
BUILDING

NEW BRIDGES

IN HOPE

*A Commentary on the
United Methodist Statement
on Christian-Jewish Relations*

*By Rabbi Leon Klenicki
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Rabbi Leon Klenicki

Director, Interfaith Affairs
Anti-Defamation League

Reverend Bruce W. Robbins

General Secretary, General Commission on Christian Unity
and Interreligious Concerns of
The United Methodist Church

LK: You and I have discussed theology and religion for many years and have talked about the possibility of publishing a dialogue on United Methodist-Jewish relations. Today we begin that task by offering this joint reflection on the 1996 United Methodist document, *Building New Bridges in Hope*, as well as other issues in Christian-Jewish relations.

BWR: In the broadest sense, we hope our conversation will inspire deeper understanding of one another as people of God. More specifically, perhaps our reflections on the document will stimulate United Methodist-Jewish thinking and further comment upon the nine principles contained within *Building New Bridges in Hope*.

Principle #1. There is one living God in whom both Jews and Christians believe.

While the Jewish and Christian traditions understand and express their faith in the same God in significantly different ways, we believe with Paul that the God who was in Christ reconciling the world to God's own self [II Corinthians 5:18-19] is none other than the God of Israel, maker of heaven and earth. Above all else, Christians and Jews are bonded in our joyful and faithful response to the one God, living our faith as each understands God's call.

BWR: In reading the first principle, the immediate reaction is, "Of course." We both come from monotheistic traditions that believe that one God is over all the world. However, we have

also come to understand Judaism and Christianity as representing different faith traditions coming from a common source. From the common source we have very similar understandings of the one God, Yahweh. However, at the same time, in the Christian tradition, a different understanding of God has arisen. God exists in the three persons of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

LK: I share the affirmation of the Guiding Principles in our belief in one God. I would, however, point out that the reference to II Corinthians 5:18-19 about Jesus reconciling the world to God's own self is not exactly the same concept of God shared by the Jews in the First Century. In Rabbinic Judaism, God was considered a partner in a covenantal relationship in which the religious law was the guiding hope and the way to implement God's commands. I prefer to talk about God without any descriptive adjectives. Let us leave the interpretations to our living experiences of God.

BWR: We drafted the statement as United Methodists. We were well aware that we created a statement and used texts specific to our tradition. This principle evoked the first discussion of the ways in which Paul believed that the Messiah had come in Jesus of Nazareth. Paul regularly uses the term "Christ" in the text, instead of "Jesus," to demonstrate the belief that it is the Messiah of whom we are speaking. I wonder if Paul's conception of God was so different from the Rabbinic conception you mention that was shared by Jews at the time of Paul's writing.

LK: What you said is very appropriate. I think that we need to study Paul in relation to his desire and vision of the gentile world accepting Jesus as the Messiah. In that respect, a better understanding of how Paul viewed the law (wrongly translated, I feel, as *nomos*), would help us to overcome a misunderstanding concerning the nature of *Halalah*. Judaism considers

Halahah as a religious discipline, an implementation of God's commands, rather than technical law.

BWR: What is the meaning of *Halahah*?

LK: The interpreters of biblical teaching, from the time of Ezra to the second century C.E., were concerned with God's commanding Voice and Word, and their implementation in the daily life of Israel. The interpreters' mission was to find ways and modes of making the covenantal relationship — God's election of Israel — a reality in the life of a Chosen People for a purpose, a continuous reality of God's love. This preoccupation resulted in a body of regulations and recommendations on how to lead a life of holiness. This is the purpose of *Halahah*.

BWR: How are God's commands present in Jewish religious life?

LK: *Halahah* is a noun derived from the verb *halah*, "to go." *Halahah* is a way of being and going, a manifestation of the covenant with God, a manner of living and reliving God's commands and partnership. To be *Halahic* is to make God's Presence a reality in all aspects of life: at the moment of waking up in the morning, thanking God for restoring the soul; at meals, thanking God for the goodness of food; at prayer and at study, thanking God for God's Presence. *Halahah* is the joy of guiding and shaping life by the experience of covenant, guided by tradition. *Halahah* is the discipline of being religious and living a religious existence, a way of being with God, for God.

BWR: Can you give us an example?

LK: What is the *Halahic* explanation and implementation? It is the Oral Torah that

completes the Written Torah. One example illustrates its meaning. Exodus 20:8 reminds Israel to “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” There is the prohibition to work, but the biblical text, the Written Torah does not detail any specifics. It does not say if carrying a child — or walking, or feeding the hungry, or saving a fellow person — might be a transgression. The *Halahic* interpretation expounds the meaning of the Exodus text into concrete expressions of daily spirituality.

Principle #2. Jesus was a devout Jew, as were many of his first followers.

We know that understanding our Christian faith begins by recognizing and appreciating this seminal fact. Neither the ministry of Jesus and his apostles nor the worship and thought of the early church can be understood apart from the Jewish tradition, culture, and worship of the first century. Further, we believe that God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is unintelligible apart from the story of what God did in the life of the people of Israel.

Because Christianity is firmly rooted in biblical Judaism, we understand that knowledge of these roots is essential to our faith. As expressed in a statement from the Consultation on the Church and Jewish People of the World Council of Churches: “We give thanks to God for the spiritual treasure we share with the Jewish people: faith in the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; knowledge of the name of God and of the commandments; the prophetic proclamation of judgment and grace; the Hebrew scriptures; and the hope of

the coming kingdom. In all these we find common roots in biblical revelation and see spiritual ties that bind us to the Jewish people.”

BWR: In developing this statement, we felt strongly that it was important for Christians to understand and not forget the faithful life as a Jew which Jesus lived with his followers. We recognize that this has been a struggle for many Christians. Too often within our tradition, we have emphasized Jesus as countering and moving away from his Jewish heritage. Today, scholarship points us to the reverse, that Jesus faithfully lived as a Jew and sought to live out his understanding of the Torah in relation to his times. Many Christians are particularly challenged today by the scholarship being done on the quest for a historical Jesus that seeks to understand his life in a purely biographical form rather than as part of a tradition which continued to be shaped after his death. It is no easy task for Christians to either hear of this scholarship or seek to understand what it means for them today.

LK: You are right that Christians could gain a better understanding of Jesus’ vocation by studying post-biblical tradition literature and especially Rabbinic interpretation. On the other hand, Judaism has not felt a reciprocal need to go into the study of the New Testament and other Christian writings to understand itself. This has been a feeling shared by Jews throughout the centuries. It is important, however, that in our time, at the Hebrew University, Professor David Flusser studies the Gospels in order to understand aspects of First Century Judaism, the Rabbinic discussions that became the body of the *Mishnah*, the *Halahic* interpretation of the Bible, and the *Midrash*, the existential literary explanation of the Bible. It was at the time of Jesus that much discussion was under way in Rabbinic circles that later on was compiled into those two bodies of Jewish theological thinking and articulated in Jewish religious writing. Studies of Christian Scriptures provide information and knowledge for aspects of the development of Jewish Rabbinic concepts.

