
developed by an intellectual minority beginning, perhaps, in the early second century CE. It was an ideal vociferously – or, depending on our degree of empathy for figures like Chrysostom, perhaps plaintively – urged in the fourth”. See Paula Frederickson, “What Parting of Ways?”, in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *The Ways that Never Parted* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 63.

23. Although without the more negative (and romanticized) connotations that “rituals” or “cultic practices” has tended to take on through opposition to organised religion.

24. See Adam H. Becker, “Beyond the Spatial and Temporal Lines; Questioning the Parting of Ways Outside the Roman Empire”, in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds), *The Ways that Never Parted*, 373.

25. See Daniel Boyarin, “Justin Matyr Invents Judaism,” in *Church History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 427-462.

26. And increasingly such groups cannot be thought of as simply “aberrations” or “heresies”.

27. Although not ethnic in the modern sense, and Hellenisation was as much philosophical as ethnic. Perhaps the word “worldview” would suffice, although without its more individualistic resonances.

28. Daniel Boyarin, “Semantic Differences: or ‘Judaism’ / ‘Christianity’,” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 68.

29. The horror of various modes of Christian anti-Judaism is actually extended when we acknowledge how an essentialised Judaism was inscribed onto Jews, and how any acknowledgement of particularities was

thereby avoided. Not only was there the obvious violence, but beneath this a secondary ontological violence; one that continually unified and essentialised difference into a singular religious Judaism. The single and universal signifier “the Jew”, effectively erased the any particular characteristics whatsoever, thereby removing any basis for identification, and propelling a level of demonisation otherwise unimaginable.

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Victor Lipski presents a personal perspective on

Jesus, justice and Judaism¹

The Lipski family history, insofar as I know it, started with my Russian grandfather’s parents. They were Jewish and, in freely giving assent to Jesus Christ as their Lord, converted to Orthodox Christianity in the Crimean Peninsula, in Imperial Russia.

Two of my Russian grandfather’s Jewish uncles became Russian Orthodox monks. One had a scholarly bent and, being fluent in biblical Hebrew, became one of the translators of *Tanakh* (the Jewish Scriptures) from Hebrew into Russian. Some of his work was included in the modern Russian Bible that was published before World War One. I don’t know which part he translated, but it would have been fitting if it were Jeremiah.

In the 1920s under Lenin and Stalin, most monasteries were disbanded, many of their buildings and libraries destroyed, and many monks imprisoned. Both my great, great uncles were sent to GuLAG prisons in Siberia for their faith, where they were forced to live for at least a decade. The scholarly one spent ten years in prison, and then was released to internal exile for five

more years (internal exile was Stalin’s method of giving freedom to people while ensuring they’d cause no trouble: this great, great uncle was given freedom to live anywhere he wanted as long as it was in Siberia). Then he was allowed to return home, but the weight of Siberia took its toll and he died some time after World War Two ended.

My mother’s Jewish grandfather had been a manager on an aristocratic estate; he also served as the village priest when he wasn’t working or inebriated. (In the Orthodox Church of the time village priests were educated mainly in liturgy, so any willing man who could sing on key could serve as a priest; habitual intoxication was no impediment to such Christian service!) Under Joseph Stalin when the estate was collectivised into a socialist workers’ paradise he refused to work for Communists, so the family was almost immediately plunged into poverty. The poverty was material on the one hand and intellectual and spiritual on the other: the Party aparatchiks confiscated the family’s 3,000 volume library that included

translations of great literature from the classics, as well as great works by English, French and German writers; there were also first editions of Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and others. When the village church building was taken to serve the Communist Party’s purposes he began to perform church services in their home for anyone courageous enough to attend. And he performed baptisms, Christian weddings and funerals whenever requested.

There were three developments that strike me as curious:

First, the communists regularly asked him to return to his previous position – without success. But he always agreed to work as a foreman and labourer at planting and harvest times whenever his stamina and excellent organisational skills were needed, and according to my great-grandmother, the work was always finished with minimal waste, and on time insofar as it depended on him. This was very rare in Crimea throughout the Communist era.

Secondly, though repeatedly warned to cease, he was never

punished for leading worship and for his other Christian services. By the mid-1930s all other priests active in worship in that part of Crimea were imprisoned or leading lives in GuLAG splendour. By the 1940s he performed burials in villages and towns as far as 30 kilometres away. Though there were many threats, his services were never disrupted. Someone, perhaps on earth, as well as in heaven, had a protective eye on him.

