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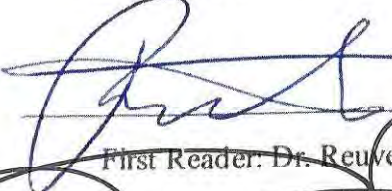
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PIONEERING DOCUMENTS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE:
CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH MILESTONES IN
REACHING OUT TO THE RELIGIOUS OTHER

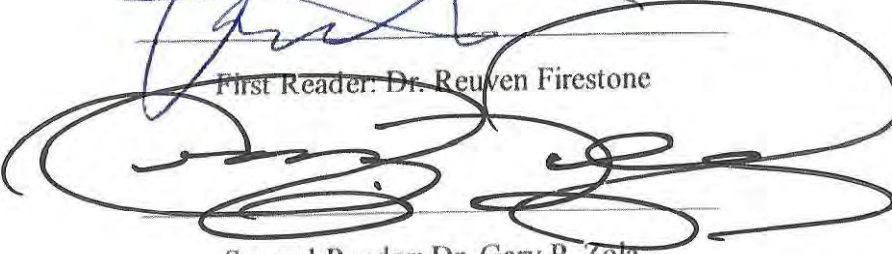
A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
PINES SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

BY
Judith Schindler

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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First Reader: Dr. Reuven Firestone



Second Reader: Dr. Gary P. Zola

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To Chip, Max and Alec

Abstract

Documents of dialogue are authoritative theological statements drafted by Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders and academics, that create an entry point for interfaith reparative work and reconciliation. These statements, first emerging in response to the Holocaust, are issued by one or multiple religious movements and articulate a theological/ideological foundation for positive interreligious engagement. This research examines four pioneering documents of dialogue: the 1945 Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt (Protestant), the 1947 Ten Points of Seelisberg (Jewish/Ecumenical Christian), the 1965 *Nostra Aetate*: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Catholic) and the 2000 *Dabru Emet*: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity (Jewish). These documents address essential issues of guilt, confession, atonement, justice, and offer a transformed theology and vision for the development of educational materials that aim to combat religious prejudices leading to violence and promote teachings that support pluralism and peaceful co-existence. The analysis of these documents, individually and comparatively, demonstrate that these statements can be effective tools for the leadership of a religious community to instruct their own faith community and to be in constructive dialogue with another faith community surrounding critical contemporary interreligious issues. At the same time, the advances these documents aim to achieve are not linear and are often motivated and/or limited by political realities. This study supports the interreligious scholar activist of today who seeks to use their knowledge and religious identity as a springboard for building healing

bridges between faith communities and igniting transformative change so different faiths can work together to promote peace.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction		1
Chapter 1	The Pioneering Protestant Path to Reconciliation: The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt (October, 1945)	21
Chapter 2	The Jewish-Christian Relational Road to Repair: Not With Animosity, but in the Spirit of Reconciliation The Ten Points of Seelisberg (July/August, 1947)	52
Chapter 3	The Catholic Approach to Atonement and a New Era of the Church: <i>Nostra Aetate</i> (October, 1965)	92
Chapter 4	Jewish Voices Speaking to Catholic Change: <i>Nostra Aetate</i> and External Advocacy	144
Chapter 5	Jewish Words of Truth About Christianity: Authored by Four Academics on Non-Jewish Campuses: <i>Dabru Emet</i> (September, 2000)	192
Conclusion		244

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Twenty-One Propositions that serve as organizing framework for Jules Isaacs' <i>Jesus and Israel</i>	266
Appendix B	The Rectification Necessary in Christian Teaching: Eighteen Points	269
Appendix C	Decretum de Iudaeis, (November, 1961)	272
Appendix D	On the Attitude of Catholics Toward Non-Christians and Especially Toward Jews (November 8, 1963)	273
Appendix E	Second Declaration on the Jews and Non-Christians (September 28–29, 1964)	274
Appendix F	Declaration on the Church's Relationship to Non-Christian Religions (November 18, 1964)	275

Appendix G	Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions <i>Nostra Aetate</i> Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965	277
Appendix H	Statement Adopted by the Rabbinical Council of America at the Mid Winter Conference, February 3-5, 1964	280

Introduction

Quoting the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's premise that "civilizations get sick, and their doctors are philosophers," Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah, the Muslim scholar and leader in interfaith dialogue, asserts that religious scholars "must descend from their ivory towers" to diagnose and treat societal diseases.¹

Today, we are witnessing a world at war with dozens of armed conflicts across the globe. Violence relating to those wars is stoking religious-based hate — seeping onto city streets, university campuses, and even onto soccer fields.² With eighty-five percent of the world's population identifying with a religion including nearly 2.4 billion Christians and 1.9 billion Muslims,³ religious leaders play a critical role in promoting pluralism and peace.

¹ Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah (1935 -), is a global thought leader, respected as a Muslim scholar by "all of the Muslim sects and schools." He is currently the president of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, and he has worked as an activist since 2013. In 2016, he convened three hundred Islamic scholars, politicians and activists, joined by a small group of interfaith observers in Marrakesh for a summit leading to the Marrakesh Declaration on the rights of religious minorities in Muslim majority countries. "His Eminence Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah," *The Muslim 500: The World's Most Influential Muslims*, accessed May 1, 2022, <https://themuslim500.com/profiles/abdullah-bin-bayyah/>. Susan Hayward, "Understanding and Extending the Marrakesh Declaration in Policy and Practice," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 392, September 2016, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR392-Understanding-and-Extending-the-Marrakesh-Declaration-in-Policy-and-Practice.pdf>.

² Mike Corder, "Israeli soccer fans were attacked in Amsterdam. The violence was condemned as antisemitic," *Associated Press*, November 8, 2024, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/maccabi-tel-aviv-amsterdam-violence-protests-palestinian-bcea212281f682098c4c77ef552af5f1>.

³ "Religions by Country 2024," *World Population Review*, accessed December 19, 2024, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/religion-by-country>.

In the mid-1990's, American political scientist and Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington⁴ coined the term "clash of civilizations" to advance his theory that wars in the post-Cold War period would be based on cultural and religious identities replacing the politics of ideology. Yet that clash is not inevitable. Despite the tragedy of September 11, Huntington's concept of irreconcilable differences as the basis for future conflict was rejected by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, who introduced a new paradigm to approach religious coexistence: the dignity of difference. Sacks argued that the shared reverence for one God mitigates against Huntington's view of an unescapable clash: "a God of your side as well as mine must be a God of justice who stands above both of us, teaching us to make space for one another, to hear one another's claims, and to resolve them equitably."⁵

This paradigmatic shift from interreligious conquest, conversion, or mere toleration to a deeper level of acceptance and inclusion is anchored first not by action but by words – by religious ideological statements called documents of dialogue. These declarations grounded in philosophy and theology have been drafted by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars and religious leaders from immediately following the Holocaust to the present day. Often motivated by political realities, the authors look inward to provide direction and motivation for reparative action, to build healing bridges

⁴ Samuel Huntington (1927-2008), an American academic and political scientist, taught as a professor at Harvard University for more than 50 years. and was director of Harvard's Center of International Affairs.

⁵ Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (1948-2020) was Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013. Rabbi Sacks received his rabbinic ordination in 1976 from Jews' College and Yeshiva Etz Chaim in London and held professorships at Yeshiva University, New York University, and King's College London. Jonathan Sacks, "The Dignity of Difference: How To Avoid the Clash of Civilisations," (The 7th Annual Templeton Lecture on Religion and World Affairs, July 3, 2002).

between faith communities, and to ignite transformative change so different faiths can live together in peace. The political pressures that frequently propel these documents into creation, can come from internal denominational issues, interdenominational tension, and ever more frequently, arise from a sensitivity to the image of a denomination/religion in the eyes of the larger world.

From 1945 until 2025, religious communities have convened, at times as sole denominational or single religious bodies and, at other times, as ecumenical or interfaith associations, to foster coexistence with different faith communities. Over eight decades, Jewish, Christian and, more recently, Muslim scholars and religious bodies/institutions have used their knowledge in the activist arena to promote peaceful interreligious relations.

Following World War II and in the aftermath of the Holocaust, international lawmaking and judicial preventive and restorative measures emerged to address the atrocities that had been perpetrated and the moral failures that enabled them. Among the post-Holocaust measures to create accountability, advance justice, and prevent future genocides were international, domestic, and military tribunals starting in 1945 and leading to the creation of the International Criminal Court that exists today; the creation of the United Nations (1945); the Nuremberg Code (1947), which created the first blueprint for principles of subjects' right in medical research (informed consent); the Nuremberg Principles (1947), which designated what constitutes a war crime; the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (1948); the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the establishment of the State of

Israel (1948) providing a homeland and refuge for Jews globally; and the UN Refugee Convention (1951) protecting those fleeing persecution.⁶

Correspondingly, some leaders of the religious communities in Europe and on the worldwide stage, convened to confront and redress the detrimental role religion had played by fertilizing the soil in which the seeds of Nazi ideology could so comfortably take root. Some faith communities began to acknowledge their guilt and complicity in the horrors of the Holocaust as their religious leaders crafted documents calling for atonement and accountability. They wrestled with teachings that had been misinterpreted to support religious and cultural supremacy and over the centuries had frequently led to violence.

The bold activism of a few individuals courageously compelling reluctant churches to engage in intense introspection and issue public proclamations of culpability calling for change would, over the course of decades, lead to a massive sea-change of religious leaders and institutions willing to engage in self-criticism and call publicly for accountability and activism. Eventually a new genre of literature emerged which can be categorized as documents of interfaith dialogue. These are statements of national and international religious organizations, orders, leaders and scholars reflecting on guilt, atonement, theology, justice, education, dialogue, and cooperation aimed at creating a safer, more peaceful world of coexistence.

⁶ "A Changed World: The Continuing Impact of the Holocaust," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20120405-aftermath-brochure.pdf>.

Surprisingly, hundreds of documents of dialogue would be created (a significant number stimulated by the Holocaust), each reflecting an evolving religious self-understanding in relation to other faiths. The most notable is the Roman Catholic Church Vatican II's 1965 *Nostra Aetate* Declaration, a watershed document articulating a new understanding of the relationship of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions. While it addresses Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, the heart of the message, and the motivating factor for its creation, was its statement denouncing antisemitism and withdrawing the accusation that Jews of Jesus' day or today are collectively responsible for Jesus' crucifixion.

While volumes have been written on *Nostra Aetate* (most notably with each milestone anniversary over the 60 years since its publication) and the transformed lens through which Catholics understand the Gospels and the Jewish people, many documents from other denominations and faiths are worthy of academic attention to guide interfaith engagement.

A close analysis of four pioneering documents penned by visionary leaders over the course of five and a half decades and affirmed by authoritative representatives of their respective faith communities can deepen an appreciation of their evolution and influence and reveal the critical and positive role these documents can have in strengthening society. This in-depth study of the 1945 Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt (Protestant), the 1947 Ten Points of Seelisberg (Jewish/Ecumenical Christian), the 1965 *Nostra Aetate*: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Catholic) and the 2000 *Dabru Emet*: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity (Jewish) and

comparative analysis of all four documents provides today's interfaith leaders with tools for approaching their bridgebuilding work and globally amplifying their vision and impact. This research will additionally examine the intersection between these documents and the ways in which the documents themselves are in dialogue with one another.

Dialogue is a conversation between two or more people that entails an exchange of ideas. The word "dia" comes from the Greek meaning "through, by, because of, for the sake of" and also has the meaning "by the instrumentality of, on account of." It reflects "the means by which an action is performed."⁷ The word "logue" comes from the Latin meaning "word, study, thought or reason" in spoken or written form. Hence, dialogue can take place either through spoken or written communication and that action provides us with an effective tool that has the potential of bringing about stronger relations between the two entities.

The word "interfaith" involves the interaction between those of different faith traditions or religions. While the interfaith movement was born in 1893 at the first World Parliament of Religions bringing together representatives from ten different religions, the word "interfaith" itself did not become popular and enter standard English-language dictionaries until 1955. In the early years, other terms were used to describe activities engaging multiple faiths — "good will," "better understanding," "inter-religious," "tri-faith," and "brotherhood."⁸

⁷ "Dia," *Strong's Lexicon, Bible Hub*, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1223.htm>.

⁸ A Parliament of Religions was convened at the Columbian Exhibition which took place in Chicago in 1893. The Parliament brought together representatives of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism,

The word “ecumenism” deriving from the Greek *oikoumené*, means "of or from the whole world." While the term in its narrowest sense and in its present day meaning connotes pan-Christian unity (among Catholics, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox), there have been times historically, especially during Vatican II, when it was used to include Jews and those of other faiths. Interfaith, on the other hand, involves the many varieties of Christianity as well as non-Christian traditions.⁹

There is some debate over whether the disputations of medieval times constituted dialogue. American theologian, James Heft, in the introduction to the book *Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, categorizes polemics as dialogue. Heft posits, “Interreligious dialogue is not new. One prominent form over the centuries has been religious disputation, in which religious thinkers aimed to prove their opponents wrong and convince them to convert to the ‘winner’s’ religion. Carefully structured arguments between Jews and Christians, Christians and Muslims, and Muslims and Jews aimed to discredit the religious claims of the opponent.”¹⁰

As interreligious dialogue has evolved so has its definition. American Professor of comparative theology, Catherine Cornille, who edited *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, narrows the definition to mean a positive exchange: “Since the middle of the twentieth century the notion of dialogue has become increasingly

Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. See Lance J. Sussman, "Toward Better Understanding": The Rise of the Interfaith Movement in America and the Role of Rabbi Isaac Landman," *The American Jewish Archives Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1982), 35-36.

⁹ On ecumenicism, see footnotes 166 and 203.

¹⁰ James Heft, Reuven Firestone, and Omid Safi, ed., *Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

common in describing or prescribing the proper relationship between religions. Rather than competing with one another over territories, converts or claims, religions have generally come to adopt a more conciliatory and constructive attitude toward one another... The category of inter-religious dialogue may then be used to refer to any form or degree of constructive engagement between religious traditions.”¹¹ Cornille defines dialogue as positive and constructive in contrast to the “neutral study of religion” or “more traditional apologetics.”¹²

Documents of dialogue are their own genre of literature. They are positive, constructive documents rooted in the religious ideology and theology that aspire to influence liturgy, preaching and teaching — thus guiding hearts and minds of religious followers.

As each of the three classic monotheistic faiths —Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — were birthed and matured, their communities of followers developed guides and boundaries regulating their relationship with the other tribes and communities with which they interacted. The emergence and canonization of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur’an and their subsequent and respective realms of religious literature define the parameters for living those faiths.

Throughout the centuries spanning medieval and modern times, the relationship between the three faiths would, at times, know peaceful coexistence, and, at other times,

¹¹ Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013), xii.

