

**“HOW SHALL WE SING A NEW SONG?”**

**THE NEED FOR A TOTAL CESSATION OF  
CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS OF SUPERSESSION  
IN THE RELATIONSHIP TO JUDAISM.”**

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A lecture presented  
by  
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in the context of the following assembly  
**POWER IN THE SPIRIT**  
**“A NEW SONG FOR A NEW DAY”**  
JULY 13-15, 1995  
ROANOKE COLLEGE, SALEM, VIRGINIA  
Friday, July 14, 1995 9:00 a.m. - Olin Theater

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Yesterday my task was to make the message of Ps 96 come alive. I hope that we all heard the message and are ready to take it to heart and implement it into our own lives.

What does the poet of Ps 96 want us to hear and to do?

He tells us:

Sing to the LORD (YHWH)!  
Announce His marvelous wonders every day and everywhere!  
Give to the LORD (YHWH) the glory due to God through prayer and deeds!  
Say to everyone, in words and deeds,  
    the LORD (YHWH) governs this world and all of her peoples,  
        (and how does the LORD (YHWH) govern?)  
    the LORD (YHWH) governs with equity, justice, rightness, righteousness, with faithfulness  
        and with certitude and confidence.

Who is invited to sing a new, a re-newed song? Only the religious people? The psalmist encourages all humans, including Jews and Christians, to be ever more imaginative in their *different* ways to praise God, the one God, through equity, righteousness, justice and faithfulness and truth, and to live out their human lives always transparent of God's vision for all humans and for the whole world because God is the creator of us all and we are all siblings.

Today, my task is to share with you a few suggestions on how we Christians, and especially we Lutherans, can sing a new song?

I am convinced, that there is *one* important task, which we Christians must face, after Auschwitz, if we Christians want to stay alive and provide a viable message for all humans today.

Because of the Holocaust we Christians

- 1) must rethink and express in a different and in a new way everything which we have said about Jesus - from the very beginning, because what we have *said* contained many untruths, and what we have *done*, in the name of Jesus, has hurt and killed millions of people, especially Jews.
- 2) We also must rethink and express in a different and in a new way our relationship to the people of Jesus, the Jews. We, Gentile Christians, have taught and believed many untruths about Jews from the very beginning. There is a long list of such untruths. The most important one is that we have believed (and most Christians still believe it) that we have superceded the Jews and, therefore, Jews really have no longer any legitimate right or reason to their faith and to their existence.

THEREFORE, I CALL FOR THE TOTAL CESSATION OF CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS OF SUPERSESSION IN THE RELATIONSHIP TO JUDAISM.

But what will be the shape and content of Christianity if this call is taken seriously?

I do not know and, therefore, I extend the call to you and to all thinking and honest Christians to use all of our powers of intellect, all of our senses, to shape Christianity into a new song, a song which will be pleasing to all: space, earth, trees, animals and all humans, including Jews.

These next few moments will be a very, very difficult for me, because I will share with you my personal involvement in this subject and it will help you to understand why this is the most important subject for me. I think, though, that it is the most important subject for all Christians, because, I think, that the very life of Christianity is at stake.

The horror of the attempted extermination of Jews during the Nazi regime has been given a number of names:

- Holocaust, which is a translation of the Hebrew word עֹלָה, *ōlāh*, which means “whole burnt offering.”
- Auschwitz, as a one word geographical summary for all the death camps.
- The Nazis used the term “End-Lösung,” which means “the Final Solution, i.e., the final solution to the Jewish problem, because for the Nazis the very existence of Jews was a problem, actually something evil which had to be rectified. The Nazis saw themselves actually as saviors of the world ridding the world of Jews.
- Another Hebrew term is Shoah, שואה, *šōāh*, which means “trouble,” “mistreatment”),
- The most appropriate Hebrew term (according to some thinkers) is Ḥurban, חרבן, *hūrbān*, which means “destruction.”

On Saturday, April 2, 1995, at 8:15 p.m., I heard Elie Wiesel speak at Moriah Congregation (200 Taub Drive) in Deerfield, Illinois, on the topic, “Longing for Home, Today: Fifty Years After Liberation.” Among the many important comments he also said something to the effect, “I no longer like the expression ‘Holocaust,’ today I prefer Ḥurban.”

