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"EVANGELICALS AND JEWS IN AN AGE OF PLURALISM"

A National Conference of
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OUR PURPOSE

Relationships between Evangelicals and Jews have been cast into public consciousness in recent months by virtue of our nation's quadrennial upheaval called elections. Unhappily, the central realities and complexities of those relationships have frequently been far more distorted than clarified, particularly as a result of the sensationalizing of issues in the heat of a Presidential campaign.

This Second National Conference of Evangelicals and Jews is timely and pertinent, and affords us an opportunity to separate out sensationalism from sober understanding. In this forum, modeled on its earlier precedent, we will seek through the insights of some of our finest Evangelical and Jewish scholars and leaders to examine what are the authentic and permanent concerns that separate these two major faith communities and what they hold in common — as believers in the Holy Bible, as fellow citizens committed to freedom of conscience and as members of the human family.

CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRPERSONS

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**THE NATHAN APPLEMAN INSTITUTE
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Concerning Evangelicals and Jews

In early spring of each year, Jews around the world celebrate Holocaust Remembrance Day. It is a reminder to Jews

and Gentiles alike of the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust under Hitler and the Nazis. Jews will never forget it, and they vow it shall never happen again. CHRISTIANITY TODAY joins with the Jewish people in remembering this infamous event. With them, we are determined that nothing like it shall ever happen again.

We believe it is specially appropriate on this occasion to raise six hard questions for both evangelicals and Jews:

1. Are evangelicals anti-Semitic?
2. Who killed Jesus?
3. Is the New Testament anti-Semitic?
4. Should Christians seek to evangelize Jews?
5. Should Jews fear evangelicals?
6. How can evangelicals and Jews work together?

No doubt it would be easier to avoid these sticky questions. But the occasion is far too momentous, the day too serious to allow ourselves to drift apart simply because we are unwilling to take the trouble to understand each other. We evangelicals and Jews need each other too much to gloss over our differences with superficial banalities. We owe it to each other to speak with open hearts and complete honesty.

Are Evangelicals Anti-Semitic?

Anti-Semitism is, of course, difficult to define. It includes infinitely more than genocide: for that is only the worst form of anti-Semitism—the final step in a long journey. On the other hand, anti-Semitism must not be so broadly defined as to preclude criticism of particular acts or of specific groups of Jews. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," says Scripture. It is possible to criticize a Jew

without being anti-Semitic, just as it is possible to criticize an evangelical without being anti-evangelical.

On the whole, evangelicals tend to slough off suggestions that they are anti-Semitic. They admit that nominal Christians, particularly medieval Catholics and some members of the liberal church in modern Germany, were anti-Semitic; but evangelicals stand opposed to this. Beyond that, however, we must confess that Luther and the Reformers and many evangelical Protestants since then have made statements that Jews certainly have a right to consider anti-Semitic. We regret these anti-Semitisms of the past and present. Southern Baptist president Bailey Smith vigorously insists that he did not intend as anti-Semitic his recent remark that God does not hear the prayers of Jews. He says he loves and honors the Jews and that he was simply expounding a fine point of Baptist theology in his well-known reference to Jewish prayers. At any rate, other evangelical leaders, including such thorough conservatives as Jerry Falwell, have publicly dissociated themselves from Bailey Smith's remark. Says Falwell, "God hears the cry of any sincere person who calls on him." These leaders have vigorously rejected the Smith statement and made clear their opposition to all anti-Semitism. Still, we sorrowfully acknowledge anti-Semitic statements and actions. We are thankful, therefore, that we detect a spirit of repentance among evangelicals.

But repentance without restitution, like faith without works, is useless. What must evangelicals, and especially evangelical leaders, do to show that their repentance is sincere?

1. It is important that, where guilty, they publicly acknowledge past anti-Semitism, and declare it to be sin. If evangelicals are unwilling to set the record straight on this matter, any mouthing of repentance is rightly suspect.

