

Dear friends, greetings once again.

Today I want to reflect on a matter that has been in my thoughts over Xmas. To set the context, just a couple of months ago, it was my privilege to spend a Sabbath worship with a Jewish-heritage congregation in Latin America. We were received with gracious warmth, and both Steve Fisher and myself deeply appreciated this experience, which included a liturgy and form of worship very different to what we are used to in our own local congregations. The liturgy was many pages long (about 30 pages or so, if I remember right), and was filled with chants, short and long hymns (almost all of which were derived from the OT with some from the NT), and lots of sitting – standing – sitting – standing – sitting at various points of the liturgy. It was impossible to sit steadfastly in deep rapid-eye movement “reflection” and not be noticed! The whole Sabbath, which included a visit to a congregation focusing on post-modern young adults, was a true privilege and blessing.

On returning home, I have been reflecting on what it takes for an observant Jew within Judaism to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of the messianic hopes of the OT. And not only this, but to accept and believe the Apostle Paul’s expositions in Romans on the theme of “the just shall live by faith” (Romans 1.17) and the later Reformation emphasis on the truth of righteousness by faith. History tells that it can be profoundly challenging not only for someone within Judaism to accept Jesus as the Messiah of God, but then to subsequently align themselves with the SDA movement or indeed with any Protestant denomination. Why is this so?

Historically, the relationship between Jews and Christians has been fraught. There are many reasons for this sad reality. There is a deep well of pain and oft-hidden suffering that we must reckon with whenever we discuss these matters. The novel by Sir Walter Scott entitled “Ivanhoe” (also available as a movie) has a central Jewish figure, Isaac of York, and his experience (together with that of Rebecca, his only daughter) at the hands of the Norman nobility of his era is a tragic representation of the sufferings imposed on mediaeval Jewish communities. One could argue that from the Christian perspective, the controversies we find in the Gospels between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders, His denunciations of these leaders, the involvement of the Jewish leaders and populace in His crucifixion, the belief that Jesus was the rejected Messiah, the belief that the Torah had been fulfilled and was no longer valid for gentile Christians, and the belief that the church was now the Israel of God rather than ethnic Israel....all of these factors were not helpful for a loving relationship. The Gospel of John and the story of the introduction of the 18th Benediction in the synagogue services of the 1st century AD (which was brought in to include a curse on the followers of the Way, and any who could not say this benediction at the end of the synagogue service would then be put out of the synagogue) testify to the early and bitter divisions between those Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and those who disagreed.

In the writings of Justin Martyr (“Dialogue with Trypho”) we find an imaginary and triumphalist dialogue (some might say a polemic) between a Jew and a Christian (Justin died in AD 165) and then in the writings of Tertullian (“Against the Jews” of AD 200) the first real stirrings of anti-Jewish polemic from among Christians.

However, one of the most significant influences in the history of Christendom has been the influence of Augustine (AD 354-430). He had four major points concerning the Church’s relationship with the Jews. Firstly, he continued with the concept that the OT prefigured Christ and that the Jews in rejecting Christ were rejecting their own Scriptures. Secondly, he wished to account for the reason that God allowed the ongoing existence of the Jews. He argued that the Jewish community in exile, without a homeland or

temple, was a living witness to the truth that the Church is now the true Israel...because the Jews were a testament to the historical veracity of the OT. Thirdly, he argued that the Jews were not just guilty of unbelief, but of deicide (God or Christ-killers). And this guilt was handed on by the Jews of Jesus' time down through time. Finally, despite this seemingly anti-Jewish viewpoint, Augustine did not personalize the implications of his ideas. Rather, he urged Christians to treat Jews with compassion and kindness, since salvation is unmerited, and one should not gloat over the fall of others.

Thus, Augustine's writings provided a context for centuries of treatment / mistreatment of Jews by Christians. On the one hand, the homelessness and sufferings of the Jews was their alleged reward for the alleged crime and ongoing guilt of deicide. On the other, their ongoing existence was a testimony to the truth of Christian doctrine and the OT's historicity, and called for compassion to be shown to the Jews as those who had fallen away from their walk with God. These deeply different concepts provided the conceptual framework within which throughout history some have focused on the side of kindness and tolerance, and others erred on the side of active persecution.