Principle #3. Judaism and Christianity are living and dynamic religious movements that have continued to evolve since the time of Jesus, often in interaction with each other and with God’s continual self-disclosure in the world.

Christians often have little understanding of the history of Judaism as it has developed since the lifetime of Jesus. As a World Council of Churches publication points out: “Bible-reading and worshipping Christians often believe that they ‘know Judaism’ since they have the Old Testament, the records of Jesus’ debates with Jewish teachers, and the early Christian reflections on the Judaism of their times. . . . This attitude is often reinforced by lack of knowledge about the history of Jewish life and thought through the 1900 years since the parting of the ways of Judaism and Christianity.”

As Christians, it is important for us to recognize that Judaism went on to develop vital new traditions of its own after the time of Jesus, including the Rabbinic Judaism that is still vibrant today in shaping Jewish religious life. This evolving tradition has given the Jewish people profound spiritual resources for creative life through the centuries. We increase our understanding when we learn about the rich variety of contemporary Jewish faith practice, theological interpretation, and worship, and when we discover directly through dialogue how Jews understand their own history, tradition, and faithful living.

LK: The interfaith dialogue is an encounter of two faith commitments. It entails a present —

our conversation of today — and a past — the consideration of centuries of contempt and alienation.

Misunderstanding has been a reality in our relationship. I feel that there has been little Christian understanding of Judaism since the days of Constantine. Judaism is not only the biblical experience but also the Rabbinic process of expounding the meaning of Torah through commentary and explanation. Judaism has grown spiritually through the interpretation and reinterpretation of commentators and theologians. In modern times, the contributions of Jewish-German theologians like Martin Buber, Leo Baeck, Franz Rosenzweig and others have been an important part of the ongoing process. They have searched to understand the meaning of being Jewish, and the meaning of the God-Israel relationship.

BWR: What is the understanding of Christianity that has emerged in Jewish theology?

LK: I feel that we have not developed an adequate understanding of Christianity. We still think in terms of our experience of medieval Christianity, rather than the reality of the contemporary dialogue encounter, especially after the Holocaust. The medieval confrontations were forced “conversations” imposed on rabbis and scholars to discuss with Christian theologians aspects of Christian theology in relationship to biblical thought. The rabbis would be asked to respond to the so-called “hints” of Jesus’ presence in prophetic texts. The negative response of Jewish teachers would result in expulsion from their cities or countries, or they would face inquisitional trials. Those historical memories obscure the contemporary Christian attempts to reckon with a sad past. New theological understandings of Jews and Judaism are now developed in Catholic and Protestant official documents. The memories of past and even present anti-Jewish realities up till the 1950s in the 20th Century are, for Jews, a heavy burden to overcome. It is important to point out that the thought of the above-mentioned Jewish German theologians continues in the reflection and study of the new generations of Jewish thinkers in the U.S.A.

BWR: Many Christians have great difficulty conceiving of Judaism as a living and dynamic religious movement parallel to Christianity today. For centuries, Christians have sought to proclaim their understanding of Christianity in such a way as to convert Jews. The teachings we read in our Christian Scriptures speak to us of the time when Jews will come to accept Jesus Christ as Messiah. For Christians to be authentic in dialogue today with Jews — to accept Jews as equal partners in seeking truth and living in faithful community with their God — there must be careful examination of what these texts mean and, at the same time, of the affirmation that Jews and Christians are in different, living and dynamic religious movements.

Principle #4. Christians and Jews are bound to God through biblical covenants that are eternally valid.

As Christians, we stand firm in our belief that Jesus was sent by God as the Christ to redeem all people, and that in Christ the biblical covenant has been made radically new. While church tradition has taught that Judaism has been superseded by Christianity as the “new Israel,” we do not believe that earlier covenantal relationships have been invalidated or that God has abandoned Jewish partners in covenant.

We believe that just as God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant in Jesus Christ, likewise God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant with the Jewish people. The covenant God established with the Jewish people through Abraham, Moses, and others continues because it is an eternal covenant. Paul proclaims that the gift and call of God to

the Jews is irrevocable (Romans 11:29). Thus we believe that the Jewish people continue to be in covenantal relationship with God.

Both Jews and Christians are bound to God in covenant, with no covenantal relationship invalidated by any other. Though Christians and Jews have different understandings of the covenant of faith, we are mysteriously bound to one another through our covenantal relationships with the one God and creator of us all.

LK: Bruce, do you think that Paul's thought in Romans on the eternal value of God's covenant with the Jewish people is relevant today?

BWR: In recent years, much Christian-Jewish dialogue has centered upon Paul's affirmation about the eternal validity of God's covenant with the Jews. Romans 11:29 is quoted within the explanation of this principle. However, even though the Letter of Romans talks about the irrevocability of the covenant, many who read this passage believe that they see the completion of the covenant coming through the Jewish acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. In this way, the text is deeply problematic for a Christian understanding of the validity of God's covenant with the Jews. We must search for ways to recognize and hold the mystery that we are bound in different covenants by the same God.

LK: Is Christianity a covenantal community of God? The question has been asked by Jews for generations. The responses related closely to historical experiences: anti-Jewish attacks or ecclesiastic anti-Semitism helped to postpone thinking about a Christian covenant, affirm-

ing or denying it. Jewish medieval theologians paid attention to the matter but it was only at the end of the 19th Century, and especially in our days, that Jewish thinkers have developed a thoughtful reflection on Christianity as a way of God to the world. This idea was brilliantly outlined and explained in the work of Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, recently translated into English and published by the Paulist Press, in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series. Benamozegh helps us in our search for a Jewish understanding of Christianity.

Benamozegh saw a relationship between Noah and Jesus. God's covenant with Noah was God's first call to humanity to witness His name and implement moral commands. God imposes on Noah and his descendants seven laws that are the very essence of God's covenant: theft, justice, homicide, illicit intercourse, eating the limb of a living creature, idolatry and blasphemy. The Rabbis considered that these basic rules should govern humanity. The Jewish scholars pointed out the fact that Noah did not follow them, prompting God to establish a covenant with Abraham and Sarah. Benamozegh followed a Rabbinic tradition that considered Jesus as fulfilling Noah's covenant. Jesus crowns Noah's call with his vocation to humanity; he completes Noah's covenant. It is a different interpretation. While Christian theology will see Jesus relating to Abraham's call, Christianity is seen by Benamozegh as a "way" of God's commands to the world through Noah. This is a Jewish interpretation, trying to fathom Jesus' testimony.

BWR: Of course, we Christians see ourselves as part of the Abrahamic covenant. For instance, the first verse of both Matthew and Luke traces the lineage of Jesus and establishes the Messiahship of Jesus directly from the descendency of Abraham. For Luke, the lineage goes back even further, from Abraham to Adam. Both lineages trace Jesus through David and Solomon up to his birth. Clearly, both writers believed it critical to locate the lineage of Jesus within the Hebrew tradition.

