

## HOW SHALL WE SING A NEW SONG?

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A summary of a few thoughts presented by Rev. Walter L. Michel, Ph. D. (Hebrew and Semitic Studies. Professor of Old Testament, Emeritus) in the context of The 2001 Professional Leaders' Conference: *Tomorrow is Here!* Sept. 17-19, 2001. Interlaken Resort Lake Geneva, WI. These thoughts were first presented during the conference *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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Among the millions which were murdered by the National Socialists during World War II were one million Jewish children. They were exterminated simply because they were Jewish. Christian teachings about Jews contributed heavily in the preparation for a climate in which the Nazi crimes became possible.

How do we Christians read the Bible and express our Christian faith after the Holocaust? Can we Christians be renewed in a way that the one million Jewish children did not die in vain? How can we "sing a new song?" (Ps 96). After "Auschwitz" Christian teaching and preaching *must* be beyond *any* possible interpretation as anti-Jewish. Some deny that this is possible. I think, though, that unless Christians teach and preach without *any* trace of anti-Jewish thoughts their message is not worthy of consideration. Christians *must* express their Christian faith in the light, which is cast from the fires of the Holocaust aware of the fact that more than one million burning Jewish children are watching. Jews and Christians are like siblings. They surely are both acceptable to God. Actually, they have the same mission: to be an invitation (a light) to all peoples of the world to accept the one moral authority of the one God, the creator of us all, who governs the world with equity, righteousness, justice and faithfulness (cf., e.g., Ps 96). All humans are invited by God to live and govern their lives in the same way: according to equity, righteousness, justice and faithfulness. Is that possible? Of course it is. The alternative is not pleasant. It surely is misery and death.

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### HOW TO SING A NEW SONG IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRISTIANS TO JEWS? A FEW SUGGESTIONS:

- A thorough acquaintance with the 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). 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
- 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 for the Jewish and Christian Scriptures; (3) a Celebration of the Glory of the Creation (during which the goodness of minerals, plants, animals and humans could be celebrated)
- Christian Worship, the Liturgy, the Prayers, the Hymns, the Confessions, etc., must not 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, study, think, 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.

## ANTIJUDAISM--ANTISEMITISM--HOLOCAUST AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

*Some of the various terms:* \* **Holocaust** (עֹלָה, *ōlāh*, “whole burnt offering”) \* **“Endlösung”** (German for “Final Solution” of the Jewish “problem”) \* **Shoah** (שואה, *šō āh*, “trouble”, mistreatment”) \* **Ḥurban** (הרבן, *hūrbān*, “destruction”). Prepared by W.L.Michel, 7-11-95.

There are MANY books on the subject (Ask me for an extensive bibliography). It is my opinion that all thinking, concerned, adult Christians, and especially Christian teachers and clergy, MUST read, at least, the following two books: **FLANNERY**, Edward. H., *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of Anti-Semitism*. Revised and Updated. A Stimulus Book. New York/Mahwah, 1985 (Preface by John M. Oesterreicher. Quest Books. New York and London: Collier and MacMillan, 1965).

I heard Father Flannery right after the publication of his book in Madison, Wisconsin, where I served as a Campus Pastor for the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America (National Lutheran Council). I read his book. I turned pale. I began to read literature on the topic. I have never been the same. I am sorry that Flannery left out of the revised edition the first paragraph of his “Introduction” in the first edition.

This important paragraph reads as follows:

“This book received its first impetus from a personal experience. One evening several years ago, I walked north on Park Avenue in New York City in the company of a young Jewish couple. Behind us shone the huge illuminated cross the Grand Central Building displays each year at Christmas time. Glancing over her shoulder, the young lady--ordinarily well disposed toward Christians--declared: ‘That cross makes me shudder. It is like an evil presence.’”

This disturbing comment evoked many questions in me, not least of which was: How did the cross, the supreme symbol of universal love, become a sign of fear, of evil for this young Jewess? It soon became clear that her fearful reaction to it was the fruit of a knowledge which she, but not I, had--a knowledge of the immense suffering undergone by her people at the hands of Christians for many centuries. It was my first introduction to the problem of anti-Semitism. Later discussions of the incident with both Christian and Jewish friends led me to a further discovery. Jews generally are acutely aware of the history of anti-Semitism, simply because it comprises so large a portion of Jewish history. Christians, on the contrary, even highly educated ones, are all but totally ignorant of it--except for contemporary developments. They are ignorant of it for the simple reason that anti-Semitism does not appear in their history books. Histories of the Middle Ages--even of the Crusades--can be found in which the word ‘Jew’ does not appear, and there are Catholic dictionaries and encyclopedias in which the term ‘anti-Semitism’ is not listed. There seems to be only one conclusion: The pages Jews have memorized have been torn from our histories of the Christian era. In a sense, this book is a contribution toward the reinsertion of those pages.” (1965, p. xi)

The other book, which I urge you to read, is the one by

**NICHOLLS**, William, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate*. Northvale, New Jersey/London: Jason Aronson, 1993.

I finished reading this book during the last week of May of 1993. It summarizes for me four decades of reading and study in the area of the Hebrew Scriptures/“Old” Testament, “New” Testament, and of Judaism and Christianity. If you would like to continue a life as an honest Christian I recommend that you read this book as soon as possible. But, do not read this book if you are not prepared to make significant changes in your religious life or face the danger of living a Christian life as a hypocrite.

I urge all thinking, concerned Christians to study these books, in detail, over the next few years. I urge you to organize study groups, Adult Forums, workshops, conferences with titles, e.g., as the following: • “What Must Change in Christianity After Auschwitz?” • “The Ethical Failure of Christianity Before, During and Since Auschwitz.” • “The Hybris of the Story of Supersession.” • “New Testament Christianity, Luther and Auschwitz.” • “Is Christianity Viable After Auschwitz?” • “The Bible & Christianity After Auschwitz.” • “Christian Antijudaism After Auschwitz.” • “How to Read the Bible After Auschwitz.” • “How to Read the Bible and Live the Christian Story After Auschwitz.” • “The Obscenity of Supersessionist Christianity Before and After Auschwitz: The Necessity of Repentance and New Life or the inevitability of Death. The formulation of a title on this topic which disturbs me the most is: • Auschwitz--The End of Christianity, Unless ...” Was Auschwitz the goal (end, consequence) of Gentile Christianity? Has Christianity come to an end with Auschwitz? Of course, this remains to be seen. If Christianity continues to teach lies about Judaism and any form of supersession to Judaism, then Christianity went up in smoke at Auschwitz.

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