¹² Catherine Cornille 2013, xii.

would become marred by discord, intolerance, and ultimately violence. Conquests, forced conversions, the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and pogroms of Eastern Europe aimed to terrorize minority religious communities — tainting both the pages of history and the image of religion. The nadir was reached during the Holocaust, with Hitler's aim of erasing religious difference by making Europe Judenrein (free of Jews) for one thousand years.

While the term dialogue covers a broad range of activities from coexistence to scholarly debates to interfaith volunteerism and activism on social issues, documents of dialogue are written declarations and statements articulating the ideological foundation for one faith community's reaching out to a religious other. These documents are authoritative theological texts communicating a path for a peaceful and positive engagement with a different religious denomination or faith community. While external events, such as the Holocaust, often inspire authors to create these documents, they reflect an internal theological wrestling that often requires a new hermeneutic.

Each document reflects the historical and political realities of their authors' and redactors' day. While documents of dialogue reflect an evolution – and the pioneering efforts explored in this research had glaring omissions which those that followed them would amend, these original documents consisted of constructive theological frameworks that aspired to heal longstanding rifts and lay foundations for mutual respect among different faith traditions.

There are fundamental characteristics of every declaration in this study. Documents of dialogue require *authority*. They must reflect the voice of a larger entity of

people. They are self-conscious statements motivated, in part, by a religious community's self-awareness of the ways in which they are perceived by communities outside themselves. They require *conscience* – a religious community's evaluation of their actions that acknowledges existing political and societal breaches, assesses their role in creating them, and recognizes the power of their religious voice of vision to bring reconciliation and healing. These documents include *confession* of wrongdoing and reflect the spirit of *courage* and *conviction* inhering in their authors so that faith communities can be called and moved to make progress.

Constructive dialogue requires a shift in self-understanding and *humility* in place of superiority with respect to one's perception of truth. Unlike the academic study of faith, positive dialogue entails growth, and may even lead to an acknowledgement of offenses in the past with the aim to repair and prevent violence. A leading American scholar of Jewish-Catholic relations, Dr. Philip Cunningham, notes that documents of dialogue capture "a willingness to be self-critical and change in response to the better understanding of the religious other."¹³ A knowledge and appreciation of the interfaith other and partner is foundational to this work.

Documents of dialogue can be progressive, acknowledging a notion of universalism that supports the salvation of those beyond themselves. They can be regressive, reverting to a former religious supremacy that sets witnessing and conversion as an end goal. And at times there can be variances, even within the same document. To

¹³ Philip Cunningham (1960 -) is Director of the Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations and Professor of Theology at Saint Joseph's University. He is scholar of biblical studies and religious education, specializing in theologies of Christian-Jewish relations. Philip Cunningham, Personal Communication with Judy Schindler, June 9, 2023.

be classified as a document of dialogue they must have the primary goal of constructive relations. Motivations vary from guilt, fear, the desire to increase genuine and honest communication and meaningful connection between religious communities, to speak to contemporary society and realities, and to prevent prejudice and discrimination arising from religious misrepresentation.

Documents of dialogue require the acknowledgement and establishment of a *relationship* between two or more religious communities. This concept is illustrated through the words of Pope John Paul II upon his 1986 visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome when he remarked, “The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.”¹⁴

These documents are not only retrospective but more importantly they look forward most often urging the transformation of educational materials and the creation of guidelines for future interfaith dialogue for the communities to whom they speak. The call for *education* ranges from the transformation of textbooks to seminary training and global conferences, to the integration of these constructive dialogical ideas into homilies and sermons that support the actualization of these theological concepts in everyday relationships.

¹⁴ “Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome,” Pope John Paul II, April 13, 1986, *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed May 6, 2023, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/jp2-86apr13>.

As the decades pass from the original post-Holocaust documents and these efforts supporting peaceful interfaith relations multiply, an acceptance of *religious pluralism* develops and becomes the high standard by which these doctrinal declarations are measured.

The desire to advance interreligious dialogue and foster a spirit of mutual respect constitutes a spiritual powerhouse that fuels the drive to create these documents and put them to practical use in the real world. The motivations and historical context that drive each set of authors are different for Christians, Jews and Muslims. Some documents are written to create greater safety and security for a given faith community. Others are written by religious leaders to advance a theology that seeks to counter the weaponization of their texts. Still others seek to use language that aims to broaden their audience of adherents.

While a great deal of literature focuses on individual documents of dialogue, few offer a comparative analysis. No prior study examines multiple pioneering documents in relationship to one another. This dissertation offers an in-depth study of each individual pioneering document -- the individuals who inspired these documents; the global/local conditions that precipitated them; the advocacy that compelled them; the political realities that influenced them and limited them; the leaders who authored them and the authority that grounded them; the issues the documents addressed as well as their omissions (the subjects they failed to confront); their dissemination and the immediate responses to them; and their long-term impact -- all of which are instructive for us today.

Each of the four pioneering documents in Jewish-Christian relations required unrelenting effort and indomitable will. There were key personalities engaged with each document who propelled the initiatives forward. Martin Niemöller, Jules Isaac, Pope John XXIII, and Abraham Joshua Heschel to name a few. Their lived experiences influenced their theology. Hence, woven into this history of each document will be brief biographies of a number of central personalities. In large part it is individual encounters with or being witness to violent antisemitism that led to the theological reckoning undergirding the respective statements. And it is through the meaningful meetings between leaders of faith communities and the development of real relationships and even friendships that the foundation for progress and intercommunal dialogue is set.

Chapter 1 examines the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt (1945), authored by a gathering of surviving members of the Confessing Church who would receive a surprise visit from leaders of an international Protestant group representing the World Council of Churches in formation. This chapter is instructive on the role religious leaders can play both in national atonement and reconciliation and the ways in which they can contribute to the upbuilding of enduring global interfaith religious organizations.

Chapter 2 explores The Ten Points of Seelisberg (1947). A post-Holocaust emergency meeting on antisemitism would build off of a 1946 Oxford Conference crafted by the American and British Jewish-Christian Organizations. This gathering would bring together global interreligious leaders and inaugurate the International Conference of Christians and Jews. This summit would yield the most influential text of Jewish-Christian relations, The Ten Points of Seelisberg.

While countless volumes have been written on *Nostra Aetate* (1965), chapters 3 and 4 explore the years of deliberations surrounding *Nostra Aetate* found in the extensive papers of the Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection at the American Jewish Archives.¹⁵ Chapter 3 focuses primarily on the Catholic side of the conversation and chapter four explores the journey to *Nostra Aetate* through the lens of the key Jewish actors. Since the two voices are in conversation throughout the six years leading to *Nostra Aetate*, it is impossible to fully tease them apart. These chapters highlight the challenges of dialogue at a distance, analyze the essential skills utilized, and weigh the effect, both positive and negative, of Jewish interreligious engagement with Vatican II.

Chapter 5 focuses on *Dabru Emet* and the responsibility that falls upon each community to engage in *cheshbon hanefesh*, a Hebrew expression that often refers to the process of *internal* religious reckoning. What responsibility do Jews have to examine their own texts, confront their biases and prejudices and respond with the development of a transformed theology? Many of the architects who laid the foundation for this pioneering Jewish document are alive today. Hence this chapter builds upon original interviews with four academics and leaders who were associated with the Jewish Scholars Project at the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore (ICJS).¹⁶

The conclusion provides a comparative analysis of the factors that drive the development of major documents and the ways Jewish, Catholic and Protestant major

¹⁵ Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum (1925-1992). The American Jewish Archives Tanenbaum Collection holds thirty-six folders on Vatican II including one folder on Joseph Soloveitchik, five folders on Cardinal Bea, three folders on Abraham Joshua Heschel, and one folder on Jacob Blaustein.

¹⁶ In 2016, the ICJS changed its name to the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies, while keeping the acronym ICJS. This transition to expand to include Islam in its mission began three years prior, when ICJS Trustees approved the expansion of the organization's mission to include Islam.

movements have historically approached interfaith relations. It will suggest next steps for research and for interfaith dialogue.

For convenient reference, the eight appendixes at the end of the book contain the complete version of the declarations/statements that are discussed in depth in the chapters.

Many compilations of documents of dialogue exist. Holocaust refugee and publisher Helga Croner began the work of collecting these documents in the final quarter of the 20th century.¹⁷ Dr. Franklin Sherman, interfaith scholar and founding director of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding at Muhlenberg College, collected 167 of these documents and organized them into two volumes: *Bridges: Documents of Christian-Jewish Dialogue*.¹⁸ Sherman divided them into six primary categories: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Ecumenical, Jewish-Christian, and Jewish.

The International Council of Christians and Jews, made up of 38 organizations in 32 countries, maintains a website devoted to Christian-Jewish dialogue.¹⁹ This platform holds over 257 statements to date.

¹⁷ Helga Croner (1913-2007) was a scholar of Jewish-Christian relations authoring seven books. She was founder and president of Stimulus Foundation, an organization devoted to promoting the dialogue between Christians and Jews. Helga Kroner, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations*, (Stimulus Books, 1977); Helga Kroner, *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations*, (Paulist Press, 1985).

¹⁸ Franklin Sherman, *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue Volume One, the Road to Reconciliation (1945-1985)*, (Paulist Press, 2011). Franklin Sherman, *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue Volume Two, Building a New Relationship (1986-2012)*, (Paulist Press, 2011).

¹⁹ "Statements," *International Council of Christians and Jews*, accessed May 14, 2022, <https://www.jcrelations.net/statements.html>.

The Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations is an association of centers in the United States and Canada that are devoted to mutual understanding between Jews and Christians. The organization is dedicated to research, publication, educational programming, and interreligious dialogue “that respect the religious integrity and self-understanding of the various strands of the Jewish and Christian traditions.”²⁰ It holds 489 documents to date.²¹

Additionally, most religious denominations that have published documents, have made them available on their own organizational sites. Most existing collections, research and analyses of documents surrounding interfaith relations focus on Jewish-Christian relations.

The reader will note that there are important areas of research that transcend the boundaries of this study. The first is addressing interreligious perspectives on the State of Israel, its establishment and the consequent tensions and wars that have ensued between Palestinians and Israelis. While religious responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a critical and pressing contemporary issue that warrants examination, this research will not address with depth Christian statements on Israel. In referencing documents on Israel, this research will utilize the compilation edited by Cary Nelson and Michael C. Gizzi, *Peace and Faith: Christian Churches and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.²² The interreligious statements following the October 7th Massacre and

²⁰ *The Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed May 18, 2023, <https://ccjr.us/>.

²¹ This does not include the documents on the Israel-Hamas War. On the Israel-Hamas War, see pages 263.

²² Cary Nelson and Michael C. Gizzi, eds., *Peace and Faith: Christian Churches and The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, (Presbyterians for Middle East Peace, 2021).

subsequent war are also voluminous.²³ These important topics deserve their own respective analyses.

In 2004, almost six decades after the first Jewish-Christian documents were composed, the Muslim community began to engage in the work of crafting documents of dialogue. By that date, the World Wide Web had become a common point of global connection; hence, the Muslim pioneering documents and many of the subsequent interfaith efforts led by the Muslim community have their own designated websites.²⁴

Due to limitations of time and space, the pioneering Muslim documents, “The Amman Message” and the subsequent “A Common Word Between Us and You” are not addressed in this research. This in no way is meant to minimize the immensely important interreligious work led by and subsequent documents of dialogue authored by extraordinary Muslim leaders. As this dissertation will show, the work of religious reconciliation is expanded when leaders of multiple faiths are at the table. Each new pioneering effort builds upon those before it and is instructive for those who will follow.

²³ Thomas Banchoff, director of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, commented on the difficulties of interreligious dialogue during war: “The Israel-Hamas war illustrates the fragility of interfaith diplomacy. Whatever its theological, cultural, and political significance, high-level interreligious dialogue has limited impact amid clashing territorial claims, rival historical grievances, and brutal violence. The limits of interfaith diplomacy are particularly evident in the context of Israel and Palestine, where religious and political differences have historically reinforced one another. Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders may all adhere to monotheism and consider Abraham a common ancestor, but they bring very different perspectives to the region. For religious Jews, the land of Israel is a divine inheritance. Muslim solidarity with Palestinians is reinforced by the holy status of Jerusalem in the Islamic tradition. Christian leaders often express both sympathy for Palestinian co-religionists and recognize Israel as a Jewish homeland against the historical backdrop of the crime of the Holocaust perpetrated in a Christian-majority Europe.” Thomas Banchoff, “Abrahamic Dialogue in the Shadow of War,” *Commonweal*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/interfaith-dialogue-israel-hamas-francis-abraham-al-azhar>.

²⁴ *The Amman Message* Official Website, accessed December 21, 2025, <https://ammanmessage.com>. *A Common Word* Official Website (2007), accessed December 21, 2025, <https://www.acommonword.com>.

The impressive work of Muslim leaders such as King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein, King of Jordan and the King's cousin, advisor, and respected Islamic scholar, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, warrant research and celebration.²⁵

The line between religion and politics is always obscure. As we approach the second quarter of the 21st century, the clashes between religions are a daily reality. From the international stage of the Vatican, to the challenges in responding to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and wars, to the local arena which has brought about violent attacks on Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, and Muslims in American and European cities, words have proven again and again to have the power to harm. By contrast, this research reveals the potential for healing that emanates from the written word. Documents crafted by major faith communities that drive towards reconciliation can impact leadership, education, and the content of what religious local leaders preach from their pulpits to the members of their community.

Leonard Swidler, Professor of Thought and Interreligious Dialogue at Temple University, and renowned forerunner in the field of dialogue for over fifty years, identifies three primary modes of inter-religious dialogue: "Reaching out to learn from other religions/ideologies more fully the meaning of life (Dialogue of the Head); joining with the Other to make the world a better place in which to live (Dialogue of the Hands);

²⁵ King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein (1962-) has been the king of Jordan since 1999, when he succeeded his father, Hussein upon the latter's death. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal (1966-) is a professor of Islamic philosophy with PhDs from Al-Azhar University and the University of Cambridge. He has served in both official and nongovernmental positions in Jordan including chief advisor for religious and cultural affairs to King Abdullah II.

and an awe-filled embrace of the inner spirit and aesthetic expressions of the Other (Dialogue of the Heart).”²⁶

Dialogue of the head is central to this dissertation with the recognition that doctrine guides practice, and thought leads to action, so in a sense, the three modes of encounter are interconnected.

In 1959, Pope John XXIII, saw the value of metaphorically opening the Church windows and letting fresh air in -- updating the Church to embrace the modern and culturally diverse world in which the Church lived. The Church’s watershed document would speak not only to positive relations with Judaism but to Hinduism and Islam as well.

Gandhi, the great Hindu leader, taught: “A man is but the product of his thoughts; what he thinks, that he becomes.”²⁷ Bold academics and religious leaders stepped down from their proverbial ivory towers and came out from their stained-glass places of worship — buildings, some would argue, designed not to allow those within to see the world outside. They crafted and disseminated pioneering documents of dialogue and thereby sought to use their thought leadership and language to create a better future for their own co-religionists and for all. That the drafting of such pioneering documents of dialogue required the utmost tenacity of representatives from many different faith groups

²⁶ Leonard Swidler, “The History of Inter-religious Dialogue,” in Catherine Cornille 2013, 5-6.

