

Deepening the Vision

The Restoration of the Church of the Circumcision

Talk given by Peter Hocken to the Toward Jerusalem Council Two European Consultation in Vienna, February 2003

The vision of Toward Jerusalem Council Two is very simple. It is a vision for the coming together of the Jewish and Gentile elements in the one body of Messiah. Earlier this year, TJCII published my booklet *Toward Jerusalem Council II: The Vision and the Story*. The booklet has aroused some discussion, which is to be welcomed. It became clear from this discussion that not enough attention was paid in the booklet to the concept of *reconciliation*, which is central to the original vision from which TJCII arose. The centrality of reconciliation for this vision is evident from the “official” documents of TJCII¹. The first booklet focused on *recognition*, the need for the Church in the nations to recognize the resurrected Jewish expression of the Church. The focus on recognition neglected the role of the Jewish believers in the realization of the vision. For reconciliation is a work of two parties. So in this paper I have tried to correct this imbalance. There is a task for the Gentile believers, and a task for the Jewish.

In the booklet, TJCII is described as a “single-issue initiative”². It is a reconciliation-initiative. It is focused on the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile within the body of Messiah, and what is needed for this reconciliation to take place. For this reconciliation to take place, the Churches of the nations must recognize the rightness and the necessity of a distinctive Jewish witness within the body of Christ-Messiah. Such a recognition of the “Jewish church” requires the confession of two related mistakes that both have a sinful character: the falsity of the replacement teaching and the exclusion of a distinctively Jewish witness from the Church.

In TJCII, the Messianic Jews play a key role. The Messianic Jews are both the great challenge of the Lord to all Gentile Christians and partners in the reconciliation. The single focus on reconciliation does not mean that other issues like the promise of the land to Israel do not matter. It means that they are not the direct task of Toward Jerusalem Council Two. All the members of the executive committee believe that the promise of the land is central to God’s covenant with Israel. Toward Jerusalem Council Two came as a vision to Marty Waldman, and the subsequent formulation and development of this vision is our attempt to be faithful to the vision and the word that Marty received.

¹ All the TJCII documents up to 2009 have been printed in a new booklet *Toward Jerusalem Council II: Vision, Origin and Documents* (TJCII, 2010) available from the European Office (europa@tjcii.org).

² P. 29.

However, we are convinced that the single focus represents the wisdom of the Lord³. It is only as our Churches, all our Churches throughout the world, deal with these two sins of Christian history (the replacement-thinking and the exclusion-policy), that they can come into the right position to deal with all the other Israel-related questions. In other words, the “single-issue” focus is not simply a clever (or a foolish) tactic, but it is – we believe – the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

There is another reason why this focus represents wisdom. It is because the Messianic Jews are a fact. They are a reality that faces us; they are not just an idea, not just a biblical interpretation. They are a reality that reminds us that the Church in its origins was wholly Jewish. This reality confronts us with the New Testament passages in Romans 11 and Ephesians 2 and 3 on the nature of the Church as the union of Jew and Gentile in the one body: on the Gentiles as co-heirs, fellow members and co-sharers in the promise (Eph. 3: 6). When we go to our leaders and scholars with this vision, we are not just going with an idea, an interpretation of Scripture. We are presenting them with a reality, with something that is happening. An openness to this reality requires a re-examination of the history. In our seven years of existence, we have seen several times how the reality of the Messianic movement can lead to an openness concerning the root sins that block the realization of the Lord’s purpose for Israel, for the Church and for the world.

During the seven years of TJCII’s existence, the Lord has been leading the executive deeper into this vision. Originally, some thought that a gathering could be held in Jerusalem within two or three years. Pronouncements could be made about abandoning replacement theology, a recognition be given accepting and honouring the Messianic Jews, and a reconciliation take place between Jew and Gentile. But we have seen how the healing of reconciliation needs all the wounds of this troubled history to be addressed. We need a deeper grasp of the layers of sin to which the replacement-thinking and the elimination-policy gave rise, and which now have to be peeled away through confession and

³ Later in the consultation, the refusal to say anything about the land of Israel was challenged. As a result of the discussions then and in Israel in October, 2003, this section of the booklet was revised to say the following: of this paragraph by the following:

“However, it has become clear to us, especially through our discussions with Messianic Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, that a truly biblical understanding of the election of Israel and of God’s “irrevocable” covenant with the chosen people involves an essential connection between the gift of the land of Israel and the calling of the people. Support for TJCII does not involve taking any particular political or theological position concerning the boundaries of the land or the policies of any Israeli government regarding the land. A proper Gentile acceptance of the Jewish believers does require a recognition that the promise of the land is an intrinsic part of the covenant that has not been revoked. As part of Israel’s call to be a blessing to the nations, the gift of the land is to bring blessing to the neighboring peoples who also share in an Abrahamic inheritance. The reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah will undoubtedly have profound eschatological implications, centering the Church increasingly upon Jerusalem, “the city of the great king” (Matt. 5: 35), but the TJCII initiative does not require the adoption of any particular scenario for the last days.” This revised wording was the work of the whole executive committee.

repentance. In particular, we have seen how the vision has to involve all those who confess the name of Yeshua, all who bear any kind of responsibility for the exclusion of the distinctively Jewish witness from the Church.

In all presentations of TJCII, we invite people to enter with us into this deepening process. Each of you Gentiles knows better than others the history in your own nations and churches, together with the mentalities that have resulted. The question for the Gentile participants is this: **What needs to change in your nation/in your church in your relationship to the Jewish people and in particular to the Jewish believers in Jesus?** Maybe the Messianic brethren should formulate the challenge this initiative poses to them: but I imagine it will be something like this: **What will the Holy Spirit require from the Messianic Jewish community for a full reconciliation with the Gentile expressions of the Church?**

From Sin to Grace

I want to approach this deepening process by a reflection on the sinful attitudes and behaviour that have characterised Christians and the Churches in the past. This will then show us more clearly the way of the Holy Spirit to lead us out of this bondage. I show in a little chart the sins (left-hand column) and the opposed virtues (right-hand column). As it is the sins that have produced the wrong relations between Christians and Jewish believers in Yeshua, so it is only by the opposed virtues that we can be led into right relationships within the Body of Messiah.

<u>Sins</u>	<u>Virtues</u>
Arrogance, Pride	Humility
Contempt	Honour, Respect
Lies, Myths, Ideology	Truth
Coercion, Violence	Freedom

We will look at each of these in turn as they affect the relationship between Christians and Jews. Then I will make a few remarks about how they affect the work of Toward Jerusalem Council Two in particular.

1. Humility instead of Arrogance/Pride

The replacement teaching is arrogant. The arrogance is at root the arrogance of usurping God's role as judge. The judgment "God has rejected the Jewish people" is a violation of God's prerogatives. God's power to judge goes with God's omniscience, so in judgment there is also the arrogance of falsely claiming divine knowledge. Jesus himself warns us, "Judge not, that you be not judged." (Matt. 7: 1).

The replacement teaching represents a usurpation of the first place of the older son, the first-born, by his younger brother. This is necessarily involved in the decisions not to permit a distinctively Jewish identity within the communion of the Church.

Even in his life-time Paul sensed the danger that would come from Gentile arrogance. Three times in Romans 11, he warns against it. He tells the Gentile believers: “do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.” (Rom. 11: 18). The second warning follows quickly: “So do not become proud, but stand in awe.” (Rom. 11: 20). The third comes in his concluding teaching: “Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren” (Rom. 11: 25). There is no mystery in the replacement teaching, simply human judgmental logic.

The replacement teaching has introduced a virus of judgmentalism and rejection that has infected the whole body of Christ (Messiah). Where God’s people have sinned grievously, and God’s wrath has fallen upon them, we have gone beyond the Lord and pronounced judgment, condemnation and rejection. Those who have pronounced judgment have always later found this judgment pronounced by others against them. Again in Romans, we read: “Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.” (Rom. 14: 13).

As a Catholic I know it is hard to face up to the long history of oppression and violence against the Jews. When I have been in Germany, I have often wondered how the German people can live with the memory of the Shoah, especially people living near to former concentration camps where such terrible things happened. But I have been discovering that it is a bit similar being honest as a Catholic. Being stripped of our false or distorted pride is painful. But the truth is that both the Germans and the Catholics have been blessed by the Lord, and there are many wonderful things in our histories for which to thank the Lord. But there are also these horrendous sins. Only the Holy Spirit can lead us into that honesty and peace that acknowledges both the glories and the shame.

