

# Response to «The Ways of God»

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## Introduction

Congratulations to the Church of Sweden for the careful reflection and courageous self-examination that it presents for the consideration of its own members and for scrutiny by others in the ground-breaking document, *Guds vägar!* Here is the first official statement presented by the Church of Sweden regarding its understanding of the relationship between the church and the Jewish people, and it is evident that considerable energy and commitment—both for the life of the church and for the sake of interfaith understanding—have been poured into its well-crafted text. It shares with other recent statements a distinctive new characteristic which brings with it a necessary caution, and there is much within the substance of the document that can lead the whole Christian church—and not only the Church of Sweden—forward into a new era in the relationship with Jews. The publication of this statement can serve as an effective signpost of the progress that the Church of Sweden has made in its reflection on the Jewish-Christian relationship; it also sets a challenging agenda both for the church on its own and for Jews and Christians in dialogue, if the plateau of the present is to become the foundation on which steps to new progress can be erected.

## I.

From the epoch-making meeting of Seelisberg in 1947 to the most recent Lutheran World Federation consultation on the Church and the Jewish People in Dobogókő, Hungary (in the

fateful early days of September 2001), Swedish theologians and church leaders have been among those who have wrestled with the significance of a new era of Jewish-Christian relations. Their voices have joined with others in renouncing antisemitism, deploring Luther's anti-Jewish vitriol, affirming God's continuing faithfulness to the covenant(s) made with Israel, and beginning to chart new paths in Christian theology that will be more adequate for a church in partnership and solidarity with «God's first love».<sup>1</sup> The Swedish Theological Institute has been a strong leader, a welcome home for some and a stimulating partner for many, in the interfaith world of Jerusalem. From a North American perspective, the emergence of Krister Stendahl as a leading biblical scholar and active participant in both the theory and practice of deeper understanding among Jews and Christians must be counted as one of the Swedish church's great contributions to the field.<sup>2</sup> Now this church has taken the decisive step of articulating its distinctive «approach» to the issues that face Christians generally and Lutherans, in particular, in our relationship with the Jewish people. That approach moves from the common heritage of Jews and Christians, through several construals of God's covenants and a reflection on «God's secret», to specific address to the topics of our

<sup>1</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Gregory Baum by Friedrich Heer for the title of his 1967 book, *Gottes erste Liebe*. Bechtel Verlag, München und Esslingen, translated as *God's First Love*. Weybright and Talley, NY 1970; see pp. xv, 25, 447 in the English.

[Christian] guilt, the land, the Christian witness, and *metanoia*.

This outline of the approach in itself signals both the newness and some of the challenge left unmet in the statement. It stems implicitly from a new way of presenting the relationship of Christianity to Judaism, which our fellow respondent, Mary Boys, has called «an alternative account of Christian origins».<sup>3</sup> It takes seriously the multiplicity of models of covenant that are present in Scripture, both Israel's and the church's, and the lack of consensus in the church about how to understand God's plan of salvation in regard to both Jews and Christians. It gives the land a prominence that few Christian theologies, even in the interfaith arena, have been willing or able to grant.

Moreover, it is a new departure in the sequence of its topics, and in what is not said. While there is reference to the Shoah (Holocaust) in two of the quotations from earlier documents cited in the Introduction, the guilt of the church in that atrocity and in its antecedents does not receive explicit focus until much else has been said about God and the relationship of Jews and Christians. The Shoah is palpably present in the background to the whole document; both its reality and its impact on subsequent

theological and ecclesiological reflection can be discerned by those familiar with the history of Jewish-Christian relations since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. But for a new generation of readers, for whom this is not only a recent document but a fresh topic, the impetus for addressing it will appear to come as much from Christianity's essential nature as from its profound moral failure in a crucial historical moment. Nor is there any extended treatment, so commonly expected and found in similar documents, of the ethical and moral partnership of Jews and Christians in the face of the world's brokenness. In only one brief phrase near the end of the document, which may not even refer primarily to joint social action endeavors, do we read that «through respectful dialogue and practical co-operation we may help <mend the world> (Hebrew *tikkun ha-'olam*)».<sup>4</sup>