²⁷ Mahatma Gandhi, translated by A. Rama Iyer, *Ethical Religion*, Second Edition, (S. Ganeshan Publisher, 1922), 62.

is set forth in this dissertation. That “perseverance in dialogue, however difficult, is the only way forward” seems indisputable.²⁸

²⁸ Thomas Banchoff 2024.

Chapter One

The Pioneering Protestant Path to Reconciliation:

The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt (October, 1945)

The devastation that Germany faced in the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War II was not only physical rubble, but also moral and spiritual wounds. In the midst of this wreckage, a group of German and international clergy gathered in Stuttgart, Germany, in mid-October 1945, to rebuild their Protestant religious community. At the center of that meeting were eleven of the best-known German Protestant leaders who would author and sign an unprecedented document acknowledging the guilt and failures of their religious community in responding to the crimes of their country.²⁹ And yet even this ground-breaking declaration of guilt will contain its own shortcoming, its own sin of omission.

The eve of their two-day gathering would commence with a prayer service at St. Mark's which, to this day, the Church identifies as "the greatest hour" of their parish.³⁰ It was the fourth postwar gathering of the surviving Protestant clergy leaders of the Confessing Church who had stood from 1933 to 1945, in varying degrees, in opposition

²⁹ John S. Conway, "How Shall the Nations Repent? The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, October 1945," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38, no. 4 (October 1987), 596.

³⁰ "The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt," *Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Markus Haigst* [Evangelical parish of Markus Haigst], translated by Harold Marcuse, University of California Santa Barbara, March 2005, accessed August 3, 2023, <https://marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/projects/niem/StuttgartDeclaration.htm>.

to the Nazi interference with the Church.³¹ The demands upon them were two-fold. On one hand, they felt internal pressure to lead Germany forward on moral ground as they sought to build a new Protestant Church in Germany (the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, EKD) – one that was free from the Nazi ideological cancer that had metastasized through the German Church putting allegiance to the Führer above faith in Jesus. And on the other hand, they felt pressure from external forces. A small group of seven high-ranking church leaders representing the World Council of Churches (WCC) that was in the process of formation, made an unexpected visit to Stuttgart with the motive of ecumenism.³² The Protestant group included representatives from the United States (Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert of the Federal Council and Dr. S. C. Michelfelder of the American Lutheran Church), from Great Britain (The Bishop George Kennedy Allen Bell of Chichester), from France (Pastor Pierre Maury), from Holland (Dr. Hendrik Kraemer) and from Switzerland (Dr. Alfons Koechlin and Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft).³³ These international visitors saw the German Protestant commitment to

³¹ While the Confessing Church was not created until 1934, its predecessor, the Pastor's Emergency League, was founded in 1933. The first post-war synod of the Confessing Church clergy met in Berlin on July 29-31, 1945. The national Brethren of the Confessing Church met in Frankfurt and in Treysa in August 1945. At the latter meeting, the new Protestant Church in Germany, *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, EKD, was formed and Hans Asmussen (1898-1968) was elected Chairman of the Council of the EKD brotherhood. John Conway 1987, 608-609.

³² The WCC would come to include all Christian faiths except Roman Catholic.

³³ In September, Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985), general secretary of the provisional committee of the WCC, wrote to Marin Niemöller (1892-1984), then Vice President of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany and in charge of relations with foreign churches, requesting an official invitation so that the international delegation could enter Germany. Niemöller, on his own initiative, extended the invitation. Without staff or an office, he was unable to inform his German colleagues of the expected visitors. John Conway 1987, 614. The task of acquiring permits and arranging military transports for the group was described by Visser 't Hooft, the leader of delegation, as "somewhat of a miracle." Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (SCM Press LTD, 1973), 190. The Rev. Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert (1888-1976) served as general secretary of the Federal Council of Churches from 1921 to 1954. He was an architect of the National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches. Rev. Dr. Sylvester Clarence Michelfelder

repentance as an essential first step to promoting unity among the global Protestant churches. They could not envision a path for church leaders from previously warring communities to heal their deep wounds and work collaboratively on an international level without the German Church offering an official acknowledgement of wrongdoing. They could not work to actuate “wider reconciliation of the peoples” without religious reconciliation as Christians.³⁴

Over the summer of 1945, external pressure increased from Swiss theologian and Confessing Church leader Karl Barth, from the American Federal Council of Churches, and from Dr. Willem A. Visser 't Hooft of the Netherlands.³⁵ Visser 't Hooft, the general secretary of the provisional committee of the WCC and the leader of that international delegation to Stuttgart, wrote in his memoirs: “How should we achieve the resumption of full ecumenical relationships? The obstacles to a new community could only be removed if the German side found a clear word.” He added that French ecumenical leader and

(1889-1951) served as Executive Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation. The Bishop of Chichester, George Kennedy Allen Bell (1883-1958) was an Anglican theologian, Dean of the Canterbury cathedral, a supporter of the German Church resistance, and a pioneer of the ecumenical movement, serving as chairman and president of the World Council of Churches from 1947-1954. As Bishop of Chichester (1929-1958), he was an active and publicly outspoken foe of Hitler and Nazism and worked to save Jewish Christians in Germany. Pastor Pierre Maury (1890-1956) was a French Protestant thought leader. He was a French pastor and theologian who translated Karl Barth's *Parole de Dieu, Parole humaine* (*God's words, human words*) thus contributing to the renewal of reformed theology in French Protestantism. In 1950, he served as President of the National Council of the French Reformed Church and as a member of the Ecumenical Council of Churches. Dr. Hendrick Kraemer (1888-1965) was a Dutch theologian and missionary who authored *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. He survived a Nazi concentration camp and served as the first director of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey, Céligny from 1948 to 1955. Dr. Alphons Koechlin (1885-1943) was President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches.

³⁴ Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, 189.

³⁵ Karl Barth, (1886-1968), was a leading 20th century Protestant theologian from Switzerland. He was a founder of the Confessing Church and a primary author of the Barmen Declaration. For more information on Barth, see Richard Burnett, *The Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth*, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

theologian Reverend Pierre Maury, had advised the group to say to the Germans: “We have come to ask you to help us to help you.”³⁶

Just hours before the prayer service marking the opening of the gathering, the German Lutheran pastor and theologian Martin Niemöller (1892-1984), was asked to preach.³⁷ Niemöller had been recently released from seven years of imprisonment for his opposition to Nazi intrusion in the German Evangelical Church -- the largest organization of churches in the 1930s to which most of Germany’s Protestants belonged.³⁸ The majority of his internment had been in Sachsenhausen and Dachau. Niemöller’s wife, Else, chose the text from Jeremiah upon which Niemöller would base his extemporaneous sermon: “Although our sins testify against us, O Lord, do something for the sake of your name!” (Jeremiah 14:7)

In that sermon, Niemöller began to crystallize and convey a mandate for the German Christian community to admit complicity and culpability: “It is not enough to give the Nazis responsibility, it is also necessary for the Church to admit its responsibility.”³⁹

³⁶ From the formation of the WCC’s provisional committee in 1939 until his death in 1966, Visser ‘t Hooft would lead the WCC as general secretary. “The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt,” (Historical Background), *Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Markus Haigst* [Evangelical parish of Markus Haigst]. Visser ‘t Hooft, *Memoirs*, 191. Greer, W. R. “W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, Churchman, Dies at 84,” *New York Times*, July 5, 1985.

³⁷ Ewart E. Turner, “Memories of Martin Niemöller,” *Christian Century*, April 25, 1984, 445, <https://www.religion-online.org/article/memories-of-martin-niemoller/>.

³⁸ The German Evangelical Church included 28 regional churches – from the Lutheran, Reformed and United traditions. Some smaller Protestant churches identified as “free” such as Methodist and Baptist. “The German Churches and the Nazi State,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed December 21, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-german-churches-and-the-nazi-state>.

³⁹ “The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt,” *Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Markus Haigst*.

Ewart E. Turner, a retired United Methodist minister and *Christian Century* correspondent during Hitler's rise to power, who regularly met with Niemöller and was with him that evening, wrote a dispatch the next morning:

“The need is for German Christians to testify before the world to the guilt of the Fatherland in invading and despoiling Holland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Russia, France, etc. So far the German church leaders have only expressed general guilt, but that isn't enough. The Bible says, before you go to pray go to your brother; if he feels you have wronged him, first get right with your brother, then come and pray. Last night Pastor Niemöller rose to heights in laying this out in just this concrete way, exactly as he used to before the Nazis imprisoned him... This may be the turning point in the postwar world... In his sermon Martin had said: ‘We have no right to pass off all guilt on the evil Nazis. We have done little to stop the corruption and, above all, we the church failed. For we knew which way was false and which right, yet [we] let people run unwarned into ruination. I do not exclude myself from this guilt, for I too have kept silent when I should have spoken.’”⁴⁰

Visser 't Hooft recalled Niemöller asking a defining accusatory question that night, “Would the nazis [sic] have been able to do what they had done if church members had been truly faithful?”⁴¹

Niemöller's indictment of the Protestant church was the catalyzing voice that propelled the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany, in a meeting separate from their guests from the representatives of the fledgling WCC, to craft the unparalleled first interfaith declaration of dialogue known as the “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt.”

⁴⁰ Ewart. E. Turner (1915-1988). Ewart E. Turner, “Memories of Martin Niemöller.”

⁴¹ Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, 191.

Declaration to the Representatives of the World Council of Churches
(widely known as the **Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt**)
Adopted: October 19, 1945⁴²

The Council of the Protestant Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) welcomes representatives of the World Council of Churches to its meeting on October 18-19, 1945, in Stuttgart.

We are all the more thankful for this visit, as we know ourselves to be with our people in a great community of suffering, but also in a great solidarity of guilt. With great anguish we state: through us has endless suffering been brought to many peoples and countries. What we have often borne witness to before our congregations, we now declare in the name of the whole Church. We have for many years struggled in the name of Jesus Christ against the spirit which found its terrible expression in the National Socialist regime of tyranny, but we accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently.

Now a new beginning can be made in our churches. Grounded on the Holy Scriptures, directed with all earnestness toward the only Lord of the Church, they are now proceeding to cleanse themselves from influences alien to the faith and to set themselves in order. Our hope is in the God of grace and mercy, that he will use our churches as his instruments and will give them authority to proclaim his word and in obedience to his will to work creatively among ourselves and among our people.

That in this new beginning we may become wholeheartedly united with the other churches of the ecumenical fellowship fills us with deep joy.

We hope in God that through the common service of the churches the spirit of violence and revenge which again today is tending to become powerful may be brought under control in the whole world, and that the spirit of peace and love may gain the mastery, wherein alone tortured humanity can find healing.

So in an hour in which the whole world needs a new beginning we pray:
“Veni Creator Spiritus.” [Come, Spirit of the Creator!]

Bishop Wurm
Bishop Meiser

[Württemberg State Bishop]
[State Bishop of Bavaria]

⁴² Translation of the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt text from Franklin Sherman, *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Volume One, the Road to Reconciliation*, 41. The titles of the signatories are from St. Mark's Church website “The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt,” *Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Markus Haigst*.

Superintendent Hahn	[Pastor, later Saxon State Bishop]
Bishop Dibelius	[Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg]
Professor Smend	[Professor of Theology]
Pastor Asmussen	[President of the Church Chancellery of the EKD]
Pastor Niemöller	[Pastor, later President of Evangelical Church in Hesse-Nassau, and later President of WCC]
Landesoberkirchenrat Lilje	[Secretary General of the Lutheran World Convention, later State Bishop in Hanover]
Superintendent Held	[Pastor in Essen, later President of the Rhine Church]
Pastor Niesel	[Pastor, Professor of Theology]
Dr. Gustav Heinemann	[Legal advisor to Confessing Church, later federal politician and President of West Germany]

Pioneering documents of dialogue are not created *ex nihilo*, from nothing, nor are they result of one passionate preacher, leader, sermon, or speech. They are the result of years, if not decades, of an evolution of theological thought, resistance, failed efforts that cause dramatic if not devastating consequences, and renewed action. Political realities, pressure from communities external to the authors, and desires to overcome perceptions or realities that prevent religious progress all play a factor.

The Guilt of the German Christian Community

The groundbreaking Stuttgart post-Holocaust document acknowledging guilt followed twelve years of inadequate church opposition to the Nazis and the Third Reich. When Hitler rose to power in 1933, apart from the less than one percent of the German population who were Jews, the majority of Germans belonged to the Protestant Church

(approximately 40 million) or the Roman Catholic Church (approximately 20 million).⁴³

Racialized antisemitic Nazi ideology was woven together with centuries-old European Christian antisemitism to produce a pseudo-scientific hierarchy of human value where Jews were deemed inferior and unfit for survival. This, coupled with anti-Jewish interpretation of Scripture within the Church, resulted in discrimination, dehumanization, and ultimately, the systematic state-sponsored murder of six million Jews just outside the church walls.⁴⁴ Nazi goals included “race and space” – a mythical master white Aryan race that required *Lebensraum* (literally living space) to fulfill its imperial and racist vision.

Hitler and his party created a system of totalitarian control over all aspects of German society and over all those societies that the Nazis would, at a later date, occupy. They held fast to a policy of aggressive *Gleichschaltung* “coordination” or “synchronization” – a process of Nazification that included control over the economy, the media, youth, education and culture. This would come to include the Nazification of the churches. As a way to demonstrate their allegiance to the Nazi party, large swaths of German church leadership implemented Nazi policy far quicker than Nazi forces would have required. And yet, Canadian Holocaust scholar Doris Bergen notes that Adolph Hitler, Henrich Himmler (commander of the German Schutzstaffel, the SS, the Nazi

⁴³ “The German Churches and the Nazi State,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed September 14, 2024, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-german-churches-and-the-nazi-state>.

⁴⁴ Centuries old European antisemitism included the unfounded accusations of the blood libel (claiming Jews slaughtered Christians to use their blood for ritual purposes), that Jews poisoned the wells during the Plague, and host desecration. Robert Chazan, *From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism: Ancient and Medieval Christian Constructions of Jewish History* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), x.

Protection Squads), and other Nazi leaders considered Nazism and Christianity “irreconcilable antagonists.”⁴⁵ While the Nazi leadership recognized the utilitarian role the church played in implementing their vision for a totalitarian regime, their relationship was ambivalent. At times, they engaged forcefully, such as ensuring their approved candidate, Ludwig Müller, a little-known Pastor, and Nazi Party member with nominal administrative experience, would be elected as Reich Bishop of the German Protestant Church in 1933.⁴⁶ At other times they would distance themselves from the *Kirschenkampf*, the church struggle, that threatened to entangle them.

