

**God's
Unfailing Word**

Theological and Practical Perspectives
on Christian-Jewish Relations

*God's Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical
Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations*

by The Faith and Order Commission
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The Faith and Order Commission



What is fascinating about this compilation of Anglican perspectives on the state of Christian-Jewish relations in Britain is that it is greeted right at the end of the booklet in the Afterword with a cool response from the Chief Rabbi Mirvis. Despite the progress this publication makes in self-reflection, Mirvis is disappointed that seemingly there was no effort 'to reject' the actions of Christians over the ages who have deliberately targeted Jews.

Still, the publication is a good overview of the history of the relationship. The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England sets out its stall in this booklet: 1) accepting that the Christian-Jewish relationship is a gift from God; 2) emphasising the need for truthful thinking; 3) acknowledging that Christians have been guilty of fostering negative stereotypes of Jews.

The opportunity to rebalance the relationship began in 1942 when the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) was established. The opening up of relations was further helped by the declaration of the encyclical *Nostra Aetate* at the Second Vatican Council in 1965, which encouraged more interfaith dialogue. In 1988, the Lambeth Conference passed a resolution that Judaism should not be seen as 'a living fossil, simply superseded by Christianity'. The 1994 CofE publication *Christians and Jews: a New Way of Thinking* urged repentance on the part of the Church. Other publications followed, including *Sharing one Hope?*, *Generous Love*, and *Land of Promise?*, all of which tackled how Christians relate to Jews as well as opportunities for dialogue.

The first chapter looks at the history of Christian-Jewish relations. It charts the rise of the Rabbinic movement after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. It reiterates that Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity had the same roots in biblical and Second Temple Judaism. Soon, though, there was the 'parting of the ways'. Early on, Christian writers like John Chrysostom described synagogues as dens of iniquity. In places like Norwich and Lincoln, 'blood libels' against Jews were claimed. Edward I ordered all Jews to leave the country in 1290. There was much hostility against the Jews during the Spanish Inquisition. Antisemitism was coined in 1860, only worsened by what Jules Isaac called 'the teaching of

contempt' in society at large. Antisemitism crept into the political narrative, including Hitler's, with a catastrophic outcome: the Holocaust.

The second chapter deals with the Christian-Jewish relationship. It acknowledges that the Jewish, Christian (and Muslim) God are the same, all being Abrahamic faiths. Jesus read the Tanakh. In the years that followed, Marcion caused havoc with his view that the New Testament made a clean break with the Old. Rabbinic Judaism placed emphasis on the Torah (law), combined with Mishnah (religious law in AD 200), as well as linking with Midrash, or exposition of the Tanakh. Christians have viewed Jews in various ways: 1) Jews denying Christ are not God's people; 2) Jews are God's people, despite non-acceptance of Christ; 3) there is a mystery surrounding the status of Jews, according to writers like Jacques Maritain; and 4), the Jews are God's people, unequivocally. The chapter focuses on the Romans 9-11 passages, and Paul's interpretation of it. It also refers to Augustine, who recommended to the Roman authorities that Jews should be safeguarded. It also talks about Cardinal Kasper's view of Judaism as a 'sacrament of every otherness', a way of Christians might see in Judaism roots of holiness.

The third chapter tackles mission and evangelism. It provides some useful theological comparisons. For example, the Christian imperative to seek the Kingdom of God is synonymous with the Jewish 'tikkun olam', the mending of the world.

In the fourth chapter, a number of useful points are made: we are urged to move beyond the Collect for Good Friday that once referred to 'all Jews, Turks, Infidels and Hereticks'; we also are asked to steer clear of stereotyping the Pharisees; there is still a debate about the distinction between the Judaeans, an ethnic descriptor, and the Jews, a religious one, in St John's Gospel; caution is advised when singing hymns, like that of Charles Wesley's 'Lo, he comes with clouds descending', some of whose verses could purport to be Jewish collective guilt in Christ's crucifixion; and then there is the controversial appropriation of the Seder meal in Holy Week – better to invite a Jewish teacher to demonstrate this.

The fifth chapter moves onto the Land of Israel. Israel was established in 1948. There is a discussion of the term 'Zionism'. Christian Zionism was a movement stretching back to the sixteenth century arguing for a Jewish homeland. Set against discussion of Israel, there is also the Palestinian perspective, which includes the *Kairos Palestine* document (2009), as well as the Jewish statement *Dabru Emet*, which calls for justice for all non-Jews living in the Jewish state. A common vision for Jews and Christians is suggested by meditating on Psalm 85.1: 'righteousness and peace will kiss each other'.

The sixth chapter looks at themes for common action: the continued dialogue over the role of Moses; the clarification of the term 'legalism' and its myths; the recognition that both Jews and Christians seek God's kingdom on earth; that both work on a common platform against persecution; that both revel in the reciting of the psalms and the moral principles of the Torah; and that both see eye to eye on natural law, the Jewish equivalent being the Noahide laws.