Words fail us to speak about the horrendous horror which the German National Socialists *unleashed* upon Europe during World War II. Their *racial* ideology demanded the extermination of Jews and Judaism from the face of the whole world.

In the introduction to a 1971 edition of Adolf Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf* (“MY Struggle”) K. Heiden summarizes the Nazi program as follows:

When Hitler came to power, in 1933, “Everyone was forced to buy it. It was presented as a gift to newly-wed couples, but the (marriage) license fee was doubled. *Mein Kampf* made Hitler rich. It became a best-seller second only to the Bible.

The book man well be called a kind of satanic Bible. To the author--although he was shrewd enough not to state it explicitly himself, but to have it said by his spiritual adviser, Alfred Rosenberg--the belief in human equality is a kind of hypnotic spell exercised by world-conquering Judaism with the help of the Christian Churches. Later the Jews invented the mass-seduction of liberal democracy; in the last stage marxism was their tool. By preaching the principle of human equality, Judaism has attempted to extirpate the feeling of pride from the soul of the Aryan race, to rob them of their leadership. To give back to these noble races their former consciousness of superiority by inculcating the principle that men (humans) are *not* equal is the theoretical purpose of *Mein Kampf*.”

I want to show you now a copy of one of the most vicious, if not the most vicious, document humans have ever devised.

I am holding up a copy of my *Ahnenpass*. Everyone had to have such a passport of ancestry during the Nazi-time. Of course people like to know their roots and, of course, the Churches and pastors participated in this search for clear and documented ancestry. The only trouble was that this document was used to prove that you either did or did not have Jewish blood. If it was detected that you did have Jewish blood, then you were doomed. There are two types of people, two races, the Aryans and the Non-aryans.

My *Ahnenpass*, certified by Nazi authorities, proves, beyond any doubt that I do not have Jewish blood. So this passport of ancestry was a passport to life for me.

The Christian teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism, for almost 2,000 years, was NOT *racially* motivated.

But, mainly gentile Christians, claimed (from the very beginning) that *THEY* had *religiously* superseded Jews and Judaism; that *they* had the *ONLY* right way to express the relationship between God and humans.

And then when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire (in the fourth century after Jesus) Christians were convinced that *their* faith had ultimately superseded Judaism.

Unbearable suffering was *unleashed* upon Jews in the name of Jesus and in the name of God wherever Christians had political power.

Christians claimed that the Jews had killed their Lord, their Messiah, their anointed King of the Endtime. And because it is possible in the gentile world for a human to become a god, Christians even claimed that the Jews had murdered Jesus of Nazareth, who was the flesh become LORD (YHWH), God. Jews had killed God, the LORD and creator of the universe -- a totally impossible thought and idea for Jewish or Biblical believers.

*There simply is no doubt, in my mind, that these, and other FALSE and DEADLY teachings, prepared the climate in which horrendous deeds, including murders and pogroms of Jews, became possible (throughout the "Christian" [?] era) and then, finally, Hitler was able to begin the execution of the "Final Solution."*

Auschwitz is *not* only a horror for Jews and Judaism, and for all of humanity, but, it is, in particular, the sign of the *end of Christianity ... unless* Christians *repent* and *prove* the sincerity of their repentance by *totally abrogating their claim of supersession* and by stating their Christian faith in terms which are not anti-Jewish.

We Christians simply have no choice, we must sing a new song, we must express our way of speaking about Jesus in a way which is not anti-Jewish. If we do not do this we will die.

This is not only true for Christianity, it is also true for any other religion or ideology, which claims that it supersedes, replaces and invalidates another. Such a belief, condemns itself, by that very belief, as invalid for consideration by even one human being.

After Auschwitz Christians *must* express their Christian faith always in the light which is cast from the fires at Auschwitz, which even consumed more than one million Jewish children. We must express our faith with the burning children watching.

I am a Christian--a Christian suffering a deep spiritual crisis. This crisis began in 1944, when I was 12 years old.

I grew up in a very pious, Christian, Lutheran family. My father, an Austrian from Vienna, was a pastor for German congregations in Yugoslavia during the 1930ies.