LK: Personally, I think that much more attention should be paid to the Christian claim to Abraham as the foundation stone of Jesus' vocation and mission. As you recall, Genesis 12 says that Abraham will have a mission to the peoples of the world. Thus, Jesus could be seen as linked to that vocation. This might contradict Rabbinic views of Noah and Jesus, but it obligates us to consider Christian understandings of the Hebrew Bible.

According to Jewish understanding, even when Jesus is seen as related to Abraham's call, it does not follow that he *fulfills* Abraham's vocation as seen in Christian theology. Rather, Judaism and Christianity are seen as the fulfillments of different vocations. The Jewish vocation would be to witness God's call and covenant in the daily individual and community existence through prayer, moral commitment and ritual. The Christian vocation, following Benamozegh's thought, would be to bring humanity to God through Jesus' service. Such a distinction would help to avoid any form of the teaching of contempt, that is, the negation in word and action of the other person as a person of God.

Principle #5. As Christians, we are clearly called to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in every age and place. At the same time, we believe that God has continued, and continues today, to work through Judaism and the Jewish people.

Essential to the Christian faith is the call to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all people. Through the announcement of the gospel in word and work comes the opportunity for others to glimpse the glory of God which we have found through Jesus Christ. Yet we also understand that the issues surrounding the evangelization of persons of other faiths, and of Jews in particular, are often sensitive and difficult. These issues call for continuing, serious and respectful reflection and dialogue among Christians, and with Jews.

While we as Christians respond faithfully to the call to proclaim the gospel in all places, we can never presume to know the full extent of God's work in the world and we recognize the reality of God's activity outside the Christian Church. It is central to our faith that salvation is not accomplished by human beings but by God. We know that judgment as to the ultimate salvation of persons from any faith community, including Christianity and Judaism, belongs to God alone.

It is our belief that Jews and Christians are co-workers and companion pilgrims who have made the God of Israel known throughout the world. Through common service and action we jointly proclaim the God we know. Together, through study and prayer, we can learn how the God we believe to be the same God speaks and calls us continually into closer relationship with each other as well as with God.

LK: The question considered by this principle is very crucial in the relationship of Christians and Jews. It reminds us of the word "evangelism" which brings great uneasiness to Jewish hearts. Through the centuries, evangelism has been a way by which Christians tried to convert and persecute Jews in the Western world. As Jews, we need to understand the exact meaning of evangelism.

I personally feel that the duty of the Christian is to be a Christian and to proclaim his or her belief in Jesus and his message. Such a living experience of Jesus in the Christian person allows me as a religious man to understand the spirituality and commitment of the other. But, at the same time, I am uneasy about the possibility of this sharing as an attempt to convert me from my Jewish tradition.

BWR: I appreciate your sensitivity to the way in which evangelism and proclamation are at the heart of Christian identity and self-understanding. You note that the duty of all Christians is to proclaim the salvation that they believe in and experience coming through Jesus Christ. I also appreciate the recognition of the uneasiness of entering into conversations with Christians when, in the past, “sharing” has been a pretext for attempts at conversion, often through coercion and other forms of pressure. Perhaps it is important today to realize that we are at a very different time and place in our sharing of our experiences of God. Those who have engaged in authentic dialogue with others about their deepest commitments and beliefs realize the potential it holds for furthering the faith experience of everyone involved.

The group that developed the principles outlined in this paper struggled long and hard to find ways to honor their belief that the universality of the Gospel can still be proclaimed, while acknowledging in humility that salvation belongs to God alone and that we can never presume to know the full extent of God’s work in the world.

LK: The question of salvation requires a deeper reflection. We Jews refer to salvation in our daily prayers, though our main concern is keeping and implementing God’s Commandments in our world. For us, the emphasis is more on redemption — the idea that we, by cooperating in partnership with God, can hasten the kingdom that will bring total peace and justice to the world.

Principle #6. As Christians, we are called into dialogue with our Jewish neighbors.

Christians and Jews hold a great deal of scripture, history, and culture in common. And yet, we also share two thousand painful years of anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews by Christians. These two apparently discordant facts move

Christians to seek common experiences with Jews, and especially to invite them into dialogue to explore the meaning of our kinship and our differences. Our intention is to learn about the faith of one another and to build bridges of understanding.

While for Christians dialogue will always include testimony to God's saving acts in Jesus Christ, it will include an equal measure of listening to and respecting the beliefs of Jews as they strive to live in obedience and faithfulness to God as they understand the conditions of their faith.

Productive interfaith dialogue requires focused, sustained conversation based on willingness to recognize and probe genuine differences while also seeking that which is held in common. We are called to openness so that we may learn how God is speaking through our dialogue partners. As stated in the World Council of Churches *Guidelines on Dialogue*, "One of the functions of dialogue is to allow participants to describe and witness to their faith on their own terms. . . . Participants seek to hear each other in order to better understand each other's faith, hopes, insights, and concerns." Fruitful and respectful dialogue is centered in a mutual spirit of humility, trust, openness to new understanding, and commitment to reconciliation and the healing of the painful wounds of our history.

BWR: Principle #6 attempts to set the groundwork for how we can be in dialogue and relationship with one another. In mentioning how previous examples of Christian witness were accompanied by subtle or overt forms of coercion, we realize that authentic dialogue could not take place in those settings. Here the principle tries to say that Christians and Jews can come together in ways that serve to reveal how God is speaking through one another. We seek to understand each other's faith. Only then can we continue deepening our relationship, sharing faith in community with God.

LK: Jews and Christians are called into dialogue at a special moment in history. Seldom have we been in a real relationship of dialogue. Our reality has been an interchange of monologues rather than an I-Thou relationship in the best tradition of Martin Buber's thought. In my dialogue with a Christian, I personally want to relate to a person, a subject of spirit and faith, with whom I am together sharing the Presence of God. Together, we can project hope to a world that deeply needs it despite the realities of present contemporary history.

I feel that in our dialogue relationship, we have to go through a process of reckoning and recognition. The first paragraph of Principle #6 talks about reckoning with the "two thousand painful years of anti-Semitism" and the persecution of Jews by Christians. This requires a reckoning of the heart in order to overcome the teaching of contempt, the theological misunderstanding of Judaism, and also of anti-Semitism that is a by-product of 2,000 years of theological anti-Judaism. We also, as Jews, have to reckon with our own memories. We have to overcome the memories of the past, though we still must remember the persecution and the hatred of the Second World War, the Holocaust. But we have to reckon with what is going on now, today, in our days.

BWR: What more can Christians do to create a mutual relationship of respect?

LK: The question of mutual recognition and acceptance is important. I feel that Christians have to recognize the continuing validity of the Sinai Covenant, God-Israel. Jews have to recognize the meaning and purpose of Christianity despite our memories of suffering and pain. We have to recognize the fact that God has designed several ways to redeem humanity, through Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other faith commitments. All of us have God in common; however, we differ in the ways to approach God covenantally.

