

<sup>13</sup>For a brief summary of specific cases see "Anti-Semitic Vandals in Suburbs Are Causing Concern," *New York Times* (November 5, 1980) B2.

<sup>14</sup>D. Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 217.

may not particularly appreciate his assessment of this eschatological viewpoint, he has raised an important question for both Christians and Jews. In the words of one rabbi who recently commented to me about this theological perspective on the future of the Jew: "What greater justification and blessing does the Christian anti-Semite need than that he is carrying out the will of God?"

The Church was born in a Jewish cradle, but it rapidly became de-Judaized. By the middle of the second century an anti-Jewish polemic arose within the Church as men like Marcion sought to rid Christianity of every trace of Judaism. Other Church fathers such as Justin Martyr, John Chrysostom and Ignatius spoke with great contempt against Jews and Judaism. With the eventual triumph of Christianity in the fourth century as the state religion, its indebtedness to Judaism had to a great extent been forgotten. Judaism was now thought to be obsolete. Because Jewish people had rejected Jesus as their Messiah, what need did believing Gentiles have to associate with or be indebted to those of a dead, legalistic religion? The Jewish roots of the Church had thus virtually been severed. A Gentile Church, largely Grecianized through the influence of Platonic thought, now stood in its place.<sup>15</sup>

To this day the rejection of Jewish culture by a proud, Gentile-dominated Church has compounded and confused the question of guilt in the Jewish mind. This has resulted in a defensive and basically anti-Christian posture on the part of many Jews. In the words of one writer:

When the ordinary Jewish person attends a Gentile-style church and hears the pastor speak of how the Jews killed Christ, he reads into the situation a rejection not only of himself, his people, and his heritage, but of his culture as well. He hears, in effect, something like this: "We Christians don't like you Jews; and we don't like your Jewish customs or your Jewish ways of doing things." It's as though someone is saying to him, "Not only did you kill Christ, but your whole religion is wrong in every way, as is your culture and heritage."<sup>16</sup>

Let it be freely admitted that the cross has **always** been a problem for the Jewish community. To Christians it is a symbol of God's **great** act of love for man. But for Jews who are painfully aware of their history the cross represents centuries of hate and persecution. In the words of one Jewish spokesman, "The Christian looks at the figure on the cross and sees another person. I look at the cross and I see myself. That's what the goyim do to a Jew."<sup>17</sup> Only through the channels of sensitive interfaith dialogue can each community begin to perceive the other in realistic terms. It is indeed difficult for today's Jew to rise above the burden of historical memories and admit to the relevancy and indispensability of hearing the Christian evangel. It has hardly been thought of as "good news" to his ears. The Church has yet fully to realize that good theology can not be easily built on hundreds of years of bad history.

Evangelical scholars and pastors must assume the leadership in insisting that

<sup>15</sup>For further discussion see M. R. Wilson, "Hebrew Thought in the Life of the Church," *The Living and Active Word of God* (ed. M. Inch and R. Youngblood; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982).

<sup>16</sup>P. Goble, "Jewish Reaction to the Guilt Question," *Pentecostal Evangel* (April 17, 1977) 13.

<sup>17</sup>"How Jews See Jesus," *Newsweek* (April 18, 1977) 88.

neither its own evangelical community, nor any Christian community, holds the Jewish people or any other specific group of people corporately culpable today for the death of Jesus. While Romans, Jews and others were involved in the events surrounding the crucifixion, we do not hold the descendants of any of these peoples singularly responsible. Rather, Christian theologians must teach and stress that the sin of all mankind—including their own—is responsible for Jesus' death.

Furthermore as evangelicals we would be wary of those within our own community whose view of theology and history mandates the suffering of the Jewish people as prerequisite to the return of Jesus and the final institution of the Age to Come (*Olam Haba*). To the contrary, we see the suffering of all people as a direct outgrowth of the sinfulness of mankind, which itself causes man's inhumanity to man. How God in his eternal, sovereign, cosmic will pleases to use the sinful actions of men and nations in no way "sanctifies" or even vindicates these actions. Let us never forget that some of the most heinous and barbaric acts in the history of this world have been justified on the grounds that "God willed it."