In 1938 my country, Austria, became part of the German Third Reich. In 1941 Yugoslavia was occupied by the German Army. I was told that from now on I had to greet everyone with "Heil Hitler," and not with "Grüss Gott" or "Guten Tag." I was a pious little boy and I knew that my Lord was Jesus Christ and not Adolf Hitler. Every time I said "Heil Hitler" I was horrified that Jesus would do something dreadful to me and punish me for my high treason.

At the end of December 1942 we were forced to leave Yugoslavia because of the deadly danger from Tito and his people. We lived in that very area where the terrible troubles began a few years ago in Yugoslavia. We spent January to March in Austria.

Then my father accepted a desperate call from several German congregations in occupied Poland. At the end of March 1943 my father began his duties in Stupza/Grenzhausen near Konin. (In hindsight: what a crazy decision!)

Of course, I had to participate in the "German Youth" (which included boys from 9-13 years of age. I was too young for the real "Hitler Youth," which was reserved for boys from 14 years of age until old enough for military service.

Once a meeting was scheduled for a Sunday morning. My father went to the authorities and told them: "I have little power to prevent you from having my son during the week, but on Sunday he belongs to the church. You can not have him on Sundays." Similar incidents occurred and in the Fall of 1943 my father was sent to the Russian front.

During the Summer of 1944 (I was 12 years old) I was sent to a "Führer-ertüchtigungs-lager," a leader-tougheng-up-camp, in Łódź/Lidzmannsstadt in the middle of German occupied Poland. Among the terrible experiences one stands out:

One day our immediate leader (a boy about 16 years of age) pointed to some of us and said: "You, you, and you, follow me." Of course, without raising any objections we followed him. He marched us to a street-car station. We boarded the tram. After some time the doors to the tram were locked and a deadly silence fell upon all in the tram. I was horribly afraid, because I could not understand what was happening. But, of course, I also did not say a thing or even asked any questions. Then I saw. What I saw was terrible. Half

starved, dirty people with yellow stars on their clothing. I was shocked. No one had prepared me for this moment. No one. Not my parents and not my leaders in the camp. No one had ever talked to me about what I was now witnessing. Soon the horror was over for me, but the effect on me stayed with me all of my life. The doors to the tram were unlocked and normal chatter filled the tram. None of us said anything about what we had just witnessed. No one asked questions and neither did I.

In the Summer of 1990 I was browsing in Powell's Book Store (1501 E. 57th Street, Chicago, Illinois) - just a block south of where I live, and I came across the book *The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto 1941-1944* (Edited by Lucjan Dobroszycki. Translated by Richard Lourie, Joachim Neugroschel, and others. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984). For the next couple of days time stood still for me as I read and cried through the book.

Only on January 20, 1945 did my mother, my brother and I flee from Poland. For a few days we were in Dresden, just a week before the horrible firebombing of Dresden, and then, somehow, we arrived in Vienna, Austria, where we suffered the bombing of the city (by the Americans) and then the occupation of the city by the Soviet Army. We lived in the Soviet occupation zone in Vienna until Austria regained her freedom, in 1955, and all occupation forces left Austria.

Of course, I have been scarred for life.

I survived the war. I grew up. I became an adult and I became obsessed with my studies of Judaism, Christianity, the Bible (in Hebrew and in Greek), Philosophy, Theology, and also Holocaust literature. I also became a student and then an expert of ancient Hebrew and other Semitic languages.

I needed to know the truth. I needed understanding. I needed freedom from any religious and ideological stupidity, hypocrisy and oppression.

I am an Austrian. I am very much aware of the fact that many individuals of my parent's generation participated in or tolerated the murder of Jewish people.

My religion is Christian and I am very much aware of the fact that many Christians throughout the centuries participated in or tolerated the murder of Jewish people because of *their* way of reading and interpreting the Jewish Scriptures, the TaNaKh, as an "Old Testament" and their own Christian writings as the "New Testament." Many Christians assumed that the "New Israel" had now substituted the "Old Israel" and that there was really no more use for the "Old Israel." Gentile Christians falsely claimed that Jews and not the Romans, had killed their own Messiah, their "Christ." Actually they had killed God, the LORD.

My particular community in the Christian Church is the Protestant community (which formed in the 16th century as a protest movement inside of the Roman Catholic Church) and, furthermore, my community is the Evangelical Lutheran Church. I am very much aware of the fact that many Lutherans participated in and tolerated the murder of Jewish people.

