

“How Then Shall We Live-Together?”

By: Karl D. Coke, Ph. D.

For nearly two thousand years, a hostility has existed between Jews and Christians. An opportunity has presented itself to end this useless hostility. Over sixty Jewish Orthodox Rabbis published an unprecedented and historical statement on December 3, 2105 that opens the door for Christians to work with Jews to “... perfect the world under the sovereignty of the Almighty, so that all humanity will call on His name ...”

Orthodox Rabbinic Statement on Christianity

December 3, 2015

To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven:

Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians

“After nearly two millennia of mutual hostility and alienation, we Orthodox Rabbis who lead communities, institutions and seminaries in Israel, the United States and Europe recognize the historic opportunity now before us. We seek to do the will of our Father in Heaven by accepting the hand offered to us by our Christian brothers and sisters. Jews and Christians must work together as partners to address the moral challenges of our era. The Shoah [catastrophe] ended 70 years ago. It was the warped climax to centuries of disrespect, oppression and rejection of Jews and the consequent enmity that developed between Jews and Christians.”

This bold statement follows years of Jewish and Christian dialogues where Christians have reached out to the Orthodox Jewish community despite the past horrors brought upon Jews by Christians. With great respect, many Jewish Rabbis have accepted the Christian hands offered them. Although some will resist or take advantage of this statement, I responded positively on December 29, 2015 to three Orthodox rabbis who have accepted me as their friend.

“Dear beloved Rabbis [Riskin, Rosen & Melchior],

As a Christian, I do not nor can I speak for Christianity. No single Christian can speak for Christianity. I am just one Gentile (among millions) who believes that Jesus is G-d’s Messiah. I humbly accept your unprecedented acceptance of my offered hand. Additionally, I thank you for many more things such as the *TaNak*, without which I could never have known G-d.

I cannot defend nor prosecute the actions of those calling themselves Christians throughout the past two thousand years. Yet, I do and must own all of it. My sorrow and shame over the past treatment of Jews by Christians is complete. As a result, and, with the great help of Benita Raphaely, French Hill, Mt. Scopus, I presented myself in person and offered my humble apology on two separate occasions to Jewish Rabbis Melchior and Rosen in Jerusalem, and, Riskin in Efrat, according to Deuteronomy 17:8-11. I gained their friendship and respect. I was able to do this following generous donations to fund the trips (during our 2014 celebration of Sukkot) from the Gardner, Pohlman, Knisley and Johnston families.

My grief over reading about the past atrocities carried out in the Name of Jesus overwhelms me. Yet, please hear me. I bear even greater grief that G-d’s purpose in the earth continues to go ignored by Jews and Christians seemingly possessed with “being right” theologically. G-d’s Word compels me to restore G-dly relationship with His family.

With a grateful heart, I am continually awe struck by the riches of Bible understanding possessed by Jewish scholars. They inspire me and often correct my ignorance. Conversely, I am dumbfounded occasionally over the intellectual dishonesty of some Christian scholars who teach such things as the (totally non-Biblical) supercessionism of Judaism by Christianity.

What is obvious in the Bible is that Jesus is a Jew. His earthly family is Jewish. He was completely kosher. He never asked any Jew to give up Judaism. Most importantly to me, He offered Himself as Messiah.

To me, His most notable prayer recorded in John 17 is that we would be one as He is with the Father. Being echad [one] with Jews by walking together is my heart's desire. I am called by G-d to do whatever I can to help produce a measurable unity in His family—Jewish and Gentile—whenever and wherever I can. Until now, my actions have been seen by both communities.

Given this grand gesture of more than 25 [now 60+] Orthodox Rabbis, I feel the time is now to spare no effort to see Jesus' prayer answered. I agreed with Rabbi Melchior in his office in Jerusalem when, he said, "I do not want to attend one more Jewish/Christian dialogue because nothing ever changes." We both agreed, however, that we could dialogue with each other regarding the theme G-d revealed to me—"How then shall we live ... together?"

The time is now. Luke, quoting Malachi 4:6 and Psalm 14:7, Isaiah 2:3, in Luke 1:16-17 says, "*And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the LORD their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the LORD.*" I am one of the formerly disobedient Gentiles needing the wisdom of the just to help me be a part of the people prepared for the LORD.