BWR: Any authentic dialogue entails a certain vulnerability between the participants. I remember when I first entered into conversations that moved beyond the sharing of monologues, I felt this vulnerability. When we are opening ourselves up as much as possible to how someone else has perceived God's actions in this world and in shaping their own lives, we see and hear them in a different way. Hearing the other need not undermine one's faith, but it can strengthen faith by the confirmation and affirmation of God's work amongst us.

Principle #7. As followers of Jesus Christ we deeply repent of the complicity of the Church and the participation of many Christians in the long history of persecution of the Jewish people. The Christian Church has a profound obligation to correct historical and theological teachings that have led to false and pejorative perceptions of Judaism and contributed to persecution and hatred of Jews. It is our responsibility as Christians to oppose anti-Semitism whenever and wherever it occurs.

We recognize with profound sorrow that repeatedly and often in the last two thousand years, the worship, preaching, and teaching of the Christian Church has allowed and sometimes even incited and directed persecution against Jews.

The Church today carries grave responsibility to counter the evil done by Christians to Jews in the Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms of Eastern Europe and elsewhere, carried out in the name of Jesus Christ. In the twentieth century there is particular shame in the failure of most of the Church to challenge the policies of governments that were responsible for the unspeakable atrocities of the Holocaust.

Throughout history up to the present, both the selective use and the misuse of scripture have fostered negative attitudes toward and actions against Jews. Use of New Testament passages that blame “the Jews” for the crucifixion of Jesus have been the basis of many acts of discrimination against Jews, frequently involving physical violence. There is no doubt that traditional and often officially sanctioned and promulgated Christian teachings, including the uncritical use of New Testament writings that can be construed as anti-Jewish, have caused untold misery and form the basis of modern anti-Semitism.

Misinterpretations and misunderstanding of historical and contemporary Judaism continue, including the mistaken belief that Judaism is a religion solely of law and judgment while Christianity is a religion of love and grace.

The characterizations of God in the Hebrew Bible (called the Old Testament by Christians) are rich and diverse; strong

images of a caring, compassionate, and loving deity are dominant for Jews as well as for Christians. Further, there are parallels between New Testament Christian understandings of the “spirit of the law” and contemporaneous theological developments in first century Jewish theology.

The Church has an obligation to correct erroneous and harmful past teachings and to ensure that the use of scripture, as well as the preparation, selection, and use of liturgical and educational resources, does not perpetuate misleading interpretations and misunderstanding of Judaism.

It is also essential for Christians to oppose forcefully anti-Jewish acts and rhetoric that persist in the present time in many places. We must be zealous in challenging overt and subtle anti-Semitic stereotypes and bigoted attitudes that ultimately made the Holocaust possible and that stubbornly and insidiously continue today. These lingering patterns are a call to Christians for ever-new educational efforts and continued vigilance, so that we, remembering and honoring the cries of the tortured and dead, can claim with Jews around the world to be faithful to the post-Holocaust cry of “Never again.”

BWR: It is no coincidence that during these decades of the 20th Century following the Holocaust, Christians are coming to the table deeply self-reflective and self-critical about

the ways in which Christianity contributed to an event as unspeakable as the Holocaust. We are coming to understand more fully how Christian teaching was complicit in perpetuating stereotypes, prejudices and attitudes that allowed for the mistreatment and abuse of other peoples and especially Jews. Relationships with Jews throughout history have been to some extent a “test case” of how Christians can respond to peoples who have different religious traditions from themselves. As Christians, we have a responsibility to examine the ways we teach and preach about Judaism. When we hold Judaism in contempt, we separate ourselves not only from Jews but also from the roots of our own lives of faith. How important it is for us to make the connection between the rich spirituality of Jewish life today and the depths of our own religious heritage.

LK: Principle #7 is an important section of this document. It is honest, committed and touches upon a question that has hurt Judaism and the Jewish people for hundreds of years. Any racist manifestation that proclaims an ideology of making the other person an object of contempt rather than a subject of faith is, what the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset called in Spanish, “*cosificación*,” that is, objectification of the human being. This process makes a person into an object rather than into a spiritual entity. This has been the reality for centuries in our Christian-Jewish encounter.

It is also important to point out how theological language resulted in a contempt for Judaism reflected in Western art, cathedrals or literary writings. The use and abuse of New Testament texts about Jews has been an ongoing source of animosity that helped to create the atmosphere for pogroms.

Let me give you several examples. One of them comes from my childhood experiences in Argentina in the 1950s. Passion Week was a time when Jews were very uncomfortable with right-wing Catholics who, together with their Nazi local allies, denounced Jews as “killers” of Jesus. We were called “killers” in high school and we felt the anti-Semitism present as a painful

reality in Argentina. Downtown Buenos Aires was flooded with excerpts from the Gospel of John, the Acts of the Apostles and other texts, adding the comment that what Jews did to Jesus, they were now doing to Argentina. After the issuing of the 1965 *Nostra Aetate* declaration of Vatican II Council on Jews and Judaism, this practice was stopped; however, it was channeled into other forms.

My other memory is of the Cathedral in Brussels. I was invited to lecture at Louvain University and one afternoon several professors and I went to visit the Cathedral and other points of interest in Brussels. In the Cathedral there is a collection of stained glass art narrating the story of the desecration of the host (the body of Christ) by Jews. Jesus defends the host and finally the Jews are taken to court, tortured and sent to death. During the Second World War, the Nazis used this story for their anti-Semitic propaganda.

These two anecdotes are more than anecdotes. They show the close relationship of the teaching of contempt and anti-Semitism. But it is important to point out that the teaching of contempt didn't create an Auschwitz. However, it created an atmosphere in which Nazism and Communism became ideologies of death for the Jewish people.

Principle #8. As Christians, we share a call with Jews to work for justice, compassion, and peace in the world in anticipation of the fulfillment of God's reign.

Together Jews and Christians honor the commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, and might. It is our task to join in common opposition to those forces — nation, race, power, money — that clamor for ultimate allegiance. Together we honor the commandment to love neighbor as self. It is our task to labor in common for those things that are part of God's work of reconciliation. Together we affirm the sacredness of all persons and the obligation of stewardship for all God has created. Jews still await the messianic reign of God foretold by the

prophets. Christians proclaim the good news that in Jesus Christ “the kingdom of God is at hand”; yet we, as Christians, also wait in hope for the consummation of God’s redemptive work. Together, Jews and Christians long for and anticipate the fulfillment of God’s reign. Together, we are “partners in waiting.” In our waiting, we are called to witness and to work for God’s reign together.

BWR: A positive relationship between Christians and Jews is clearer in this area than in any other of our experiences. Indeed, the mutual work together of Jews and Christians in addressing social needs has been remarkable in the last several decades in the United States. Combating racism and joining together in fighting against anti-Semitism illustrate this mutual cooperation. Personally, one of my earliest memories of social involvement came as an eight- or ten-year-old joining with other people from my church in washing swastikas off of a synagogue in our community.