Augustine's contemporary, Jerome (famous for translating the Bible into Latin), studied for 10 years under rabbis and had continual and positive relations with Jews at a personal level. Nevertheless, he could still refer to the prayers and hymns of the Jews as the "grunting of a pig and the bellowing of an ass." John Chrysostom (AD 344-407), perhaps the most famous silver-tongued preacher in the early church era, was possibly the most extreme, with inflammatory language in some of his sermons. For instance, "Where Christ-killers gather, the cross is ridiculed, God blasphemed, the Father unacknowledged, the Son insulted, the grace of the Spirit rejected....if the Jewish rites are holy and venerable, our way of life must be false. But if our way is true, as indeed it is, theirs is fraudulent." Thankfully, there was no mass media to broadly circulate these remarks at the time.

And so it was that for centuries, Jewish communities in Christendom suffered pogroms, forced expulsions, torture, murder, extortion, social exclusion and deep suspicion. Many were cruelly mistreated as if they had no legal rights in the countries where they lived. Often the least excuse was the occasion of a community being destroyed by mob violence. The Children's Crusade, on its way to the Holy Land, expressed their ire against the "heathen" on any Jewish communities they could find as they marched across central Europe. The Jewish communities along the Rhine were particularly unfortunate and innocent victims of these soldiers of Christ. Recently, while chatting with a Jewish gentleman at an airport, he explained the pain of his history with the following grim humor. At an undisclosed location in eastern Europe in the mid 1800s, in a small town, the brutalized body of a small girl was found. Rumors flew around the marketplace, with the broader community eventually placing the blame for this unsolved crime on the small Jewish community. The Jewish community gathered together, prayed, discussed flight to a place of safety, and prepared for the worst....a pogrom. But salvation arose in a most unexpected manner, for a Jewish man came running through the streets to the Jewish quarter, and cried out with a large voice, "We are saved! Do not be afraid! There will be no pogrom! Praise be to God! The little girl was Jewish!" There was no pogrom that day.

But for today's discussion, I want to focus briefly on the role of Martin Luther, the hero of the reformation. Luther was the indirect beneficiary of one of Ashkenazi Judaism's greatest scholars, Rashi (AD 1040 – 1105). Rashi wrote a profound commentary on the Talmud and on the Bible, and his massive commentary on the Talmud is now routinely published with copies of the Talmud itself. Nicholas de Lyra (AD 1270 – 1340), a Franciscan professor of theology, studied Rashi's commentary and then himself produced a 50 volume running commentary to all the books of the OT and NT. His work became central to Luther's interpretation of Scripture, for both Rashi and de Lyra ignored the allegorical interpretation

of the Bible so fondly cherished by mediaeval RC scholars, and focused instead on a very direct, literal principle of interpretation of the text. This more direct hermeneutic had a profound impact on Luther, working its way into his "Quadrige" or 4-way approach to interpretation that included literal, allegorical, eschatological and tropological forms of interpretation.

It appears that in his early years, Luther thought kindly of the Jews. He felt that the Christian attitude towards Jews should be of persuasion, not of force. He had high hopes that they would be attracted to the Reformation movement. But that was not to be. In his later years, Luther wrote some of the worst diatribes regarding the Jews in all of history, including his infamous "Concerning the Jews and Their Lies" of 1543. What I now write is difficult to write, and I am sure any reader will find these words jar the soul and give pause for deep breath, but these are the published words of Martin Luther himself from 1543:

"Let me give you my honest advice.

First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn should be covered or spread 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 in order that God may see that we are Christians, and that we have not wittingly tolerated or approved of such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of His son and His Christians....

Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed. For they perpetrate the same things there that they do in their synagogues. For this reason they ought to be put under one roof or in a stable, like Gypsies, in order that they may realize that they are not masters in our land, as they boast, but miserable captives, as they complain of us incessantly before God with bitter wailing.

Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught.

Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden, under threat of death, to teach any more...