My heartfelt desire to love Ha-Shem by obeying His Torah is maturing. My only spiritual goal is to always please G-d as did Jesus. I have discovered what pleases Him—obeying His Torah out of the same pure love for Him that He shows me. I know that love for G-d properly expressed is obeying His Torah. Neither I nor any Jews have been "saved" by obeying Torah. It is neither Jewish nor Christian to obey Torah. Obeying Torah is G-d's plan to prepare mankind as His people. Like Jews, I obey Torah out of love after He saved me by His grace alone. I have asked the question, "How then shall we live—together?" His answer? "... to make ready a people prepared for the LORD." I say to Malachi, David, Isaiah, Rabbi Melchior, Rabbi Riskin, Rabbi Rosen, et. al., ... **"Count me in regarding walking together!"**

Reading your proclamation to accept our offered hands is not an opportunity for me to welcome you into Christianity. This is not, nor ever should be considered, an invitation to Jews to come "into" Christianity. Rather, it is the most welcomed news that frees tens of thousands of Gentile Christians to ask for your help in walking out Torah. It is but my humble plea asking for the help of Orthodox Rabbis to walk with us in Torah. I am, after all, adopted into YOUR family. I am an obedient child—not an arrogant supercessionist as I introduced myself to Rabbi Rosen.

What seems strange to me is that Christians accept the living Torah but deny the written and oral Torah. I have found that my love for obeying the living Torah to be the same as that of Jews for obeying the written Torah. Concerning Christians, I recognize the truth to be: most are totally unaware of the 613 mitzvot, but, unwittingly obey over 200 of them. In fact, a Gentile could not even accept Jesus as Messiah without believing in mitzvah #1, "one must believe that G-d exists." Therefore, for Christians to continue to falsely claim "I am not under the Law, but under grace," is both untrue and impossible.

I do not accept "triumphalism." The temptation of past "triumphalism" has been for Jews to judaize Christians and Christians to christianize Jews. HaShem has always wanted Jews and Christians to (Deuteronomy 32) accept the Rock of their salvation, not requite His love, lightly esteem or forget Him. He is unwilling that any should perish. Romans 9-11 affirms to Christians the position held by Jews in the heart of G-d. Yet, Jews continue to question Yeshua and Gentiles continue to question Torah. Rather than call constant attention to these differences, is it now possible to help each other? Can we finally allow correction to be involved in living together in G-d's single purpose?

G-d's question has never been, "Who should convert to ...?" His question has always been, "How then shall Jews and Christians live-together?" The bottom line has always been a Jewish and Gentile Bride being prepared for the LORD.

John 14:15 (et. al.,) makes abundantly clear that it is time to recognize that Christians (Gentiles) must follow the instructions of Torah out of pure love. It is time for Christians to stop denial, supercessionism and false teachings filled with anti-semitism.

Psalm 102:13 says Now is the time for G-d to favor Zion—the set time (moed). Psalm 133:1 sets the "beauty goal" of dwelling together in unity. Isaiah 2:2-3 spoke of these days, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

It is time for the Gentile portion of G-d's Congregation to cease its boasting against the natural olive branches, to acknowledge Gentiles have been grafted into the olive tree and drink deeply from the roots of the natural olive tree, and, to cease being wise in Gentile conceits.

It is time for the Gentile portion of G-d's Congregation to fulfill Isaiah 40:1-5. There are no Jewish and Christian winners or losers. God alone wins when Jews and Christians walk together pleasing Him! Malachi 4:6 refers to the hearts of the fathers being turned to the children. It no longer matters which "religion" has the bragging rights of being the father (or mother). It is time to cease calling each other heretics. Faith in G-d is a spiritual matter not a religious matter.

Professor Daniel Boyarin makes clear in his book, *Border Lines*, that early Christian definition and prosecution of *heresy* led them into calling Judaism a *religion*.