Theologically we are joined together in “the anticipation of the fulfillment of God’s reign.” We are “partners in waiting” as the text indicates. All of us are waiting in anticipation for a coming of the Messiah to create a new world amongst us.

Perhaps the reason for our strong work together in this area comes from the shared commitments to love our neighbors as ourselves and love our God who is the Maker of the creation in which we live. Our faith commitments demand our respect, protection and renewal of that creation. Increasingly, we see Jews and Christians joining together in struggling for preservation of the environment, for protection of natural habitats, and for working together in the lives of people across the planet so that there can be a more harmonious relationship than presently exists.

LK: The phrase, “The sacredness of all persons and the obligation of stewardship for all God has created,” is a welcome invitation to our respective faith commitments. It is, first of all, our joint obligation, as you well said, to protect our environment. It is quite sad to see what we have done in the universe, the pollution of the atmosphere, the atomic waste that threatens daily life, and an economic order based on consumption rather than real needs. We need also to accept our missions, our respective vocations of God in a world which seems to be empty of the divine, to witness together as people of God. This testimony entails the exercise of our covenants beyond the temptation of proselytism or syncretism that results out of a desire to be liked or to be fashionable. It is the difficult task of being ourselves but accepting the other as a believer of God. It is as well to recognize the Presence of God in the other faith community, a reality seldom known in our relationship of centuries. The recognition of ourselves as people of God entails the condemnation of any form of racism, of the scourge of anti-Semitism, and our fight to eradicate these evils from our society.

Principle #9. As United Methodist Christians, we are deeply affected by the anguish and suffering that continue for many people who live in the Middle East region that includes modern Israel. We commit ourselves through prayer and advocacy to bring about justice and peace for those of every faith.

Within the United Methodist Church, we struggle to understand the complexity and the painfulness of the controversies in which Christians, Jews, and Muslims are involved in the Middle East. The issues include both disputed political questions of sovereignty and control and concerns over human rights and justice. We recognize the theological significance of the Holy Land as central to the worship, historical traditions, hope, and identity of the Jewish people. We are mindful of this land’s historic and con-

temporary importance for Christians and Muslims. We are committed to the security, safety, and well-being of Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East, to respect for the legitimacy of the State of Israel, to justice and sovereignty for the Palestinian people, and to peace for all who live in the region.

As we join with others of many religious communities in wrestling with these issues and searching for solutions, we seek to work together with other Christians, Jews, and Muslims to honor the religious significance of this land and to bring about healthy sustainable life, justice, and peace, for all.

BWR: Perhaps there is no principle on which the United Methodists and Jews are further apart today than this one. Partly, that may be because of the Christian presence in Israel and the influence of some of their reports to us. Additionally, it could come from news reports and other secular coverage of the situation in the Middle East. There are many causes for it.

What seems most important for United Methodists is for a dialogue to happen with Jews so that the deep passions and commitments about the theological significance of the Holy Land and its importance to the Jewish people can be heard and experienced by United Methodists. Only when these voices are within our midst and truly heard can we have a better understanding of the situation in the Middle East.

It is clear that there is tremendous anguish and suffering among all parties, and that there is a great need for prayer and learning to move us to a new place.

LK: Principle #9 talks in general about the present situation in the Middle East. It is important that the text clearly says “modern Israel,” recognizing the existence of the State of

Israel in that part of the world. However, the explanation following the principle omits an important matter, a denunciation of any form of terrorism that has affected the area and delayed the peace process. Israel is, after many terrible experiences, very sensitive to the reality of that terrorism by extremist groups.

The explanation talks about the “theological significance of the Holy Land as central to the worship, historical traditions, hope, and identity of the Jewish people.” This phrase is very important in the consideration of the Middle East. Some Christian denominations have been doubtful about the special relationship of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, a relationship that started in the biblical account and became a national reality in the 20th Century. The United Methodist document talks about political questions of sovereignty without getting into any specific detail. The Jewish reader is grateful for this because such a formulation belongs to Israelis and Palestinians. I am very unhappy about certain Christian organizations who, in the comfort of New York and Washington offices, can discuss the political boundaries of a situation thousands of miles away from the United States. The United Methodist statement, however, is a prudent, concerned approach to the situation in the Middle East.

BWR: The last section, *New Bridges to Christian-Jewish Understanding*, points toward future work between Christians and Jews. The hope is that out of this document will come the stimulation for conversations and meetings between Christians and Jews. It is critical for the Jewish understandings of Christianity and the Christian understandings of Judaism to be articulated in ways that can be heard and reflected upon by all of the participants. Such a dialogue leads toward deeper interfaith understanding.

Where can such meetings take place? Ideally, in local churches and synagogues across the country, there will be opportunities for conversation over issues of mutual concern, be they challenges within the community itself or discussions on the Middle East and the State of Israel or the continual need to challenge evidence of anti-Semitism and racism within our culture

and country. These encounters offer tremendous opportunities for relationships to be strengthened.

LK: We have been talking for a while on how to implement dialogue between Jews and Christians. Christian denominations and the Catholic Church have issued documents formulating the theological and practical aspects of the dialogue. We need, however, to implement it at the more popular level. The ideal process would be for a United Methodist church and a local synagogue to start an interfaith program. Such a program could become a model that would inspire other groups in the country. Their dialogue beginning with local issues would project the spirit of *Building New Bridges in Hope* into the community's life.

BWR: Leon, do you have any specific suggestions?

LK: I would suggest two projects. First, I would like to consider together how Jews understand Christianity, especially in the atmosphere of American pluralism.

Second, a joint consideration of the New Testament and its presentation of Judaism. Teachers, scholars, and informed lay people could work on a study guide on how to teach the gospel message and the presentation of Judaism. This does not mean to change the text, but explain it *in situ*. For example, when Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew, is criticized for healing a person on the Sabbath, the text says that the Pharisees believed that Jesus desecrated the holiness of the day. The text puts all the Pharisees together, although we know that there were seven or more schools within the movement with different interpretations. One trend of Pharisaic thought pointed out that because of "*Pikuach Hanefesh*," saving a soul, one can profane the Sabbath. This is not clear in the New Testament text that takes it for granted, but it requires an understanding by the people listening to it. Otherwise, the Pharisees appear highly legalistic while essentially they were not that way. Our joint effort would be to make the

text meaningful for fellow Christians, but also for Jews to understand the thought of Jesus and his Rabbinic background.

BWR: Yes, these are good suggestions. Only when United Methodists and Jews actually come together to share their faith — through the breaking of bread, prayer and social commitment — can they begin to see more clearly through each other's eyes. If Jews and United Methodists in only one community come together in deeper relationship as a result of the United Methodist statement and this project, we can thank God for this testimony of peace.