Taken together, these elements signal the freshness of the approach that the authors of *Guds vägar* set forth. This is a second- or third-generation document, able to reflect both in its content and in its structure many of the gains that have been realized in more than 50 years of interfaith growth. At the same time, the shape of the document betrays much that remains to be achieved. This is not a fault of the authors; their formulation cannot be expected to accomplish or resolve things in which the church has not yet clearly found its way. Rather, their forthrightness and clarity is an aid to charting the terrain in which the church must yet find its way.

The handling of God's covenants is a striking case of this dynamic. Three «models» of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity are presented, each centering in the idea of covenant. Each is presented in its most positive understanding, and its advantages and disadvantages for the Jewish-Christian relationship are highlighted. At the conclusion of the section,

<sup>2</sup> See especially his seminal *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1976; *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995; «Can Christianity Shed Its Anti-Judaism?» *Brandeis Review* (Spring 1992) 24–27; and, «From God's Perspective We are All Minorities», *Journal of Religious Pluralism* 2 (1993) 1–13. Stendahl has, of course, exerted a profound influence on two generations of both professional and graduate students at Harvard Divinity School. From 1975–1985 he served as Moderator of the World Council of Churches «Consultation on the Church» and the Jewish People. Having met David Hartman at a WCC event, he subsequently was the co-director of the Osher Jerusalem Center for Religious Pluralism at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem for nearly a decade. The Stendahl legacy continues also in the strong contribution of his son, John, as a pastor and ecumenical and interfaith leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

<sup>3</sup> *Has God Only One Blessing?* Paulist Press, NY & Mahwah 2000, 83–85.

<sup>4</sup> In its place at the end of a section on the Christian witness, following a reference to «creat[ing] new parameters for dialogue ... [as] the challenge that now faces the Church», is the healing not first and foremost a healing of the wounds from which the lifeblood of the one people of God in synagogue and church has spilled out to our mutual, if not commensurate, detriment?

however, the document simply moves on with the dismissive judgment that «models of [this] kind ... seem to presume that we Christians know more about God's counsel and ... ways than [God] has vouchsafed». Neither this nor the subsequent discussion of the importance of mystery in faith, however, adequately addresses the theological task of the church to frame the relationship of the church and the synagogue in a coherent way. That we cannot yet do so in consensus is the clear insight of this document; that we must yet address that task, even with due respect for divine mystery, seems equally clear.

As a second example of the *desiderata* to which this document points, we may again take our point of reference in a structural observation. Two sections of *Guds vägar* suggest themselves as foundational to the theological task under consideration. One is the section on A Common Heritage following the introduction, which adopts a substantially historical approach to the relationship of Judaism and Christianity. Various focusing on God as the one voice of Scripture, biblical Israel's peoplehood and covenant, and the several Judaisms among which followers of Jesus emerged as a distinct group, this section implies that historical experience, as Scripture testifies to it, is the ground on which our relationship with the Jews is built. Alternatively, the section on God's Covenants, already profiled above, could be understood to address thematically and theologically the essential character of the Jewish-Christian relationship. Notwithstanding the authors' demurrals at reaching unequivocal clarity on the understanding of the covenant(s), the covenantal character of the Christian witness and of God's relationship with all God's people is made plain in the final two sections of the document.

For a document from the Church of Sweden, both options seem somewhat alien. The Lutheran heritage of that church has little within it pointing the way toward a development of this theological approach. Granting the centrality of the incarnation for Lutheran hermeneutics and systematics, it is God and God's Word in history, not historical experience itself, that shapes much Lutheran theology. And the *theologoumenon* of covenant is nearly absent, rather than central, in classical Lutheran sources. Indeed, glancing

over the topical organization of *Guds vägar*, one might rather expect that the theological core of such a document from Lutheran hands would come in the section on Our Guilt. But the guilt addressed there, and properly so, is the guilt of the church's anti-Jewish record and antisemitic complicity, not the *Anfechtung* of a soul condemned by God's holy demands and comforted with the gospel word of redemption through God's own righteousness.