2. Evangelical leaders must avoid any direct or indirect support for anti-Semitic causes. We believe contemporary evangelicals pass this test fairly well. Anti-Semitic leaders of the past, such as Gerald L. K. Smith and Gerald Winrod, and the anti-Semitic movements of the present such as the Ku Klux Klan, have absolutely no following among even the most conservative evangelical leaders. Of course, some evangelicals

have espoused political and social causes that are not generally popular among Jews (who have tended to be liberal in these matters). But so far as we can see, they do this without any anti-Semitic overtones. And many evangelicals favor middle-of-the-road or liberal policies more congenial to the Jewish mainstream. It is also striking that the most politically conservative evangelical spokesmen are frequently the most pro-Jewish and pro-Zionist in their convictions. At any rate, evangelical leaders do not now align themselves in any way with anti-Semitic causes.

3. It is not enough just to condemn anti-Semitism in the past and remain aloof from anti-Semitic causes. Evangelical leaders and pastors must also use their teaching ministries to present solid instruction as to the antibiblical and anti-Christian nature of all anti-Semitic attitudes or actions. To heighten evangelical sensitivities concerning the horrors of anti-Semitism and the need Jews have for true Christian friends, church leaders would do well to show films like *Avenue of the Just* or *Night and Fog*, and discuss them as a deterrent to future wrongs.

4. Further, evangelical leaders must ferret out, expose, and actively oppose incipient and overt anti-Semitism that creeps into a society structured for centuries along anti-Semitic lines. Hitler did not arise in a cultural vacuum. His persecution of the Jews was the end product of a long history of anti-Semitism in which, alas, evangelicals too played an ignoble part. Incipient anti-Semitism leads to gross anti-Semitism, which may terminate in genocide. So evangelicals must root out even the incipient forms we often think are harmless. Are we careful to show an appropriate respect for Jews in our casual remarks, attempts at humor, or social and business relations?

5. Evangelicals must guard against the unconscious anti-Semitism in themselves and others that lies concealed in the structures of society. Jews, naturally more sensitive to this, can help evangelicals here by forthrightly pointing out such attitudes. A public school English teacher, for example, can instill prejudices for life by his treatment of Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

6. As evangelicals demonstrate in tangible ways their abhorrence of anti-Semitic actions, they will declare a crucial truth to the Gentile world at large: *to attack Jews is to attack evangelicals, and such attacks will be resisted by evangelicals as attacks against themselves*. Only in this way can evangelicals make their repentance credible. Evangelicals, we grant, may well have begun to move in this direction. They may well be the Jews' best friends, but they certainly still have a long way to go.

Who Killed Jesus?

Careful students of Scripture may regard this question as irrelevant, if not ridiculous. But among untaught evangelicals and nominal Christians it is significant. The blame Gentiles heaped on Jews for the death of Christ created a profound sense of unfairness and resentment that has become a fixture of Jewish culture. Today, the repetition of this unjust charge produces an emotional, unconscious antagonism deep in the hearts of many Jews. Evangelical scholars, in writing on the New Testa-

ment, must bear this in mind, and show uninformed readers the scriptural teaching. A superficial reading of the New Testament leads some to conclude that the Jews as a whole condemned Jesus to death and the Romans performed the execution. A more careful reading shows it was only *certain* Jewish leaders who brought the charge and stirred up the mob. Romans executed Jesus partly because Pilate lacked the courage to stand against those leaders and the excited mob.

But this is only part of what the New Testament says on this question. Christians also believe that the death of Jesus was part of God's overall plan. He chose the Jews to be a messianic people—a people through whom the world would be richly blessed (Gen. 12:1-3: "Thou shalt be a blessing . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"). In his perfect life and sacrificial death, Jesus was the representative of the Jews in their messianic role to bring ultimate blessing to the whole human race (John 4:22: "Salvation is of the Jews").