Thirdly, he almost stopped drinking. My great-grandmother wrote to my mother in the 1950s that once, sometimes twice, a year he'd binge drink for an evening, and then not touch alcohol again for months and months. I can't explain this, except in terms of recent moral and psychological theory. Gaylord Noyce, a professor at Yale Divinity School was a leading thinker on the theory that many psychological problems and unhealthy dependencies develop or become more serious by the refusal to make appropriate moral choices and by the neglect of moral goodness (virtue). This great-grandfather made a series of small courageous moral choices, choosing to incarnate the beliefs he had come to consider most true. However deficient his understanding of his faith in Christ might have been under the last Tsar, when he had to choose between a relatively secure and somewhat comfortable life and faithfulness to Christ, he chose Christ. In his work, he chose passive non-cooperation with the communist regime, while doing all he could to help his people, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim or atheist; and he did so because he believed in the God and Father of Jesus Christ. That takes courage, and it made him a visibly better person than he would have been had he chosen otherwise.

So my mother's father was Jewish by race. He married a Gentile, and they had two daughters. His wife died when my mother was two years old. By that time the communist government was well into a programme of destabilising families and other social institutions in order to increase the relative strength of the Party and its organs. So my

grandfather, an accountant who was wanted elsewhere, was sent to work in Ukraine, and my mother and her sister were placed in an orphanage; but too many younger children arrived, and after a few years they were sent out to be cared for by aunts and uncles, none of whom wanted them for more than several months. They were moved around from one relative to another for several years, until her Jewish grandparents, seeing they were emaciated and ill, took them in permanently. By that time, Russia was in the grips of a state-imposed reconstruction of agriculture, which resulted in a famine of unprecedented proportions. As many as 16 million people died of hunger because during the years of 1929–1937 there were widespread, humanly-caused shortages of food. For several summers, in the weeks right before harvest, they had to eat boiled grass or go hungry. So they ate grass. Several villagers in extremity killed their feeblest children. This was not uncommon during this period throughout the USSR.

When my mother was sixteen she went to the Crimean Polytechnic Institute in Simferopol to train as a history teacher. During her first term the German Army invaded Crimea, captured her and her sister and deported them to Germany to work on a farm. En route to Germany my mother and her sister were treated pretty much the way invading armies, intent on establishing their dominance and their victims' compliance through fear, treat women.

In Germany they, like thousands of others, became captive labourers (that's the euphemism for slavery that my parents and their friends use amongst themselves). Their experience there was in accord with Nazi policy, which intended to resurrect the practices of imperial Rome, where Slavic people were slaves. She spent three and a half years working in farm fields; her home was the loft of an unheated barn, but her masters usually fed and clothed them adequately.

It was there that she met my father. The story of his life, from his capture in September 1939 to the end

of the war is one of prolonged degradation and trauma but it has little to do with today's theme of Jesus, Justice and Judaism, so I'll skip it. My parents were married shortly after the war, in part because the Russian army and NKVD were forcing all Soviet citizens back to the Soviet Union. So Mom and Dad married, partly because the marriage of a Pole and of a Russian would create complications and delays in returning her to Russia, delays that would help them decide on their future. Although Dad was mesmerised by Mom's mysterious, eastern beauty for decades, it wasn't a marriage made in heaven, although over the years it got better. But my sisters and I agree that both Mom and Dad eventually developed beauty in their characters. One of the prophets of Israel promises that God will give his people beauty in exchange for ashes. He does.

After the war they were moved to a refugee camp, where some Russian Baptist missionaries, funded by American, British, and Canadian churches, provided for their physical needs, and preached the gospel. This combination was critical to their conversion. Those who needed clothing and food and medical care got it, and those who wanted got New Testaments. One missionary even had a complete Russian Bible, containing *Tanakh*. Somewhere in it was the work of my great, great uncle, the fruits of his sacrifice. It contributed to the restoration of these downtrodden, shattered people, my parents and their friends, who assented to Jesus and thus, by becoming Christians, finally began to come out of pits of destruction into God's light.

Application to Jewish-Christian concerns

In reflecting on my family's story there are several concepts that I think can help us Christians in our relationships with Jews and Judaism. I'll use a verse in Micah 6, closely echoed by Jesus in Matt. 23, to organise these.