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH'S STATEMENT ON JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

The goals of this study are that those who use it will become more aware of the commonalities and differences between Christians and Jews and develop an appreciation that in the midst of our different faiths there could be a community of witnessing to the grace of God.

INTRODUCTION

Study Questions

1. *What are some of the commonalities between Judaism and Christianity? What are some of the differences?*
2. *Is "unity" the goal of interfaith dialogue? What are some of the ways we can participate in a Jewish-Christian dialogue without minimizing the important differences?*
3. *How are interreligious efforts such as Christian-Jewish relationships different from conversations within our own traditions?*
4. *As a Jew, what was your first interaction with a Christian person?*
5. *As a Christian, what was your first interaction with a Jewish person?*
6. *Why do you want to learn more about Judaism or Christianity?*

PRINCIPLE #1

Study Questions

1. *As they seek to live faithfully today, Christians, Jews, and Muslims believe in one living God. Is this affirmation of the one God a place to start dialogue?*
2. *In your experience, do you recognize the same God in both Christianity and Judaism?*
3. *How does the Christian concept of a Triune God differ from the Jewish understanding of God?*
4. *How do you relate the first two biblical commandments to the Church's understanding of Trinity?*

PRINCIPLE #2

Study Questions

1. *How do the Christian roots in Judaism affect your understanding of each other?*
2. *How do you relate Hebrew scripture to Christian scripture?*
3. *Look at Matthew 5:17-18; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 2:21-24; 4:1-13; 5:12-14; 22:13-15. What do these passages tell us about Jesus and his disciples' relationship to the Judaism of their day?*

PRINCIPLE #3

Study Questions

1. *Judaism underwent profound crisis and alteration at the same time that Christianity was developing its unique identity. Further, both religions have two thousand years of rich and complex history since their division in the first century. Can you describe differences in the Judaism of scripture and the present experience of Judaism? Is Christianity different today than in scriptural times?*
2. *When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 C.E., what replaced Temple sacrifice?*
3. *What do you know of theological varieties of Judaism and Christianity today?*

PRINCIPLE #4

Study Questions

1. *How can God's eternal faithfulness be explained as it relates to the covenantal relationships with both Jews and Christians?*
2. *How do we as Jews and Christians understand God's covenant?*
3. *What are the meanings of Christianity for Jews?*
4. *What is the meaning of Christ in relationship to God's covenant with Israel? How have traditional interpretations of Christianity as the "new Israel" shaped Christian-Jewish interaction?*

PRINCIPLE #5

Study Questions

1. *Proclamation of the gospel, the “good news” of Jesus Christ, is fundamental to the Christian faith. This belief in evangelism has long been an issue of tension between Jews and Christians, especially when it has been experienced as coercive and disrespectful of Judaism. How should the call to proclaim the gospel, especially to those of the Jewish faith, be understood today? Is the Christian proclamation a conversionary movement?*
2. *What do Christians believe about God’s continuing activity in Judaism?*
3. *What are the possibilities of joint proclamation and witness to the one God known to both Jews and Christians respectful of the different religious commitments?*

PRINCIPLE #6

Study Questions

1. *What benefits do you see that can come from Christian-Jewish dialogue?*
2. *How might dialogue help address the trauma of past division, misunderstanding, conflict and persecution?*
3. *What are the challenges to successful dialogue? What attitudes, expectations and understandings should be held by the participants?*

PRINCIPLE #7

Study Questions

1. *It is impossible to address the issues in contemporary Christian-Jewish relationships outside the context and continuing impact of the Holocaust. Many people believe that the interpretation of the Christian message, especially the teaching of contempt, was a major contributor to forces that reached their culmination in the Holocaust and still exist decades later. How did the teaching and preaching of the New Testament contribute to an atmosphere of contempt for Jews and Judaism?*

2. *Where do you see anti-Semitism today? What can be done about it?*
3. *How important is it for Christians today to repent for the atrocities of the Holocaust? What meaning would repentance have for Christians? What meaning might Christian repentance have for Jews?*
4. *Can our present dialogue relationship assist in reconciliation?*

PRINCIPLE #8

Study Questions

1. *Jews and Christians have worked side by side in many times and places seeking to do God's will through their own traditions, as they search for justice and the alleviation of suffering and misery. What are some biblical foundations for Jewish and Christian commitment to work for a better world?*
2. *Where in your community have Jews and Christians worked together?*
3. *What difference could working together make in building new understanding between us?*

PRINCIPLE #9

Study Questions

1. *The land in which the modern State of Israel exists is also sacred and deeply symbolic to Christianity and Islam. The challenges to justice, security, and peace are very real but complicated and controversial. How is land significant to Jews, Muslims and Christians?*
2. *How should the many difficult issues of this land be addressed in conversation with Jews? What are the possibilities of three-way discussions that include Jews, Muslims and Christians in your community?*
3. *How can interreligious dialogue contribute to justice and peace in this area which is so important to so many?*

BUILDING NEW BRIDGES IN HOPE
Statement of The United Methodist Church
on Christian–Jewish Relations

God, whom Christians have come to know in Jesus Christ, has created all human beings in the divine image and . . . God desires that all people live in love and righteousness . . .

“While we are committed to the promotion of mutual respect and understanding among people of all living faiths, we as Christians recognize a special relationship between Christians and Jews because of our shared roots in biblical revelation.”¹

A Quest for New Understanding

What is the relationship that God intends between Christianity and Judaism, between Christians and Jews? In The United Methodist Church, a search for understanding and appropriate response to this important theological and relational question has been under way for some time. A significant step in the development of United Methodist understanding of and intention for Christian–Jewish relations was taken in 1972 when the General Conference adopted a position statement under the title *Bridge in Hope*. This denominational statement urged church members and congregations to undertake “serious new conversations” with Jews in order to promote “growth in mutual understanding.”² As it has been studied and used, *Bridge in Hope* has served as a strong foundation for United Methodist–Jewish dialogue in many settings.

Since 1972, other Christian denominations, as well as ecumenical bodies in which The United Methodist Church participates (such as the World Council of Churches), have also made statements on Christian–Jewish relations. Those voices have contributed to our knowledge, reflection, and understanding. At the same time, we have learned much from the many relationships and dialogues that have flourished between Jews and Christians locally, nationally, and internationally.

Especially crucial for Christians in our quest for understanding has been the struggle to recognize the horror of the Holocaust as the catastrophic culmination of a long history of anti–Jewish attitudes and actions in which Christians, and sometimes the Church itself, have been deeply implicated. Dialogues with Jewish partners have been central for Christians in exploring the scope of the Holocaust atrocities, acknowledging complicity and responsibility, and pledging repentance and commitment to work against anti–Semitism in all its forms in the future.

We are aware, however, that the Christian–Jewish bridge of understanding has only begun to be constructed. The United Methodist Church is committed to clarifying and expanding our knowledge of Judaism, and to strengthening our relationships with Jewish people. We seek mutual exploration of the common ground underling Christianity and Judaism, as well as that which makes each faith unique. This statement is an expression of the principles of that commitment.