But the world today does not accept Jesus and his salvation, just as earlier it rejected God and his messianic people. In this sense, the Jewish leaders (and Pilate) were more representative of the unbelieving world than of the Jews. Jesus presented himself as the true Jew doing God's messianic work as their representative. It is important that evangelical pastors, teachers, and leaders spell out clearly and specifically to their churches and constituencies that neither Jews of Jesus' day nor Jews of today are corporately to be held responsible for the death of Jesus.

Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?

Closely related to the question of who killed Jesus is the broader question of anti-Semitism in the New Testament. Paul, who is often considered to be the most anti-Semitic of all the New Testament writers, was himself a Jew, intensely proud of his Jewishness. The same is true of John, who, for all he said about Jewish leaders, left no doubt that Jews were the true people of God. All the New Testament writers except Luke were Jews. They boldly identified with the Jews, who, in contrast to Gentiles, cherished the Hebrew Scriptures and the idea of a coming Messiah.

One practical application of the alleged anti-Semitism of the New Testament requires special consideration. We must distinguish between what would not be anti-Semitic in the mouth of a first-century Jew and what those same words might convey about a Jew when spoken today. Both Christian and Jewish scholars recognize that the so-called anti-Jewish polemic in the New Testament is in reality an in-house debate among Jews.

But 2,000 years of anti-Semitism provide a wholly different context from that of the first century. New Testament words repeated in today's context are interpreted to mean something quite different from what these same words meant in their New Testament context. This is not so much a theological problem as a hermeneutical one, and it demands very sensitive, discerning action on the part of the church. Whenever a pastor or leader reads or refers to a passage from the New Testament relating to this topic, it is imperative that he interpret it so that he places it in its wholistic Bible context, for these passages *are* misunder-

stood, perhaps not by the well-taught, but by the ill-taught. To avoid a misunderstanding of the New Testament message, therefore, evangelicals must provide their hearers with a careful interpretation set in its original Jewish context. Christians are not sensitive to this problem, but they would be if their grandfather, two uncles, and six cousins had died in the furnaces of Buchenwald.

Should Christians Seek to Evangelize Jews?

From its very beginning, Christianity sought to win converts to its faith. Evangelicals believe that Jesus Christ is their divine Lord and Savior and wish to share this good news with all others. Ultimately, salvation depends on faith in Christ. Any evangelical who does not believe this either is not a genuine evangelical, or is a very poorly instructed one. Jews, therefore, can expect evangelicals to seek adherents to Christian faith. They would be poor evangelicals if they did not.

But is it possible for evangelicals to obey the biblical mandate to evangelize in ways acceptable both to them and to Jews?

We begin by noting that both Jews and evangelicals today are firmly committed to religious freedom. Every religious group has the right to practice and propagate its own faith. At times Judaism has been a missionary religion. Jews have every right to seek to convert Christians to the Torah of God. They, in turn, must grant evangelicals the right to seek to win all people to the Christian message.

Of course, both Jews and Christians must repudiate certain kinds of evangelism. Some evangelistic techniques are not consistent with true respect for other people and, therefore, with the respect that every biblical Christian should have for every Jew. Evangelists ought not place unworthy pressures on Jews to induce them to become Christians. Any sort of manipulation or bribery is wholly out of order. We abhor any deception in seeking to present Christ to Jews. A small minority of Jewish Christians disguise their Christianity to attract unsuspecting Jews to accept Christianity. This is deceitful, contrary to the New Testament teaching, and unworthy of evangelical Christians. Evangelicals have more reasons to oppose this type of deception than do Jews, but we have often failed them by our silence. Evangelicals must speak out boldly and unequivocally against any deceitful practices. We must insist on ethical integrity as the first law of any Christian witness.

Should Jews Fear Evangelicals?

On what grounds, then, can we argue that Jews should *not* be afraid of evangelicals who are open and sincere in their evangelizing of Jews? We believe a number of reasons show that Jews ought to trust evangelicals as true friends.