My profession, in the sixties, has been parish pastor and university pastor in the Lutheran Church.

Since 1972 my profession is Professor of Old Testament and I am very much aware of the fact that a certain type of Christian teaching and preaching and a certain type of Christian reading of the Jewish Scriptures (for almost 2,000 years) has contributed to the misery and death of millions of Jewish people and, finally, it has contributed to the intellectual and spiritual climate in which the Holocaust, i.e., the extermination of about 6 million Jewish people (including more than one million children) became a reality.

I am tormented by questions.

How is it possible to continue to be a serious Christian, a Protestant, a Lutheran, ... after becoming aware of the horrors of the Shoah. How is it possible to confess to be a Christian after becoming aware of the role which Christian teachings have had in establishing a climate in which pogroms (throughout the so-called "Christian" centuries) and, finally, the Holocaust became possible?

My own answer is that there is only one way. There *must* be a total, a *final* repentance. (In Hebrew repentance is teshuvah, תשובה, *těšûbāh*)

There must be a *turning away from* anything and everything which even vaguely smells of antisemitism and antijewish feelings, attitudes, teachings and beliefs.

But this *must* be done not for the sake of the Jewish people, *but for the sake of the survival of the Christian faith* -- if that is at all possible after the Holocaust.

I am tormented by the fact that it may not even be possible to cleanse Christianity of antijudaism and that Christianity (i.e., *Gentile* Christianity and not the first *Jewish* Christians!), at its root, is actually anti-jewish. If this is really so then how can anyone be a Christian after the Shoah?

Surely the Holocaust was a deep and profound tragedy for the Jewish people--if words are even possible to express this tragedy.

But, at the same time, the Holocaust was also a terrifying disaster for the Christian faith and proved the wrong-headed (and even demonic) way in which Christians have read the Tanakh, Jewish Scriptures as the "Old" and therefore "Obsolete" Testament.

The Holocaust signals *the end of the Christian* faith, as we have known it, for almost 2,000 years. The Holocaust signals *the end of the so-called "Christian Era."* It shows that the Christian faith, if it needs to be anti-jewish, is bankrupt and even demonic.

*If* the Christian faith could allow and encourage the murder of Jewish and other peoples not only during the Holocaust, but during much of the history of Christianity, *then* it should, finally, be clear to everyone that Christianity, as we have known it, is bankrupt and not worthy of allegiance from even one human being.

Another question torments me: is repentance (*teshuvah*, תשובה, *těšûbāh*), forgiveness and newness of life, even possible for the Christian Church?

*If* this is possible *then* it *must* begin with a re-reading of the Scriptures in the light which is cast from the fires of the Holocaust/Shoah.

Such a duty is especially serious for us Lutherans. We *must* re-read, re-hear, re-interpret our Christian Scriptures and also our dogmas, our confessions, our festivals, our liturgies, our hymns, our prayers, our beautiful music ... in the light which is cast from the fires of the Holocaust. Are the burning children happy with our songs?

We Lutherans have a special problem because of Martin Luther and his particular way of expressing the Christian faith which, on the one hand, is very beautiful, but on the other hand, led him to a terrifying attitude toward the Jewish people. Luther made a horrifying mistake towards the end of his life. (He lived from 1483 to 1546)

In 1523, as a 40 year old priest, he wrote a wonderful treatise entitled "That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew." The first paragraph reads:

"I will ... show by means of the Bible the causes which induce me to believe that Christ was a Jew ... Perhaps I will attract some of the Jews to the Christian Faith. For our fools--the popes, bishops, sophist, and monks--the coarse blockheads! have until this time so treated the Jews that to be a good Christian one would have to become a Jew. And if I had been a Jew and had seen such idiots and blockheads ruling and teaching the Christian religion, I would rather have been a sow than a Christian."

(Quoted from Talmage, F. E., ed., *Disputation and Dialogue: Reading in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* [New York: KTAV and Anti-Defamation League of B'nei B'rith, 1975] 33).