Fifthly, passports and travelling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews. For they have no business in the rural districts since they are not nobles, nor officials, nor merchants, nor the like. Let them stay at home.

Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury. All their cash and valuables of silver and gold ought to be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. For this reason, as we have said before, everything that they possess they stole and robbed from us through their usury, for they have no other means of support.

Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses as is enjoined upon Adam's children. For it is not proper that they should want us cursed *Goyyim* to work in the sweat of our brows and that they, pious crew, idle away their days at the fireside in laziness, feasting and display....We ought to drive the rascally lazy bones out of their system.

If however, we are afraid that they might harm us personally, or our wives, children, servants, cattle etc., when they serve us or work for us....then let us apply the same cleverness [expulsion] as the other nations.....and.....drive them out of the country for all time. To sum up, dear princes and nobles who

have Jews in your domains, if this advice of mine does not suit you, then find a better one so that you and we may all be free of this insufferable devilish burden – the Jews.”

The *Encyclopedia of Judaism* cites these writings of Luther, and then comments thus: “Short of the Auschwitz ovens and extermination, the whole Nazi holocaust is pre-outlined here.” Concentration camps, ghettos, forced labor camps, forced migrations, *Kristellnacht*, extracting teeth from corpses for the gold fillings, total confiscation of Jewish property, absolute removal of freedom of movement, the Final Solution (“for all time”).....all these acts of evil were directly nourished by the soil of Luther’s writings. It would appear that Luther’s writings on the Jews, the sense of national pride and unity he encouraged with his German translation of the Scriptures, and his attacks on the papal system for milking the German people for funds to build St. Peter’s basilica in Rome all combined to unleash attitudes that centuries later would reap a fearsome harvest across allegedly “Christian” Europe, with people of many nationalities participating in the holocaust in one way or another.

As I grew up, far removed from these historical events, reading *The Great Controversy* on Luther’s life and witness, probing through Roland Bainton’s balanced and eminently readable biography of Luther (the best one out there in my opinion), and watching Luther in an old black and white movie standing at the Diet of Wurms and proclaiming those famous words (“Here I stand....I can do no other....so help me God”), I imagined that if ever there was a hero of faith, it was Martin Luther. A man of his times, to be sure (as can be confirmed by any who take the time to read the small book entitled “The Table-Talk of Martin Luther”), but a hero of faith nonetheless.

It is very hard for Protestants not to share the wonderful truth of righteousness by faith without sharing some elements of the story of Luther. The “Revelation of Hope” series used by pastors worldwide, and recently by Elder Wilson in the NY City outreach events, affirms God’s progressive leading of His people out of the darkness of mediaeval Christianity into deeper truth diachronically through the Anabaptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Millerites and Adventists. But, for a person of Jewish heritage, informed and knowledgeable about the past, it can only be painful in the deepest possible way for anyone to share the Gospel [Good News] with any reference to Martin Luther and his role in the Reformation. Thus, in the relationship between the spiritual and biological children of Abraham, there must be a deep sensitivity to the sufferings of the past, often perpetrated wrongly and tragically in the name of Jesus Christ. We simply cannot assume that those we consider “heroes of faith” will be perceived likewise by those we minister to.

Perhaps the inspired words of the Apostle Paul apply to us today as much as they did to Gentile believers in the 1st century AD: “For He [Jesus Christ] is our peace; in His flesh He has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph. 2.14). If in our dialogue with the biological children of Abraham, e.g. on planes or in airports or within friendships, we are seeking to get the *other* to leave the *other* and join *us* (with our books about Luther on our bookshelves, his life and witness celebrated in the Spirit of Prophecy and movies about him beside our TVs), the dividing wall of historical anguish may never be overcome. If however we are seeking to lead the *other* to follow *Him*, maybe then and only then will the dividing wall of historical hostility and pain between *us* be broken down, for in following *Him*, we both affirm that there is something we all must leave behind and *Someone* other than and outside our biological and historical selves whom we can both follow.

Wherever you are during these Sabbath hours, I pray you and your fellow believers are experiencing the peace that only Jesus Christ offers.

Best wishes,

Conrad.