1. Events of the last few years have shown that evangelicals have sought to identify with Jews. At times they may have embarrassed Jews by their well-meaning but not very sophisticated support, but in public and private they have made known

their backing of Jewish causes; many have consistently supported the nation of Israel and Zionism; and they have defended the Jew in high and low places. G. Douglas Young, late president of the Israel American Institute, and Arnold T. Olson of the American Bible Society and president emeritus of the Evangelical Free Church of America, are only two of many evangelical leaders who have staunchly supported Jews at home and abroad.

2. Our next point is extremely sensitive, and we do not wish to introduce a red herring. Yet we fail to see why evangelicals' support for Jews is negated by their desire to evangelize. Just the opposite is true. Their special concern for the Jew, drawn from the Bible, often translates into an even stronger motivation to share their faith with those toward whom they feel a unique relationship. Moreover, a Jew does not necessarily cease to be a Jew when he becomes a Christian any more than a Gentile ceases to be a Gentile when he becomes a Christian. Would he not technically remain a Jew—even though he might be reckoned apostate—since Judaism teaches that a Jew who sins is still a Jew?

We do object when Messianic Jews disguise their true intent and claim to be simply a Jewish party for the purpose of attracting Jews to Christianity. But if a Jew is defined as the son of a Jewish mother who voluntarily identifies himself as a Jew, one with other Jews of the past and present, brings himself under the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures, and follows Jewish practices as a true expression of his own piety, then surely there is no reason why his acceptance of Jesus as Messiah means that he ceases to be a Jew. We do not accept the view of Chaim Potok that a Jew cannot become Christian without converting out of Judaism. Christianity, Potok argues, destroys the essence of Judaism by completing its messianic goal, so the Jew who becomes a Christian has no further purpose in existing as a Jew. As we read the Bible, however, the messianic role of the Jew is permanent, both as a burden and as a glory, and will never be accomplished until the end of history (Isa. 2:1-4 and Rom. 11:26: "And so all Israel shall be saved").

3. This leads us to a third reason why Jews can trust evangelical Christians for continued support: the role accorded to Jews by the Bible. This provides Christians faithful to both Old and New Testaments with powerful built-in safeguards to keep them from falling into anti-Semitism. They owe a great debt of gratitude to the Jewish people. According to the Bible, God chose them to be the instruments for his redemptive purposes in the world. Through them God gave his revelation in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and, finally, the Christian Messiah and Savior.

But if gratitude has a short memory, evangelicals have an even more compelling reason for special concern over Jews: many of them believe Jews are specially protected by God. Jews also have a future role in God's plan; therefore, to fight them is to fight God (the Jews are still specially loved by God for "his gifts and call are irrevocable," Rom. 11:28-29). God has even specially commanded them, so many evangelicals believe, to treat Jews well ("I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse," Gen. 12:3).

4. Finally, Jews can count on evangelical concern because

of the general stress in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures on the fundamental nature of the ethic of love. Evangelicals do not always act in love, but in their Bible they have an immensely powerful and continuous encouragement to love Jews. And it warns them that eventually they are accountable to God for their deeds.

How Can Jews and Evangelicals Work Together?

Jews and evangelicals must join in working for racial and human justice in our homeland and in the Middle East, and for Jews and all people everywhere. They must stand united against all kinds of man's inhumanity to man. For their part, Jews should not limit their opposition to anti-Semitism, but also stand against the hatred and superpatriotism that can foster it. Christians, on the other hand, need to share equally with the Jews in the ongoing battle against anti-Semitism. They must make all legitimate Jewish concerns their own, and they must especially identify with Jews and join with them in equally vigorous opposition against even incipient forms of anti-Semitism. We evangelicals need to make our identification with Jews so plain that—let us repeat—when anyone attacks Jews as Jews, or displays any form of anti-Semitism, he must know that he is also attacking evangelicals and violating their basic convictions. And he will then need to do battle against both Jews and evangelicals.

We would do well to heed the warning of a Christian of a former day. In his later years, German pastor Martin Niemöller lamented: "In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up." God forbid that American evangelicals will bring such a fate upon themselves.