This Lutheran commentator is personally encouraged by the official recognition, by a Lutheran communion, of the importance of covenant in understanding God's ways with the people of God. There is much to be gained, I believe, from a more thorough and creative exploration of the biblical presentations of covenant and the centrality of «new covenant» language in the earliest communities that acclaimed Jesus as Lord and Christ. Such exploration, though, ought not simply substitute covenant for grace and faith as primary categories for understanding God's redeeming love; rather, we must discern and articulate the relationship of covenant to redemption. That is a task in which Jews and Christians might profitably collaborate, given our different formative communal experiences and on the presupposition that God's ways in this regard might be consistent in the two communities, and even beyond them.

## II.

*Guds vägar*, then, makes a significant contribution both by embodying what is new in the Christian community's relationship with Jews and by pointing toward those areas in which the hard work of the church still lies ahead. Several keys to its approach are profound in their insights and offer great promise to those who will use them to open new doors of understanding and discernment. Among these is the emphasis on a balance between pride in one's own tradition and humility before both our heritage and the Jews'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, we can learn much from the authors' clear assertion that the issues facing New Testament writers, especially in relationship to (other) Jews, were quite different

<sup>5</sup> God's Secret, paragraph 2.

from the issues we face, with the result that some of their issues may now be moot and some of our issues may find no clear or direct address among their writings.<sup>6</sup> Equally worthwhile is the frank acknowledgement that Christian faith must lie in part «outside the framework of Jewish faith»<sup>7</sup> and that Christian faith must both respect the Jewish faith and hold to its own distinctive confession.<sup>8</sup> These are not the only keys to the approach presented in *Guds vägar*, but they are significant in their affirmation that Christians can articulate their faith in ways that honor its distinctiveness—the newness of the New Covenant—while fully honoring the integrity and validity of God’s covenant with the Jews.

This reflects the fundamentally distinctive new characteristic of the document: it is addressed to the church as a call to develop a Christian theology for a new day, one that is continuous with and faithful to the church’s theological heritage, and one that departs enough from that heritage to leave behind every vestige of anti-Judaism and teaching of contempt with which it was fraught. More than a call, it offers a few first steps toward that theology. At the LWF consultation in Dobogókő in 2001, I was asked to address the theme of the meeting in some closing reflections. That theme was a question, «A Shift in Lutheran-Jewish Relations?» and I responded in the affirmative: there is a distinct shift, at least in our North American setting and, I now see, in the Scandinavian setting as well. One of the most significant elements of that shift is an urgency «to reformulate Christian theology from its very roots, and to integrate the changes into the curricula of our churches and theological institutions».<sup>9</sup> *Guds vägar*, already published in 1999 and officially adopted soon after Dobogókő,<sup>10</sup> is

the beginning of a Swedish response to that urgent call.<sup>11</sup>

Having taken part in the necessary and long-overdue repentance of the church before its Jewish neighbors, the descendants of so many of its victims, and having undertaken the thorough self-examination that has laid bare anti-Judaism as «the left hand of Christology»,<sup>12</sup> revealing the centrality of Christian supersessionism in the long tradition of Christian self-understanding and theology, the Church of Sweden here begins to craft a new theology that will reflect the emerging self-understanding of the church as a partner people of God with the Jews. In such a task, the shame of the Shoah and the *mea culpa* it properly elicits are prolegomena, while the commitment to moral partnership with Jews in sanctification, *tikkun olam*, is an ethical implication. As we have seen above, *Guds vägar* reflects these realities appropriately, rather than reiterating the documents that have preceded it, wherein Shoah and partnership with the Jews

<sup>10</sup> Jesper Svartvik, «Sweden», in *A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations?* (LWF Documentation No. 48, January 2003), edited by Wolfgang Greive and Peter N. Prove. Lutheran World Federation, Geneva 2003, 183f.