When it came to the Protestant Church in Germany, on one powerful side stood the “German Christian” movement that aligned with Nazism in the early 1930s, viewing National Socialism and Christianity as “mutually reinforcing.”⁴⁷ They would become a force of more than a half million people with adherents holding positions of power in all levels of the Church from governance to serving as theology faculty in universities. That position and power was solidified with Müller’s election. These German Christians embraced a church based on “race” and “blood” that excluded non-Aryan Christian clergy; in many cases, Christian clergy married to non-Aryans were ousted from their leadership.⁴⁸ In Bergen’s words, these German Christians were “self-styled ‘storm

⁴⁵ For more on Henrich Himmler (1900-1945), the 4th Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel and chief architect of the Final Solution see Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, (Oxford University Press, 2012).

Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1.

⁴⁶ Ludwig Müller (1883-1945). Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*, (Oxford University Press, 1992), 33-34.

⁴⁷ Doris L. Bergen 1996, 1.

⁴⁸ Nazi ideology deemed that even small amount of ‘Jewish blood’ tainted Aryan purity. The 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws created legal specificity. Barnett notes: “A ‘non-Aryan’ was a person with at least

troopers of Christ” seeking “a synthesis of Nazi ideology and Protestant tradition.”⁴⁹

They sought to remove the Jewish roots of Christianity, detach the Old Testament from their Scripture, and portray Jesus as an Aryan. The German Christian movement saw no conflict between Christianity and Hitler’s National Socialism.

On the other side of this schism, stood the Pastors’ Emergency League, founded in 1933, that evolved into the Confessing Church in 1934. These were Christian leaders who actively and publicly challenged the Nazi infiltration of the church. Specifically, they opposed the enforcement of the “Aryan paragraph” in the April 1933 Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service which created “racial” criteria for employment and/or membership. The Aryan paragraph was a legal regulation that permitted the removal of Jews and baptized Jews from governmental positions, professional groups, academic positions, and other institutions. The Aryan paragraph became fundamental law with the passing of the September 1935 Nuremberg Laws. While the 1933 Aryan paragraph did not require enforcement in the church, leaders of the German Christian Church movement willingly embraced and administered these legal guidelines. These German Christians petitioned their synods demanding similar legislation and began to adopt provisions in regional churches removing non-Aryan,

one Jewish parent or grandparent. A ‘full Jew’ was a person with three to four Jewish grandparents or a person with two Jewish grandparents who married to a ‘full Jew’ or a member of the Jewish faith.” Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*, 127.

⁴⁹ Doris Bergen 1996, 7.

Jewish born ministers and church officials who had converted to Christianity from leadership.⁵⁰

A Religious Resistance Movement that Fell Far Short

While those who led Germany's religious resistance movement would become the critical voices leading to postwar reconciliation, their conscience was far from clear. There was a theological shortfall in the leadership of the religious resistance movement, the Barmen Declaration they crafted, and the Confessing Church they built. The most prominent German voices reflecting an evolution of theological reckoning leading to the Stuttgart acknowledgment of guilt were Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), who was executed in the Flossenbürg concentration camp just days before its liberation and from where he wrote and left behind prolific writings, and Martin Niemöller, who survived the Dachau concentration camp.

At the time of Hitler's rise to power, Bonhoeffer, who was then a 27-year old recently ordained Lutheran minister, and Martin Niemöller, then a 42-year old pastor and supporter of the Nazi party, were an unlikely couple to lead the Confessing Church. They were from vastly different backgrounds.

Bonhoeffer grew up in a free-thinking home. Dietrich's father possessed "great tolerance that left no room for narrow-mindedness and broadened the horizons" of their

⁵⁰ "'The Brown Synod' and 'The Aryan Paragraph,'" *Resistance!? Protestant Christians under the Nazi Regime*, accessed September 14, 2024, <https://en.evangelischer-widerstand.de/html/view.php?type=dokument&id=20>.

home.⁵¹ Dietrich's mother, a credentialed teacher, was the sole educator of each of her children until they were seven or eight. "She was openly distrustful of the German public schools and their Prussian educational methods. She subscribed to the maxim that Germans had their backs broken twice, once at school and once in the military, she wasn't about to entrust her children to the care of others less sensitive than she during their earliest years."⁵² Dietrich's grandmother, blatantly disobeyed the 1933 boycott of Jewish stores. And Dietrich's twin sister Sabine's marriage to a Jew, who was baptized and given a Christian education, made Dietrich's opposition to Nazi policy not only a religious issue, but one that was deeply personal and familial.

Martin Niemöller's background was far more conservative and nationalistic. In the small town of Lippstadt in Westphalia in northern Germany, his father, Heinrich Niemöller, was the local pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It was the first Church in the region to embrace Martin Luther's teachings. Love of altar and love of the throne were equal values preached in the pulpit and transmitted in the home.⁵³ Martin Niemöller's early childhood witnessed the reign of last German Emperor and King of Prussia, Wilhelm II, who abdicated the throne in 1918, marking the end of the German Empire. It was a reign that bound nationalism with Christianity. At the age of ninety,

⁵¹ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, (Nelson Books, 2020), 15.

⁵² Eric Metaxas 2020, 9.

⁵³ Matthew D. Hockenos, *Then They Came for Me: Martin Niemöller, the Pastor Who Defied the Nazis*. First ed. (Basic Books, 2018), 8.

Niemöller told his biographers, “I began my career as an ultra-conservative, I wanted my Kaiser back.”⁵⁴

Niemöller recalled that the whole atmosphere of the first decade of the 20th century, when he grew to maturity, was antisemitic.⁵⁵ “I remember I was not a friend of the Jews,” Niemöller recalled in his later years. “I had no hatred against Jews but this whole atmosphere of noncooperation with the Jews was just that which everybody grew up.” In a 1963 television interview with German journalist Günter Gaus, Niemöller noted, “In my native Tecklenburg there were many farmers who were in debt to Jewish moneylenders and livestock traders. At the time, the mood in this area was not systematically anti-Semitic, but it was intuitively and traditionally so, and I never especially questioned it.”⁵⁶

Niemöller served in the Imperial German Navy as a U-Boat commander during World War I. His belief that “reparations, democracy and foreign influence” caused Germany’s devastating post-World War I condition led him to vote for the Nazis in the 1924 Prussian state elections and 1933 last national parliamentary elections. Niemöller lauded German’s withdrawal from the League of Nations, sending Hitler a congratulatory telegram in October 1933; proposed that Confessing Church members join the Nazi party (to counter accusations of disloyalty) in 1935; and wrote letters from his imprisonment in

⁵⁴ Wilhelm II (1859-1941), John S. Conway, “The Political Theology of Martin Niemöller,” *German Studies Review* 9, no. 3 (1986): 545.

⁵⁵ James Bentley, *Martin Niemöller 1892-1984*, (Free Press, 1984), 44.

⁵⁶ Matthew Hockenos (1966-) is a scholar of Modern European history at Skidmore College. Matthew D. Hockenos 2018, 12. Wolfgang Gerlach, Translated and edited by Victoria J. Barnett, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 47.

Sachsenhausen to the Command-in-Chief of the Navy seeking to reenlist in the German Navy in 1938 and 1941.⁵⁷

Yet even so, Holocaust scholar and biographer on Niemöller, Matthew Hockenos, notes that Niemöller “drew a thick line between his conservative-nationalist Protestantism and the DC’s *völkisch* [the *Deutsche Christen* (DC), German Christian ethnic-nationalist] Protestantism.” While both supported conservatism, nationalism, anti-Communism and antisemitism, Niemöller and the traditional Protestant community with which he identified rejected race as a litmus test for church membership, upheld the Old Testament and the origins of Jesus as a Jew, and denounced the flagrant politicization of the Church. “By twisting the cross to resemble a swastika,” Hockenos concludes, “the DC [the German Christians] won over many Nazis to the church but also alienated many conservatives, Martin Niemöller among them.”⁵⁸

Despite their ideological differences, Bonhoeffer and Niemöller agreed on the need to keep the Church free from Nazi control and together drafted and disseminated a four-part pledge to Germany’s Protestant pastors asking them “to affirm their commitment to the church’s creed; to vigorously protest violations of that creed; to reject the Aryan paragraph; and to commit themselves to supporting non-Aryan colleagues.”⁵⁹ Seven thousand of the eighteen thousand pastors of the German Protestant Church would

⁵⁷ “Martin Niemöller: Biography,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, accessed August, 4, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/martin-niemoeller-biography>. Niemöller was in Sachsenhausen from March 1938 through July 1941. Matthew D. Hockenos 2018, 113.

⁵⁸ Matthew D. Hockenos 2018, 82.

⁵⁹ Matthew D. Hockenos 2018, 92.

ultimately sign that pledge thus making themselves member of the Pastors' Emergency League (PEL), an organization founded in September 1933 and led by Niemöller.

Over the course of the next eight months, as the German Church's growing fusion with National Socialism became more evident, Protestant clergy who opposed the church's prostration to National Socialism, attended regional meetings of resistance, culminating in an assembly in Barmen, Germany, on May 29-31, 1934, for a Confessional Synod. The 139 delegates from nineteen territorial churches (Lutheran, Reformed, and United) who were in attendance were comprised of ordained ministers, 53 church members, and 6 university professors.⁶⁰ This gathering of dissenters would sign the Barmen Declaration, authored primarily by Swiss Reformed Theologian Karl Barth, with assistance in crafting the outline from German Lutheran theologians Hans Asmussen and Thomas Breit.⁶¹

Echoing the "95 Theses" of Martin Luther in 1517 which birthed Protestantism proclaiming that the Bible rather than the Pope was the central religious authority, the Barmen Declaration, which birthed the Confessing Church, was comprised of six theses proclaiming Scripture rather than the Nazi government as holding religious authority.

⁶⁰ "The Barmen Declaration," *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://www.ekd.de/en/The-Barmen-Declaration-133.htm>. Franklin Hamlin Littell, "From Barmen (1934) to Stuttgart (1945): The Path of the Confessing Church in Germany." *A Journal of Church and State* 3, no. 1 (1961): 41-52.

⁶¹ John Godsey reports that according to Barth, the three men (Barth, Asmussen and Breit) met at a hotel in Frankfurt to outline the six points over a large lunch with wine, liqueur, and cigars. Each was meant to put together a draft of their own statements in the afternoon. However, Asmussen and Breit took a nap and overslept producing nothing. Meanwhile, Barth ordered coffee to his room and drafted the entire Barmen Declaration. Thomas Breit (1880–1966) was a member of the Bavarian High Consistory. John E. Godsey, "Epilogue: Karl Barth as a Teacher" in George Hunsinger (Ed), *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology* (Eerdmans, 2004), 209.

The signatories sought to reject the false dogma of the German Christian movement. The goal of the Confessing Church was not to break from the German Protestant Church but to claim itself as the authentic Church.

While the Barmen Declaration has been elevated in recent decades as a means of creating a wall to defend the church from political influence, the Confessing Church that the Declaration birthed, failed to provide protections for those outside the Church. Victoria Barnett, American Holocaust scholar and theologian, interviewed fifty surviving members of the Confessing Church.⁶² She notes that the Barmen Declaration text, even today, can be read in two directions: “as a retreat inward to a pure Christian message that will remain untainted by the politics of the world or outward, as a challenge to the world and its attempts to stifle the conscience and the spirit... And it was read in both directions at the time, even by the more than 100 Protestant leaders who voted in Barmen to affirm it.”⁶³ The latter was the most common interpretation.

What was the failure of the Barmen Declaration? It did not deem Nazi ideology and Christian dogma as incompatible, nor did it reject antisemitism or condemn the Nazi assault on the Jewish people that had already begun to be enacted through the Nazi’s then sixteen-month reign. Each thesis notably opened with a New Testament quote which, even at a most simple level of interpretation, could be viewed as a concession to the German Christian goal of severing its Scriptural ties with the Old

⁶² Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*, Chapter 7 “The Confessing Church and the Jews,” 122-154.

⁶³ Victoria Barnett, “The Rise and Fall of the Confessing Church,” (Lecture, University of Virginia, February 21, 2008), <https://www.livedtheology.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/20080221PPR.01.pdf>.

Testament and hence its Jewish roots.⁶⁴ While some Protestant scholars view the Barmen Declaration as *implicitly* challenging the Hitler regime and the dangerous Nazi ideology embraced by the German Christian Church movement, the Barmen Declaration's failure to *explicitly* challenge that German Christian doctrine, confront the Nazi government and the persecution of non-Aryans already underway, reflected only partial resistance.⁶⁵

Barnett's oral history research that began in 1979 captures firsthand accounts of both the courage and cowardice of the Confessing Church.⁶⁶ Best known for courage would be Bonhoeffer. In his 1933 essay -- his only essay directly addressing the relationship between "The Church and the Jewish Question" -- Bonhoeffer identified three imperatives that should guide Church action. First, the church must question the state and hold it accountable for its actions. Second, the church must help victims of unjust state policies. And lastly, beyond that, the Church must work against the state to

⁶⁴ Each of the six theses anchoring the Barmen Declaration starts with one or two prooftexts from the New Testament grounding what was identified as the "evangelical truths" of the German Confessional Churches in Jesus, the Church, and Christian Scripture. For example, thesis number one opens with two texts from the Gospel of John: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14.6) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber... I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved." (John 10.1, 9). The utilization of only New Testament texts exemplifies a dissociation of the Confessional Church from the Old Testament.

⁶⁵ In 1967, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America included the Barmen Declaration in their Book of Confessions alongside two ancient confessions, six documents from the time of the Reformation and two others from the twentieth century. For a more in-depth analysis of the theological resistance of the Barmen Declaration see Ulrich Meiser, "The Theological Declaration of Barmen," *Theology Matters*, Volume 6, Number 6, (Nov/Dec 2000), accessed September 21, 2024. <https://theologymatters.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/00Vol6-No6-TM.pdf>.

⁶⁶ This dissertation has a predominant focus on the theological premise of official documents. Criticism of the Confessing Church's theological stance should not diminish appreciation for the leaderships' acts of courage. By the time of Niemöller was arrested on July 1, 1937, eight hundred and five other Confessing Church clergy had been arrested before him. Matthew D. Hockenos 2018, 124.

stop those policies. “The third possibility is not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel,” Bonhoeffer wrote, “but to seize the wheel itself.”⁶⁷

Bonhoeffer would run the underground seminary of the Confessing Church at Finkenwalde from 1935 to 1937 until it was closed by the Gestapo at which point he would travel to supervise his students clandestinely.⁶⁸ While on one hand, like so many other members of the Confessing Church, the purity of his religious confession was tainted by his supersessionist belief in Christian superiority, on the other hand, his theology continued to evolve until his day of death and his courage of conviction was unmatched. In the summer of 1944, he would turn from a steadfast philosophy of pacifism to take a role in an assassination plot against Hitler that would cost Bonhoeffer his life.

