

scepticism about truth claims may be regarded as threatening all positions of (religious) commitment. Although many noted postmodernists are Jews, Nazi use of Nietzsche, and Heidegger's support for **Hitler**, lead some to view postmodernism as a dangerous phenomenon; historians like Deborah Lipstadt (b. 1947) trace links between postmodernism's emphases on relativism and deconstruction, and Holocaust denial.

Postmodernism has prompted some thinkers to question essentialist definitions of **religions**, stressing instead their malleability and dynamism. For those who accept this idea, interfaith relations and **dialogue** are transformed. Instead of the modernist approach, which sees 'Jew' and 'Christian' as two separate, readily definable, coherent identities which relate to, but remain discrete from, one another, postmodernist dialogue sees the boundaries between 'Jew' and 'Christian' as fluid and permeable, and emphasises the fact that encounters inevitably lead to changes in self-image, **identity** and practice.

See also **modernity**

MELANIE J. WRIGHT

Post-supersessionism

Post-supersessionism designates not a single viewpoint but a loose and partly conflicting family of theological perspectives that seeks to interpret the central affirmations of Christian faith in ways that do not state or imply the abrogation or obsolescence of God's **covenant** with the Jewish people, that is, in ways that are not supersessionist. Positively expressed, a theology is post-supersessionist if it affirms the present validity of God's covenant with **Israel** as a coherent and indispensable part of the larger body of Christian teaching. Strictly speaking, the term applies to theological viewpoints that emerge out of ecclesiological contexts that once espoused **supersessionism**. Therefore, post-supersessionism should be distinguished from the views of dispensationalist Christian movements that originated in the nineteenth century and continue to enjoy widespread popularity today, even though these latter also affirm in some fashion the present validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people.

The emergence of post-supersessionism was first occasioned by the **Holocaust** and the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland, and has been sustained since then by a growing consensus among Christians that traditional Christian

teaching on the Church's relation to the Jewish people was inherently flawed (see **replacement theology**). Significantly, post-supersessionism has been embraced not only by individual Christians, but by many Christian denominations in North America and Europe, which have incorporated post-supersessionist perspectives in a variety of official teaching documents (e.g. **Vatican II's** statement *Nostra Aetate*). Arguably, therefore, the emergence of post-supersessionism represents the most significant development in Christian teaching on the Jewish people since the second and third centuries, when supersessionism originally solidified as the Church's dominant outlook.

The development of post-supersessionist theology since the 1950s can be divided into three broad stages. A first stage (until 1970) was characterised by historical scholarship (e.g. that of Marcel Simon (1907–86) and James **Parkes**), establishing the fact and extent of **anti-Judaism** in Christian history and by the first steps to affirm the unrevoked character of God's covenant with the Jewish people (e.g. *Nostra Aetate*). The systematic connection between supersessionism and other Christian doctrines remained relatively unexplored. During a second stage (roughly 1970–85) theologians sought to explore the systematic connections between supersessionism and other Christian beliefs, concluding that supersessionism could not be corrected without radically rethinking virtually the whole body of Christian divinity, especially the Church's **Christology** (Rosemary Ruether (b. 1936), Franklin Littell (b. 1917), Alice (b. 1923) and Roy Eckardt (1918–98)). This period was dominated by a broadly liberal theological ethos that tended to assume that post-supersessionist gains could be achieved only by a corresponding willingness to jettison or minimise traditional Christian affirmations, for example that **Jesus** is the Christ, was raised from the dead and so on. A third period (1985 to date) has been characterised by the increasing prominence of what some have called a **postliberal** approach to the problem of supersessionism, as represented by theologians such as George Lindbeck (b. 1923), Berthold Klappert (b. 1939) and Robert Jenson (b. 1930). (Arguably, the important figure of Paul van Buren (1924–98) straddles the second and third stages.) Typically, a 'postliberal' post-supersessionism affirms the systematically entrenched character of traditional

supersessionism, but holds that a post-supersessionist theology can be successfully developed by reinterpreting rather than rejecting or minimising such traditional Christian affirmations as, for example, Jesus' Messiahship, the **incarnation**, the **Trinity** and so on.