<sup>11</sup> In our North American context, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has made a similar overture with the publication of *Talking Points: Topics in Christian-Jewish Relations*. Comprising eight «propositions for discussion and debate on theological issues in Christian-Jewish relations», the talking points are directed to «adult forums in local congregations, conferences of clergy and other church leaders, synodical assemblies, colleges, and seminaries», in the «hope that reflection on these and related topics will contribute to contemporary formulations of Lutheran theology and practice in light of the new realities of Jewish-Christian relations» (see the «User’s Guide» in *Talking Points*, available by download or mail order from the ELCA and at <http://www.elca.org/ea/interfaith/jewish/talkingpoints.html>).

<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, «Christology and Jewish-Christian Relations», in Abraham J. Peck, ed., *Jews and Christians after the Holocaust*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1982, 25; see also Paul van Buren’s important caveat regarding Ruether’s sweeping claim, in *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, Part III: Christ in Context*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, San Francisco 1988, 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*, paragraph 3.

<sup>7</sup> The Christian Witness, paragraph 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*, paragraph 2. The importance of this insight is not lessened by the exception I will take to its particular formulation below.

<sup>9</sup> Peter A. Pettit, «A New Era in Lutheran-Jewish Relations?» in *A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations?* (LWF Documentation No. 48, January 2003), edited by Wolfgang Greive and Peter N. Prove. Lutheran World Federation, Geneva 2003, 102.

were often the central features. This significant step forward is noteworthy and welcome as an impetus to embrace the new task.

At the same time, the very strength of the document as a Christian theological overture prompts a word of caution. The habits of Christian theological arrogance run deep in nearly all of us, and the patterns of a theology that takes Judaism with the utmost seriousness are not yet entirely clear. Harold Ditmanson, in his collection of Lutheran statements on Jewish-Christian relations, noted that the «traditionalist theological perspective» of replacement theology and the «revisionist theological perspective», characterized by a «theology of recognition and a program of dialogue, of mutual listening and receiving», ran side by side through all of the documents.<sup>13</sup> It is to that listening and receiving that my own caution would point us, particularly in regard to two sections of *Guds vägar*.

In the introduction, the history of the church's culpability in anti-Jewish and antisemitic attacks is presented with an unwarranted gentleness. The 1995 statement of the Swedish church's House of Bishops is quoted extensively for its repudiation of antisemitism, and it follows the general caution that «Christological reading of the Scriptures does not lead to anti-Jewishness, and even less to antisemitism». Yet without further elaboration regarding the ways in which the church's Christology has in fact embodied anti-Judaism and buttressed antisemitism, the persistent passive voice of the bishops' statement leaves one wondering just who might be culpable of such prejudice. «A systematic crime had been committed ...», «statements made by Martin Luther have been used ...», «[a]nti-Jewish statements are made and anti-Jewish actions are per-

formed ...», «the atrocity that was done in the center of Christian Europe ...». The explicit responsibility of the Church extends only so far as to be «an accessory to what then happened», because of «[t]he attitude of acceptance shown by some Swedish clergy and Church members towards Nazi ideas during the war». The text of *Guds vägar* itself then picks up the same dissembling tone two paragraphs on, when it says, «we are all obliged to react against the signs of explicit or implicit antisemitism and xenophobia».<sup>14</sup>

The evils that are condemned remain substantially outside the church proper, an external threat against which the church must defend itself as well as their more immediate victims. «Antisemitism touches the heart of Christianity, and if it is not condemned, it will poison the teachings and life of the Christian faith». Can we not, rather, admit that «the things that come out are what defile» (Mark 7:15)? Even if Christology *should* not lead to anti-Judaism and antisemitism, have we not learned and do we not feel remorse that it *did* lead to just those evils, and nurtured them in the bosom of the church? Anti-Judaism has too long characterized the teachings and life of the Christian faith and, left uncondemned, poisoned the society it so powerfully shaped. Must we not try to listen to our own words with the ears of our Jewish neighbors, and banish from our speech any gentling of the atrocities to which we have been not merely accessories, but designers and primary agents?