And then, in 1543, as a 59 year old, after even *his* way of stating the Christian faith, was, of course, also not acceptable to Jewish people, he wrote a devastating treatise entitled, "Concerning the Jews and Their Lies." He begins by writing:

"What then shall we Christians do with this damned, rejected race of Jews? [The Jews were rejected by God since they refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah.] Since they live among us and we know about their lying and blasphemy and cursing, we can not tolerate them if we do not wish to share in their lies, curses, and blasphemy. In this way we cannot quench the inextinguishable fire of divine rage (as the prophets say) nor convert the Jews. We must prayerfully and reverentially practice a merciful severity. Perhaps we may save a few from the fire and the flames [of hell]. We must not seek vengeance. They are surely being punished a thousand times more than we might wish them. Let me give you my honest advice.

First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. And this ought to be done for the honor of God and of Christianity ..."

(Quoted from Talmage, *Disputation*, 34f.).

Luther then goes on with six more points in this diatribe and it is extremely unpleasant to read.

How can I be a believing Christian, and a Lutheran at that, after becoming aware of the demonic streak in Christianity and in Luther, which paved the road to Auschwitz?

There is only one way to handle these statements by Luther. They **MUST** be repudiated. Each one of them. And loudly and clearly.

And we are very fortunate that Prof. Dr. Franklin Sherman (for many years my colleague at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) has written an excellent article entitled, "Martin Was Wrong," published in *The Lutheran* (October 20, 1982) 11-13. Read the article one of these days.

I am not so sure, though, that saying and writing that Luther was wrong is enough. There must be evidence in our teaching and preaching. I am pained to say, that I have not seen much evidence.

The antijewish way of reading the Scriptures and of stating the Christian faith *MUST* stop not for the sake of the Jewish people, but for the sake of the survival of Christianity.

We must repent.

But is repentance - (forgiveness and newness of life, a total, a *final* turning away from the sin of antijewish statements and deeds) - even possible for Christians and for Lutherans?

And, even if repentance is possible, will God then be allowed to accept our repentance? Is the biblical God bound to accept repentance?

What do OUR (Jewish and Christian) Scriptures say? In Amos 5:15 we hear Amos address the people (and, I think, also us):

15 *śin ũ-rā 'wě'ehēbū tōb*  
*wěhaššigū bašša 'ar mišpāt*  
*ūlay yeḥenan yhwḥ/ 'ādōnāy*  
 - *ēlōhē šēbā 'ōt - šē 'ērīt yōsep*

15 Hate evil and love good,  
 and establish justice in the gate (court);  
*it may be* that the LORD will be gracious  
 - the God of Hosts - to the remnant of Joseph.

The Hebrew word *ūlay*, means “perhaps.” Even repentance does not guarantee, does not force God to accept us back into a safe haven, into the fold of the “People of God.”

And, the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth (or, at least, Matthew, who speaks about Jesus), is even harsher than Amos.

By the way, if you really read the New Testament attentively you will find that its message is much harsher than anything in the so-called Old Testament.

In Matthew 25:1-13 we read:

- 1 Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this.  
 Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.
- 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise.
- 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;
- 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.
- 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.
- 6 But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’
- 7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps.
- 8 The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’
- 9 But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’
- 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; **and the door was shut.**
- 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’
- 12 But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, **I do not know you.**’
- 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

The Holocaust/Shoah came upon us and we Christians, especially, we Lutherans, had no oil, no light. Does God say to us: “The Door is closed. I do not know you.”

I am a Christian. Why?

During my teens and twenties I rejected everything the Bible and the Church said to me. Then I studied. Knowledge is not faith. But, knowledge made it possible for me to remove the stumbling blocks to even being able to hear the invitation to faith. I have accepted that invitation.

I am now a Christian by choice and by conviction. I believe that I, as a gentile, have access to the God of the Tanakh, the Jewish Scriptures through the life, death and resurrection of the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. Through

Jesus I, like a *wild* olive branch, am grafted on the superbly *cultivated* olive tree (i.e., the people of God, the Jewish people), whom God tends and keeps and prunes (yes! ... and sometimes harshly), and waters with the spiritual power and revelation through the Torah, the Teaching, the Revelation from God. (Romans 11:17f.) I too, now drink of the sap, the blood, the spiritual life of the olive tree pulsing through my body, brain and heart. Jesus functions for me like a grafting point, like a valve, like a door (cf. John 10:7). And "door" in Semitic languages is a designation for a teacher, an instructor. For me, a Christian, Jesus functions like the Torah does for the Jewish people. And the word Torah refers to the teaching, the instruction, the word - in Hebrew *dābār* and in Greek *λογος* -, i.e., the Word, the Divine Communication from God.