Do justice

One workable definition of justice is

“right public action”. My Jewish relatives’ lives, and my parents’ lives would have been better if Christians had cared to treat them rightly, had cared enough to show them a basic justice. In my parents’ case, it was Lutherans and Catholics who deprived them of justice to devastating effect. They have no doubt that the justice shown to my parents by the Allies in 1945-49 met some very basic needs – mere dignity, respect as human beings – that they deserved to have met.

Love kindness

The Allies, Red Cross and a Church group provided the medical treatment, warmish hostel rooms, health-giving food, and clothing; and church groups provided for their spiritual and emotional needs that permitted them to think in a difficult situation about life’s purposes, emigration from Germany, and the possibility of a relationship with God.

Walk humbly with God

Baptists, not Lutherans or Catholics, modelled this, and proclaimed Jesus, the humble walker *par excellence*, as the Messiah. This is important: known Lutherans or Roman Catholics would not have received a minute’s attention from my parents after the war. A Lutheran family owned my mother; a Roman Catholic man owned and through negligence almost killed my father, who up to his capture had been a practicing Catholic. I think it was important, too, that this particular group of Baptist missionaries were Mennonite-type communitarians and pacifists: they saw the Church as a distinct believing community, following Jesus by seeking to live out his example. They introduced my parents to the hard discipline of walking humbly with the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jeremiah, Peter, John, Paul and all Israel.

It’s a discipline to which we Christians are to submit in our relations with Judaism generally and with the Jewish people we have been given to know. Paul Morris has indicated that Christians, especially in the 20th century, have made it almost impossible for Jews to

seriously consider faith in Jesus. Mike Mawson has indicated how from a very early period in Church history, the Church and many of its leaders allowed themselves to be used for the purposes of those in power, overlooking the call of Jesus for the Church to be like him in its dealings with others. We cannot afford to ignore these two factors in our relationship with Jewish people.

And so, I’d like to suggest two things that might help Christians to walk humbly with God and with regard to Judaism:

Firstly, I think the Church should give up all notions of having replaced Judaism in God’s scheme for the world. Surely if the Church were the new Israel, intended to replace the Jews in God’s purposes, Judaism would have died out long ago, as did the Amalekites and Edomites. I’d like to suggest that we imagine the Church as St Paul did in Romans 11: grafted into Israel. We should think of the Church as ingrafted Israel – and that image should never be far from our consciousness as we seek to comprehend God’s purposes for the Jewish people. One consequence of such an understanding of the Church’s place in God’s scheme, is that we would stop arguing with Judaism about which of us is the children of God. Sibling rivalry in the Lipski family is at least as unpleasant and unseemly as it is in the Morris family: and that applies to both of the large families who rely on *Tanakh* for their understanding of God.

Secondly, it’s time the Church did more than apologise to the Jews for our cruelties to them, and began to repent. To repent means to change, to turn away from past practices. A good beginning to repentance is to pray for God’s mercy on the Church, for we need forgiveness precisely because of our treatment of the Jewish people. Lest we think this isn’t asking for too much in light of the Church’s anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, let me explain why this hard discipline is important: it’s important because in one sense, prayer is the most difficult activity of a believer. Prayer is God’s word that we return to him, it is the faithful repetition of those words of God that

are appropriate to the circumstances we are facing. For individuals, this means we often must pray what we would prefer not to pray. It probably means diminishing that proportion of our prayers that are concerned with our own well-being such as good progress in our careers. For individuals it may mean praying for holy patience and humble courage as personal characteristics. For congregations it may mean minimising requests for the things that will give us societal approval, which is a powerful temptation to the Church in New Zealand today. For congregations it means praying for what is good for the Church and the world as God considers goodness. It will probably mean paying more attention to those places in the world where there is a need for God’s grace – and praying that that grace be manifested. Doing so with regard to Judaism would be an important step towards a fuller repentance. It might be right for us to pray, “Father, forgive us, for we did not know what we were doing.”

Let me also make it absolutely clear that if prayer is the repetition to God of God’s words to us, then Christian leaders and churches have a weighty responsibility to study God’s word, to understand it, and to give assent to the Jewishness of Jesus and the Gospel. By God’s grace repentance in prayer may in time produce the necessary humility that would make us useful to God in respect of our Jewish brothers and sisters. We serve and worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the One who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – through whom, and only through whom, all Israel is to be saved.

Endnotes

1. This article was originally presented as a response to Paul Morris’s address on “Jesus, Judaism, and Justice”, the Bible College of New Zealand’s Clyde Vautier Memorial Lecture, 20 October 2004, St John’s in the City, Wellington.

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