Signed by members of the

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS GROUP ON CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

Institutions are listed only for identification purposes.

Dr. Norman Beck
Poehlmann Professor of Biblical Theology and Classical Languages,
Texas Lutheran University, Seguin, TX

Dr. Mary C. Boys, SNJM
Skinner & McAlpin Professor of Practical Theology, Union Theological Seminary, NYC

Dr. Rosann Catalano
Roman Catholic Staff Scholar, Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies, Baltimore, MD

Dr. Philip A. Cunningham
Exec. Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA

Dr. Celia Deutsch, NDS
Adjunct Associate Professor of Religion, Barnard College/Columbia University, NYC

Dr. Alice L. Eckardt
Professor emerita of Religion Studies, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

Dr. Eugene J. Fisher
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Washington, DC

Dr. Eva Fleischner
Montclair [NJ] State University (emerita), Claremont, CA

Dr. Deirdre Good
General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, NYC

Dr. Walter Harrelson
Distinguished Professor emeritus of Hebrew Bible, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

Rev. Michael McGarry, CSP
Director, Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem

Dr. John C. Merkle
Professor of Theology, College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN

Dr. John T. Pawlikowski, OSM
Prof. of Social Ethics; Director, Catholic-Jewish Studies Program
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL

Dr. Peter A. Pettit
Institute for Christian-Jewish Understanding , Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA

Dr. Peter C. Phan
The Warren-Blanding Professor of Religion and Culture,
Catholic University of America, Washington, DC

Dr. Jean-Pierre Ruiz
Associate Professor and Chair, Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies,
St. John's University, NYC

Dr. Franklin Sherman
Associate for Interfaith Relations, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Dr. Joann Spillman
Professor and Chair, Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies,
Rockhurst University, Kansas City, MO

Dr. John T. Townsend
Visiting Lecturer on Jewish Studies Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA

Dr. Joseph Tyson
Professor emeritus of Religious Studies, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX

Dr. Clark M. Williamson
Indiana Professor of Christian Thought, emeritus,
Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN

A SACRED OBLIGATION

RETHINKING CHRISTIAN FAITH IN RELATION TO JUDAISM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

A Statement by the
Christian Scholars Group
on Christian - Jewish Relations

September 1, 2002

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1969, the Christian Scholars Group has been seeking to develop more adequate Christian theologies of the church's relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people. Pursuing this work for over three decades under varied sponsorship, members of our association of Protestant and Roman Catholic biblical scholars, historians, and theologians have published many volumes on Christian-Jewish relations.

Our work has a historical context. For most of the past two thousand years, Christians have erroneously portrayed Jews as unfaithful, holding them collectively responsible for the death of Jesus and therefore accursed by God. In agreement with many official Christian declarations, we reject this accusation as historically false and theologically invalid. It suggests that God can be unfaithful to the eternal covenant with the Jewish people. We acknowledge with shame the suffering this distorted portrayal has brought upon the Jewish people. We repent of this teaching of contempt. Our repentance requires us to build a new teaching of respect. This task is important at any time, but the deadly crisis in the Middle East and the frightening resurgence of antisemitism worldwide give it particular urgency.

We believe that revising Christian teaching about Judaism and the Jewish people is a central and indispensable obligation of theology in our time. It is essential that Christianity both understand and represent Judaism accurately, not only as a matter of justice for the Jewish people, but also for the integrity of Christian faith, which we cannot proclaim without reference to Judaism. Moreover, since there is a unique bond between Christianity and Judaism, revitalizing our appreciation of Jewish religious life will deepen our Christian faith. We base these convictions on ongoing scholarly research and the official statements of many Christian denominations over the past fifty years.

We are grateful for the willingness of many Jews to engage in dialogue and study with us. We welcomed it when, on September 10, 2000, Jewish scholars sponsored by the Institute of Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore issued a historic declaration, *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity.* This document, affirmed by notable rabbis and Jewish scholars, called on Jews to re-examine their understanding of Christianity.

Encouraged by the work of both Jewish and Christian colleagues, we offer the following ten statements for the consideration of our fellow Christians. We urge all Christians to reflect on their faith in light of these statements. For us, this is a sacred obligation.

1. God's covenant with the Jewish people endures forever.

For centuries Christians claimed that their covenant with God replaced or superseded the Jewish covenant. We renounce this claim. We believe that God does not revoke divine promises. We affirm that God is in covenant with both Jews and Christians. Tragically, the entrenched theology of supersessionism continues to influence Christian faith, worship, and practice, even though it has been repudiated by many Christian denominations and many Christians no longer accept it. Our recognition of the abiding validity of Judaism has implications for all aspects of Christian life.

2. Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as a faithful Jew.

Christians worship the God of Israel in and through Jesus Christ. Supersessionism, however, prompted Christians over the centuries to speak of Jesus as an opponent of Judaism. This is historically incorrect. Jewish worship, ethics, and practice shaped Jesus's life and teachings. The scriptures of his people inspired and nurtured him. Christian preaching and teaching today must describe Jesus's earthly life as engaged in the ongoing Jewish quest to live out God's covenant in everyday life.

3. Ancient rivalries must not define Christian-Jewish relations today.

Although today we know Christianity and Judaism as separate religions, what became the church was a movement within the Jewish community for many decades after the ministry and resurrection of Jesus. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by Roman armies in the year 70 of the first century caused a crisis among the Jewish people. Various groups, including Christianity and early rabbinic Judaism, competed for leadership in the Jewish community by claiming that they were the true heirs of biblical Israel. The gospels reflect this rivalry in which the disputants exchanged various accusations. Christian charges of hypocrisy and legalism misrepresent Judaism and constitute an unworthy foundation for Christian self-understanding.

4. Judaism is a living faith, enriched by many centuries of development.

Many Christians mistakenly equate Judaism with biblical Israel. However, Judaism, like Christianity, developed new modes of belief and practice in the centuries after the destruction of the Temple. The rabbinic tradition gave new emphasis and understanding to existing practices, such as communal prayer, study of Torah, and deeds of loving-kindness. Thus Jews could live out the covenant in a world without the Temple. Over time they developed an extensive body of interpretive literature that continues to enrich Jewish life, faith & self-understanding. Christians cannot fully understand Judaism apart from its post-biblical development, which can also enrich and enhance Christian faith.

5. The Bible both connects and separates Jews and Christians.

Some Jews and Christians today, in the process of studying the Bible together, are discovering new ways of reading that provide a deeper appreciation of both traditions. While the two communities draw from the same biblical texts of ancient Israel, they have developed different traditions of interpretation. Christians view these texts through the lens of the New Testament, while Jews understand these scriptures through the traditions of rabbinic commentary.

Referring to the first part of the Christian Bible as the "Old Testament" can wrongly suggest that these texts are obsolete. Alternative expressions – "Hebrew Bible," "First Testament," or "Shared Testament" - although also problematic, may better express the church's renewed appreciation of the ongoing power of these scriptures for both Jews and Christians.

6. Affirming God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian understandings of salvation.

Christians meet God's saving power in the person of Jesus Christ and believe that this power is available to all people in him. Christians have therefore taught for centuries that salvation is available only through Jesus Christ. With their recent realization that God's covenant with the Jewish people is eternal, Christians can now recognize in the Jewish tradition the redemptive power of God at work. If Jews, who do not share our faith in Christ, are in a saving covenant with God, then Christians need new ways of understanding the universal significance of Christ.

7. Christians should not target Jews for conversion.

In view of our conviction that Jews are in an eternal covenant with God, we renounce missionary efforts directed at converting Jews. At the same time, we welcome opportunities for Jews and Christians to bear witness to their respective experiences of God's saving ways. Neither can properly claim to possess knowledge of God entirely or exclusively.

8. Christian worship that teaches contempt for Judaism dishonors God.

The New Testament contains passages that have frequently generated negative attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. The use of these texts in the context of worship increases the likelihood of hostility toward Jews. Christian anti-Jewish theology has also shaped worship in ways that denigrate Judaism and foster contempt for Jews. We urge church leaders to examine scripture readings, prayers, the structure of the lectionaries, preaching and hymns to remove distorted images of Judaism. A reformed Christian liturgical life would express a new relationship with Jews and thus honor God.

9. We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people.

The land of Israel has always been of central significance to the Jewish people. However, Christian theology charged that the Jews had condemned themselves to homelessness by rejecting God's Messiah. Such supersessionism precluded any possibility for Christian understanding of Jewish attachment to the land of Israel. Christian theologians can no longer avoid this crucial issue, especially in light of the complex and persistent conflict over the land. Recognizing that both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own, we call for efforts that contribute to a just peace among all the peoples in the region.

10. Christians should work with Jews for the healing of the world.

For almost a century, Jews and Christians in the United States have worked together on important social issues, such as the rights of workers and civil rights. As violence and terrorism intensify in our time, we must strengthen our common efforts in the work of justice and peace to which both the prophets of Israel and Jesus summon us. These common efforts by Jews and Christians offer a vision of human solidarity and provide models of collaboration with people of other faith traditions.

BOSTON COLLEGE

The work of the Christian Scholars Group is currently being sponsored by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College.

www.bc.edu/cjlearning