Earlier, in 1940, after being forbidden by the Reich Chamber of Literature to publish anything, Bonhoeffer authored segments of a manuscript on ethics and concealed them in garden-hiding places at the monastery at Ettal and at Kieckow. They contained words which, had they been known in 1945, could well have grounded the confession created in Stuttgart.⁶⁹

“She [the Church] was silent when she should have cried out because the blood of the innocent was crying aloud to heaven. She has failed to speak the right word in the right way at the right time... She has stood by while violence and wrong were being committed under the cover of this name. And indeed she has

⁶⁷ Clifford Green and Michael P. DeJonge, eds. *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, (Fortress Press, 2013), 366.

⁶⁸ From 1937 to 1939, 67 seminarians would complete their studies with Bonhoeffer. Victoria J. Barnett, Claudia D. Bergmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Scott A. Moore, Peter Frick, *Theological Education Underground, 1937-1940 (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 15)*, (Fortress Press, 2011), 5.

⁶⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, (Touchstone Press, 1995), 11-12.

left uncontradicted, and has thereby abetted, even open mockery of the most holy name.”⁷⁰

Confession of Guilt and the Sin of Omission

An embellished, perhaps even mythic image, at times, surrounding the heroism of the Confessing Church would enable its leaders to emerge as post-war leaders. The reality was that it was their feelings of guilt for having failed to act up more against the Nazi regime that propelled them forward. The leadership of the Confessing Church, whether they faced their deaths during World War II or survived, were well-aware of their sins. American Holocaust scholar and pioneer in studying the influence of Christian antisemitism on Nazi ideology, Franklin Hamlin Littell, argued that the road from the *Bekennende Kirche*, the Confessing Church, runs directly to Stuttgart:

“At Stuttgart there took place one of the most remarkable events in church history. In the presence of God and delegates from the sister churches, leaders of the Christian resistance identified themselves with the sin of the German people, expressed repentance, and begged forgiveness... Astonished newspapermen asked what men who had resisted Nazism for years and experienced jail and concentration camp had to repent of. They answered: ‘We accuse ourselves that we didn't witness more courageously, pray more faithfully, believe more joyously, love more ardently.’ They confessed not sins but sin, that *Erbsünde* or ‘blood guilt’ which was theirs as members of the German folk.⁷¹ That act at Stuttgart, which was so unintelligible to the secular mind, drew a line across the pages of history and more than any other single thing opened the way for the spirit of reconciliation which has been at work in Germany and the rest of Europe.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 113-114.

⁷¹ *Erbsünde* means literally “original sin.”

⁷² Franklin Hamlin Littell (1917-2009). Franklin Hamlin Littell 1961, 49-51. “After the War: Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt” *Resistance!? Protestant Christians under the Nazi Regime*, accessed February 4, 2023, <https://en.evangelischer-widerstand.de/html/view.php?type=dokument&id=206>.

Bonhoeffer's words would echo beyond his grave. Visser 't Hooft noted that Bonhoeffer had spoken to him in Geneva expressing "the conviction that the only road open to Christians of Germany was the road to repentance."⁷³ Visser 't Hooft had received a poem written by Bonhoeffer from Tegel prison called "*Nächtliche Stimmen - Voice in the Night*" that resonated both a penitential psalm and a psalm of lament:

“...We accuse those who drove us to the evil deed,
who allowed us to share their guilty seed,
who made us witnesses of the just abused,
only to despise those they had used...
We learnt to call lies just,
uniting ourselves with the unjust.

When violence was done to the weak,
our cold eyes did not speak...

Sacred bonds by which we once were bound
are now torn and fallen to the ground,
friendship. and truth betrayed,
tears and remorse in ridicule displayed.”⁷⁴

Niemöller was far slower in recognizing the gravity of his transgression. In the months and years following the war, he would become increasingly aware of his irrefutable guilt. For the remaining thirty-nine years of his life after World War II, he would preach extemporaneous sermons up and down Germany and across the globe that were built upon the poetic device anaphora, the repetition of a phrase at the start of a sentence. His powerful repetitive phrase was: “First they came for....” Niemöller would then confess by mentioning victim groups such as the Communists, the incurably ill,

⁷³ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, 189.

⁷⁴ Philip G. Ziegler, “Voices in the Night: Human Solidarity and Eschatological Hope,” in Bernd Wannenwetsch (Ed.), *Who am I?: Bonhoeffer's Theology Through His Poetry*, (T&T Clark, 2009), Poem translated by Edwin Robertson, 23-25.

Jehovah's witnesses, and later the Jews, and admit that he himself had been silent when the Nazis came for each group. And then they came for him.⁷⁵

The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, born out of the conscience of the Confessing Church leadership, conveyed a clear affirmation of the culpability of its authors and their community of Christians and marked the beginning of their contrition. They declared that their accountability extended beyond borders expressing “a great solidarity of guilt” that bound them to their international siblings of faith. They took responsibility for the suffering brought about not only in Germany but beyond and acknowledged that their prior personal confessions and those uttered before their congregations needed to be spoken to the whole Church. They acknowledged that their struggle to affirm the authority of Christianity and authentically live the teachings of Jesus Christ were inadequate thus allowing Nazi tyranny to prevail. They committed to embarking on a new beginning, through which members of the German Protestant Church would “cleanse themselves from influences alien to the faith.” The Declaration concluded with the words, “*Veni Creator Spiritus* - Come, Spirit of the Creator!” a ninth century hymn that is often recited at the celebration of councils and synods expressing public penance.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ There is no definitive text that Niemöller consistently used and Harold Marcuse shows that the version used by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and quoted in countless other places is historically inaccurate and a distortion. Harold Marcuse, “The Origin and Reception of Martin Niemöller’s, ‘First they came for the communists...,’” in *Remembering for the Future: Armenia, Auschwitz, and Beyond*, ed. Michael Berenbaum, Richard Libowitz, and Marcia Sachs Littell, (Paragon House, 2016), 175.

⁷⁶ *Veni Creator Spiritus*, *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed January 13, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15341a.htm>.

While the document, in Niemöller's view, was intended to "set the standard for national honesty" by calling for costly discipleship upon which the path to penitence and reconciliation would be built, the declaration failed to meet that criterion.⁷⁷ The declaration had a flagrant omission - it failed to mention the Jewish people and the vast brutality and bloodshed to which they fell victim. It made no mention of antisemitism nor the extermination of the Jews.

The eleven authors of the Stuttgart Declaration faced limitations. They were well aware of the "toxic consequences" of the 1919 Versailles Treaty that held Germany morally and financially responsible for World War I.⁷⁸ The terms experienced as unbearable by much of the German population created a psychological and economic despair that made Hitler's rise to leadership and promise of redemption possible. While following World War II, the war-crimes had been exponentially greater, Germany lay utterly devastated and adrift in a situation, often using the term '*Zusammenbruch*', (translated by modern Church historian John Conway as "disastrous collapse"), to describe their country's state.⁷⁹ A goal of the confession was to separate spiritual confession from political confession. Acknowledging responsibility for their complicity

⁷⁷ Conway, "How Shall the Nations Repent?" 619.

⁷⁸ Roger Newell, "The Stuttgart Declaration of 1945: A Case Study of Guilt, Forgiveness and Foreign Policy" in Todd Speidell, ed., *Trinity and Transformation: J. B. Torrance's Vision of Worship, Mission, and Society*, (Wipf & Stock, 2016), 159.

⁷⁹ John Conway (1929-2017) noted scholar of modern Church history translated this term and noted its widespread prevalence in Germany in the aftermath of World War II. The term was used to describe both the breakdown of German society including the devastation of its cities and the emotional despair Germans experienced as the atrocities of the Holocaust committed in their name were revealed. John Conway 1987, 603.

to the murderous society the Nazi regime created was a step farther than the authors, no doubt, felt they could take.

It should be noted that after 1945, two major Protestant churches in Saxony-Anhalt, the Church Province of Saxony and the State Church of Anhalt, engaged in their own denazification processes addressing “compromised” pastors and church hierarchs. In the case of these churches, the process was identified, more specifically, as “de-German-Christianization.” In Anhalt, questionnaires were utilized to determine prior allegiances to and affiliations with the Nazi party. In Saxony, tribunals were held. Actions resulted in either dismissal, probation, demotion, or opportunities for confession or “re-education.”⁸⁰

The immediate response to the Declaration of Guilt (also known as the Stuttgart Confession) was muted. It was not immediately disseminated to pulpits across the country. Only gradually would it enter into the German church community consciousness. While its enactment marked the proudest hour in the memory of St. Mark’s Church, it was not broadly applauded in its own day. In October 1945, Church leaders and many German citizens alike were not ready to acknowledge any personal culpability. Many Protestant leaders placed blame on a small number of evildoers.

When news of the statement spread throughout Germany, the Declaration was viewed by the broader Church and the greater population as a betrayal of German

⁸⁰ Luke Fenwick, “The Protestant Churches in Saxony-Anhalt in the Shadow of the German Christian Movement and National Socialism, 1945–1949.” *Church History* 82, no. 4 (2013): 877, 883-5.

national interests equivalent to Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty (the controversial War Guilt clause) that placed moral responsibility upon Germany for the loss and damages at the end of WWI. Some feared the Stuttgart Declaration would bring about similar dire consequences for Germany's future. Others viewed the Declaration as submission to blackmail. In fact, it was a statement of contrition that would earn overseas provisioning of relief supplies during a time of extreme deprivation.⁸¹

Internationally, the document gave the ecumenical community the proof of penitence they needed to proceed down the road to post-war reconciliation and the work of reconstruction. While it was imperfect, Pastor Maury urged the committee "to accept the declaration without pharisaism."⁸² The Council of the German Evangelical Church would be accepted into the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches with Niemöller as their representative. Visser 't Hooft committed to using his voice and position of power to ensure the Declaration would not be exploited as a political tool.⁸³ As the text was shared with international Christian associations, each would respond positively: the Assembly of French Protestantism, the Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Dutch Church, and churches in Great Britain and England. They expressed gratitude and praised it as "a truly Christian and liberating action." Several associations, such as the Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Church, sent responses to

⁸¹ John Conway 1987, 597.

⁸² It would take many decades before the use of the term "pharisaism" would be recognized as a stereotype fueling antisemitism. Even in 2019, the Pope was urged to be cautious with his use of the term. *Agence France-Presse* and *Times of Israel* Staff, "Pope urged by Jews to take care over Pharisees talk," *Times of Israel*, May 12, 2019, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pope-urged-by-jews-to-take-care-over-pharisees-talk/>.

⁸³ Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, 193.

the Declaration's authors sharing their own confessions of failing to show courage in the fight against national socialism.⁸⁴

In February 1946, the Provisional Committee of the WCC in Process of Formation met in Geneva as a full committee for the first time since 1939. A subcommittee, the Ecumenical Refugee Commission, comprised of religious leaders from eleven countries submitted two resolutions of note. The first, a "Resolution on Christians of Hebrew Ancestry," affirmed that all Christians who have Jewish ancestry will be assured of equal rights and protections. The Church will always be a place of refuge for them." And the second, a "Resolution on Antisemitism and the Jewish Situation," built upon the foundation of the Stuttgart Declaration. Addressing the Stuttgart Declaration's inadequacies, the WCC's latter statement focused specifically on the "unprecedented tragedy" that aimed to exterminate European Jewry, admitting the penitence required for the failures of the Churches to overcome the human evil that had threatened and continued to threaten "both Jewish and Christian communities."⁸⁵

Why could this subsequent document that involved the Provisional Committee and written only four months later than the Stuttgart Declaration venture so much further with an explicit acknowledgement of the atrocities of the Holocaust and Christian accountability? First, it emerged from an international body, not just German Protestant

⁸⁴ Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, 193.

⁸⁵ Visser t' Hooft, "The World Council of Churches: Its Process of Formation," *Counsel Oecuménique des églises*: 1946, 31-36. These are the minutes and reports of the meeting of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches held in Geneva from February 21 to 23, 1946 and the constitutional documents of the World Council of Churches.

leadership. They had greater latitude because the vast majority of representatives' governments were not being prosecuted for crimes against humanity or war crimes that might hold them liable. Second, on November 20, 1945, the Nuremberg Trials commenced with the trial of major war criminals – the first of the thirteen trials held in that historic city once known as the “City of Nazi Party Rallies” and where the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws were initially announced. For the first time, the world was coming to learn of both the Nazi mass atrocities and their perpetrators, seeing the evidence and hearing the testimony. This no doubt led to the Christian leaders continued and growing wrestling with their conscience.

Martin Niemöller recalled his personal journey to self-indictment in November 1945. In a July 1946 speech, he explained that he was driving by Dachau when his wife asked to see the cell where he had been imprisoned for four years. After seeing the cell, an American officer led them past an open gate enabling Niemöller to approach the crematory— a building he knew was there but had never seen. Before it was a sign reading: “Here in the years 1933 to 1945 238,756 people were cremated.”⁸⁶ Niemöller recalled that his wife fainted and sank trembling into his arms, which he believed was in response to the nearly quarter million people murdered in that spot. He already knew that number. For him it was seeing the dates “1933 to 1945” that shook him to his core. His alibi claiming ignorance had been shattered. In 1933, while Jews were being murdered, Niemöller had been an avid Hitler supporter. Through his role in the Pastor’s Emergency

⁸⁶ Martin Niemöller, *Der Weg ins Freie* (Stuttgart: F. Mittelbach, 1946), 17–20. Translated by Harold Marcuse, “The Origin and Reception of Martin Niemöller’s, ‘First they came for the communists...,’” 177–78.

League and Confessing Church, he had challenged only those Nazi decrees connected to Church policy that excluded Christians with Jewish ancestry from being officers of the Church. The cremation dates and numbers on the sign at Dachau confronted him with his sin of omission – what he should have protested against at the time. This realization produced a sudden full-throated contrition acknowledging complicity, responsibility, and guilt for the Holocaust that would guide Niemöller’s interfaith leadership for the remaining 39 years of his life. In 1961, Niemöller was elected one of the six presidents of the WCC, a position that he held until 1968.

Niemöller’s second wife, Sibylle Sarah Niemöller noted her late husband’s clear acknowledgement that antisemitism not only led to the failures of the Protestant Church during the Holocaust but was a threat to Christianity itself. Sibylle shared her late husband’s words in a speech to students in Heidelberg after the war, “It is not that we – meaning the church – did ‘too little’ (quoting from the lukewarm Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt). Those six million are a heavy burden on Christendom because it knew what it was doing and it did nothing. Antisemitism, therefore, is the one acute threat to the church, an antisemitic church being a contradiction in itself.”⁸⁷

The progression reflected in Niemöller’s moral and ethical progression was similarly observed in his WCC colleagues as they, too, made efforts to rectify past wrongs and construct interfaith bridges. Over the subsequent decades, the WCC declarations would evolve on the issues of Christian supremacy and evangelism that had

⁸⁷ Zev Garber, “Faith from the Ashes: An Interview with Sibylle Sarah Niemöller von Sell.” 2004. *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 22 (2): 44–55.

bolstered antisemitism, making violence aimed at Jews likely. It wasn't until the June 1977 WCC Committee meeting in Jerusalem that leaders, building upon their prior statements, acknowledged the pluralistic world in which they live that upholds "religious liberty of all." They made clear what this meant in terms of co-existence: "We reject proselytism both in its gross and more refined forms. This implies that all triumphalism, religious imperialism and every kind of manipulation are to be abrogated." The document also explicitly affirms Israel's right to exist, respects the Jewish right to self-determination while supporting the self-determination of Palestinian Arabs, and reiterates the WCC General Secretary's strong concern about Zionism being equated with racism (a reference to the 1975 UN Resolution 3379).⁸⁸

For decades, the WCC continued to work to confront critical issues related to historic and present-day Jewish-Christian relations: the Church's complicity with the Holocaust, historic antisemitism, anti-Jewish theology, supersessionist doctrine, and the political realities of the modern State of Israel with respect to Palestinians. This introspection produced strategies for interfaith dialogue and illuminated the need to revise materials to educate congregations.