There would seem to be only one posture, therefore, open to the sensitive Christian thinker. It is to condemn all sinful acts and to live by example a life that promotes righteousness and justice (Amos 5:24; Mic 6:8). This has been a foundational teaching of both Judaism and Christianity. In the words of both Moses and Jesus, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39). And again, in the words of Hillel, a great first-century sage, "What is hateful to yourself do not do to your fellow-man" (*Sabb*. 31a).

In addition to the long recognized factor of anti-Semitism, a second impetus for dialogue has lately surfaced in the Jewish community from a different direction. This most recent motivating force is the rise of evangelicals to candidacy for public office and, at the same time, the parallel impact of the new Christian right. When Jimmy Carter began his drive to the presidency in 1975 as a "born-again" evangelical Christian, the American public—notably Jews and other nonevangelicals—became curious about the nature of this southerner's religious commitment. This was understandable since most Jews in America live in the northeast corridor and hence have had little firsthand exposure to evangelicals whose numbers are not comparatively strong in that part of the country.

Carter's candidacy for the presidency was a major factor in evoking the printed media to begin to give national attention to the "evangelicals." For instance, one week before Carter was elected in 1976 the cover of *Newsweek* was emblazoned with the words, "Born Again!: The Evangelicals."<sup>18</sup> The following year a cover story of *Time*<sup>19</sup> caught the eye of millions when it captioned evangelicalism as that "New Empire of Faith," made up of a booming 45.5 million people.

Despite the fact that about 75 percent of the Jewish community voted for Jimmy Carter in 1976, Carter's election campaign raised certain questions and suspicions among Jews: "How would a self-professed 'born-again' Christian lead a pluralistic nation of more than 200 million?" "Would he be a president who is evangelical or would he prove to be an evangelical president?" "If the latter, what effect would this have on Jews and all other Americans who for centuries have prized the priceless right of religious liberty?"

<sup>18</sup>*Newsweek* (October 25, 1976).

<sup>19</sup>*Time* (December 26, 1977) 52-58.

Carter's election was interpreted by many as a sort of "rite of passage" for evangelicals. It pointed to their acceptance into the heart of American cultural and political life. Why? Here was a relatively unknown Southern Baptist peanut farmer from the small town of Plains, Georgia. He would move to the large capital city of Washington to lead this great nation. Here was a man who would become commander-in-chief of the United States military. Here was one destined to be a world leader who would be capable of establishing friendships with such dignitaries of state as Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat.

At the beginning of 1980, the final year of Carter's term in office, it became evident that two other evangelicals would be vying for the presidency. Their names: John Anderson, a member of the Evangelical Free Church, and Ronald Reagan, a Presbyterian by affiliation. Reagan, during his successful bid for the presidency, became the favored candidate of the new Christian right. He received enthusiastic backing from many new right organizations whose membership is strongly made up of fundamentalists and politically conservative evangelicals. In the face of this rapid rise of the new right, which includes various conservative Christian lobbyist groups, the current Jewish community has become perplexed and uneasy. They want to know about the goals and objectives of what has been termed "born-again politics." Hence not only Jews but also other Americans have been asking such questions as these: "Is it the goal of these fundamentalists and evangelicals to create a 'Christian republic' by 'Christianizing' government and politics?" "Are those who do not line up with the vote of organizations such as the Moral Majority somehow, by implication, not good Christians (or Jews)?" "If one grants the importance of stressing pro-life, pro-family and pro-America issues, what about the Judeo-Christian teaching on other important social concerns such as poverty, peace and justice?" "Will the new Christian right continue to oversimplify complex political issues by seeming to view them as black-and-white matters simply because there are scriptural proof texts that supposedly can be appealed to?" "Is there only one 'Christian' way to think politically?" "What is the responsibility of a presidential leader—in particular, an evangelical by conviction—when it comes to the issue of the separation of Church and state?" "How will a 'born-again' president insure the preservation of American pluralism?"