Foundation for United Methodist Understanding of Christian–Jewish Relations

As expressed in its Constitution, The United Methodist Church has long been strongly committed to the unity of the Church: “As part of the Church Universal, The United Methodist Church believes that the Lord of the Church is calling Christians everywhere to strive toward

unity . . .”³ For many years, The United Methodist Church has devoted itself at all levels of church life to building partnerships with other Christian denominations in striving to reveal the reality of the One Body, the whole Church of Jesus Christ. “We see the Holy Spirit at work in making the unity among us more visible.”⁴

By its *Book of Discipline* The United Methodist Church is also dedicated to “serious interfaith encounters and explorations between Christians and adherents of other living faiths in the world.” We believe that “Scripture calls us to be both neighbors and witnesses to all peoples. . . . In these encounters, our aim is not to reduce doctrinal differences to some lowest common denominator, but to raise all such relationships to the highest possible level of human fellowship and understanding.”⁵ In an interdependent world of increasing awareness of the vitality and challenges of religious pluralism, we are called to “labor together with the help of God toward the salvation, health, and peace of all people.”⁶

As with all theological questions, United Methodists approach the issues of interfaith relationships, including Christian-Jewish dialogue, by seeking understanding of God’s will in Scripture in the context of tradition, reason, and experience. In that spirit and with that intention, we affirm the following principles for continued study, discussion, and action within The United Methodist Church, with other Christians, and especially with Jews.

United Methodist Guiding Principles for Christian-Jewish Relations

In order to increase our understanding of and with peoples of other living faith traditions, of ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ, and of God and God’s truth, The United Methodist Church encourages dialogue and experiences with those of other faiths. For important and unique reasons, including a treasury of shared scripture and an ancient heritage that belong to

us in common but which also contain our dividedness, we look particularly for such opportunities with Jews. United Methodist participation in Christian-Jewish dialogue and relationships is based on the following understandings:

1. There is one living God in whom both Jews and Christians believe.

While the Jewish and Christian traditions understand and express their faith in the same God in significantly different ways, we believe with Paul that the God who was in Christ reconciling the world to God's own self [II Corinthians 5:18-19] is none other than the God of Israel, maker of heaven and earth. Above all else, Christians and Jews are bonded in our joyful and faithful response to the one God, living our faith as each understands God's call.

2. Jesus was a devout Jew, as were many of his first followers.

We know that understanding our Christian faith begins by recognizing and appreciating this seminal fact. Neither the ministry of Jesus and his apostles nor the worship and thought of the early church can be understood apart from the Jewish tradition, culture, and worship of the first century. Further, we believe that God's revelation in Jesus Christ is unintelligible apart from the story of what God did in the life of the people of Israel.

Because Christianity is firmly rooted in biblical Judaism, we understand that knowledge of these roots is essential to our faith. As expressed in a statement from the Consultation on the Church and Jewish People of the World Council of Churches: "We give thanks to God for the spiritual treasure we share with the Jewish people: faith in the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; knowledge of the name of God and of the commandments; the prophetic proclamation of judgment and grace; the Hebrew scriptures; and the hope of the coming kingdom. In all these we find common roots in biblical revelation and see spiritual ties that bind us to the Jewish people."⁷

3. Judaism and Christianity are living and dynamic religious movements that have continued to evolve since the time of Jesus, often in interaction with each other and with God's continual self-disclosure in the world.

Christians often have little understanding of the history of Judaism as it has developed since the lifetime of Jesus. As a World Council of Churches publication points out: "Bible-reading and worshipping Christians often believe that they 'know Judaism' since they have the Old Testament, the records of Jesus' debates with Jewish teachers and the early Christian reflections on the Judaism of their times. . . . This attitude is often reinforced by lack of knowledge about the history of Jewish life and thought through the 1900 years since the parting of the ways of Judaism and Christianity."⁸

As Christians, it is important for us to recognize that Judaism went on to develop vital new traditions of its own after the time of Jesus, including the Rabbinic Judaism that is still vibrant today in shaping Jewish religious life. This evolving tradition has given the Jewish people profound spiritual resources for creative life through the centuries. We increase our understanding when we learn about the rich variety of contemporary Jewish faith practice, theological interpretation, and worship, and when we discover directly through dialogue how Jews understand their own history, tradition, and faithful living.

4. Christians and Jews are bound to God through biblical covenants that are eternally valid.

As Christians, we stand firm in our belief that Jesus was sent by God as the Christ to redeem all people and that in Christ the biblical covenant has been made radically new. While church tradition has taught that Judaism has been superseded by Christianity as the "new Israel," we do

not believe that earlier covenantal relationships have been invalidated or that God has abandoned Jewish partners in covenant.

We believe that just as God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant in Jesus Christ, likewise God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant with the Jewish people. The covenant God established with the Jewish people through Abraham, Moses, and others continues because it is an eternal covenant. Paul proclaims that the gift and call of God to the Jews is irrevocable (Romans 11:29). Thus we believe that the Jewish people continue to be in covenantal relationship with God.

Both Jews and Christians are bound to God in covenant, with no covenantal relationship invalidated by any other. Though Christians and Jews have different understandings of the covenant of faith, we are mysteriously bound to one another through our covenantal relationships with the one God and creator of us all.

5. As Christians, we are clearly called to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in every age and place. At the same time, we believe that God has continued, and continues today, to work through Judaism and the Jewish people.

Essential to the Christian faith is the call to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all people. Through the announcement of the gospel in word and work comes the opportunity for others to glimpse the glory of God which we have found through Jesus Christ. Yet we also understand that the issues surrounding the evangelization of persons of other faiths, and of Jews in particular, are often sensitive and difficult. These issues call for continuing, serious and respectful reflection and dialogue among Christians, and with Jews.

While we as Christians respond faithfully to the call to proclaim the gospel in all places, we can never presume to know the full extent of God's work in the world and we recognize the reality of God's activity outside the Christian Church. It is central to our faith that salvation is not accomplished by human beings but by God. We know that judgment as to the ultimate salvation of persons from any faith community, including Christianity and Judaism, belongs to God alone.

It is our belief that Jews and Christians are co-workers and companion pilgrims who have made the God of Israel known throughout the world. Through common service and action we jointly proclaim the God we know. Together, through study and prayer, we can learn how the God we believe to be the same God speaks and calls us continually into closer relationship with each other as well as with God.

6. As Christians, we are called into dialogue with our Jewish neighbors.

Christians and Jews hold a great deal of scripture, history, and culture in common. And yet, we also share two thousand painful years of anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews by Christians. These two apparently discordant facts move Christians to seek common experiences with Jews, and especially to invite them into dialogue to explore the meaning of our kinship and our differences. Our intention is to learn about the faith of one another and to build bridges of understanding.

While for Christians dialogue will always include testimony to God's saving acts in Jesus Christ, it will include an equal measure of listening to and respecting the beliefs of Jews as they strive to live in obedience and faithfulness to God as they understand the conditions of their faith.