A few months ago, I gave a talk on Catholic repentance for sins against the Jewish people, that was probably a bit less blunt than what has been said here. After the talk, one of the Catholics present was very angry with me. I was accused of being unbalanced. The lack of balance was seen in the fact that I did not follow the confession of Catholic sins with a list of Catholic glories. The criticism, I felt, came from too human a perspective. Our confessions of sin are first made before God. Before God, it is blasphemous to try and justify ourselves – to balance our sins with our perceived virtues. Until we face God with our guilt, our pride will not allow us to face and admit the horrors of our past, and we will cling to our romanticized views of history.

2. Honour and Respect instead of Contempt

The result of rejection and exclusion was contempt. Those defending the Messianic Jews have paid most attention to the wrongness of replacement teaching. They have not always paid the same attention to the Church exclusion of the distinctively Jewish witness. But this was the policy that consolidated the replacement teaching and made its triumph inevitable: for if there had been a distinctively Jewish expression within the Church, there could not have been a replacement teaching and there could not have been a contempt for the Jewish people.

There is an honour and a respect due to every human being, but there is also an honour and respect that is due to the Jew as God's chosen. Even for those Jews who were directly resisting the message of Jesus the Messiah, Paul recognizes both their opposition to the gospel and their being beloved on account of their election. "As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers." (Rom. 11: 28).

For us Gentiles, we have to learn again to honour and to respect the election of the Jewish people, and we have to honour and respect in a particular way those Jews who confess Yeshua to be the Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the world. This respect should not be dependent on our opinions concerning their theology and their practice. We Gentiles should not approach the Jewish believers with a spirit of interrogation and suspicion, as if we will only accept them if they pass all our tests with flying colours. The respect and honour are based first on their election, and secondly on their confession of faith in Yeshua as Messiah.

Reconciliation will mean an honouring of Jew by Gentile and of Gentile by Jew. This was probably to the fore in Paul's mind when he wrote to the Romans, immediately after his treatment of the role of the Jews in chapters 9 – 11: "outdo one another in showing honour." (Rom. 12: 10).

Just as the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, which leads to repentance, so the Holy Spirit manifests what is the Spirit's own work, which has to lead to thanksgiving and honour. As we rid ourselves of the replacement virus, we will be freed to honour and thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit among the Messianic Jews, and in other Christian traditions than our own.

3. Truth instead of Lies, Myths and Ideology

The replacement teaching is itself a lie. As Paul affirmed in Romans 11: 1, God has not rejected his people. One lie leads to another. The rejection of the Jews leads to contempt, and contempt adduces new lies to justify the contempt. So the Jews are held to be dishonest, crafty, untrustworthy, lecherous, avaricious, and so on. In fact, the

association of the Jews with finance and money-lending was the direct consequence of their exclusion from the “honourable” professions by the authorities in Christendom.

The contempt for the Jews as a people regarded as accursed and the negative stereotyping of Jews created the conditions in which anti-Jewish myths flourished. Criminals and debtors had only to cry Foul against the Jews to escape their own responsibilities.

The confession of sin must be based on what we know with historical certainty based on proper research. There is often a tendency for charismatic Christians to justify a laziness in regard to research by appealing to supernatural illumination. We need the supernatural illumination, but the Lord does not send his Spirit to save us from using the abilities He has given us. As we deal with the lies of the past, we may feel they are so enormous that a few small inaccuracies here and there do not matter. Let me take a small example. In some Messianic Jewish literature you can read that the Council of Nicea in the year 325 CE excommunicated church members who continued any Jewish practice. This is a confusion of two distinct Councils of Nicea, separated by 450 years. For there was a decree on these lines at the second Council of Nicea in the year 787 CE. If we urge the successors of the leadership of the Church of the first millennium to recognise the wrongness of such decisions, we must do our homework. Inaccuracies discredit our work, and provide grounds for rejection of our efforts.

Global denunciations of the Christian past also violate the requirement of truth. The history is bad enough quite apart from our exaggerations and our failure to make necessary distinctions. I am not disagreeing at all with what Pope John Paul II said of the horror of the Shoah at Yad Vashem in March 2000: “Personne ne peut en diminuer l’ampleur.” [No one can diminish/lessen its extent.]. Maybe no Gentile can imagine the extent and depth of the sufferings of the Jewish people through the centuries. But my point here is that in detailing the particular sins and evils that need to be confessed, we need to find out as fully as we can what actually happened. We cannot be lazy in this task. I should also say that the requirement of truth demands a total relinquishing of a defensive spirit that only concedes reluctantly the evils of the past.