With these and other questions very much in the air, little wonder that recent years have been very unsettling and frustrating for the Jewish community—not to speak of a large segment of very sympathetic evangelicals. Accordingly Jews have sensed a growing need to inquire about the evangelical beliefs and practices of not only Carter and Reagan, the two most recent presidential occupants of the White House, but also of those millions of Americans who claim a similar "born-again" religious commitment. Gradually Jews are coming to discover that not all evangelicals think alike when it comes to politics. Indeed they are finding out that the words "fundamentalist" and "evangelical" are not necessarily synonymous. Jews and other concerned Americans are now realizing that for one to be a conservative Christian in religious convictions does not necessarily imply a conservative stance in political commitment. To be sure, there are many evangelicals who could and would welcome the day when the first Jew emerges from a field of qualified candidates to assume the presidency of this great land.

3. *Factors Motivating Both Jews and Evangelicals.* The final four factors prompting dialogue, which I have set forth below, are particularly those mutually

shared by both evangelicals and Jews. Though they may arise from one community more than another, in general they appear to be common factors around which joint interest in dialogue is frequently engendered.

First, interest has resulted from the fact that since the 1960s there has been a general improvement in interfaith relationships. Both evangelicals and Jews have benefited from a changing climate largely brought about by ecumenical endeavors, the civil rights movement and specialized efforts aimed at easing racial tensions.

At the time of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy during the first half of this century it was common to find Christians fleeing mainline denominations in droves, only to assume a more separatistic, anti-intellectual and cultic stance. For many a new Christian lifestyle has emerged. Evangelicals had pulled back from relating the evangel to societal needs and had become preoccupied instead with some of the more peripheral areas of Christian doctrine.

But today the picture has changed considerably. The mainstream of contemporary evangelicalism has now returned to a more culturally open position. There is renewed interest in sociopolitical concerns, mainline denominationalism and ecumenical issues that deal with human rights in the context of a pluralistic society.

The progress made in race relations in the last decade and a half has likewise been paralleled by major strides in Catholic-Jewish, Orthodox-Jewish and liberal-Protestant-Jewish relations. Since evangelicals were the only major group left with whom interreligiously-minded Jewish organizations had not entered into formal dialogue, it was simply a matter of time before evangelicals and Jews would find themselves in conversation.

A second factor is the growing awareness of the need to dispel faulty images and popular stereotypes of each other. Personal encounter between evangelicals and Jews has also been prompted by the realization that many prejudices, distortions and faulty perceptions exist. The geographical concentration of evangelicals is largely in the south and the "Bible belt" of the midwest. Jews, on the other hand, are located mostly in the northeast and large cities of the west. As a result, various half-truths and stereotypic images arise from this mutual isolation. Accordingly, cutting epithets such as "Elmer Gantrys," "rednecks" and "wild-eyed religious fanatics," or "Pharisee," "Shylock" and "money-grubber" have created unjust portrayals of each group.

By coming together in interfaith discussion, evangelicals and Jews are starting to discover accurate modern-day images of each other. This is especially helpful to those in the evangelical community who have sometimes in the past carried ignorant and painfully naive misperceptions of Jews and Judaism. Perhaps the major reason for this has been that evangelicals for too long have persisted in equating modern Judaism with Biblical Judaism. Only by personally coming to know the Jews of today will evangelicals realize that Judaism is not simply the religion of the OT but one that developed from it. Little wonder that Anglican churchman John Stott calls his fellow evangelicals to get involved in dialogue. He rightly states: "Dialogue is a token of genuine Christian love, because it indicates our steadfast resolve to rid our minds of the prejudices and caricatures which we may entertain about other people."<sup>20</sup> If this alone were the result of interfaith

<sup>20</sup>J. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975) 81.

dialogue, in my opinion it would still be well worth the effort.

Third, evangelicals and Jews have a mutual interest in coming to understand their religious and cultural differences. The paths of both are crossing more frequently than in the past. This is happening through the military service, the secular university (most evangelicals and Jews of college age do not attend religious schools but are meeting in the classrooms and residence halls of large secular schools), volunteer organizations, PTA, and suburban neighborhood contacts brought about by the flight of the modern Jew from the confines of his traditional *shtetl* (ghetto).