But evangelicals and Jews have much more in common than a mutual desire for survival. Under God, both know themselves called by God to work for human good. Jews and evangelicals can cooperate to preserve all truly human values. We share the ethics of the Ten Commandments and the prophets. We are deeply committed to both political and religious freedom. In America, at least, we are committed to the separation of church and state. But we are also coming more and more to see that Western society, our nation, and even our public schools dare not be value free. Actually, there is no such thing as a value-free society. Our Western culture cannot hold together as a society where we should like our children to live without the Judeo-Christian heritage on which it was built. To remove these commonly held religious and moral values from Western society would be wholly undesirable and even disastrous for both Jews and Christians.

Rather, we should gratefully accept and promulgate the common values of our Judeo-Christian faith: the sanctity of human

life, the stewardship of the earth's resources, the importance of the family as the basic unit of society, respect for the individual and his inalienable rights, and the moral imperative to love one's neighbor.

Of course, these are *religious* values, but they are also values to be preserved and defended by any stable government for the common good, for the personal and social welfare of the nation. We dare not permit those who reject these basic human values to prevent Christians and Jews from building them into our government, our public schools, and the basic social fabric of our society. Evangelicals and Jews must stand together to preserve our freedoms, our democratic society, and most of all, those basic values we owe ultimately to the Jews. As the messianic people of God, they have brought these infinite blessings to us Gentiles; and for this we evangelical Christians are deeply thankful. □



JEWISH leaders have assumed that messianic congregations are really churches with bits of Jewishness sprinkled on top for effect. Contrary to this, we say we are legitimately part of the Jewish community.

We take our cue from the apostles, including Paul, who not only observed Jewish practices and continued to worship in the temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 18:18; 21:20-26), but celebrated the holidays as well (Acts 20:5-6, 16; 27:9). In fact, Paul defended himself by asserting that he had "not transgressed the customs of our fathers" (Acts 25:8; 26:5; 28:17). Irenaeus, an early church leader, attests to this: "But they themselves . . . continued in the ancient observances. . . . Thus did the apostles scrupulously act according to the dispensation of the Mosaic law" (*Against Heresies* 3:23:15).

Building on this apostolic model, messianic congregations, or synagogues, have developed a worship and lifestyle incorporating Jewish traditions and synagogue practice to varying degrees. For example, in our congregation we use the traditional synagogue prayers, and our worship is similar to a Conservative synagogue except that we include the New Testament. Our members observe the holidays, and most light the Sabbath candles. The compatibility of the traditions—most of which were in place before Jesus' time—with messianic faith makes this possible. In fact, it appears that Jesus drew on parts of two standard Jewish prayers, the Amidah and Kaddish, for the Lord's Prayer.

The traditions and holidays provide beautiful pictures of God's actions in his-

Messianic Jews Are Still Jews

tory centered in Jesus, or Yeshua (Hebrew for Jesus). A knowledge of the holidays is crucial to a complete understanding of numerous biblical passages (e.g., John 7:37-39; 8:12; 1:29). This messianic fulfillment perspective is what some Jewish people find objectionable or label as a distortion of Judaism, but which is nevertheless validated by Yeshua's resurrection. But the holidays and traditions have meaning apart from their fulfillment in Yeshua; they are vehicles for conveying important truths about God and his universe, and they add beauty to messianic worship.

MESSIANIC Jews seek to live consistently as Jews, as did the apostles (Acts 22:3f.; 1 Cor. 9:19f.). For many of us, this means the integrity of terminology and theological expression.

