

I feel less sure and more modest than the thinksheet title suggests. I've just come (17Feb83) from a meeting at which a rabbi stonewalled reps of the whole schmeer of churches--Greek, Roman, Protestant. Reactions ranged from defensiveness (mouthing the old antisemitic canards) to liberal-patronistic kick-my-ass-again-I-deserve-it; rather, there was nothing in between except my closing remark (my only remark in the meeting) that, while Christians asking Jews to stonewall them is some progress (but possibly at the cost of increasing antisemitism, as majorities dislike being made to feel guilty in the presence of minorities), the more progress we now need is dialog beyond stonewalling ("stonewalling" = party-lining propaganda, you're-wrong-we're-right, win/lose monologing). Actually, the rabbi was slightly beyond stonewalling: he mixed "This is how it feels to be a Jew vis-a-vis you Christians" (which is beyond stonewalling) with "This is how you Christians have wronged us Jews, beginning with your distorted NT" (which is accusative stonewalling, unmodulated by "This is what we Jews have done wrong"). What I know is that we Jews and Christians now are --for the first time--in position to go beyond stonewalling, and accordingly are under a divine call to do so. I'm using the rest of this page for a few suggestions toward that end.

1. The Vatican II document on the Jews denounces accusing them of deicide and declares evangelism of Jews invalid. What it does not do, and I do do, is insist that Judaism is a valid religion parallel with Christianity and worthy of equal treatment religiously, morally, politically. Further, I hold it to be a Christian duty not only to defend Jews (as some Christians did under Hitler) but also to defend Judaism as our sibling faith, with which we are related under a divine mystery till the eschaton (as in Ro.9-11). As my position is new in history, I deserve from Jews a different treatment from the treatment Jews have given Christians in the past. Am I getting it? With almost no exceptions, no. Certainly not from the rabbi today: he excoriated me with knee-jerk blame-the-victimism: he took my "it takes two to tangle" as antisemitic, and was "very angry" at my suggestion that at the next stage, Jews and Christians will have to be more honest and open and vulnerable with each other.

2. Transculture, Inc., is one of many processes enabling Jews and Christians to be human together, heart-to-heart. Perhaps Jewish/Christian dialog won't get much farther till it becomes less frontal, more oblique, more end-run. We Jews and Christians who care about Jewish-Christian ecumenism need to explore, and exploit, these options....I long for Jews who can and will and do hear my heart, as I long to hear theirs. It is not just that I want to hear/speak: I need to if I am to be a late-20th-c. Christian. I need help from my Jewish siblings/enemies/friends.

3. "Siblings/enemies/friends"? Yes, it's that complicated, on both sides. Sin? Yes, mixed in. Tragedy independent of sin? Yes, a mix of it. Possibilities of unity-with-diversity? Certainly! We Jews and Christians have (1) negatively, many common enemies to combine against, and (2) positively, many common virtues-values-commitments to combine to honor. Are not siblings both friends and enemies? If they establish an honest and human relationship beyond their relationship to their parents, is it not a thing of beauty and truth and love and power? Historically, Judaism and Christianity were born of a time of Palestinian troubles about 20 cs. ago: we are siblings. But we have acted more as enemies (early, Jew oppressing Christian; later unto today, Christian oppressing Jew): of this, I feel sure, God is calling us both to repent. It will not do for the Jew to ask the Christian to repent more on the argument from quantity: I'm proud we Christians came to dominion, and it's stupid to ask me to repent of it. What I should be asked to repent of is that when my people came to power, we betrayed our Lord Jesus as certainly and seriously as any of us have ever accused Jews of doing.

OVER

\*Glenn C. Loury, IMPRIMIS Feb/83, p.3: "Responsibility and Race." The manipulation of political mechanisms has moved us toward justice as far as it can, and "externalizing the responsibility" is self-defeating. (WEE: Naming-blaming gets nobody any good place.)

4. But what shall we tell the children? Cultural-spiritual formation in all human groups is by deeds (modeling) and words (+/- self-defining of "us" over against all actual "thems"). Social psychology has made it possible to remove much moral heat from group relations, and God calls us all to make this possible actual. The simple reason why a group's self-defining to its children cannot be positive only is that the children ask both + and - questions. In training children, in preparing for parenthood, and in shaping curricula of religious education, Jews and Christians need to work together toward three goals: (1) Maximizing the values in the huge overlap of the two faiths; (2) Emphasizing what is distinctive in each faith, and why the distinctives are vital; and (3) Minimizing the potential damage to children and to the two faith communities from these distinctions and their attendant, inescapable negations.

5. These inescapable negations must be honestly stated and honestly heard; only then can they be softened, made less cutting and damaging--though they must remain negations as long as our two faiths are two faiths, which means as long (I think) as history. EXAMPLES: (1) A Greek priest at the meeting today asked the rabbi, "What should Jews do with the fact that God came to the world as Christ?" That way of putting it virtually eliminates any considerable improvement in Jew/Christian relationships! For the Jew must forthwith destroy the question by denying its premise; (2) A parallel Jewish question: "What should Christians do with the fact that Jesus died and Shalom, the Kingdom of God, is no more here-and-now than it ever was?" The Christian reply cannot escape negating the premise as reductionistic; for if the Christian accepts the premise, the devotional and doctrinal bases of the Christian faith disappear. The logomachic (word-weapon) skills of each faith against the other are well developed. Given our origins and history, why wouldn't we both be good at being murderous to each other? And given the dominance of Christianity almost everywhere Jews have lived and are living, why wouldn't Christian murderousness be more successful (limiting the Jewish right to speak, to move in society, and--in extremis--even to stay alive)? It's all so natural; "banal," Hannah Ahrend said. In the use of inescapable negations, minorities have a severe disadvantage. That is a human and tragic fact. When majorities take unfair advantage, that is a human and sinful fact which is not made less sinful when we distinguish between the tragic and the sinful (though this distinction does lessen the moral heat and the warpings due to excessive temperatures). A little sympathy from minorities, please: it's tough being the majority, as Jews in Israel know.

6. To Alice B. Toklas' question to her dying companion, "What is the answer?" Gertrude Stein responded "But what is the question?" and died. I suggest that Jewish/Christian dialog needs to work hard at prior questions yielding a more accurate, 1983, situation definition, promising more hopeful strategies. Frozen positions would thaw; rigid, self-defeating tactics would cease. (E.g., a Southern churchman at the meeting said to the rabbi, "I do despise somebody else confessing my sins.") A tough assignment requiring removing swords and shields, confessing self-righteousness, asking forgiveness, admitting distortions, facing what each side finds difficult/easy over against the other side. Our two histories and their documents are severely vulnerable to critical-historical science: thank God, and take courage!

7. Fear of epithets is a deterrent of courageous, honest confrontation. If I try to be honest-to-Blacks, I'm a "racist"; honest-to-Jews, "anti-semitic." The primary call to honesty is within each group, though no group rewards those of its number who confess its shortfalls (such as, now among Blacks, Loury of Harvard and Roberts of ITC). A marriage is hopeless when one or both spouses react instead of acting; humans dislike being around those who make them feel guilty. Says Loury, "racism" is good: people prefer being with their own kind--a wrenching definition!