We also do well to listen to Jewish testimony when we speak of those theological emphases that we discern as common between the faiths.

<sup>14</sup> The later section, Our Guilt, does acknowledge more fully the brutal history of Christian anti-Judaism and the fact that «most European Jews [in the Shoah] were annihilated in that part of the world where the Christian Church had exercised its influence from powerful positions» (Paragraph 5). Even in this section, however, the passive voice predominates in discussion of Jewish suffering, while the active voice is mobilized to describe Christian efforts at protection of Jews and condemnation of racial antisemitism. I am not suggesting that the authors of *Guds vägar* are insensitive to the church's guilt or the Jews' suffering; only that we all have habits of language, subliminally triggered and registered, that continue to betray our best intentions.

<sup>13</sup> *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Lutheran Relations: Key Lutheran Statements*. Augsburg, Minneapolis 1990, 15, 13. Ditmanson also charted a third element, «moral obligation in the references to anti-Semitism» (76). Though his summary statement locates both theological elements in all the documents, his commentary on the Missouri Synod statements of 1977–78 indicates that «[i]nstead of the usual mix of three elements found in varying proportions in other Lutheran statements, the reader finds here only two»; i.e., the revisionist perspective is lacking.

In the section on A Common Heritage, the effort to situate Jesus unquestionably within his Jewish context seems to overstate the extent to which his teaching, and later Christian theology, are central to Jewish self-understanding. The emphasis on a *sola gratia* understanding of Yom Kippur rings somewhat out of tune with the more nuanced tones in which Jews understand forgiveness and renewal. While the sufficiency of God's grace, and the Jew's dependence on it for forgiveness, is certainly thematic to the Days of Awe, the phrasing of *Guds vägar* is not likely to seem familiar to Jewish ears. «God is the one who reconciles and restores ...», «Through mercy God writes off the debt ...», «sin and shame ... are abolished ...», «[a] people, free from guilt, are sent out ...». All these are phrases more familiar from a developed Christian theology of sin and grace.

Rabbi Wayne Dosick, in his *Living Judaism*, concludes his discussion of Yom Kippur with reference to the whole 10-day period of the Days of Awe: «This name demonstrates the awesome task and the eventual joy that characterize Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur—the difficult and painful process of genuine self-evaluation, the honesty of humble repentance, personal growth, hoped-for forgiveness, and the ultimate satisfaction of receiving God's richest blessings». <sup>15</sup> The satisfaction is there, to be sure, but in *Guds vägar* there is nothing of the «awesome task» that accompanies Dosick's journey to «eventual joy». So too in Dosick's subsequent essay on right and wrong, in the concluding section on «at-one-ment», he emphasizes the mutual character of human and divine work in reaching reconciliation: «When we know the difference between right and wrong, when we honestly admit our mistakes and our transgressions, when we repent, seek and hear forgiveness, we <get right with God>. We restore balance to our lives, bring peace to our hearts and quiet calm to our souls». <sup>16</sup> Even that joyous moment of hearing God's forgiveness for Dosick is not without human participation: «How do we hear forgiveness from God? ... when we have *changed*

*enough* not to commit the same transgression again, or at least to be immediately aware and repentant if we make the same mistake again». <sup>17</sup> Not only does Jewish practice underscore the importance of seeking human reconciliation before approaching God for forgiveness, the Yom Kippur service itself begins with a prayer (*Kol Nidre*) that anticipates the broken vows that will begin to accumulate as soon as Yom Kippur has ended—or perhaps even during the service itself.

