

T-641: Dialogue Between Jews and Christians

Rabbi Dennis Sasso/Dean Clark Williamson

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Class website discussion group: www.cts.edu/JewsChristians

Required Reading

Michael Fishbane, *Judaism* (Harper Collins).

Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* (Fortress Press).

Jacob Neusner, *Torah From Our Sages (Pirke Avot)* (Rossel Books).

Jacob R. Marcus and Marc Saperstein, *The Jew in the Medieval World* (Hebrew Union College Press).

Albert H. Friedlander, ed., and Jacob Landau, illustrator, *Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Literature* (Union of American Hebrew Congregations).

Leon Klenicki, *Toward a Theological Encounter: Jewish Understandings of Christianity* (Paulist Press).

Clark Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel* (Westminster/John Knox Press).

The aims of this course

In this course, the student should expect: a) to gain a deeper understanding of the Holocaust; b) to learn how the church's traditional teaching and practice of contempt for Jews and Judaism is related to the Holocaust; c) to understand better the Jewish context and Jewishness of both Jesus and Paul; d) to learn something of rabbinic Judaism; and e) to begin an acquaintance both with the theological conversation between Jews and Christians and with post-Holocaust (i.e., post-Shoah) theology among Christians.

The character of this course

The theme of this course is dialogue (conversation). Historically, Jews and Christians have seldom talked with one another as Jews and Christians. Nor have either Jews or Christians historically talked about one another in ways that were appropriate to or true of those being discussed. This course is about learning to listen, both to the Christian tradition and how it talked of and treated Jews as an alienated other, as the

shadow side of Christianity that has to be rejected, and to Jews whom we need to learn to listen to as those whose standing is based, as is ours, on the good news of God's unconditional love.

Conversation is not only more humane and fruitful than conflict and misrepresentation; it is finally the only alternative to conflict and injustice (mere tolerance will always break down). Conversation is a non-zero sum game from which all benefit; it need not have winners and losers. It can reflect and result in the kind of creative interchange in which all participants grow in understanding of and communion with one another.

The orientation of this course is post-Shoah. Shoah is a Hebrew term meaning "destruction" and is preferable to "Holocaust" for referring what happened to eleven million people, including six million Jews, under Nazi Germany. "Holocaust" refers to a whole burnt offering dedicated to the Lord; this is not what Hitler had in mind. We do all our thinking in particular historical situations; our situation is one which can be characterized, among other ways, as the time after the Shoah, that whirlwind of destruction that befell European Jews and that discloses to us demonic tendencies that lurk in the Christian tradition (as well as in modern culture, science, technology, capitalism, liberal democracy, the legal profession, etc.). Johann Baptist-Metz' rule for doing theology, that we should be suspicious of any theological statement made after the Shoah that could have been made in the same way before the Shoah, is the form of the hermeneutic of suspicion that shall claim our attention in this course.

Website discussion group

Thanks to the good offices of Jeff Siemon, we have a class website discussion group; you can access this on the internet at this address: www.cts.edu/JewsChristians. Members of the class are encouraged to use the website to raise questions, engage in conversation with each other and the professors, comment on readings, etc. The website discussion group not only has the advantage of being available at any time, it can contribute significantly to the benefits of participating in the course.

Attendance policy

In any class, participation is important. Class attendance is a minimal indicator of such participation. So here are the rules for those enrolled for credit: 1) each student gets one free absence without penalty; 2) more than one absence will reduce the final grade by .4 grade points; 3) more than three absences will result in failure or withdrawal from the course (this is federal law by the way).

Grading

Grades will be based 50% on participation (attendance, in-class reports, participating in discussion over the web or in class) and 50% on the term paper.

Meeting Place

After the first session, the class will meet at Congregation Beth-El Zedeck (600 W. 70th Street). Maps will be distributed in class to help you find your way to Beth-El. The reason for our meeting at Beth-El is that not all learning comes from reading books and listening to lectures. The only way that we come to understand another faith is by becoming a participant-observer at the same time that we work hard at learning by study.

Reading Reports

Classes will consist mostly of conversation over readings, with contributions from all members of the class. Students are expected to come to class having read the material assigned for that day and prepared to discuss it understandingly. When the nature of the reading material permits, we will ask students to make brief class reports on the reading. The purpose of the class report is to a) state the major point of the reading, b) interpret its significance, and c) raise issues for conversation.

Cross-Cultural experience

Students wanting this course to satisfy their cross-cultural experience at CTS should speak with Carmelo Alvarez, Dean of Students and Director of the Cross Cultural Program.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

On April 17, the class will make a trip to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. This trip is heavily (but not totally) subsidized by a grant from the Efroymsen Fund of the Central Indiana Community Foundation. The visit to the Holocaust Museum is part of the contextual, hands-on educational intent of the course.

The instructors will need to have, by no later than February 20, an accurate list of those planning to make the trip. Names must be recorded as they appear on your driver's license or passport.

Cost of the trip to each participant will be: \$50.00.

Lunch on Tuesdays

Professor Williamson is willing, should members of the class be interested, to eat lunch weekly with students in the CTS refectory on Tuesdays before class, from 12:00 noon until 1:00 p.m. Rabbi Sasso will be able to join us on some occasions by pre-arrangement.

Term Paper

Each student is asked to submit a term paper embodying the results of his/her critical and constructive reflections on the content of the course. This paper should show how the student has come to understand both what the relationship between Jews and Christians has been and what the student thinks the relationship ought to be. The term paper may have any particular focus that the student wants to give it. That is, because the history of Jewish-Christian relations is a vast topic, the student should focus her approach to it around some topic, such as that of how the church has understood its scriptures, or its Christology, or the role of Abraham in faith, or itself (the doctrine of the church), etc., and how that understanding and the practice and teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism reflect and reinforce each other.

Whatever its particular focus, the term paper should contain both a theoretical and a practical-moral dimension. The former should focus, theologically, on what the student understands the relationship of the church to the synagogue ought to be; the latter should focus on the question of the practice of ministry: what does the student plan to do to help bring about that changed self-understanding and changed relationship to Jews in the church.

Length: Minimum of 20, maximum of 25 pages, double-spaced, 1" margins, font size no smaller than that used in this syllabus.

Due date: May 1, 2001.

Class meetings

The Shoah

1. January 16. Film/video/discussion.

Judaism

2. January 23. Read Fishbane, *Judaism*.

The Shoah

3. January 30. Read Friedlander, *Out of the Whirlwind*, sections one and two.
4. February 6. Read Friedlander, *Out of the Whirlwind*, sections three and four.

Christendom

5. February 13. Read Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, section II.
6. February 20. Read Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, section I.

7. February 27. Read Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, section IIIId.

Judaism

8. March 6. Read Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*.

9. March 13. Read Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, chapters three and four.

10. March 20. Read Neusner, *Torah From Our Sages*.

Post-Shoah Theology

11. March 27. Read Friedlander, *Out of the Whirlwind*, sections five and six.

12. April 3. Reading week; no class meeting.

13. April 10. CTS Easter recess; no class meeting.

14. April 17: Class trip to United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. USAir flight # 662 departs Indianapolis International Airport at 5:35 a.m., arrives Reagan National Airport at 8:01 a.m. Return trip USAir flight # 2116 leaves Reagan National at 7:55 p.m., arrives Indianapolis 8:47 p.m.

Post-Shoah Theology

15. April 24. Read Klenicki, *Toward a Theological Encounter*, Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, chapters 5 through 9.

16. May 1. Term paper due/Dean's office, by 1:30 p.m.