With this increased interaction, evangelicals are taking advantage of the opportunity to ask a variety of questions—some simple, some complex, and all curious—about the life and practices of today's Jew. A sampling of some of the more interesting and frequently-posed questions heard in casual conversation are these: "Why is a glass smashed at a Jewish wedding?" "When Jewish women light the Sabbath candles, why do they cover their eyes with their hands?" "Christians feel free to pray or sing while attending services in a Jewish temple, but why don't Jewish people pray or sing when visiting Christian churches?" "Why don't my Jewish neighbors ever have any flowers or music at their funerals?" "Why don't Jews embalm their dead like Jacob was in OT times?" "Why do Jews eat chicken instead of lamb at their Passover seders?" "Since there are no more animal sacrifices, how do Jews today receive atonement for their sin?"

Jews, in turn, are curious about evangelicals and their beliefs and subcultural practices. Typical questions informally posed have included ones such as these: "Why do 'born-again' Christians seem to always insist that Bible reading and prayer be part of the opening exercises in the public school?" "Why doesn't the pastor of the evangelical church here in town seem to understand when our rabbi keeps on questioning the use of town funds for the construction and lighting of a large creche during the Christmas season on the lawn of the town hall?" "Why does my son's public school teacher, who is an evangelical, seem to resent the fact that I question that my son is made to sing with his class many traditional Christmas carols each year when Hanukkah songs are never included?" "If evangelicals try to be so Biblical in their approach to life, why do they criticize us Jews at weddings for using wine and dancing when these things were so much a part of life in Bible times?" "Is being an evangelical Christian simply a matter of believing certain doctrines about salvation and the world to come, or does the evangelical faith have any direct relevancy to the problems of this present world of flesh and blood?"

The search for answers to these and other probing questions like them has contributed immeasurably toward understanding some of the religious and cultural differences separating evangelicals and Jews.

Let us turn now to one final factor motivating evangelicals and Jews to seek each other out: their common interest in the survival of Israel. Many (but not all) evangelicals see Israel's return to the land and emergence to statehood (1948) as in some way connected with Biblical prophecy. This was boldly brought to the attention of the national public through full-page ads published in many of the large newspapers across the country.<sup>21</sup> Signed by fifteen evangelical leaders, the ad

<sup>21</sup>The ad is titled "Evangelicals Concerned for Israel." See *New York Times* (November 1, 1977) 12.

affirmed belief in "Israel's divine right to the land" and urged evangelicals to write Washington in support of Israel's stance in the Middle East. This widening evangelical support of Israel is viewed by certain observers of the current religious scene as part of a "new political assertiveness," a move described as a "drastic step [by evangelicals] in their effort to overcome or repeal their choice to disengage, to be aloof from the public sphere."<sup>22</sup>

Whereas liberal mainline Protestantism largely assumes an attitude of indifference or passivity in regard to the backing of Israel, evangelicals tend to be strong and enthusiastic supporters of Israel's right to a homeland. Especially in light of the Nazi holocaust, evangelicals are now speaking out to condemn the declaration that "Zionism is racism" and to back Israel.

Though much of the justification for support of Israel seems to derive from theological concerns,<sup>23</sup> today evangelicals are happily giving other reasons as well. Political, economic and sociological factors are also important in arguing for Israel's right to exist as a free and secure state. Indeed there is concern for a just peace among all peoples in the Middle East, not just between Israel and Egypt or between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

For a variety of motivations and reasons, Jews and evangelicals will continue to find a common bond of interest in Israel's future. Israel is the land of the Bible. Here is the stage on which the events of Holy Writ have been played out for centuries. It is a land sacred to Jew and evangelical alike. And it will always be that way.

### III. PROSPECTUS FOR THE FUTURE

When we seek to assess the present state of evangelical-Jewish relations, it is clear that much progress has been made. As we have seen, however, both communities tend to approach interfaith relations from somewhat different perspectives and often with different interests in mind. Evangelicals, for instance, seem to be mainly interested in seeking out Jews for the purpose of discussing ancient Biblical texts and/or theological issues. Jews, on the other hand, though neither unfamiliar nor passive about the Bible and its teachings, seem especially concerned that they be viewed as modern living people, not as those whose image is that of the sandal-shod patriarchs with staffs in hand so familiar to the cover of Christian Sunday-school quarterlies. Indeed Jews may be more prone to discuss with evangelicals those two thousand years of history since the Bible was written and the consequent needs and practical issues relating to this world in which they now live. In sum, as one Jewish leader has rightly stated: "Jews and Judaism cannot be seen only as ancient biblical categories; rather, Christians must experience the contemporary Jewish community today *in situ*."<sup>24</sup>

#### 1. *Some Joint Projects to Consider.* Recognizing the importance of the above

<sup>22</sup>Marty, *Context* 1.