However, advances have not been uniformly enduring. In 1982, the WCC would reverse its trend, on one hand acknowledging that "teachings of contempt for Jews and Judaism" created a "spawning ground for the evil of the Nazi Holocaust" while on the other, affirming their obligation to witness and their support of the segment of their

⁸⁸ Franklin Sherman, *Bridges: Volume One*, 305–6.

constituents who understood the “salvific significance” of converting Jews so long as they embraced “non-coercive” practices.⁸⁹ In 2005, building on a July 2004 Presbyterian Church–USA General Assembly watershed resolution supporting pro-Palestinian activism, the WCC urged its 347-member Protestant and Orthodox member churches representing half a billion Christians to divest from companies profiting from Israel’s control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁹⁰ To the present day, the WCC continues to issue statements that many characterize as possessing a strong anti-Israel bias.

In the first four months after Hamas’s barbaric October 7, 2023 attack on Israel leading to the murder of 1200 Israelis, the abduction of 240 hostages, and subsequent war that as of February 2024 created more than 25,000 Palestinian casualties, the WCC issued four statements.⁹¹ One of these statements, issued on October 13, 2023, failed to

⁸⁹ Franklin Sherman, *Bridges: Volume One*, 322–23.

⁹⁰ “The Presbyterian Church’s General Assembly voted 431 to 62 in July [2004] to ‘initiate a process of phased selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel’ and also decided to continue funding messianic congregations that target Jews for proselytizing.” Alan Cooperman, “Israel Divestiture Spurs Clash,” *The Washington Post*, September 29, 2004. “World Council of Churches Endorses Divestment From Israel,” *Religion News Service*, February 23, 2005, accessed July 18, 2022, <https://religionnews.com/2005/02/23/news-story-world-council-of-churches-endorses-divestment-from-israel/>. While many prior Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assemblies offered up single resolutions related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the 2004 General Assembly created five resolutions criticizing Israel. This dissertation cannot treat Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). For resources on the history of BDS and Christian denominational involvement in it, see Cary Nelson and Michael C. Gizzi 2021, *Peace and Faith: Christian Churches and The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

⁹¹ “Statement: WCC calls for a new approach to the conflict in Palestine and Israel,” *World Council of Churches*, October 13, 2023, accessed January 28, 2024, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-wcc-calls-for-a-new-approach-to-the-conflict-in-palestine-and-israel>. “Statement: WCC outraged with news of an attack on Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza; calls for a new reality based on justice and human dignity,” *World Council of Churches*, 17 October 2023, accessed January 28, 2024, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-wcc-outraged-with-news-of-an-attack-on-al-ahli-hospital-in-gaza-calls-for-a-new-reality-based-on-justice-and-human-dignity>. “Statement on the War in Palestine and Israel,” *World Council of Churches*, November 13, 2023, accessed January 28, 2024, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-the-war-in-palestine-and-israel>. “WCC general secretary statement on public hearings in the International

condemn Hamas, instead placing blame on Israeli policies of settlement expansion. The October 17, 2023, statement called the attack on the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza a war crime, when the predominance of evidence points to a failed rocket fired within Gaza.⁹²

In summing up the pioneering effort to craft a transformative document that would have global interreligious implications, there were several forces that brought Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt to the Representatives of the World Council of Churches into existence. In the catastrophic aftermath of WWII, international leaders of the World Council of Churches in Formation were in a quandary. They aimed to establish their global ecumenical church organization that had been in the making since 1937 but knew that steps to launch that vision could not be taken without the German Protestant Church as partners and without its leadership publicly affirming their contrition. These international leaders sought a confession but knew that a forced public display of repentance would be inauthentic. Ultimately, eleven surviving leaders of the Confessing Church were compelled not by their global colleagues but by their own conscience to spiritually redeem the church through the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt – a document they would draft and sign in a private meeting.

Court of Justice on allegations against the State of Israel," *World Council of Churches*, January 11, 2024, accessed January 28, 2024, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-general-secretary-statement-on-public-hearings-in-the-international-court-of-justice-on-allegations-against-the-state-of-israel>. For all WCC statements on the Israel-Hamas War, see <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents>.

⁹²Chas Danner, "Everything We Know About the Gaza City Hospital Blast," October 23, 2023, *New York Magazine*. Retrieved January 28, 2023, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2023/10/israel-hamas-war-everything-we-know-about-the-gaza-hospital-blast.html>.

The Stuttgart Declaration remains a remarkable document even though it fell short on the truth-telling and honesty essential for reconciliation. The statement was not immediately widely disseminated and initially it was broadly condemned by German church counterparts. The document would speak not only to the global religious community but some have concluded that it played a positive role politically and in foreign policy. Religion scholar Roger Newell highlights the vital role the Stuttgart Declaration played in restoring relations between the Protestant Church in Europe and the United States in the tumultuous post-World War II period: “Though controversial at the time, the Stuttgart Declaration was not a document acknowledging collective guilt which German pastors were coerced into signing. It was a personal response to the pilgrimage taken by their fellow believers from enemy nations, who took the daring initiative to be reconciled.” The Declaration provided a pathway for the Allies to replace strategies of collective punishment with politics supporting reconciliation.⁹³

Similar to the Yom Kippur *viddui* in the Jewish Faith, the Jewish confessional prayer offered on the Day of Atonement, the Stuttgart Declaration was a confession written in the first-person plural. It was built on accepting communal responsibility for collective societal offenses and crimes. The Declaration marks a milestone in the church’s post-Holocaust rehabilitation as it worked to reassert and model moral leadership. The Stuttgart Declaration created a rudimentary template for religious communities to follow from 1945 to the present day.

⁹³ Roger Newell 2016, 172.

Chapter Two

The Jewish-Christian Relational Road to Repair:

Not With Animosity, but in the Spirit of Reconciliation

The Ten Points of Seelisberg (July/August, 1947)

As was evident in Stuttgart, the road to reconciliation starts with both an acknowledgement of guilt and an acceptance of responsibility. A next critical step along the path is truth-telling which entails unearthing and identifying the roots of the harm. While the Stuttgart Declaration was the work of one faith community — the leaders of the new Protestant Church in Germany prodded to some degree by international ecumenical visitors — a summer 1947 gathering in Seelisberg, Switzerland (the “Emergency Conference on Anti-Semitism”), would take this work a significant step farther.⁹⁴ The revolutionary document that emerged at this conference demonstrates the power of bringing several faith communities to the table of conversation, in this case Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews. This assembly would craft what would become a cornerstone document in Jewish-Christian dialogue, the Ten Points of Seelisberg.

The historic gathering in that small Swiss village, would represent the third of three significant Jewish-Christian meetings during and in the immediate aftermath of World War II. The notion of interfaith leadership in the post war “rebuilding of human society” was the brainchild of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) in the United States and the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) in Great Britain. The two

⁹⁴ While the conference was formally called the Emergency Conference on Anti-Semitism, hereinafter it will be referred to as the Seelisberg Conference.

independent organizations would first build bridges in the fall of 1941, when three leaders of the American group, Father Edward Cardinal, Rabbi Morris Lazon of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, and Protestant leader Reverend Everett Clinchy, President of the NCCJ, traveled to London to study the impact of the Nazi Blitz on religion, morale and human relations.⁹⁵

In the midst of that trip, a talented lay leader and treasurer of the recently established British CCJ, Sir Robert Waley-Cohen, invited the three American interreligious leaders to join him and several other British CJJ colleagues to dinner at the Savoy Hotel in London. There they shared their respective organization's origin stories and breadth of work and recognized their common ground. Through their continued correspondence afterwards, they would co-craft a vision for an international Jewish-Christian conference as soon as would be feasible after the war.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Father Edward Cardinal (1916-1981) was an historian and college president of St. Viator College. Through the NCCJ, he addressed more than 500,000 US and European servicemen during World War II. Rabbi Morris Lazon (1888-1979) was a US Reform rabbi who served as rabbi and rabbi emeritus of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation for 31 years. Dr. Everett Clinchy (1896-1986) was a Presbyterian minister who co-founded the NCCJ in 1929. The Blitz was the Nazi campaign of bombing the United Kingdom from September 1940 to May 1941 during WWII. The term was first used by the British press and originated from the term *Blitzkrieg*, the German word meaning 'lightning war.' "Cardinal," The Clerics of St. Viator, accessed February 2, 2025, <https://www.viatorians.com/vc-memorial-us/cardinal>.

⁹⁶ The meeting of these three interfaith leaders in London was not spun out of whole cloth. In 1933, Rabbi Lazon and Dr. Clinchy along with Father John Elliott Ross initiated a pilgrimage program as a "Trio" modeling interfaith dialogue by travelling 9,000 miles together across the United States and speaking to 129 American audiences. The Blitz inspired Lazon to suggest an overseas trip. Sir Robert Waley Cohen (1877-1952) was a British industrialist and lay leader of the Anglo-Jewish community serving in turn as treasurer, vice president, and president of the United Synagogue, the association of Ashkenazi congregations in London. William W. Simpson and Ruth Weyl, *The Story of the International Council of Christians and Jews* (International Conference of Christians and Jews: 1997), 20-21. "National Conference of Christians and Jews - evaluation study, 1960," 6, MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992, Series C: Interreligious Activities, 1952-1992 Box 39, Folder 2, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

In 1944, with the war in its final stages, the two organizations set plans in motion to actualize their vision for a first international gathering. They understood the war as a “symptom of a deep-seated and universal spiritual disorder” and believed that Christians and Jews could play a unique role in reconstructing the human social order.⁹⁷ At Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford, July 30 to August 6, 1946, the Oxford Conference, entitled “Freedom, Justice and Responsibility,” brought together 120 participants representing Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish communities drawn from 15 countries including: Australia, Britain, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Germany, Mandatory Palestine, the Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. By the time the conference was held, four of those countries (Canada, the United States, Great Britain and South Africa) had joint organizations of Christians and Jews, with one being formed in New South Wales, Australia. The remainder of participants would be drawn from the widest representative circle of religious organizations as possible, with each participant acting in a voluntary and unofficial capacity.

The conference papers from that 1946 gathering noted, “Never before, so far as we know, had an international group of Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews met together on the basis of their common convictions, with proper regard for differences of faith and practice, to discuss their mutual responsibilities and the possibilities of joint action in relation to human welfare and order.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ International Council of Christians and Jews, *Freedom, Justice and Responsibility: Reports and Recommendations of the International Conference of Christians and Jews, Oxford, 1946* (The Council of Christians & Jews, 1946), 5.

⁹⁸ International Council of Christians and Jews 1946, 5.

Commission One of the Oxford Conference addressed “Group Tensions.” Having met just one month after the Charter of the United Nations was signed, the Commission affirmed the UN’s recent commitment to promoting “the respect for human rights and fundamental freedom for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.”⁹⁹ Their report urged their Conference to exert influence on the UN Statesmen then gathered in Paris to incorporate such language into the post-World War II Peace Treaties being developed.

On one hand, Commission One’s report noted that every religious group present had experienced “persecution or restriction of rights in varying degrees in different parts of the world” and that each one had a responsibility to fight the evil affecting humankind by standing solidly against attacks on any other group. On the other hand, they acknowledged the uniqueness and urgency of addressing antisemitism:

“Of all the various group tensions, that known as antisemitism concerns the whole world and calls for special treatment. Recent history shows that an attack on Jewry is an attack on the fundamental principles of Judaism and Christianity on which our ordered human society depends. Accordingly it is advisable to deal with antisemitism as a special case requiring special treatment, though suggestions for dealing with antisemitism may be applicable to other types of group tensions.”¹⁰⁰

The Commission’s short-term goal called for a conference on antisemitism to be convened in Europe “at the earliest possible moment.” The Commission’s longer-term goals were to strengthen existing Jewish-Christian organizations and to establish new

⁹⁹ There were six commissions at the Oxford Conference: Group Tensions, Fundamental Postulates of Christianity and Judaism in Relation to Human Order, Religious Freedom, Justice and Its Claims, Mutual Responsibility in the Community, Education and Training for Responsible Citizenship. In addition, there was a youth commission. International Council of Christians and Jews 1946, 11.

¹⁰⁰ International Council of Christians and Jews 1946, 11-12.

organizations that would support interreligious cooperation and cultural and social programs that addressed group tensions of “a racial and religious character.”¹⁰¹

The Commission called for the formal creation of an International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ). The concept of an international conference was envisaged in 1943 and the ICCJ historical records (including the Oxford Conference Report itself) recognize the Oxford Conference as its first official convening. While the official organization was endorsed by a 1947 resolution appointing a Continuation Committee and would hold gatherings over the subsequent decades, the ICCJ would not become a legal incorporated entity until November 1974.¹⁰² Both UNESCO’s launching of the World Brotherhood organization in 1950 engaging some of ICCJ’s strongest leaders and a 1950 Vatican directive instructing its Catholic hierarchy to refrain from working with the ICCJ defining it as an ‘indifferentist’ organization (that ignored differences between faiths) would inhibit the ICCJ’s immediate path to growth.¹⁰³

In contrast, the planning and actualization of the Seelisberg Conference proceeded without delay and convened one year later from July 30 to August 5, 1947, at the Grand Hotel Kulm in Seelisberg, Switzerland. Sixty-five participants from 19 countries convened for a joint endeavor to combat racial and religious intolerance.¹⁰⁴ The organizers understood the urgency of addressing antisemitism, both its roots and its toxic legacy that remained a grave threat, even in the post-World War II and post-Holocaust

¹⁰¹ International Council of Christians and Jews 1946, 9.

¹⁰² On the formal incorporation of ICCJ, see pages 87-88.

¹⁰³ William W. Simpson and Ruth Weyl 1997, 28-29.

¹⁰⁴ International Council of Christians and Jews, *Reports and Recommendations of the Emergency Conference on Anti-Semitism, Seelisberg*, Geneva: The International Conference of Christians and Jews, 1947, 1.

era. Invitations were extended to a select group of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish experts from diverse disciplines whom the organizers felt could contribute in a substantive way to the proceedings. Included were academics with specialties in Jewish-Christian relations; the leaders of existing organizations of Christians and Jews and those in formation (from England, Switzerland, the US, and Scotland); the Chief Rabbis of France, Bucharest, and Budapest; and a professor of International Law and Economics who had already drafted legislation for the restitution of Jewish properties taken by the Nazis. Only thirteen had attended the Oxford Conference, and thus most of the attendees had not met before.