Although Boyarin says that "... the difference between us [Yuval] ..." exists over early rabbinic understanding of Messiah, he also says in the same context, "I agree completely with Yuval's claim that there is something fundamentally upside down in looking within rabbinic sources for "background" in the New Testament. Judaism is not the "mother" of Christianity; they are twins, joined at the hip. I am also in total agreement with his insistence that the frequently expressed scholarly notion that Jews were not concerned with Christianity until the Middle Ages is a serious error." (p. 5, Boyarin, *Border Lines*)

Professor Israel Jacob Yuval in his book, *Two Nations In Your Womb*, quotes A. F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World*, "Indeed, there seems to be good and sufficient reason to revise the view that grants Judaism the status of mother religion. First, the term, *daughter religion*, is problematic insofar as it relates to the status of Christianity in relation to Talmudic Judaism, seeing they both are daughter religions of biblical Judaism, which centered on the Temple before its destruction in 70 C.E." (p. 17, Yuval, *Two Nations In Your Womb*)

Yuval correctly identifies the ongoing reason for unproductive Jewish-Christian dialogue. He says, "Classical scholarship frequently tended to examine the relations between Christianity and Judaism through the literature of direct and explicit polemics. But polemical literature deals with professed theology, and its purpose is to sharpen the points of friction between the two religions." (p. 17, Yuval, *Two Nations In Your Womb*)

A polemic is a contentious argument that is intended to support a specific position via attacks on a contrary position. Polemics are mostly seen in arguments about controversial topics. The practice of such argumentation is called polemics. A person who often writes polemics, or who speaks polemically, is called a polemicist or a

polemic. The word is derived from Greek *polemikos*, meaning: “warlike, hostile” from *polemos*, meaning: “war.”

Is the polemic war over? Can Christians speak of Jesus without Jewish offence being taken? Can Jews speak of Torah without Christian offence being taken? Can we all take the advice of a Jew, the Apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 10:31b-32, “... whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: ...”

Speaking about Jesus in his book, *The Jewish Gospels*, Jewish Professor Boyarin says, “Thus the Son of Man became the Son of God, and “Son of God” became the name for Jesus’ divine nature—and all without any break with ancient Jewish tradition.” (p. 47, Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*)

Professor Boyarin defends the Gentile belief in Yeshua more brilliantly than most Christian scholars. He further demonstrates in his book, *The Jewish Gospels*, that Jesus is not inconsistent with Isaiah 53 and that Jesus kept kosher.

Thousands of Christians have become very interested in Israel and Judaism. On the one hand, they have a very romantic but uninformed idea about the land of Israel. On the other hand, many have sought to better understand Judaism and have joined Messianic Synagogues. Is Judaism a nation or a religion? What should be the Christian’s response to both? According to Deuteronomy 17, before Christians should respond, they should gain understanding by learning from the Jews in charge who form the policies regarding both the land and the faith of Jews. Furthermore, they should learn from Christian scholars who are in close relationship to the Jews making policies.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin says, “God established covenants on two different occasions with the Jewish people, the first in this week’s portion of *Lekh Lekha*, and the second right after the Revelation at Sinai in the book of Exodus. At first glance these eternal, irrevocable contracts allude to the paradox of Israel: Are we a nation (Genesis 15:18), bound together by a common bloodline, a shared ancestry and gene pool, whose most earnest desire is to live together as an extended family in our own land? Or are we primarily a religion (Exodus 19:8), bound together by a group of laws, united not so much by where we live as by how we live, by the quality of our commitment to Jewish law and ritual passed down to us by previous generations[?]” (p. 101, Riskin, *Torah Lights*)

Dr. Marvin Wilson’s book, *Our Father Abraham*, contains Chapter Fifteen entitled, “If Not Now ... When?” Dr. Wilson says, “Throughout this volume we have stressed that the essence of biblical faith is relationship. In scriptural terms, the ethical command to love God and one’s neighbor is more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mic. 6:1-8; Mark 12:28-34). It would be wrong, however, to refer to this undertaking as *religion*, in the modern sense of this word. The popular use of “religion” distorts how the Jewish biblical writers define a godly life.” (p. 319, Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*)

Are Judaism and Christianity different faiths? Are they talking past one another?

Rabbi David Rosen says in his book (co-authored by Dr. R. T. Kendall), *The Christian and the Pharisee*, explains, “Of course belief is important to Judaism, because that will lead you to live the godly way of life revealed in the Torah. But there’s the rub: the purpose, for Judaism, is the way you behave and conduct your life. The purpose is not belief in and of itself.” (p. 27, Rosen & Kendall, *The Christian and the Pharisee*)

Should Christian scholars know the TaNaK in Hebrew as well as Jewish scholars know haB’rith haChaDesha in multiple languages including Greek? YES! While visiting the Jerusalem rabbis, I was struck by how well they knew the New Testament—in multiple languages—and how very little I knew the TaNaK in Hebrew.