Dosick points to the weighty responsibilities and profound cautions that a person carries forward in the peaceful heart and quiet, calm soul that has heard forgiveness. That does not make the forgiveness less powerful or thorough, any more than the Christian emphasis on freedom, release, joy, and the prevenience of grace makes it frivolous. But to erase the distinctions in emphasis and theological culture that mark Judaism and Christianity is neither respectful nor constructive. In the voice of the Jewish neighbor, in the testimony of the Jewish faithful, can we hear God's voice with a different accent? From a theological culture nurtured on the underside and in the margins of a dominant Christendom, can we draw resources and insights to which we have heretofore been blinded? Only if we are careful to listen and to receive as we develop the patterns of our new theology. If, as *Guds vägar* rightly asserts, «[Jesus] relates to, and develops, in word and deed, the Jewish motif of atonement and forgiveness», <sup>18</sup> Judaism has also related to and developed that motif from the first century to our own. And Christianity has its own heritage developing the motif beyond what Jesus did. The distances between these paths of development are as important to our new task as the recognition of how often they lie parallel to one another.

### III.

Notwithstanding the cautions just voiced, there is much of value that *Guds vägar* will stimulate in our efforts to craft theology for the new day that has dawned and in which we will live. A few

<sup>15</sup> *Living Judaism*. HarperCollins, San Francisco 1995, 138.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, 146.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, 143, italics in the original.

<sup>18</sup> *A Common Heritage*, paragraph 8.

observations regarding several of those stimuli will bring these reflections to a close.

The centrality of both the section and the idea of God's Secret—the mystery that lies at the heart of religious experience—offers a welcome humility in a field more often known for its bold claims and, as it were, dogmatic assertions. Here the authors rely directly on Stendahl and his reading of Paul in Romans 11, resorting to doxology when theology has reached the limit of its ken.<sup>19</sup> That which is «ineffably sublime» about God at the very least opens up the space in which the (post-)modern faithful can entertain theologically that pluralism to which human religious diversity seems to point us.<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Ehrenpreis has captured well, in the lines quoted in *Guds vägar*, the power of humility in our interfaith encounters.

Yet the positive value of mystery as a building block of theology has clear limits. Ehrenpreis affirms the mystery as one that «is difficult for outsiders to grasp». Even while granting that it is «difficult for [insiders] to explain», he leans on mystery primarily to engender respect for faiths not one's own and appreciation for those who are willing and able to open up some aspect of those faiths to us. He does not develop the notion that mystery is *per se* a primary theological virtue, in the way that *Guds vägar* lifts it up. Whether «we cannot speak dogmatically on issues where the statements of the New Testament are wholly or partly open to different interpretations»<sup>21</sup> remains a challenging proposition, also in arenas well beyond the reach of Christian-Jewish relations. As a hermeneutical principle, it leaves a startling range of Christian faith entirely beyond the reach of dogmatics.

Nor is it clear how the reliance on mystery extricates us from the challenge of understanding covenant in either its biblical or its theological role. There are multiple covenants por-

trayed in Scripture, even within the Torah alone. Any understanding of Judaism in itself must render at least an implicit account of the relationship of these covenants to one another. It may be God's secret to know why there are various covenants, but God's people cannot await the final revelation before deciding how to act in relation to God and those others who are implicated in and by the covenant. In that decision, we necessarily imply a particular relationship among the covenants. We can be more explicit and articulate about it, or less so, but we cannot avoid it. *Guds vägar* leads us forward to be more articulate when it asserts that «belief in the new covenant and its promises does not imply the conclusion that God has annulled his covenant with the Jewish people»,<sup>22</sup> that «Jesus Christ established a covenant»,<sup>23</sup> and that Paul's view, that God's covenants with Jews and Gentiles «are fundamentally one organic unit», «does not remove all tension between Jewish and Christian traditions».<sup>24</sup>