<sup>23</sup>For an elaboration of this point see my article, "Zionism as Theology: An Evangelical Approach," *JETS* 22 (1979) 27-44.

<sup>24</sup>A. J. Rudin, "Prospectus for the Future," *Evangelicals and Jews* 311.



admonition, we observe that both evangelicals and Jews must now seek out additional ways and new contexts in which they can profitably meet. This way they can become better acquainted in situations other than dialogues exclusively structured around Biblical topics. Lay people especially can benefit from interfaith activities when organized around community-centered projects of mutual interest. I would therefore urge that the future of evangelical-Jewish relations move more in this direction. Accordingly, let me suggest a number of possible joint projects and social settings by which church and synagogue groups might beneficially interact together: (1) Write letters to Russia seeking the freedom of enslaved Christians and Jews. (2) Share in a Passover seder. (3) Bring youth groups together to work on the constructing of a *sukkah* (an outdoor hut for the celebration of the fall Biblical Festival of Tabernacles). (4) Conduct a Jewish cooking class for joint women's organizations. (5) Hold a joint study-discussion group which introduces the Talmud through the ethical *Sayings of the Fathers* (*Pirke Avot*). (6) Have an interfaith music night stressing Jewish and Christian songs that derive from our common heritage. (7) Conduct a workshop on Biblical art projects<sup>25</sup> useful for lay teachers. (8) Hold an evening of instruction in Jewish folk dancing. (9) Show and discuss films such as "His Land," "The Hiding Place," "Night and Fog" and "Fiddler on the Roof." (10) Encourage local Hadasah and Christian women's clubs to plan programs of mutual interest. (11) Produce a community version of "The Diary of Anne Frank" or "The First American Thanksgiving." (12) Hold a joint historical gathering in the month of May to commemorate Israel Independence Day. (13) Begin a monthly joint reading circle that alternates between synagogue and church facilities, using such books as *The Chosen* (Potok), *The Insecurity of Freedom* (Heschel), *Evangelical Roots* (Kantzer, ed.), or *How Should We Then Live?* (Schaeffer). (14) Cross-register in community lay religious schools for the study of the Hebrew language, Church history and other courses. (15) Take trips together to museums and points of common historic and religious interest—e.g., in Rhode Island the Touro Synagogue and sites made famous by Roger Williams. (16) Plan a jointly sponsored travel-study tour of Israel, Greece and Rome. (17) Hold an illustrated lecture on Jewish or Christian history, archaeology and culture.

2. *Our Unfinished Agenda.* To this point I have largely called attention to those areas where both evangelicals and Jews share a common basis for meeting in formal dialogue and other interfaith activities. It would be less than honest, however, to leave one the impression that evangelical-Jewish relations are likely to be all downhill from this point on. In other words we should not think that just because we may have the ability to work together cooperatively on a number of joint projects—and I believe we have that ability—and agree on other things, this means we face no major obstacles ahead. It must never be forgotten that we represent two different religions. We must be candid with one another; we must never consciously downplay our differences. In the long run we accomplish little when we fail to face our differences objectively for what they are. We have some sensitive areas of tension where theological antitheses of centuries past have resulted in what appears to be a perpetual impasse—an ideological cul-de-sac—

<sup>25</sup>For ideas see *The Jewish Catalogue*, Jewish Publication Society, 1973.

which, unless God intervenes, may never be fully resolved until the end of this age. Evangelicals, for instance, are not about to abandon their belief in the divinity and messiahship of Jesus. Likewise the Jewish community does not seem ready to abandon their oral law and proclaim that man is saved—that is, worthy of the life to come—by faith alone. In brief, then, our agenda is yet unfinished. But despite these sharp differences, we must keep talking. And we must remain respectful of the deepest faith convictions of the other.