There is a close link between myths and ideology. Ideology is idolatry committed by the mind. Truth degenerates into ideology when we turn divine revelation into a total system that justifies itself without regard to the facts of history. Ideologies have no defects. The ideological mind is an obstacle to the confession of past sins. The Catholic Church has to become more honest and transparent in this respect. The anti-Jewish problems do not all belong to a distant past. One example concerns the “ritual murder” myth that the Jews

abducted and killed Christian children to use their blood in ritual celebrations⁴. In the 13th century two popes protested against the “blood libel” dismissing these stories as false and malicious⁵. However, in 1900, following requests originating in England for the Vatican to disown the “blood libel” a decision was reached in the Holy Office that no declaration of the innocence of the Jews could be made⁶.

4. Freedom instead of Coercion and Violence

The history of the oppression of the Jewish people is a long history with much coercion and much violence. There was pressure on Jews to receive baptism, sometimes with the alternative of exile or baptism; there was enforced Jewish attendance at sermons aimed at conversions; there was removal from their families by force of Jewish children illegally baptised by Christian maids or nurses. The last two continued within the papal states in present-day Italy until the second half of the nineteenth century. There was coercion that came from official policy, and coercion that came from mob behaviour.

For all these reasons, the freedom of the Holy Spirit must characterise all levels of reconciliation between Gentile and Jewish believers. This means there must be no pressure from Gentile or Jew concerning the right course of action for Jews who come to faith in Jesus. We cannot make global statements that Jewish believers in Yeshua within the Christian churches must or must not leave them to join the Messianic Jews. We have to preach the vision of the one new man, the Church made up of Jew and Gentile, but then have confidence that the Holy Spirit will guide all Jewish believers as to how they are to live out their call. This choice is linked to a person’s sense of identity that is not conferred by us but by the Lord.

The Lessons for TJCII

Humility is essential at every stage for this TJCII initiative to go anywhere. We have to free ourselves of all judgmentalism, of all forms of the replacement virus, by which we arrogate to ourselves in any Gentile grouping the exclusive claim to be God’s chosen,

⁴ The “blood libel” was “the claim that Judaism commanded its adherents to capture Christian children, mutilate and torture them as painfully as possible, and then drain them of their blood. Jews’ need for Christian children’s blood was insatiable, thousands of Catholic newspaper accounts informed their readers. The Jewish religion, according to the papers, required such blood for many ritual purposes, from the making of Passover matzah to marriage celebrations.” (David I. Kertzer *Unholy War*, Macmillan, London, 2001, p. 14).

⁵ Innocent IV in 1247 and Gregory X in 1272.

⁶ According to Kertzer, who has studied the Vatican archives, a note accompanying this decision states: “Although nothing was found either in the Holy Office or at the Secretariat of State, where careful research was undertaken, bearing on this accusation ... ritual murder is a historical certainty.” (*op. cit.*, p. 221).

while we exclude all those whom we have judged. It is the only way that such an extraordinary mixture of believers can hang together and advance towards the goal.

During this initiative, it has been made clear to us that we cannot be making exaggerated claims for ourselves. In 1998 and 1999, the executive together with a group of intercessors visited important historic sites to confess that “we and our fathers have sinned” (Jer. 3: 25). It was strongly impressed on our hearts that we have to entrust this confession to the Lord, and we have to avoid making great claims before others about the importance of what we have done.

When we went to Spain in March 1998, the executive with a group of intercessors, there were very few Catholics in the group, which was a weakness in such a heavily Catholic country as Spain, especially the lack of knowledgeable Spanish Catholics. In this situation, what easily happens is that as the expression of Christian repentance begins, the Evangelicals – often more confident and quick off the mark than the Catholics – speak first. There is then a danger that the Catholics can feel this confession to be another Protestant accusation not sensing a true identification with the Catholic oppressors of the Jews! When we went to Nicaea six months later, we knew we had to begin with the confession of those from the ancient Churches, who most fully identified with the Church of the 4th and 8th centuries. Then the other Christians followed, identifying with the history as the Spirit led them. In this way, we were led into a greater humility and a greater respect for each other.