Jews and Christians today face a substantial challenge in finding the appropriate place in which to speak together of the land of biblical Israel and the state of modern Israel. The importance of this issue is clearly recognized by the authors of *Guds vägar*, and some of its most difficult aspects are on display. Indeed, the document explicitly prescinds from discussing Zionism and the State of Israel because of the «theological context» it has established, despite having rightly acknowledged that the issue «for many Jews ... has a theological dimension».<sup>25</sup> Might it not be that the Jews' «overwhelming experiences» of «exile and alienation»<sup>26</sup> could find a sympathetic partner for dialogue about homeland and security precisely among those who would say with Augustine that they are restless until finding rest in God? Perhaps, too, a deeper exploration of Christian themes of alienation, albeit historically quite dissimilar from the Jews', would lead us to question whether Jews «could live a satisfactory Jewish life»<sup>27</sup> in

<sup>19</sup> Krister Stendahl, *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995, 7; *idem*, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and Guide*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1984, 223, 243f.

<sup>20</sup> See the author's «Christ Alone, the Hidden God, and Lutheran Exclusivism», *Word and World* 11:2 (Winter 1991) 190–198.

<sup>21</sup> God's Secret, paragraph 4.

<sup>22</sup> God's Covenants, paragraph 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Idem*, paragraph 5.

<sup>25</sup> The Land, paragraphs 3 & 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Idem*, paragraph 2.

diaspora; apart from noting more carefully the several annual sighs for «next year in Jerusalem», we could ask ourselves whether a Christian life apart from church or heaven or our own spiritual homeland could ever be called «satisfactory». In our further struggle to come to grips with the issue of land, surely we will also need to include reflection on Muslim solidarity with this same land and the place of all its inhabitants and refugees, from every generation, in its future. On these issues, our new theology has only begun to take meaningful shape.

With its consideration of *The Christian Witness*, *Guds vägar* tackles a central challenge of our new era. Christological confession, which underlies the distinctive witness of Christians, clearly «lies outside the framework of Jewish faith»<sup>28</sup> and historically has been the well-spring of Christianity's anti-Jewish animus. Nearly every phrase and image from the church's Christological catalogue is tainted with an anti-Jewish record. To its very heart, the Christological tradition is challenged by the church's recent affirmations of the enduring validity of God's covenant with the Jews. As the Christian Scholars Group on Jewish-Christian Relations, working under the sponsorship of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College, said in point #6 of its 2002 state-of-the-field summary, «A Sacred Obligation»: «Affirming God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian understandings of salvation ... If Jews, who do not share our faith in Christ, are in a saving covenant with God, then Christians need new ways of understanding the universal significance of Christ».<sup>29</sup>

Several of the phrases in this section of *Guds vägar* make plain the scope of the challenge. When we say that «*already* the Old Testament scriptures bear witness»,<sup>30</sup> is it to Jesus, and/or to the Messiah, and do we imply that those

scriptures made their witness to Jesus as Messiah before the resurrection and the shaping of the New Testament witness? The incarnation and its relationship to the Trinity, portrayed as «God's eternal Son became human in Jesus so that we, through him, may know God himself»,<sup>31</sup> begs the question that plagued the community of John the Gospeler: what is the relationship of the one that Jesus called Father to the God of Israel? How do we affirm that «Jesus confirms the old tradition» (of Judaism) in regard to reconciliation, in that «he himself becomes the sacrifice of reconciliation»,<sup>32</sup> when the old tradition explicitly negates the necessity of any human sacrifice? When we affirm «that Christ fulfilled the biblical promises»,<sup>33</sup> what do we mean by fulfillment, and which promises are in view, and for whom is he the fulfillment? Will «a deeper knowledge of Jewish faith [be] likely to bring us closer to Jesus himself»,<sup>34</sup> when we now affirm that one faithful response of Jews (who know Judaism best) is to speak their «no» to the Christian claims about Jesus? In order to come closer to God is it necessary to find something that will bring us closer to Jesus? If we say that God's ways are «ultimately beyond the grasp of humans»,<sup>35</sup> do we reject the classical incarnational claim that *finitum capax infiniti*?

