

BETWEEN JEWS & CHRISTIANS, IS INTELLIGENT **DIALOG** WITH MUTUAL RESPECT POSSIBLE?

2652 10 Jan 94

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone 508.775.8008
Noncommercial reproduction permitted

I think so even against Jacob Neusner. (On the origin-time of Christianity & rabbinism [ie modern Judaism], he's the most extensively published living Jewish authority.) He admits that something passing for Christian/Jewish dialog exists but insists that it would go poof if it became both intelligent & honest. I think he's wrong, but I've been giving it another think since the CAPE COD TIMES published this letter of mine & I've been inundated by letters (published & not) & phonecalls misreading my intention & my words. Here, in sequence, is what happened:

The paper's lead editorial for the last day of '93 was on the Israel/Vatican accords. Unfortunately, the writer took the occasion to lay at the door of Christian theology the blame for Jewish/Christian troubles through the centuries down to the present time....As a counterpoise, & stimulus toward honest intelligent dialog, I wrote this letter. None of my critics has shown evidence of noticing (1) this context & (2) my corrective intention, even though both are in my first ¶, (1) by statement & (2) by implication.

On hot-button issues, accurate listening-reading is highly improbable. We get off to a bad start on abortion & many other subjects, including the troubles between Christians & Jews (etiology et al)....So wouldn't it be better to avoid talking about these issues? Theoretically, maybe. Actually, it's impossible: almost everybody has a take or angle or spin or slant (how many words we have for it!) on these topics, & anybody letting loose will stir others of other opinions to reciprocate, as I reciprocated to the editorial's excessive blaming of Christian theology for the woes of the Jews.

On balance, I conclude that "trusting the process" of public airing of differences & disputes will serve truth, fairness, & justice. This is the presupposition of Milton's magisterial AREOPAGITICA, a founding document of democracy. But many Christians, on the topic of this Thinksheet, say "Let sleeping dogs lie. The only thing you'll accomplish will be to get yourself called antisemitic." But I press on in faith, faith in the God of Truth, who calls us forth out of the walled cities of our self-regarding, awkward-facts-suppressing stories into humble mutual respect & labor toward a more humane world.

Now, here's a short battery of **questions** vis-a-vis my printed critics of these past five days since my letter appeared:

What did my letter say that none

Honesty on Jewish-Christian difficulties

Your editorial Dec. 31, "A chasm finally bridged," is both lucid, in rightly rejoicing in the Vatican-Israel accord, and obtuse, in commenting of Jewish-Christian difficulties through the centuries. As to the latter:

1. You call the fundamental Jewish-Christian disagreement a mere "fine point in religion"! Christianity would not even have come into being without the "fine point" of the conviction that Jesus is the Christ, sent by God to refine and fullfull Jewish messianic expectations.

In trying to wipe out the earliest Christians, the Jews understood that this was no fine point, it was the major point.

2. You leave the false impression that the Jews had nothing to do with the death of Jesus. The Gospels make clear that the Romans executed him, so the charge of direct decide is false: Jews should never have been called "Christ-killers."

But while Jesus' opponents did not kill him, or even directly cause his death, by rioting they did occasion the Crucifixion, a Roman action to suppress the disturbance of the peace.

The picture you present needs nuancing if the cause of better Jewish-Christian relations is to be served.

3. In mentioning the cases of England, France, and Spain, you give the impression that expelling Jews was a Christian invention. The truth is that anti-Semitism precedes Christianity.

Another relevant truth is that anti-Semitism has not been limited to Christianized areas. For example, it is strong today in Japan, where the population is not even 2 percent Christian.

4. Your editorial overrates the religious factor in the persecution of Jews and underrates the economic factor. You do say that "the motive (for the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290, from France in 1392, and from Spain in 1492) was economic. The Jews . . . excelled in business."

History shows that majorities are hard on minorities that excel in business. A recent instance is the present Indonesian regime, which came to power with the murder of 300,000 Chinese.

The fact that Indonesia is 98 percent Muslim is incidental: The murders are not charged against that religion. Similarly, the persecution of Jews in Christianized area is a species of the genus persecution-of-rich-minorities.