And like a biblical prophet (cf. Amos, Jeremiah, etc.), the Jew Jesus, does not only challenge me, but also all wayward Christians, including all wayward Jews and, I believe, all wayward humans.

Was Jesus the Messiah? No, not during his life-time. But, I agree with all Christians that the Jew, Jesus, is the *resurrected*, the *coming* Messiah, the "Anointed King" of the End-time. And the End-time is now. Every time I, or anyone else (even an atheist) actually *does* the will of God, then the "Kingdom of God" breaks into my life, ... the door opens and I enter into the heavenly banquet. When you want the Messiah to come then act like one and the Messiah, the Kingdom of God becomes a present reality.

Yes, of course, this is poetic language. How else can one express these things?

The disciples of Jesus were told that they had no right to call Jesus "the Messiah." "Don't you people know your own Bible?

- 1) In Isaiah 11:12 it says: he will gather all the dispersed, all the refugees, all the exiles of Israel and Judah from the four corners of the earth.
- 2) In Ezekiel, chapter 40, and Zechariah 6:12, and other places, it says that the Messiah will rebuild the temple, but look, the temple was just destroyed (i.e., in 70 CE)
- 3) In Isaiah 9:6 it says that the Messiah will institute an eternal peace. Where is this peace?
- 4) In Psalms 72, 8:11 and other places it says that the Messiah will have dominion over all the kings and governments of this earth. Well?
- 5) And then, of course, you all know that in Isaiah 2:4, Joel 3:10, Micah 4:3 it says that when the Messiah comes the whole world will beat their swords into ploughshares and no nation will lift up swords against another nation, nor will they train and prepare for war any longer. Well?

The followers of Jesus listened to this. Sure they knew those Bible passages by heart. Sure they knew that Jesus had *not* accomplished *any* of those things during his life-time. But a glimmer of joy flickered in their eyes: "well, so what. But he will come back again. And then watch out! He will prove to be the Messiah after all ... in all those mighty and even greater acts, by the grace and power of God."

(Have you ever tried to tell a person in love to be realistic. The trouble is: one can not argue with someone in love. All facts, all the realities take on a different glow. The trouble is that the same is also true for those who have fallen victim to some ideology.)

Actually, according to my limited understanding, I believe, that we Jewish and Christian peoples are *not* far apart at all. We are both messianic peoples living in the glow of God's revelation and God's constant invitation to live our lives according to God's vision for our human lives. Jewish people hear this invitation through the Torah. Christian people hear this invitation through Jesus, whom we accept as the Door to the Heart of God.

THIS is the kind of Christianity which I have taught and preached for thirty eight years. Nothing in this teaching reflects any anti-Jewish attitudes.

Am I wrong to express and live my Christian faith in this manner? Some Christians would certainly not accept my brief interpretation of what it means to be a Christian. But, for centuries, Christian teachers and preachers *have* portrayed the Christian faith as antijewish at its root--and *this* I do not believe and I will not teach it and preach it.

But, *if* it turns out that Christianity *is*, at its root, antijewish *then* I can no longer be a Christian. And, if I would then remain in the Christian fold, then I would be as guilty as all of those who were responsible for the Holocaust ... and the light, the fire, which is cast upon me (from Auschwitz) will surely destroy me.

The Holocaust came upon us and we Christians, we Lutherans, had no oil, no light. Does God say to us: "The Door is closed. I do not know you."

We Christians had almost 2,000 years to repent. Yes, some Christians did many good things, but are not all of those good deeds *negated* by the attitude of superiority and the intellectual and spiritual responsibility in the preparation of a climate in which pogroms and then the Holocaust could take place?

What must be done? What *must* be the evidence that we Christians, and especially we Lutherans, have begun a serious and total repentance?

As you, probably, know, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has, finally, made a little baby step in the direction of repentance and has begun to accept the enormous guilt of the teaching of contempt for Judaism throughout the last 2,000 years.