Productive interfaith dialogue requires focused, sustained conversation based on willingness to recognize and probe genuine differences while also seeking that which is held in common. We are called to openness so that we may learn how God is speaking through our dialogue partners. As stated in the World Council of Churches *Guidelines on Dialogue*, “One of the functions of dialogue is to allow participants to describe and witness to their faith on their own terms. . . . Participants seek to hear each other in order to better understand each other’s faith, hopes, insights, and concerns.”⁹ Fruitful and respectful dialogue is centered in a mutual spirit of humility, trust, openness to new understanding, and commitment to reconciliation and the healing of the painful wounds of our history.

7. As followers of Jesus Christ we deeply repent of the complicity of the Church and the participation of many Christians in the long history of persecution of the Jewish people. The Christian Church has a profound obligation to correct historical and theological teachings that have led to false and pejorative perceptions of Judaism and contributed to persecution and hatred of Jews. It is our responsibility as Christians to oppose anti-Semitism whenever and wherever it occurs.

We recognize with profound sorrow that repeatedly and often in the last two thousand years, the worship, preaching, and teaching of the Christian Church has allowed and sometimes even incited and directed persecution against Jews.

The Church today carries grave responsibility to counter the evil done by Christians to Jews in the Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms of Eastern Europe and elsewhere, carried out in the name of Jesus Christ. In the twentieth century there is particular shame in the failure of most of the Church to challenge the policies of governments that were responsible for the unspeakable atrocities of the Holocaust.

Throughout history up to the present, both the selective use and the misuse of scripture have fostered negative attitudes toward and actions against Jews. Use of New Testament passages that blame “the Jews” for the crucifixion of Jesus have been the basis of many acts of discrimination against Jews, frequently involving physical violence. There is no doubt that traditional and often officially sanctioned and promulgated Christian teachings, including the uncritical use of New Testament writings that can be construed as anti-Jewish, have caused untold misery and form the basis of modern anti-Semitism.

Misinterpretations and misunderstanding of historical and contemporary Judaism continue, including the mistaken belief that Judaism is a religion solely of law and judgment while Christianity is a religion of love and grace.

The characterizations of God in the Hebrew Bible (called the Old Testament by Christians) are rich and diverse; strong images of a caring, compassionate, and loving deity are dominant for Jews as well as for Christians. Further, there are parallels between New Testament Christian understandings of the “spirit of the law” and contemporaneous theological developments in first century Jewish theology.

The Church has an obligation to correct erroneous and harmful past teachings and to ensure that the use of scripture, as well as the preparation, selection, and use of liturgical and educational resources, does not perpetuate misleading interpretations and misunderstanding of Judaism.

It is also essential for Christians to oppose forcefully anti-Jewish acts and rhetoric that persist in the present time in many places. We must be zealous in challenging overt and subtle anti-Semitic stereotypes and bigoted attitudes that ultimately made the Holocaust possible and that stubbornly and insidiously continue today. These lingering patterns are a call to Christians for

ever-new educational efforts and continued vigilance, so that we, remembering and honoring the cries of the tortured and dead, can claim with Jews around the world to be faithful to the post-Holocaust cry of “Never again.”

8. As Christians, we share a call with Jews to work for justice, compassion, and peace in the world in anticipation of the fulfillment of God’s reign.

Together Jews and Christians honor the commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, and might. It is our task to join in common opposition to those forces — nation, race, power, money — that clamor for ultimate allegiance. Together we honor the commandment to love neighbor as self. It is our task to labor in common for those things that are part of God’s work of reconciliation. Together we affirm the sacredness of all persons and the obligation of stewardship for all God has created.

Jews still await the messianic reign of God foretold by the prophets. Christians proclaim the good news that in Jesus Christ “the kingdom of God is at hand”; yet we, as Christians, also wait in hope for the consummation of God’s redemptive work. Together, Jews and Christians long for and anticipate the fulfillment of God’s reign. Together, we are “partners in waiting.” In our waiting, we are called to witness and to work for God’s reign together.

9. As United Methodist Christians, we are deeply affected by the anguish and suffering that continue for many people who live in the Middle East region that includes modern Israel. We commit ourselves through prayer and advocacy to bring about justice and peace for those of every faith.

Within The United Methodist Church, we struggle to understand the complexity and the painfulness of the controversies in which Christians, Jews, and Muslims are involved in the

Middle East. The issues include both disputed political questions of sovereignty and control and concerns over human rights and justice. We recognize the theological significance of the Holy Land as central to the worship, historical traditions, hope, and identity of the Jewish people. We are mindful of this land's historic and contemporary importance for Christians and Muslims. We are committed to the security, safety, and well-being of Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East, to respect for the legitimacy of the State of Israel, to justice and sovereignty for the Palestinian people, and to peace for all who live in the region.

As we join with others of many religious communities in wrestling with these issues and searching for solutions, we seek to work together with other Christians, Jews, and Muslims to honor the religious significance of this land and to bring about healthy sustainable life, justice, and peace for all.

New Bridges to Christian-Jewish Understanding

The above statements of principle and affirmation offer a foundation for theological reflection within The United Methodist Church and with other Christians on our understanding of our relationships with the Jewish people. They are meant to be the basis of study, discussion, and action as we strive for greater discernment within the church.

Further, we hope that the statements of guiding principle will be important as bases of cooperative efforts, and especially for dialogue between United Methodists (sometimes in the company of other Christians) and Jewish communities, as we mutually explore the meaning of our kinship and our differences.

Using the foregoing foundation and principles, The United Methodist Church encourages dialogue with Jews at all levels of the church, including and especially in local congregations. It is

also hoped that there will be many other concrete expressions of Jewish-Christian relationships, such as participating in special occasions of interfaith observance, joint acts of common service, and cooperative programs of social transformation. These offer great opportunity to Christians and Jews to build relationships and together work for justice and peace (*shalom*) in our communities and in the world, serving humanity as God intends.

We dare to believe that such conversations and acts will build new bridges in hope between Christians and Jews, and that they will be among the signs and first fruits of our sibling relationship under our parent God. Together, we await and strive for the fulfillment of God's reign.

NOTES

1. “The Churches and the Jewish People, Towards a New Understanding,” adopted at Sigtuna, Sweden, by the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People, sponsored by the World Council of Churches, 1988.
2. “Bridge in Hope, Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” adopted by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, 1972.
3. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 1992, The Constitution, Division One, Article 5, p. 22.
4. *Ibid.*, Doctrinal Standards, Our Theological Task, p. 84.
5. *Idem.*
6. *Idem.*
7. “The Churches and the Jewish People . . .”
8. *Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 1993, World Council of Churches, Par. 1.6.
9. *Guidelines on Dialogue*, adopted at London Colney, England, by the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People of the Unit on Dialogue and People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, World Council of Churches, 1981, Par. 3.4.