See also **biblical theology**; **recognition theology**

R. KENDALL SOULEN

Prayer

Human means of seeking communication with God by way of petition, confession or praise. In **Hebrew** to pray is *hitpalel*, a reflexive meaning 'to work on oneself'. It well describes the inner psychological need to pray. In Deut. 11.13 we read 'serve him with all your heart'. Says Midrash *Sifre*: 'What service is with the heart? It is prayer.' The Jewish emphasis on prayer as a duty can be contrasted with prayer for one's own needs, as emphasised by **Jesus**. 'I tell you, then, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours' (Mark 11.24). The structure of Jewish prayer services develops the imagery of the worshipper approaching God directly; Roman Catholic tradition encourages prayer to God alone, but also mediation through the action of Christ, and intercession through the action of **Mary**, the **angels** and the **saints**. The basic unit of prayer as developed by the rabbis is the *berakhah* or **blessing**, an utterance that has power to transform any everyday act into one that acknowledges God's role in the world. Both faiths have developed regular forms of prayer that have grown and changed in parallel to and in contradistinction from each other. In some Christian rites the communicant gives thanks after partaking for the gift of eternal life; a blessing thanking God for eternal life is said in synagogue by each person called to the reading of the **Torah**, after hearing or reading the text. Thus the Jewish worshipper gains life through the reading and quoting of scripture, the Christian worshipper through the body of the living Christ.

MICHAEL HILTON

Prayer of the Faithful see **intercessions**

Prayerbooks see **liturgy**

Preaching

Pulpit discourse, usually in the context of a **worship** service, in which classical religious texts are expounded to address the intellectual or spiritual needs of the listeners. In the pre-modern period, preaching was one of the most important means of mass communication, through which ordinary

people received the ideas they lived by. Many listeners believed that the preacher was actually divinely inspired, speaking the word of God. The representation of Jews and Christians in the sermons of the other could therefore have an enormous effect on the way people thought and behaved.

Among the other roles that he played, **Jesus** of Nazareth was apparently a gifted preacher. No first-century records of Jewish sermons are preserved in internal Jewish sources, so the accounts in the Gospels are an important source for what Jewish preaching was like. The **parables** – a specialty of Jesus – and the novel exposition of a familiar biblical verse, seem to be distinctively homiletical forms of communication.

After the death of Jesus arguably the most important medium of propagating the message that would become Christianity was the spoken word, delivered by believers who travelled throughout the Mediterranean world, addressing assemblies of Jews and others open to hearing about the new faith. The precise forms of their discourse during the first generations are not clear, but they certainly included an exposition of scripture (what Christians began later to call the **Old Testament**) in light of the new reality, instruction in the teachings of Jesus, admonition and rebuke, exhortation and consolation, often framed in familiar Greek rhetorical patterns. This message was often communicated in open competition with Jewish preachers who had no use for the new tidings.

As the hierarchy of the Church crystallised, it became one of the recognised responsibilities of the bishops to instruct their flocks on worship occasions, and stenographers were commissioned to record their words. One of the earliest recorded Christian homilies, *Concerning the Pascha*, attributed to **Melito**, second-century bishop of Sardis, includes a strong condemnation of the Jews for the crime of **deicide**. A far more sustained attack was launched in the late fourth century by one of the most gifted preachers of antiquity, John **Chrysostom**, whose series of sermons attacking Christians in his own church who went to the synagogue to watch Jewish observances not only denied any efficacy or legitimacy to contemporary Jewish worship, but also demonised it. In the sermons of **Augustine of Hippo**, the element of attack is far more subdued. When preaching on Hebrew scripture, his central purpose seems to be

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