Terminology is important. While boldly affirming that we follow Yeshua, our Messiah and Lord, we do not call ourselves Christians, since most Jewish people associate Christians with centuries of persecution. In addition, we feel a deeper affinity to our first-century forebears than to the historical developments growing out of the first-century movement as they became formalized in the church. We call ourselves Messianic

Jews, Jewish followers of the Messiah. Yeshua, whom we call the Messiah rather than the Christ, because "Christ" has no legitimate Jewish connotation. While affirming the unity of believers and the truth of the corporate body of Messiah, we call our gatherings "congregations" or "synagogues" (cf. the Greek of James 2:2) rather than churches because this better describes us. Some may consider these as semantic exercises or word games. But since words are the vehicles of communication, we must carefully choose those that will accurately reflect the realities we affirm, and be understood correctly within the Jewish community.

Our theological expressions also need to be relevant to the Jewish culture. Our formulations, therefore, bear a close kinship to those found in the Bible rather than those developed by historical Christendom. Thus we speak of God's unique unity rather than the Trinity. The first-century expressions far better reflect and relate to Jewish ways of thinking and speaking.

Even with all this emphasis on Jewishness, we encourage Gentile involvement in our congregations and abhor any expressions of Jewish superiority. Many non-Jewish believers have responded to the challenge, have found a warm home among us, and have been most effective in communicating the biblical faith to Jewish people.

Because our messianic faith and our Jewish heritage and traditions are so organically connected, when properly understood, we need not feel torn between Yeshua and Jewishness.

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IT WILL STRIKE some as paradoxical or bewildering that Jewish religious thinkers and leaders find it more compatible to dialogue with authentic evangelical Christians than with so-called Messianic Jews.

That is not a matter of elitism or of social etiquette. Rather, it derives from profound theological conviction as well as from prudential considerations.

Jews and evangelicals (and other Christians share a rich inheritance of biblical belief, values, and ideals about God, man, nature, society, history, and the kingdom to come. At the same time, Jews and Christians differ over critical affirmations about the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, and the forgiveness of sin. (For an excellent discussion of the Jewish theological reasons for these differences, read *Jews and Jewish Christianity*, by David Berger and M. Wyschogrod, Ktav Publishers, New York.)

Jews stake their existence on the truth of their 4,000-year-old belief in ethical monotheism. "On the day when the Lord spoke to you out of the fire on Horeb, you saw no figure of any kind; so take good care not to fall into the degrading practice of making figures carved in relief, in the form of a man or a woman" (Deut. 4:15).

No, They Have Forsaken the Faith

As formulated by the great scholar and codifier, Maimonides, in thirteenth-century Spain, Jews believe that the God of Israel "has no corporeal image and has no body." Judaism is incompatible with any belief in the divinity of a human being.

While Judaism believes that all Gentiles are obligated to observe the seven Noachian principles of moral and ethical behavior in order "to be assured a place in the world to come," Jewish tradition allows that Gentiles can believe in the Trinitarian concept, termed in Hebrew as *shittuf* (partnership). Belief in *shittuf*, Judaism affirms, does not constitute idolatry for non-Jews, but does so for Jews.

Jews, born of a Jewish mother, who become so-called Messianic Jews, are bound by the Covenant of Sinai, which explicitly excludes the possibility of any belief that God shares his being in any partnership with any other being (Exod. 20:2-6; Deut. 4:15-21).

It is the faith of Israel that God's election of his holy people is eternal and irrevocable (Deut. 7:9, "He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth the covenant and mercy to a thousandth generation"). God's law remains binding for all Jews for all times. A Messianic Jew can stop obeying the Law, and usually does. He can marry out of the faith, so that within two or three generations the golden chain of Jewish continuity is broken. Throughout the centuries, this is exactly what happened to Jews who left the synagogue and entered the church.

While humanly one might empathize with Messianic Jews who wish nostalgically to retain some cultural linkages with the Jewish people—whether for guilt or other emotional reasons—in point of fact, reenacting Jewish rituals of the Sabbath, the Passover, the bar mitzvah, without commitment to the convictions they symbolize, soon make a mockery of their sacred meanings.

When those rituals are employed as a ruse or a device to trick other Jews into believing that they can remain both authentic Jews as well as authentic, believing Christians, that is nothing less than deception, which is not worthy of any high religion such as Christianity.

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