When we pursue this matter of our respective differences further, it is precisely at this point that evangelicals and Jews confront perhaps the greatest—certainly the most sensitive—challenge of the future. Therefore it is realistic and timely to question whether evangelical-Jewish relations will remain harmonious and peaceful in the future. Recently, for example, millions of evangelicals and Jews across this land saw how a single insensitive statement—on whether God hears the prayers of a Jew—can cut deeply into the heart of both our communities. Who is to say that, God forbid, this kind of remark will not be made again? And what of those historically more substantive issues that have already divided us for more than nineteen hundred years?

At heart I am an optimist, so I personally hope for a bright tomorrow in evangelical-Jewish relations. My energies will continue to be directed to work for and promote that end. Nevertheless, at the same time I am a realist. And for that reason I feel that our prospectus for the immediate future must be understandably cautious and somewhat guarded. Evangelical-Jewish relations have never enjoyed the luxury of proceeding from the stance of thoroughgoing and unquestionable optimism. This is because both our communities continue to affirm views—traditional to each respective faith—that immediately have the potential to bring us into conflict. Many of these issues are held very deeply on the visceral level. Thus we face the possibility that these present impasses will never be adequately resolved to the satisfaction of either community. After all, neither of us is seeking to build some symbiotic worldwide religious body. But at the same time this gives neither of us excuse to sidestep them out of courtesy or to pretend they do not exist out of indifference or ignorance. In my opinion there are at least three main issues over which considerable difference of opinion and tension is found—whether overtly or under the surface—whenever evangelicals and Jews meet.

To begin with, we must recognize the foundational differences that exist in the areas of Biblical interpretation and theology. Evangelicals hold to the canonicity and absolute authority of the NT writings; Jews do not. Because of this fact, evangelicals interpret certain OT texts Christologically through the eyes of what they believe were inspired NT authors. Thus it should be readily apparent why Jews fail to discover messianic meaning in texts like the Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 53. Their hermeneutic is different. Evangelical Christians, however, arrive at their interpretation because eight of the twelve verses from that prophetic chapter are referred to in the NT and associated with the messianic claims of Jesus. Taken alone, however, the OT has no hint of a suffering Messiah or that the Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth. What is more, in Jewish interpretation the Hebrew Scriptures (OT) are not the only authority. The Bible must also be understood and interpreted through the oral law (Talmud), the codes, the responsa and the commentaries of scholarly authorities such as Rashi. In short, Judaism is not bound to one authority but embraces many in a long line of living tradition.

The nineteenth century saw the matter of authority become more fluid through the rise of Reform Judaism. This modern movement brought in its wake an emphasis upon reason and experience that tended to detract significantly from the traditionalist's "Torah-true" or halakic approach to religious authority. Furthermore, in its acceptance of the judgments of higher criticism on the Hebrew Scriptures liberal Jewry moved considerably away from the more conservative position common to historic evangelicalism. To be specific, evangelicals have usually read the Bible rather literally—that is, they believe in predictive prophecy and generally accept both the details of historical narrative and the accounts of miracle-working as true. Likewise evangelicals have customarily rejected such higher-critical viewpoints as the documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch (JEDP), the notion of a "Deutero"- and "Trito"-Isaiah, and the late (second-century B.C.) dating of the prophecy of Daniel. It is important, therefore, to recognize some of these presuppositions and points of reference in that they very much affect the conclusions of evangelical Biblical scholarship.

Modern Jewish scholarship, on the other hand, approaches most of these same issues from a radically different perspective. Thus it becomes clear that questions such as the uniqueness of Jesus, Biblical hermeneutics, the appropriate use of higher criticism, and the nature of religious authority represent major points of difference between the two faiths. It is indeed a strange and ironic phenomenon that the one written authoritative Source that in so many ways unites evangelicals and Jews at the same time so radically divides them. Without question, a thorough study of the history of canon and the early schools of Biblical interpretation could well be undertaken jointly with considerable profit by both our communities in the future.

There remain two other tough issues that continue to divide many evangelicals and Jews. Both of these concern outreach or mission, an area that appears to be as tense and controversial now as it has ever been. The first of these issues involves the polemical question of missionary organizations and the so-called Jewish Christian or messianic Jewish movement closely tied to them. Whether referred to as Jewish Christians or messianic Jews, these missionary groups receive the greater part of their financial backing from fundamentalist and mainline evangelical churches. Their supporters recognize them not as "fringe groups" made up of religious fanatics but as those who represent a legitimate outgrowth of early Christianity in accord with the great commission (see Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rom 1:16).