The Seelisberg Conference set the goals of studying the extent of existing antisemitism and factors contributing to its continuation and growth in post-War Europe and developing plans for educational, political, religious and social institutions to eliminate its causes and alleviate its effects. Like in Oxford, participants would not be speaking in their official capacities.

On March 15, 1947, an invitation was extended to Jules Isaac, a new and soon-to-become influential voice of scholarship in the field of Christian-Jewish relations. In the aftermath of the 1940 Nazi invasion and occupation of France, Isaac, a distinguished professor and scholar of French history, was stripped of his prestigious role as General Inspector of National Education. It was the most senior government administrative position in education. The Vichy French puppet government, run by Marshal Philippe

Pétain, voluntarily implemented anti-Jewish measures that included the removal of Jews from civil service including teaching.¹⁰⁵

In December 1940, Isaac fled south to Aix-en-Provence where he continued his research and writing. By 1942, when antisemitic measures against persons and property were undeniable, Isaac turned his research from history to the Bible. With his knowledge of Greek and resources in hand provided by colleagues and friends, Isaac immersed himself in the theological study of the New Testament. He sought to understand the soil tainted by intolerance that allowed Nazi ideology to take root and aggressively spread like a deadly weed. His first draft of a dozen pages exploring the historical Jesus and his relationship with the Jewish people of his day was titled “*Quelques constatations basées sur la lecture des Evangiles*” (“Some Observations Based on Reading the Gospels”). This essay would become the basis of his 585-page book *Jésus et Israël*, the majority of which he would write in hiding and in grief.¹⁰⁶

With the Nazi occupation of Southern France in November 1942, Isaac and his wife Laure fled to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon where their son, Daniel Isaac, was teaching in a school run by the heroic Pastor André Trocmé (who was later deemed by Yad Vashem, to be a Righteous Among the Nations).¹⁰⁷ There, Isaac and his wife received

¹⁰⁵ Norman C. Tobias, *Jewish Conscience of the Church: Jules Isaac and the Second Vatican Council*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 55.

¹⁰⁶ Tobias 2017, 70, 126.

¹⁰⁷ Pastor André Trocmé (1901-1971) was a famous Protestant Pastor who urged the approximately 5,000 people living in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon to rescue 5,000 individuals. Among them an estimated 3,500 were Jews. Righteous Among the Nations (in Hebrew *Chasidei Umat HaOlam*) is an official title bestowed by Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Education Center to honor on behalf of the State of Israel those who risked their lives to save Jews. This program, established in 1953, has a strict set of criteria including: active engagement in saving Jews from death or deportation; risking one's personal life, liberty or

false papers and lived in the village of Saint-Agrève, Haute-Loire. In early 1943, Isaac and Laure would move up to Riom (Puy-de-Riom) to be closer to their daughter and the larger libraries in Clermont. Shortly after their arrival while Isaac was at the barber, his wife was arrested by the Gestapo. Isaac managed to secretly retrieve his precious manuscripts from their hotel, escape, and continue to complete writing his historic book in hiding. Isaac's youngest son, Jean-Claude, his daughter Juliette, and her husband, Robert Boudeville, would be arrested separately while attending a resistance meeting at the home of Robert's sister and brother-in-law. Isaac's wife and daughter would be murdered in Auschwitz and his son-in-law would perish in Bergen-Belsen.¹⁰⁸

In a final note that Isaac's wife managed to smuggle out of the Drancy transit camp, she urged him to finish his critical research: "My dearest, take care for our sakes, be steadfast and finish your work for which the world is waiting..."¹⁰⁹

While Isaac's book would not be published until 1948, his July 1946 published letter calling out the dangerous antisemitic writings of Catholic historian Henri Petiot (publishing under the pseudonym "Henri Daniel-Rops") thrust Isaac's scholarship onto the international stage.¹¹⁰ Dr. Pierre Visseur, one of the two executive secretaries of the

position; one's motivation had to be aiding the Jew and not personal reward; and testimony to these facts or unequivocal documentation on the nature and circumstances needed to be available. "FAQs: the Righteous Among the Nations Program," *Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Education Center*, accessed March 17, 2024, <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/faq.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Norman Tobias 2017, 84.

¹⁰⁹ Norman Tobias 2017, 83.

¹¹⁰ Henri Jules Charles Petiot (1901–1965), was a French Catholic historian and writer who used the pen name Henri Daniel-Rops. Daniel-Rops' 17th edition of *Jésus en son temps* included a commentary on Matthew 27:25 stating, "Perhaps it was necessary for Israel to kill their God, whom they failed to recognize; but since blood mysteriously invokes blood, does it not perhaps belong to the charity of Christians to let the horrors of pogroms compensate, in the hidden balance of the divine intention, for the unbearable horrors of the crucifixion?" Norman Tobias 2017, 4.

International Council for Christians and Jews (ICCJ) corresponded with Isaac on March 15, 1947 and convinced him during a visit one month later to contribute foundational documents for consideration at the upcoming Seelisberg Conference.¹¹¹

By June 1947, Isaac submitted a draft distilling the twenty-one propositions that served as the foundation of his manuscript *Jésus et Israël* (identifying the Jewishness of Jesus and his place within ancient Israel; detailing the ways in which later Christian tradition had deleteriously distorted the presentation of Jews and Judaism; and working to uproot Christian anti-Jewish teaching) into an 18-point document entitled “The Rectification Necessary in Christian Teaching: Eighteen Points.”¹¹² It would be translated into English and distributed to the conference participants in advance.

At the Seelisberg Conference, five commissions were created: (a) The Principle Objectives of Jewish-Christian Co-Operation in Relation to the Combating of Antisemitism; (b) Educational Opportunity in Schools and Universities; (c) The Task of the Churches; (d) Work in the Field of Civic and Social Service; and (e) Relations with Governments.

Commission 3 on the Task of the Churches would be charged with tackling Isaac’s submission. After the Eighteen Points were initially presented to the entire committee comprised of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish members, the Jewish committee members would withdraw. The Protestants and Catholics would draft what would

¹¹¹ Dr. Pierre Visseur was the first Secretary of the International Council of Christians and Jews, from 1947 to 1949. He assumed varied positions in the World Brotherhood (Geneva) from 1950 to 1963.

¹¹² See Appendix A for the Twenty-One Propositions which serve as the organizing framework for Jules Isaacs’ *Jesus and Israel* and Appendix B for “The Rectification Necessary in Christian Teachings: Eighteen Points.”

become known as the Ten Points of Seelisberg.¹¹³ Throughout the deliberations, the results of each session were discussed with the Jewish delegation, and ultimately the Ten Points would be adopted by the entire conference in full session.¹¹⁴

Below is the entire final report of Commission 3 — a four-paragraph introduction followed by what has become known as the Ten Points of Seelisberg, followed by a list of practical suggestions.

Commission 3.

The Task of the Churches Address to the Churches¹¹⁵

We have recently witnessed an outburst of antisemitism which has led to the persecution and extermination of millions of Jews living in a Christian environment. In spite of the catastrophe which has overtaken both the persecuted and the persecutors, and which has revealed the extent of the Jewish problem in all its alarming gravity and urgency, antisemitism has lost none of its force, but threatens to extend to other regions, to poison the minds of Christians and to involve humanity more and more in a grave guilt with disastrous consequences.

The Christian Churches have indeed always affirmed the anti-Christian character of antisemitism, but it is shocking to discover that two thousand years of preaching of the Gospel of Love have not sufficed to prevent the manifestation among Christians, in various forms, of hatred and distrust towards the Jews.

This would have been impossible if all Christians had been true to the teaching of Jesus Christ on the mercy of God and love of one's neighbour. But this faithfulness should also involve clear-sighted willingness to avoid any presentation and conception of the Christian message which would support antisemitism under whatever form. We must recognize, unfortunately, that this vigilant willingness has often been lacking.

We therefore address ourselves to the Churches to draw their attention to this alarming situation. We have the firm hope that they will be concerned to show their members how to prevent any animosity towards the Jews which might arise from false, inadequate, or mistaken presentations or conceptions of the

¹¹³ Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, Claire Huchet Bishop, ed., translated by Sally Gran, (Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1971), 404.

¹¹⁴ The reason Commission 3 "contributed so significantly to the future Jewish-Christian dialogue ...all present were aware of the fact that over the centuries, Christian anti-Judaism had established a culture of contempt against the Jews, serving as a precondition which enabled modern racist anti-Semitism to express itself without limitation." Christian Rutishauser, "The 1947 Seelisberg Conference: The Foundation of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue." *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2, no. 2 (2007): 40.

¹¹⁵ The International Council of Christians and Jews 1947, 14-16.

teaching and preaching of the Christian doctrine, and how on the other hand to promote brotherly love towards the sorely-tried people of the old covenant.

Nothing would seem more calculated to contribute to this happy result than the emphasizing of the following points:

1. Remember that One God speaks to us all through the Old and the New Testaments.
2. Remember that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the seed of David and the people of Israel, and that His everlasting love and forgiveness embraces His own people and the whole world.
3. Remember that the first disciples, the apostles and the first martyrs were Jews.
4. Remember that the fundamental commandment of Christianity, to love God and one's neighbour, proclaimed already in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus, is binding upon both Christians and Jews in all human relationships, without any exception.
5. Avoid disparaging biblical or post-biblical Judaism with the object of extolling Christianity.
6. Avoid using the word *Jews* in the exclusive sense of the enemies of Jesus, and the words *the enemies of Jesus* to designate the whole Jewish people.
7. Avoid presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon Jews alone. In fact, it was not all Jews who demanded the death of Jesus. It is not the Jews alone who are responsible, for the Cross which saves us all reveals that it is for the sins of us all that Christ died.

Remind all Christian parents and teachers of the grave responsibility which they assume, particularly when they present the Passion story in a crude manner. By so doing they run the risk of implanting an aversion in the conscious or subconscious minds of their children or hearers, intentionally or unintentionally. Psychologically speaking, in the case of simple minds, moved by a passionate love and compassion for the crucified Saviour, the horror which they feel quite naturally towards the persecutors of Jesus will easily be turned into an indiscriminating hatred of the Jews of all times, including those of our own day.

8. Avoid referring to the scriptural curses, or the cry of a raging mob: *His blood be upon us and our children*, without remembering that this cry should not count against the infinitely more weighty words of our Lord: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*.
9. Avoid promoting the superstitious notion that the Jewish people are reprobate, accursed, reserved for a destiny of suffering.
10. Avoid speaking of the Jews as if the first members of the Church had not been Jews.

We make the following practical suggestions:

The introduction or development in school-instruction and elsewhere, at each stage, of a more sympathetic and more profound study of biblical and post-biblical history of the Jewish people, as well as of the Jewish problem.

In particular the promotion of the spread of this knowledge by publications adapted to all classes of Christian people.

To ensure the correction of anything in Christian publications and above all in educational handbooks which would be in conflict with the above principles.

Our common endeavors are inspired by the spirit of the words of St. Paul in Romans xi, 28-29:

They are beloved for the fathers' sake. For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.

The Ten Points of Seelisberg reveal the transformative power of having Jews and Christians (of multiple denominations) at the same table together addressing core teachings of Christianity. The multifaith approach in Switzerland inspired Christian self-examination and reorientation offering greater clarity than any other post-Holocaust document of dialogue on the harm done by anti-Jewish Christian teachings. It was this document built upon the historical and textual critique of Isaac that compelled Christian leaders to reconsider the ways in which they taught and preached the Gospel texts. The text crafted in Seelisberg would lay the foundational principles upon which the Protestant and Catholic Church would build their work of reconciliation paving the way to Vatican II's 1965 *Nostra Aetate*.

Jews and Christians at the Table Together

While Judaism and Christianity have been in conversation since the latter's inception, that conversation was usually contentious and polemical, with arguments and differences being captured within the pages of each respective faith community's core texts. Scholars agree that there are no sources from the earliest decades of the Jesus movement (c. 30 CE to 50 CE) and that the first writings that we have capturing the

narratives and teachings of the then nascent religious community were composed during the latter half of the first century.¹¹⁶ During the first three centuries, the Jesus movement and rabbinic Judaism were two of many competing sects for the name of being “the true Israel and the true interpreter of the Torah.”¹¹⁷

Israeli-American scholar of history and religion, Daniel Boyarin, explores heresiology -- the process of self-definition that creates definitive borders between one faith and the next -- in his book *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. He posits that Judaism’s evolution from a people into what would be labeled as a religion was not solidified until the two communities, Jewish and Christian, officially parted ways in the fourth century. “One cannot speak of Judaism as existing before Christianity but only as part of the process of the invention of Christianity,” Boyarin writes. “Christianity, in its constitution as a religion, therefore needed religious difference, needed Judaism to be its other -- the religion that is false.”¹¹⁸

Judaism, too, embraced the notion of heresiology. This is typified by the *Birkat haMinim*, the “Blessing of the Heretics” that was added to Jewish daily liturgy by the second half of the first century.¹¹⁹ In its first century context, the word *minim* (literally

¹¹⁶ Rabbi Michael Cook dates the composition of the New Testament to around 50 to 150 CE with 1 Thessalonians likely being the earliest and 2 Peter being the latest. Michael J. Cook, *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament: Enhancing Jewish Well-Being in a Christian Environment* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 2012), 19.

¹¹⁷ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 2.

¹¹⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 11.

¹¹⁹ The Talmud notes that *Birkat haMinim*, literally “a blessing of the sectarians,” was instituted by Rabban Gamliel II, the *Nasi*, the leader of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish legislative body, in Yavneh after the fall of the Second Temple though the wording of the blessing or “curse” as some call it, is not presented (Babylonian Talmud, *B’rachot* 28b). Ruth Langer provides an uncensored medieval Rhineland version, “May there be

meaning “types” or “kinds,”) referred to sectarians or heretics -- those who had separated themselves from Judaism. While the Jerusalem Talmud noted at least 24 kinds of *minim* at the time of the Temple’s destruction in 70 CE, it seems clear that the subject of the original *Birkat Haminin*, was the Nazarenes, the early Jewish Christian sect in first century Judaism.¹²⁰ The rhetoric resulting from the tense and, at times, acrimonious relations between the two emergent communities of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity would be recrafted and reiterated through sacred texts and authoritative teachings.¹²¹

Certain New Testament texts, when taken out of their ancient context, created a dangerous animosity which would recurrently resurface and incite Christian violence against Jews throughout the subsequent millennia most notably during the Middle Ages -

no hope for apostates; and may all the *minim* immediately perish; and may all the enemies of Your people speedily be cut off; and may You speedily uproot and smash and defeat the empire of insolence; and humble all our enemies speedily in our day; Blessed are You, Eternal, who breaks enemies and humbles the insolent.” Ruth Langer, *Cursing the Christians? A History of the Birkat HaMinim* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

¹²⁰ Jewish historian Joseph Jacobs and Orientalist Isaac Broydé note that the original was *notzrim* (Nazarenes) in place of the present text, *vela-malshinim* (meaning “to the informers”) and that “the cause of this change in the text was, probably, the accusation brought by the Church Fathers against the Jews of cursing all the Christians under the name of the Nazarenes.” Joseph Jacobs and Isaac Broydé, “Min,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, accessed September 21, 2024, <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10846-min#:~:text=In%20passages%20referring%20to%20the,39b>).