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on April 18, 1994 (why not 1945? Why not 1933?), adopted the following document as a statement on Lutheran-Jewish relations. I will read this statement and if you have heard it before then this will be a reminder:

“In the long history of Christianity there exists no more tragic development than the treatment accorded the Jewish people on the part of Christian believers. Very few Christian communities of faith were able to escape the contagion of anti-Judaism and its modern successor, anti-Semitism. Lutherans belonging to the Lutheran World Federation and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America feel a special burden in this regard because of certain elements in the legacy of the reformer Martin Luther and the catastrophes, including the Holocaust of the twentieth century, suffered by Jews in places where the Lutheran churches were strongly represented.

The Lutheran communion of faith is linked by name and heritage to the memory of Martin Luther, teacher and reformer. Honoring his name in our own, we recall his bold stand for truth, his earthy and sublime words of wisdom, and above all his witness to God’s saving Word. Luther proclaimed a gospel for people as we really are, bidding us to trust a grace sufficient to reach our deepest shames and address the most tragic truths.

In the spirit of that truth-telling, we who bear his name and heritage must with pain acknowledge also Luther’s anti-Judaic diatribes and violent recommendations of his later writing against the Jews. As did many of Luther’s own companions in the sixteenth century, we reject this violent invective, and yet more do we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations. In concert with the Lutheran World Federation, we particularly deplore the appropriation of Luther’s words by modern anti-Semites for the teaching of hatred toward Judaism or toward the Jewish people in our own day.

Grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred, moreover, we express our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people. We recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us. Finally, we pray for the continued blessing of the Blessed One upon the increasing cooperation and understanding between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community.”

(I attended a very moving service of “confession and repentance” which was held on Sunday, November 13, 1994, at Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest and then the whole assembly silently walked to West Suburban Temple Har Zion for a joint ceremony commemorating the ELCA’s declaration of repudiation.)

I am very grateful that my church has made this statement.

But, I am also *very* sad and, actually, I am *outraged* that our Christian teaching of contempt for Judaism is compared merely to *bigotry* -- even now, 50 years after Auschwitz -- and that this statement does not include a paragraph expressing full and sincere repentance, and a concrete plan to exclude all anti-Jewish statements from all Lutheran teaching, preaching, singing, and worship services.

By the way, have you noticed that all kinds of people and organisations are now saying that they are sorry.

Look on p. 65 in the recent *Newsweek* (July 17, 1995). There is an article by Kenneth L. Woodward entitled: “Who’s Sorry Now? Religion: From the pope on down, it’s mea culpa time.”

- The pope is sorry for the way women were treated.
- The Southern Baptists are sorry for defending slavery and racism.
- A group of German Christians apologized to the Dutch for the Nazi invasion of their country.
- On a trip to the Czech Republic in May the pope begged forgiveness for the church’s part in religious wars that followed the 16th century Protestant Reformation.

- The Jesuits apologized for abetting centuries of "male domination" and pledged their "solidarity with women."
- And "Next Easter, Protestants will Join Catholics in a series of ceremonies repenting the Crusades against Muslims and Jews 900 years ago."

And then Kenneth L. Wookwards ends his little article by saying, "Being Christian, it appears, is always having to say you're sorry." Ouch, that hurts, but it seems to be true.

One of the most impressive examples of repentance is the lecture which was given by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin (of Chicago) at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, March 23, 1995.

I have a copy of the lecture and it is truly remarkable what a prince of the Roman Catholic Church has dared to say. It is also truly remarkable how far the Catholics have gone in eradicating anti-jewish statements from their literature and teaching.

What *must* be the evidence that we Christians, and especially we Lutherans, have begun a serious and total repentance? The list is very long.

How then shall we sing a new song in the relationship of Christians to Jews?