Some of my Christian brothers have long realized the need to know Hebrew, Bible geography, history & culture to properly understand Jesus and the New Testament. For example, in his book, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables*, Dr. Brad Young says, “The parables of Jesus are intimately related to the religious heritage, culture, language, agricultural life and social concerns of the Jewish people during the Second Temple Period.” (p. 3, Young, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables*)

Most Christian leaders are unaware of the need to know Hebrew, geography, culture and history. Why? Christians have inherited centuries of anti-Jewish theology by Christian theologians. To highlight this, Dr. John Garr, in his book, *Christian Fruit Jewish Root*, agrees with Dr. Brad Young when he says, “Serious students of the life and ministry of Jesus must return to Second Temple Judaism, to the life and practices of first-century Jewry. The key concepts of Jesus’ teaching, therefore cannot be understood apart from Jewish heritage. What Jesus said and did can never be fully understood if it is transplanted into Gentile soil, no matter in what part of the non-Israelite world one may choose to locate them.” (p. 314, Garr, *Christian Fruit Jewish Root*)

In this same vein, I wrote in my book, *A Proper Education*, “The result of being Anti-Semitic is ignoring Hebrew. This caused the Church to minimize the *TaNaK* (Old Testament). The result of being Hellenized is that Christians have embraced the life-style of Greek philosophers and call it biblical. This ultimately led the Gentile Church to claim it was exclusively “New Testament.” This error severed it from a major portion of God’s intended purpose.” (p. 171, Coke, *A Proper Education*)

Since: 1) Gentiles left Egypt with Moses and the Jews; 2) Hosea includes Gentiles as being “lured” to the wilderness along with Jews; and, 3) Jesus in John 10:16 said, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd ...”

I, humbly, offer myself along with my colleagues to hold a totally new and major dialogue, in Jerusalem, broadcast live throughout the earth, on the theme: “How then shall we live ... together.” May the four mentioned Jewish scholars defend the right of Christians to hold Yeshua, and, may the four mentioned Christian scholars defend the right of Jews to hold Torah!

Call the dialogue ... we will be there, and, by our presence, joyfully honor your acceptance of our most sincere hands.

Your friend,

Karl D. Coke, Ph. D., Chancellor
Timothy Program International

Response December 30, 2015

“Dear Dr. Coke,

Good evening from Israel. Your letter is very touching and goes to the heart of the matter in many of the issues we face in the sacred calling of Jewish-Christian relations. Rabbi Riskin and I value your friendship. We look forward to seeing you in Israel.

Please note that you can read the original **Orthodox Rabbinic Statement on Christianity** on CJCUC’s website along with the press release. It is important to know that the *Israel Today* article completely misrepresented the Statement and certain organizations are using this as arsenal to target Jews for conversion. We are not happy with the title of Israel Today article - *Orthodox Rabbis Bring Jesus Home for Christmas*. As you know the Center is premised upon respecting the core theological doctrines of Judaism and Christianity without agenda.

You have eloquently stated this yourself in the letter sent to Rabbi Riskin.

In 2011, CJCUC in cooperation with the Hebraic Heritage Christian Center issued their receptive statements on the dialogue between our faith communities. We are indebted to Drs. John Garr, Marvin Wilson, Brad Young as well as Dwight Pryor of blessed memory for their groundbreaking statement. All of these positive statements create an atmosphere of trust between us and move the dialogue into places that go beyond the Israel celebratory events.

Both of our faith communities are dealing with the influences of secular culture that blots the lines of right and wrong. We need to strengthen each other and have Faith deal with 21st century issues. We are to be His active agents to repair a broken world.

To recognize the other as a person of faith is not an invitation to syncretism. It does not mean to lose one's individual commitment but rather to strengthened particular vocations respectful of other vocations. We are not alone in the universe, no solitary islands of belief but peninsulas linked to the eternal and to one another; and there is much to learn in our respective covenantal experience of God. We walk this unprecedented alliance between Jews and Christians in humbleness, respect and mystery.

Blessings,
David Nekrutman, Executive Director
CJCUC”

As a reader of *Restore Magazine*, please pray that G-d will prosper this bold statement by Orthodox Jewish Rabbis and my humble, Christian response. We are in those prophesied days ... come, let us live together!