But at this point a tension immediately arises. The Jewish community is generally unwilling to acknowledge that a Jew can believe in Jesus as Messiah and still rightfully retain his Jewish identity. A Jew cannot have it both ways. He must choose on what side of the fence he will fall—Jewish or Christian.

Many in the evangelical community, however, accept and support the idea of Jewish Christianity. One may ask, therefore, to what degree future interaction between evangelicals and Jews will be affected once this issue is openly and forthrightly addressed. Can this issue ever be approached irenically with Jews and evangelical Jewish Christians taking part in the same discussion? I am not sure it can be. Past attempts have often resulted in heated arguments rather than constructive exchanges. I personally hope it will not be on the horns of this dilemma that evangelical-Jewish dialogue somewhere along the line permanently breaks

down. It is understandable why there are those in both our communities who, like their ancestors, feel very deeply about these issues. To them it is a matter not open to compromise. Hence some claim that Jewish Christianity is authentic for it is "Biblical," while others say it is little more than a fraudulent masquerade. Because the evangelical community is comprised almost totally of Gentiles, the impact of this issue is not existentially felt by evangelicals the way it affects the Jewish community. And so after nineteen hundred years this remains a most sensitive matter fraught with all kinds of potential controversy. Open dialogue may never solve this problem, but it can help immensely in understanding the issues involved.

The second tough question we are faced with in relation to outreach concerns the way in which evangelical faith is being communicated to Jewish people. Happily, a number of evangelical leaders are now taking a clear stand against "singling out Jews as Jews" in evangelistic efforts. In this vein Leighton Ford at the first national conference in New York affirmed that "good news we have no right to withhold from anyone. But we do reject the neurotic approach which would select out Jews alone as some uniquely needy objects for proselytism."<sup>26</sup>

Along with this, many evangelicals now publicly dissociate themselves from any evangelistic methods employed to contact Jews that are considered to be "deceptive" or "devious" or "coercive" or "manipulative." In a word, they strongly shun any idea of so-called "hard-line conversionary tactics." To be sure, no soul can be brought into the kingdom against his will. Nevertheless for a future matter for discussion both communities must come to grips with what it means for an evangelical to be genuinely "evangelical." It is the question of how an evangelical can be faithful to that understanding of his Christian calling to spread the gospel to all men and yet to do so in an honest, open, humble and non-manipulative way. Is the evangel, in the very nature of the case, to be always reckoned a "stumbling block" (see 1 Cor 1:23)? Is it realistically possible for evangelicals and Jews to agree on the ethics of bearing witness to that evangel?<sup>27</sup> Granting that there have been abuses in the past, as a priority on our unfinished agenda let this be a call for evangelical and Jewish leaders to meet and seek to establish some agreed-upon guidelines pertaining to the ethics of evangelical Christian witness.

If we have learned anything from the last two millennia, it is that neither of us can impose or force his faith on the other. This overzealousness, unfortunately, has been the practice of some Christians largely due to their deep conviction regarding the finality of Jesus as the Christ. Regretfully this has often been associated with a depreciation of respect for Jewish beliefs and practices. But this should never be the case. As far as evangelicals are concerned, there is no ground for boasting or arrogance at this point. There is nothing inherent in Christianity that makes one individually, or Christians corporately, better than Jews. It is indeed to our shame that this proud and elitist spirit has sometimes been openly displayed, particularly in situations that seem to have little respect for the concept of religious pluralism upon which this nation was founded. Such attitudes of

<sup>26</sup>L. Ford, "A Letter to Richard," *Evangelicals and Jews* 307.

<sup>27</sup>For a discussion of this question and others related to it see my article, "Christians and Jews: Competing for Converts?", *Christianity Today* (March 21, 1980) 28-30.

superiority have often resulted in the denigration of Judaism to the point that the ground has been prepared for the sowing of the seeds of anti-Semitism.