Here are some of my suggestions:

- A thorough acquaintance with the Holocaust/Shoah and the causes which led to it;
- A visit to a Holocaust Museum;
- Christians should insist that their clergy know, at least, Elementary Hebrew and Greek in order to be able to read the Jewish Scriptures and also the Christian Scriptures in the original languages;
- Travel to Israel;
- Study of the the whole Bible together with Jewish people. Christians should know that Jews call the "Old Testament" the TaNaKh, which is a acronym for **T**(orah = Teaching"), **N**(evi'im = Prophets), **K**(etubim = Writings). And Jews should know that the "New Testament" was, at first, Jewish literature;
- A change of terminology for the Christian Scriptures might be necessary (a new terminology *must* be found which is not offensive to either Jews or Christians);
- The selection of the weekly Sunday readings from the Jewish Scriptures/Old Testament *must* be rethought by Christians in order to reflect a much broader understanding of Jesus. They **must** be read and interpreted not as being superseded by the "New" Testament;
- The weekly readings should be studied together with Jewish people;
- The Jewish weekly readings should become known to Christians;
- Christians *must* be made aware of the fact that there are quite a number of different ways to interpret the Biblical texts and that there are distinct Jewish ways of interpreting the Jewish Scriptures. *We must* listen for the Word of God, for the Revelation of God in all of Scripture;
- The role of Torah as instruction, teaching, guide, revelation (and not as "Law") in the Bible and in Judaism *must* be understood by Christians and, especially, by Lutherans, who have a special problem here, because they make a distinction between "Law and Gospel;"
- Christian priests and pastors should be studying together with rabbis when it comes to preaching from the Jewish Scriptures;
- The Christian feasts throughout the Christian year *must* not reflect any anti-Jewish sentiments. *Especially the worship services during the week before Easter, and the Easter services, MUST not reflect any anti-Jewish sentiments* (... but, horror or horrors, most of such services, continue to reflect the teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism);
- Christians *must* develop new festivals and commemorations, e.g.,
  - (1) a Holocaust Remembrance Sunday (during this commemoration Christian responsibility for the pogroms and the Shoah should be remembered);
  - (2) a Thanksgiving service for the Jewish and Christian Scriptures;
  - (3) a Celebration of the Glory of the Creation (during which God's gift of minerals, plants, planets, galaxies, ... animals and humans could be celebrated);
- Christian Worship, the Liturgy, the Prayers, the Hymns, the Confessions, etc., *must* no longer reflect any anti-Jewish sentiments;
- Christians *must* rethink what they mean by "The Good News," "The Gospel;"
- The division of time into B.C (Before Christ) And A.D. (Anno Domini, i.e., the year of the Lord) *must* be rethought.

- Etc.

Please, let us study, let us think, let us discuss, talk, and the Holy Spirit will guide us in this new, difficult, but very exciting time of trying to find a new tune, a new song, a new way of expressing the Christian faith.

A final thought.

Is it important for Jewish people what Christians will decide how they will read the Bible and celebrate their feasts and how they will express their Christian faith after the Holocaust?

In my opinion, Jewish people no longer need to fear what Christians think or do in their relationship to the Jewish people. The Jewish people not only suffered the Holocaust, but they also experienced the re-birth of the State of Israel ... another miracle in the long line of miracles. The Jewish people now have the joy and the burden of the state and of the Israeli Defense Force. There are no more “Christian” armies. Praise God! (I pray for the day when there will be no need for a “Jewish army,” when there will be no “Arab armies,” no USA armies, etc.)

It is no longer important for the Jewish people *how* we Christians read the Scriptures or *what* Christians think of Jewish faith and Jewish people ... but, such thinking is of the utmost importance for Christian survival ... if that is even possible.

And one more, and even more sobering thought (at least for me). Does the world care how we Jews and Christians read our Scriptures and express our Jewish or Christian faith -- from the most orthodox to the most liberal (whatever these terms mean)?

Is it God’s will that we should mistreat or destroy even *one* other human being, an animal, or any thing in this world, ... because of our particular religious or ideological convictions?

Are we (Jews and Christians) “the light to the world,” as OUR Scriptures claim (e.g., Isaiah 42:6; Matthew 5:14)? If not then, both, Jewish and Christian believers have much work to do ... and they would do well to do this work together. (Just imagine: all Jewish and Christian believers working together!)

How to sing a new song? The agenda is long and difficult. I suggest that we start, or continue, the difficult work. The reward can only be a much more beautiful life as Christians, who know themselves as part of the choir, the symphony, of many other religious voices, including all vegetation, the trees, the sea, all the sea creatures, the earth and all the animals, sky and space ... may be we could learn something from nature? What a song worthy of our God who created us all!

Thank you for your attention.