

Judaism Affirmed in Church Milestone

By Ari L. Goldman

THE UNITED Church of Christ became the first major Protestant denomination in the United States to declare "that Judaism has not been superseded by Christianity" and that "God has not rejected the Jewish people."

The declaration, adopted with only scattered opposition at a meeting in Cleveland of the 1.7 million-member church, did not try to grapple with the theological validity of the Jewish claim to the land of Israel. It was the question of Israel that led the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to downgrade a similar paper from a policy statement to a study document at a divisive convention.

Jewish leaders welcomed the adoption of the United Church of Christ paper, which had been in preparation for two years. "We now have a remarkable mandate for change in American Christianity, which we warmly welcome," said Rabbi A. James Rudin, Director of Interreligious Affairs at the American Jewish Committee.

Long a Troublesome Issue

The continued existence of the Jewish people after the coming of Christ has long been a troublesome theological issue for Christians. While various American church bodies, both Protestant and Catholic, have strongly denounced anti-Semitism, none has gone as far as the United Church of Christ in formally stating that the Jewish and Christian faiths have equal validity.

The Rev. Philip Joseph Mayher, who presented the paper to the convention, said its adoption "is long overdue and is timely." He said the renewed ecumenical efforts within his church and others was in part the result of Protestants' wanting to make a theological statement about the Holocaust. The Nobel Peace Prize last year gave greater impetus to the effort.

"We are concerned about resurgent anti-Semitism in the country and we want very much to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive," said Mr. Mayher, a minister in a United Church of Christ church in Wellesley, Mass.

One major feature of the document is a public request for forgiveness for complicity "in the shaping of anti-Jewish attitudes of societies and the policies of governments."

"We in the United Church of Christ acknowledge that the Christian church has

throughout much of its history denied God's continuing covenantal relationship with the Jewish people," the document said, "This denial has often led to outright rejection of the Jewish people and to theologically and humanly intolerable violence." For this, the paper adds. "We ask God's forgiveness."

Biblical Basis of Position

The paper emphasizes the continuing validity of the Jewish covenant with God, quoting Romans 11:29, "The gifts and the promise of God are irrevocable."

In its affirmation of the Jewish faith, the United Church of Christ document is similar to the one presented in June before the Presbyterian convention in Biloxi, Miss. That document, however, also included a strong statement supporting "God's promise of land to the people Israel," an assertion attacked at the convention by Presbyterians who took part in the denomination's extensive missionary work in the Middle East. Some opponents attacked the draft document as "political" rather than religious.

In the end, the Presbyterians approved a compromise paper that also spoke of the rights of Palestinians, adding that "the modern State of Israel cannot be validated theologically." Unlike the final action taken by the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian paper was passed as a study document that will be reconsidered in two years.

The Rev. Martin Bailey, a spokesperson for the United Church of Christ, said the sensitive question of Israel was left out in part to avoid similar opposition within his denomination. He called the new paper

a "first step" that will be followed by other statements on Christian-Jewish issues.

The United Church of Christ, one of the 10 major Protestant denominations in the United States, was formed 30 years ago by the merger of the Congregational Christian Churches and of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The predecessor Congregational body did extensive missionary work in the Middle East and the merged church continues that work in Turkey, Jordan, and the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

A Call to Revise Views

The new paper mentioned Israel only incidentally, but significantly, according to one Jewish consultant to the panel that drafted the document, Rabbi Alan Mittleman of the American Jewish Committee. The document calls for United Church of Christ churches, educators, and seminaries to "examine and evaluate the image of Jews, Judaism, and the State of Israel" in light of the new understanding of Judaism.

Like the United Church of Christ, Roman Catholics have rejected the notion that Christianity has superseded Judaism. In the 1963 Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, the Vatican declared that "Jews still remain most dear to God." And in his sermon at a synagogue in Rome last year, Pope John Paul II called God's covenant with the Jewish people "irrevocable." The American Protestant statements on Judaism have taken longer to prepare because they come out of a democratic process of consultation rather than by executive fiat.

THEY DONE IT !!

"Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done?"
JEREMIAH 3:6

Not giving heed to Jewish fables" TITUS 1:4

The Apostle Paul said it! Why don't Christian people listen?

Jewish Fables (Lit. "MYTHS") are no new thing. St. Paul has plainly warned the household of faith NOT TO GIVE HEED...

Does not disobedience lead on to deception?