

A Statement on Jewish-Christian Relations

from the Alliance of Baptists

April 25, 2003

As Baptist Christians we are the inheritors of and, in our turn, have been the transmitters of a theology which lays the blame for the death of Jesus at the feet of the Jews; a theology which has taken the anti-Jewish polemic of the Christian Scriptures out of its first century context and has usurped for the Church the biblical promises and prerogatives given by God to the Jews; a theology which ignores nineteen centuries of Jewish development by viewing contemporary Jews as modern versions of their first century co-religionists; a theology which views the Jewish people and Jewish nationhood merely as pieces in an eschatological chess game; a theology which has valued conversion over dialogue, invective over understanding, and prejudice over knowledge; a theology which does not acknowledge the vibrancy, vitality, and efficacy of the Jewish faith.

The madness, the hatred, the dehumanizing attitudes which led to the events known collectively as the Holocaust did not occur overnight or within the span of a few years, but were the culmination of centuries of such Christian theology, teaching and church-sanctioned action directed against the Jews simply because they were Jews. In spite of the evidence of humankind's inhumanity to its own bolstered by religious prejudice, most Christians have done little or nothing to correct the theology which nurtures such hatred or develop avenues of understanding which counter the centuries of prejudice. While some notable strides have been made in post-holocaust theology which provide new ways of reading the biblical text, especially the Johannine and Pauline texts, we have done little to utilize those understandings in the preaching and teaching ministries of our churches.

It is in recognition of a past and present among Baptists that are complicit in perpetuating negative stereotypes and myths concerning Jews, that we, the Alliance of Baptists, meeting in convocation on April 25, 2003, at Vienna, VA, adopt as an Institutional Understanding for Jewish-Christian Relations the following confessions and affirmations which were first adopted as a Resolution by those meeting in convocation at Vienna Baptist Church, Vienna, Virginia March 4, 1995:

As individual members and churches of the Alliance of Baptists, we:

- Confess our sin of complicity;
- Confess our sin of silence;
- Confess our sin of interpreting our sacred writings in such a way that we have created enemies of the Jewish people;
- Confess our sins of indifference and inaction to the horrors of the Holocaust.
- Confess our sin against the Jewish people; and

Offer this confession with humility and with hope for reconciliation between Christians and Jews towards which end we will work.

As the Alliance of Baptists, institutionally, and as individual members and churches, we:

- Affirm the teaching of the Christian Scriptures that God has not rejected the community of Israel, Gods covenant people (Romans 11:1-2), since the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29);
- Renounce interpretations of Scripture which foster religious stereotyping and prejudice against the Jewish people and their faith;
- Seek genuine dialogue with the broader Jewish community, a dialogue built on mutual respect and the integrity of each others' faith;
- Lift our voices quickly and boldly against all expressions of anti-Semitism;
- Educate ourselves and others on the history of Jewish-Christian relations from the first century to the present, so as to understand our present by learning from our past; and
- Commit ourselves to rigorous consideration of appropriate forms of Christian witness for our time.

Adopted April 25, 2003

Vienna, Virginia

The above statement is a revision of an original statement adopted in 1995, printed below.

A BAPTIST STATEMENT ON JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS (1995)

Fifty years ago the world stood in shocked disbelief at the evidence of humankind's inhumanity to its own as the reality of places like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Dachau, Buchen-wald, Bergen-Belsen, and Ravensbruck, were forever etched into conscience and history. The madness, the hatred, the dehumanizing attitudes which led to the events known collectively as the Holocaust did not occur overnight or within the span of a few years, but were the culmination of centuries of Christian teaching and church-sanctioned action directed against the Jews simply because they were Jews.

As Baptist Christians we are the inheritors of and, in our turn, have been the transmitters of a theology which lays the blame for the death of Jesus at the feet of the Jews; a theology which has taken the anti-Jewish polemic of the Christian Scriptures out of its first century context and has made it normative for Christian-Jewish relations; a theology which has usurped for the Church the biblical promises and prerogatives given by God to the Jews; a theology which ignores nineteen centuries of Jewish development by viewing contemporary Jews as modern versions of their first century co-religionists; a theology which views the Jewish people and Jewish nationhood merely as pieces in an eschatological chess game; a theology which has valued conversion over dialogue, invective over understanding, and

prejudice over knowledge; a theology which does not acknowledge the vibrancy, vitality, and efficacy of the Jewish faith.

It is in recognition of a past and present among Baptists that are complicit in perpetuating negative stereotypes and myths concerning Jews, that we, the Alliance of Baptists, meeting in convocation on March 4, 1995, at Vienna Baptist Church, Vienna, Virginia:

- Confess our sin of complicity.
- Confess our sin of silence.
- Confess our sin of interpreting our sacred writings in such a way that we have created enemies of the Jewish people.
- Confess our sins of indifference and inaction to the horrors of the Holocaust.
- Confess our sins against the Jewish people.
- Offer this confession with humility and with hope for reconciliation between Christians and Jews.

We call upon all Baptists to join us in:

(1) Affirming the teaching of the Christian Scriptures that God has not rejected the community of Israel, God's covenant people (Romans 11:1-2), since "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29);

(2) Renouncing interpretations of Scripture which foster religious stereotyping and prejudice against the Jewish people and their faith;

(3) Seeking genuine dialogue with the broader Jewish community, a dialogue built on mutual respect and the integrity of each other's faith;

(4) Lifting our voices quickly and boldly against all expressions of anti-Semitism; and

(5) Educating ourselves and others on the history of Jewish-Christian relations from the first century to the present, so as to understand our present by learning from our past.

*This statement was read publicly for the first time on March 5, 1995, during a ceremony at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

BACKGROUND. In 1965 the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church adopted the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate). This statement heralded a significant change in Jewish-Christian relations, first among Roman Catholics and soon thereafter among Protestant Christian bodies. As Baptists, we too have been influenced by this invitation to dialogue begun by Vatican II. Certain Baptists, including Southern Baptist leaders A. Jase Jones, Joe R. Estes, George Sheridan, Glenn Igleheart and others, modeled out for a brief moment in

time a different way to relate to the Jewish people and the Jewish faith. Regrettably, in recent years this effort at Jewish-Baptist dialogue has been reduced to a theology of conversion.