

EDITORIAL

Nationwide interest was focused upon what John Dart, religion writer for the Los Angeles Times (January 10, 1971), called an unprecedented dialog between Jewish and Evangelical scholars at the 22nd annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society at Westmont College in Santa Barbara on December 29th. Fifteen Jewish representatives and their wives attended this significant session.

Two major papers were delivered—one by Rabbi Samson H. Levey, professor of rabbinics and Jewish religious thought and director of graduate studies at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, entitled “The Messiah and the Messianic Era: Jewish and Christian”—and the second by Dr. William Bass of Biola College in La Mirada entitled “Theology No Issue: Appraisal of the Jewish-Christian Barrier” (see pages following in this issue).

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, pointed out that Jews and Evangelicals have a common ground in their reverence for the Old Testament in an increasing secular society and in their consideration of the Holy Land as important to their religious tradition.

Dr. Levey suggested that the Messiah concept arose as “crises theology rooted in crisis psychology” when the Hebrew states were threatened by enemies. Rabbinic sources generally agreed that the Messiah would be of rabbinic lineage and come as an agent of liberation, that there would be a resurrection of the dead and that the Temple would be rebuilt, and that through the Messiah righteousness, equity, material blessing and unending peace would be established with the Torah as universal law involving the moral regeneration of all mankind.

Dr. J. Barton Payne of the Wheaton Graduate School responded with a brief survey of the evangelical perspective pointing out that the Messianic idea is one of prominence beginning in Genesis and is progressively clarified and expanded throughout the Old Testament. Some of these predictions are fulfilled in Jesus as recorded in the New Testament and others still await fulfillment.

In the discussion period Dr. Bruce Waltke of Dallas Theological Seminary pointed out that Jesus in so many ways satisfies the description of the Old Testament prophecies and that the political expectations of the Israelites are yet to be realized. He posed the crucial question “What fault does the Jewish community find in Jesus?”

It was Dr. David Lieber, president of Los Angeles' University of Judaism, who asserted that the major theme of the Hebrew Scriptures or Judaism is not the messiah but the keeping of the covenant between God and the Jews. The crucial issue for all was to work for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

To this Dr. Waltke responded in his cordial soft-spoken manner saying, "you cannot have a kingdom without a king. The way of salvation for Jewish people today is through Jesus Christ."

Dr. Levey summarized the objection to Jesus as the Messiah indicating that Jesus, who was one of many men who claimed to be the Messiah was so portrayed by the book of John decades later under Christian influence. The Jews continued to suffer. Jesus had not alleviated their suffering. Rabbi Akiba shortly after the turn of the first century of the Christian era examined the claims of Christianity and rejected the view that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. Consequently rabbinic traditions have concurred with this interpretation.

Ever since Abraham was not allowed to sacrifice his son, Dr. Levey continued, the Jews have rejected the idea of human sacrifice. In conclusion he stated with conviction that "the doctrine of human blood for atonement of human sin—the Christian doctrine deriving from Jesus' crucifixion—would not be accepted by Jews."

Although Jews and Evangelicals had a common base in the Old Testament in this discussion it became apparent that the basic difference is in their consideration of Jesus Christ. The Evangelicals consider Him the God-Man through whom forgiveness of sin is offered to both Jew and Gentile as taught in the New Testament which is also of Jewish origin. For Judaism the line dividing God and man is essential as is evident in the rabbinic interpretation of the Old Testament.

Both Dr. Robert Cooley outgoing president of the E.T.S. and Dr. Tanenbaum expressed satisfaction with this dialogue that delineated the basic differences in an atmosphere of religious freedom allowing the rights and privileges to worship and propagate according to the dictates of conscience. Sympathy and opposition to the persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union and other oppressed peoples was expressed.

The 23rd annual meeting is scheduled to meet at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Wenham, Mass., December 27-29, 1971. Present anticipation is that arrangements can be made for a dialog with the Roman Catholics.

The Near East Archaeological Society conducted a session on Monday afternoon, December 28, 1970 also at Westmont College. A series of papers and presentations stimulated the well attended sessions. At the business session a constitution was adopted and ten men were elected to serve on the N.E.A.S. Board to direct the program of this Society for the coming year. For those who are interested in more information correspondence may be addressed to the secretary, Dr. Harold Mare, 1429 Jaywood Drive, St. Louis, Missouri 63141, or to Dr. Robert Cooley, president.