*Guds vägar* has the courage to set these questions before us, in its efforts to speak of the distinctive Christian witness after the classical forms of that witness have been laid bare with their supersessionist marks. It knows enough to affirm that the *Realpolitik* of intergroup dynamics has as much to do with centuries of Jewish-Christian animosity as it does with any theological formulation. Yet the animosity has left its stamp on the theology, and the theology has become complicit in the animosity. Until the courage of this document is met by an equal courage that finds the tools to reshape our theology and the will to teach it afresh, the promise that is here for Jews and Christians will remain only one more pious—and passing—hope.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *The Christian Witness*, paragraph 1.

<sup>29</sup> «A Sacred Obligation», <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/displayItem.php?id=986>, also available at [http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/partners/CSG/Sacred\\_Obligation.htm](http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/partners/CSG/Sacred_Obligation.htm).

<sup>30</sup> *The Christian Witness*, paragraph 1 (italics added).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Idem*, paragraph 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



The final line of *Guds vägar* encourages «worship of the one God who renews everything». Both the freshness and the challenge that are embodied in its message may indeed best be met by Jews and Christians, each in their own ways, humbly seeking guidance and offering praise in prayer. The Church of Sweden has brought its long and venerable heritage of inter-

faith work and reflection to a worthy plateau in this document, and has set the course for further advance in the difficult questions it sets forth both implicitly and explicitly. May it be God's will to bring these efforts to fruitful expression, and to draw many more into the stream that seeks to live as one people of God with all those who know God's ways.

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## IN MEMORIAM

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### Dorothee Sölle 1929–2003

Den tyska teologen Dorothee Sölle gick ur tiden den 28 april 2003, sjuttiotre år gammal. Sölle betraktas som en av 1900-talets mest betydelsefulla teologer. Hon är den mest lästa teologen i Tyskland.

Genom Sölle kom teologi ut på det offentliga torget. Det skedde alltsedan 1965 med *Stellvertretung* och 1968 med *Phantasie und Gehorsam*, en kristen olydnadsteologi. 1971 följde *Politische Theologie* i kontexten av politiska nattböner i Köln. Sölle uppträdde flitigt på kyrkodagar och var en ofta hörd röst i massmedier. Utgångspunkten för hennes teologiska tänkande och praxis var det hon kallade «trons nollpunkt»: Auschwitz som Guds död i historien.

Den teologiska tematiken gällde ett brett fält där Sölle satte tydliga accenter. Den gällde bibeltolkning som *relectura* utifrån de fattigas perspektiv, Jesu Kristi befriande existens, Gud som treenig gemenskap och solidaritet, ekumenik som gemensam rättvisekamp för människor och miljö. Ecklesiologi utvecklade hon som radikal kyrkokritik. Befrielsesteologier och feministteologi blev allt mer centrala i hennes författarskap.

Sölles teologi hjälpte många sökande att finna befriande drag i spiritualiteten hos kristna och andra trostraditioner. Under senare år riktade hon sin bibeltolkande kritik främst åt ett flertal håll som för henne var mest angelägna för kontextuell teologi: den ekonomiska globaliseringens människoförakt, det postmoderna samhällets och kyrkornas kris, exkluderande och marginalisering av folkmassor i tredje världen, kvinnors förtryck under patriarkala system, naturförstörelsen och behovet av ett ekologiskt försvar som Guds rättvisekrav.

Ett antal av Sölles böcker finns översatta till svenska, många fler till danska. Under några besök med föredrag i Lund på Teologiska institutionen och Pastoralinstitutet väckte hon stor uppmärksamhet och debatt. Svensk teologisk forskning, avhandlingsarbeten och studentuppsatser har fokuserat på olika aspekter som hon bearbetade i mer än trettio teologiska böcker och poetiska verk.

*Manfred Hofmann*