There is a better way open to all Christians who truly care about the feelings of others: It is for us to recognize humbly—without compromise of the deepest commitments of our faith—that “there is nothing to boast of in ourselves. We are just human beings speaking to other human beings, testifying to what we have found. We do not assume we are completely right and infallible or have nothing left to learn.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, growth comes through mutual sharing and a willingness to risk self-exposure. It is on this level that the deepest sensitivities and convictions of each other are laid bare. Yet it is this two-way street that gets to the very heart of dialogue.

3. *Is There a Future?* In bringing our prospectus for the future to a conclusion, we face head-on this question: “Where is the current dialogue going?” From an evangelical perspective there is a broad range of speculation at this point. It is appropriate therefore that we call attention to two representative viewpoints. One is negative in its assessments, the other positive.

First, as was pointed out earlier a large segment of evangelicals stand in great fear of dialogue. Many of these come from fundamentalistic church backgrounds. For the most part they feel that the evangelical movement has everything to lose by any kind of interreligious activity with any group outside its own self-contained evangelical world. By involvement in interfaith dialogue evangelicalism is headed nowhere, they say, but to its own destruction. This will come because of a fatal compromise of its evangelical distinctives. So, it is argued, dialogue is to be avoided lest evangelicals become lukewarm and succumb to compromising ecumenical pressures. Those who will mount these pressures, these evangelicals insist, though appearing friendly at first will eventually convince evangelicals not in any way to be an offense religiously to others. There will be strong insistence that evangelicals display great tolerance and broadmindedness, for this is an age of “live and let live.” Where does this “garden path” eventually lead? They point out that it ends when evangelicals suddenly and tragically find themselves part of a doctrineless ecumenical religious body. Then NT Christianity will have lost its uniqueness, and the wisdom of the Biblical warning about compromise will be vindicated: Shun syncretism and mixing with those on the “other side.”

In contrast to the above, there is another segment of evangelicals—and I number myself among them—who are rather enthusiastic about the future prospect of dialogue. They refuse to believe that God has rejected his people (Rom 11:1) and that there is no more place for Israel in God’s redemptive and messianic program. Rather, these evangelicals affirm that they who once were not part of God’s people, and who became his people purely by his grace, can learn much from those who from Biblical times have been his people.<sup>29</sup> Most of these evangelicals believe that evangelicals and Jews some day will be one. While affirming the centrality of a Christian witness that sees the gospel as open to all peoples

<sup>28</sup>C. Pinnoch, “Why Is Jesus the Only Way?”, *Eternity* (December 1976) 14.

<sup>29</sup>W. S. LaSor, “The Messiah: An Evangelical Christian View,” *Evangelicals and Jews* 93.

everywhere, these evangelicals believe that Romans 9-11 teaches that in God's plan Judaism and Christianity will coexist until the end of this age. At that time God will regraft into the olive tree (Rom 11:23) those natural branches (Jews) beside the place where the wild olive branches (Gentiles) presently now grow, so that finally "all Israel will be saved" (11:26). It would appear from the context that the apostle Paul's understanding of this future salvation of Israel is tied clearly to Jesus, the one he called the Messiah. But irrespective of the eschatological leanings of these same evangelicals they are conscious that, from the NT perspective, the when and how of God's sovereign outworking of his plan for "Israel after the flesh" remains shrouded in a great mystery that no man can fathom (Rom 11:33-34).

At this point, therefore, who knows how the Spirit of God will choose to shape or use this new dialogue in the future? That remains to be seen; it is in his hands. He is still the Lord of history and the ultimate Judge of men and movements. He controls for his own glory and purposes the affairs of his people. The Almighty omnisciently sees as no mere mortal can presently see.

What is important is that barriers of communication are now being broken down between evangelicals and Jews. This new dialogue is now enabling evangelicals—many for the first time—to learn from and make lasting friendships with a people who have brought riches to the Gentile world (see Rom 11:12).

For hundreds of years the evangelical has had something to offer the Jew, but for thousands of years the Jew has had something to teach the rest of the world. Witness to the tradition of one's faith cuts both ways. Hopefully for both evangelicals and Jews more riches have yet to be discovered. So dialogue need not be written off out of peril but pursued for its potential.

But will evangelical and Jew respond by becoming increasingly involved? The history of the 1980s will tell.