Being honest to history is a precondition of improved Jewish-Christian relations, which we should all pray and work for.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
Craigville
CCT
December 5, 1994

The Jews were expelled from Rome as early as the year 40, long before there was any significant Christian presence in that city.

of my critics mentions?....1. That I "rejoice in the Vatican-Israel accord."....2. That "Christianity would not even have come into being without...the conviction that Jesus is the Christ, sent by God to refine and fulfil Jewish messianic expectations."....3. The Jews tried "to wipe out the earliest Christians." The earliest attacks of Christians on Jews were reactions, not actions. For whatever reasons, it was Jews who started the bad blood against Christians, not the other way around. Does this justify Christian persecution of Jews? Of course not! But this historical fact, by providing shading (Fr., "nuancing"), rules out the simplistic-moralistic-B&W (black-&-white) un/wittingly anti-Christian accusation that "those bad Christians have always picked on the Jews." Yes, numerically, Christians have been harder on more Jews than vice versa. But while Christians were once in danger of being wiped out by Jews (when Christianity was a neonate), Jews have never been in danger of being wiped out by Christians....4. "Jews should never have been called 'Christ-killers.'" Jesus' death was "a Roman action to suppress the disturbance of the peace." Anti-Semites wouldn't make these concessions....5. "Anti-Semitism precedes Christianity"--an awkward fact my critics would rather not think about....6. None of my critics credits me with "the religious factor" in the persecution of Jews. I said it's "overrated," not that it's nonexistent. My motive in writing the letter was to correct the overrating, thus overblaming, of Christian theology for the long plight of the Jews. None of my critics credits me with this motive, though it's implied in my first paragraph, which makes clear that I'm not bringing up (as some critics have accused me of doing) "Jewish-Christian difficulties through the centuries."....7. The Indonesian murder of 300,000 Chinese for excelling in business (though of course not all did, just as not all Jews)....8. That what I say of rich Jews is continuous with the editorial's saying "The Jews...excelled in business" & "the [sic!] motive" for the expulsions "was economic." As for myself, I'm against deterministic hermeneutics: I don't explain complex phenomena by reducing them to economics (as Marx did, & the editorial does in the expulsions) or religion (as anti-Christians do in explaining the persecution of the Jews). It's only in the two contexts of the editorial & the Indonesian story that I say "the persecution of Jews in Christianized area[s] is a species of the genus persecution-of-rich-minorities." Some critics, in the interest of their own agenda & in disinterest of truth, quote me out of both contexts....9. No critic credits me with the conviction that "being honest to history is a precondition of improved Jewish-Christian relations."

What didn't I say that my critics said I did?....1. That I reduced anti-Semitic causality to economics....2. "Jews were Christ-killers" (this, though I said "Jews should never have been called 'Christ-killers'!")....3. Anti-Semitism is "fair sport" because (I'm alleged to have said!) "Everyone did it."....4. "Everyone hates Jews because they excel(led) in business." (The critic who made all three of the above errors accuses me of what obviously applies to him, viz "bitterness and anger.")....4. That Jews today "bear responsibility" for Jesus' crucifixion.

What did my critics falsely assume I don't believe?....1. That Jews have a right to their own religion....2. That "the Gospels are faith documents, not historical documents." (This, however, is true of all the world's sacred scriptures, including the Jews' Torah, which like the Gospels doesn't provide "historical proof." But this critic would not disagree with me that "the Gospels make clear that the Romans executed" Jesus.)....3. That non-rich Jews have been persecuted....4. That "Christian Scriptures" & Christian theology have been factors in the persecution of Jews: the two religions have been & are over against each other, but that cannot justify persecution; indeed, inherent in both is the call to cooperation.....5. That "Christianity grew out of Judaism."....6. That we all need "an understanding of universal humanity and...all religions."

What didn't my critics admit?....1. That economics ("rich Jews") has been & is a factor in the persecution of Jews....2. The mystery of Jewish suffering (on which Elie Wiesel dwells) includes the death of Jesus....3. That Jews tried "to wipe out the earliest Christians."....4. That Jews were involved, however tangentially, in Jesus' death.....5. That Christians did not invent the persecution of Jews: non-Christians were & are persecutors of Jews....Let's all see the wider picture!