¹²¹ Marvin Marx Lowenthal (1890-1969), an early 20th century leading Jewish writer and lecturer wrote, “Defensive aloofness paved the way for downright aggressive intolerance when Judaism gave birth to Christianity. The Jew had recognized in the new sect a dangerous offspring; and if we are to follow the Christian account, for contemporary Jewish records say little about, he turned violently against the new claimants — not as outsiders, but as dissident, internal trouble-makers. Meanwhile the early Christian, usually a Jew by upbringing, learned the lesson of intolerance from the mother-faith, and never was there an apter pupil. The Jew hoped to save mankind by remaining true to himself and so prepare the road for the Messiah. The Christian, convinced that the Messiah had come, took the next step by proposing to save mankind through making it over in the Christian image. And he ended, reasonably enough from the pretensions of having a monopoly on revelation and on saving other people, by concluding that whoever refused to be saved — that is, to become a Christian — was damned; and whoever persisted in remaining damned must obviously be an enemy and an abomination to all right-thinking — that is, Christian — men.” Marvin Lowenthal, *The Jews of Germany: A Story of Sixteen Centuries*, (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1936), 7-8.

from the massacres of Jews during the Crusades to the blood libel falsely accusing Jews of murdering Christians and utilizing their blood for ritual purposes.¹²²

The late 18th and 19th century *Haskalah*, Jewish Enlightenment, and modernity would open new doors of interfaith interaction. Dr. David Ellenson noted that modernity “radically changed the nature of interfaith dialogue. The leading medieval scholar, Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki), and others did interact to some extent with Christians on matters of biblical interpretation. In medieval Spain – and elsewhere in Europe – there were also forced religious debates between Jewish scholars such as Nachmanides (Rabbi Moses ben Nahman or “Ramban”) and Christians. In these exchanges, voluntary or coerced, Jews had to stand up for their identity and their religion.”¹²³

With modernity, Jews were increasingly brought to the table not to defend their religion but to expand interfaith understanding. The turn of the 20th century would witness a historic example that took place in Chicago, Illinois, the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions. This distinctly American phenomenon consisted of a seventeen-day gathering held September 11th through the 27th, celebrating religious inclusion as it brought together some four hundred people representing ten religions including forty-one denominations. Eleven notable Jewish speakers would take part. Among them were American-born Jewish Zionist educator, leader and founder of Hadassah (the Women’s

¹²² Robert Chazan. *From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism: Ancient and Medieval Christian Constructions of Jewish History* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 109-135 (on the Crusades), 188-189 (on the blood libel).

¹²³ Rabbi David Ellenson (1947-2024), Reform scholar and leader, and expert in Jewish religious thought, ethics and modern Jewish history. David Ellenson, “How Modernity Changed Judaism – Interview with Rabbi David Ellenson,” *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, September 15, 2008, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://jcpa.org/article/how-modernity-changed-judaism-interview-with-rabbi-david-ellenson/>.

Zionist Organization of America), Henrietta Szold; Talmudic scholar and professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Rabbi Alexander Kohut; pioneer who established the three primary organizations of the Reform movement (the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Hebrew Union College, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis), Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise; leading Reform Jewish theologian Kaufmann Kohler; and American rabbi and scholar of rabbinical literature and philosophy, Emil G. Hirsch. While the gathering brought the promise of a pluralistic future, a second World's Parliament of Religions would not be held until a century later.¹²⁴

The post-World War II transformation of Jewish-Christian dialogue that aimed for repair and reconciliation would come through two paths. First, it was a culmination of the independent work of the North American Conference of Christians and Jews alongside that of the British Council of Christians and Jews that would give birth to an emerging International Council of Christians and Jews and the creation of the Ten Points of Seelisberg. And second, it was the drive and academic fervor of Isaac, propelled by utter grief (both personal grief for his deceased family and grief for all victims of the Holocaust) to unveil and confront the misunderstood teachings of the New Testament that fueled antisemitism and to call for the transformation of Christian education regarding Jews.

¹²⁴ Henrietta Szold (1860-1945). Alexander Kohut (1842-1894), Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), Emil G. Hirsch (1851-1923). *Judaism at the World's Parliament of Religions: Comprising the Papers on Judaism Read at the Parliament, at the Jewish Denominational Congress, and at the Jewish Presentation* (Robert Clarke & Company: 1894), xiii to xviii, accessed May 14, 2024, <https://dn790007.ca.archive.org/0/items/judaismatworldsp00unio/judaismatworldsp00unio.pdf>.

Christian and Jewish Joint Organizations

It would be a collective response to bigotry that would inspire the first Jewish-Christian organization. At a 1923 convention in response to the post-World War I revival of the Ku Klux Klan with their expressions of hatred aimed at African Americans, Roman Catholics and Jews, the Federal Council of Churches addressed the question, “What makes a person join the Ku Klux Klan?” As a result of their debate in 1924, a Committee of Good Will between Christians and Jews was created with financial support from B’nai Brith. In 1928, in response to a number of conferences on the topic of religious misunderstanding, it became clear that a new organization was needed with a broader mission than could be hosted simply under Protestant auspices. In 1928, the first organization aimed at interfaith understanding, the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) was born. The creation of the NCCJ was also in a response to interreligious tension and anti-Catholic bigotry that erupted against Democratic Party presidential candidate Governor Alfred E. (Al) Smith.¹²⁵

At the time of its formation, the NCCJ set three goals as its foundation: 1. To analyze and allay prejudice arising among religious groups in the United States. 2. To establish a basis of cooperation for common ends while ensuring the right of individuals

¹²⁵ Governor Alfred Emanuel Smith (1873-1944) served as the forty-fifth and forty-seventh Governor of NY. “Memorandum by Dr. Bernard Lander,” in Tanenbaum Collection, Box 39, Folder 2, National Conference of Christians and Jews - evaluation study, 1960, 2. See Lance J. Sussman, “Toward Better Understanding”: The Rise of the Interfaith Movement in America and the Role of Rabbi Isaac Landman,” *The American Jewish Archives Journal*, 1982 and Benny Kraut, “Towards the Establishment of the National Conference of Christians and Jews: The Tenuous Road to Religious Goodwill in the 1920s,” *American Jewish History*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (March 1988): 388-412.

and groups to differ. 3. To immunize the public mind and emotions against propagandas of misinformation and hatred by developing mutual understanding and appreciation.¹²⁶

The NCCJ, under the leadership of Rev. Everett R. Clinchy, its founder and first president, would develop a diversity of programs devoted to addressing interreligious conflict. One of its famous initial efforts was sponsoring Brotherhood Day, celebrated first in 1934 and expanding after World War II in 1947 to Brotherhood Week. A second renowned program was the “Tolerance Trio” through which a minister, rabbi and priest promoting interfaith understanding would travel the country addressing hundreds of audiences. Their additional initiatives of round tables, institutes, joint religious Thanksgiving services, Brotherhood meetings and dinners would break down stereotypes and seed NCCJ chapters across America.¹²⁷

In 1940, *The Saturday Evening Post* reported that, "During 1939, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish speakers appeared together at 10,000 meetings in 2,000 communities in 48 states. In the last 12 years it is estimated that Protestants, Catholics and Jews sat down together 250,000 times to consider their relations as American citizens belonging to differing religious bodies. That is a social change which has permanent effects. The Trialogues are becoming an established American technique."¹²⁸

At the same time, interfaith leaders in London recognized a similar need for collaboration and deepened understanding that would “break down barriers of misunderstanding and dislike.” In 1924, a Social Service Committee of the Liberal

¹²⁶ Lance J. Sussman 1982, 47.

¹²⁷ See Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 35-41.

¹²⁸ “Memorandum by Dr. Bernard Lander,” 6.

Jewish Synagogue in London convened a Conference on “Religion as an Educational Force” that would evolve in 1927 into the Society of Christians and Jews. They sought to increase religious understanding, promote good will and cooperation between the two faith communities and combat religious intolerance.¹²⁹

As Hitler came to power and news of antisemitic fanaticism and violence in Germany became known in London, a Youth Council on Jewish-Christian Relations was set up with the goal of educating young people about the perils of antisemitism and to encourage “friendly contact” with young Jews. As the Jewish community of London became overwhelmed by the flood of Jewish refugees from Germany in 1936, an Inter-Aid Committee of Jews and Christians was created. In the aftermath of the notorious Nazi pogrom known as “Kristallnacht” (November 9-10, 1938) and the British government’s subsequent agreement to admit Jewish children as refugees, the committee worked to find Orthodox homes for German Jewish children who became refugees from their homeland. If the organization could not find such homes, it established a policy that would permit Jewish children to be placed in a Christian home. There was to be no proselytization, however, and the child was to be connected with the nearest rabbi for religious instruction.¹³⁰

In England, there were two Christian clergy who independently claimed to have brought up the idea to establish a Council of Christians and Jews: Rev. Dr. James Parkes and Rev. W.W. Simpson. Both of them had a strong academic interest in Jewish-

¹²⁹ Marcus Braybrooke, *Children of One God: A History of the Council of Christians and Jews*, (Valentine Mitchell, 1991), 3.

¹³⁰ Marcus Braybrooke 1991, 6-7.

Christian relations and a drive to unveil through their research the roots of antisemitism found in the Church's teaching.

Parkes would become a pioneer in the field who, for decades, would use his pen and position to fight Christian antisemitism and call for a Christian reexamination of Judaism. His initial 1930 publication, *The Jew and his Neighbour: A Study of the Causes of Anti-Semitism*, that attacked the false construct of race held by German race theorists, kindled a lifetime of scholarly articles and books. Ordained by the Church of England in 1926 and witness to the racist nationalism proliferating throughout Europe, Parkes would become the predominant academic and activist before, during and after World War II, working to combat Jewish hatred steeped in Christian teachings. His 1933 doctoral thesis, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism*,¹³¹ places clear and certain accountability for Jewish antipathy in the hands of the Church: "... the Christian public as a whole, the great and overwhelming majority of the hundreds of millions of nominal Christians in the world, still believe that 'the Jews killed Jesus, that they are a people rejected by their God, that all the beauty of their Bible belongs to the Christian Church and not to those by whom it was written'; and if on this ground, so carefully prepared, modern antisemites have reared a structure of racial and economic propaganda, the final responsibility still rests with those who prepared the soil, created the deformation of the people, and so made these ineptitudes credible."¹³²

¹³¹ Published in 1934 notably by a Jewish publisher, The Soncino Press in England; republished in 1961 by The World Publishing Company and The Jewish Publication Society of America.

¹³² Sidney Sugarman, Diana Bailey, and David A. Pennie, ed. *A Bibliography of the Printed Works of James Parkes: with selected quotations* (University of Southampton, 1977), 7.

Parkes would become a rescuer of Jews during the Holocaust. He denounced as a forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* that originated in 1905 in Russia and that was and continues to be the most widely distributed antisemitic publication. The fact that the Nazi Party attempted to assassinate Parkes at his home in England testifies to his widespread influence. He authored 329 books, articles, monographs and speeches – a vast number of them addressing the Jewish-Christian relationship.¹³³ He rightfully deserves the title given to him by many as the founding father of Christian-Jewish relations. Parkes taught, “You cannot build good theology on bad history.” The Church required a truthful reckoning with its past. In 1966, preaching to a gathering of Christians and Jews, Parkes did just that saying: “There lies behind us centuries of persecution in the name of Christ, centuries of massacre in the name of Christ, centuries of forced baptisms in the name of Christ, all of which we Christians cannot undo.”¹³⁴ However, what the Church could do was transform its future by establishing a positive theology and positive relationship with the global Jewish community.

Reverend W. W. (William Wynn) Simpson, in his early years as a university student, recognized the separation of his Jewish peers and became interested in Judaism. As a young Methodist minister, he was distressed by Christian missionary practices directed toward Jews. The authorities of the Methodist Church encouraged him to embark on a two-year study of contemporary Jewish problems which led to his enrolling as an

¹³³ Sidney Sugarman et al. 1977, 1-117.

¹³⁴ Alice L. Eckardt, "Founding Father of Jewish-Christian Relations: The Rev. James Parkes (1896-1981)," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 3, no. 1 (2008): CP9, CP1, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://ezproxy.queens.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/founding-father-jewish-christian-relations-rev/docview/2099857485/se-2>.

external student at Jews' College in London, a rabbinical seminary. Serving as General Secretary of the Christian Council of Refugees which was created in 1938 to raise money for “non-Aryan” victims who were defined as Jewish by the Nazis but did not identify as Jewish by religion, Simpson was well aware of the unfolding tragedy of the Holocaust. In 1939, recognizing the historic role that Christianity played in Jewish suffering and the need to address it, Simpson authored a pamphlet entitled, *The Christian and the Jewish Problem*. By that early date, he already had a vision for a need to educate Christians about Judaism.

Whether it was Parkes or Simpson or both who had the initial vision for and conversation that sparked a Jewish-Christian collaborative council to address historic and present relations, convincing Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Dr. Joseph Herman Hertz, would be a critical barrier to overcome. A council could not move forward without his support and Hertz strongly opposed religious fraternization.¹³⁵ Yet, Hertz — well aware of the unfolding Nazi atrocities which at that time included the murder of the mentally ill, the German invasion and occupation of nine countries, and their consequent massacres aimed at decimating the Jewish people—formed and was Chair of the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council. Together with Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld, founder of the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement, Hertz persuaded the British Government to

¹³⁵ Dr. Joseph Herman Hertz (1872 – 1946), Chief Rabbi of the British Empire for 33 years, Biblical scholar and Zionist, authored a commentary on the Torah that aimed to reconcile the Orthodox notion of Divine revelation with modern science, and played an important role in the development of the Balfour Declaration. Hertz even opposed religious engagement with non-Orthodox Judaism. He prohibited pulpit exchanges with non-Orthodox synagogues and requested that the BBC not give airtime to non-Orthodox rabbis. Benjamin J. Elton, “A Bridge across the Tigris: Chief Rabbi Joseph Herman Hertz,” *Conversations*, Winter 2015/5775, Issue 21, 67-81, <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/bridge-across-tigris-chief-rabbi-joseph-herman-hertz>.

give visas —saving thousands of refugees from the Holocaust, including 10,000 children and 500 rabbis from every Jewish denomination.

At a November 19, 1941 lunch at the Grosvenor House hosted by William Temple, the Archbishop of York (where the Rabbi was served a basket of fresh fruit, a rare wartime indulgence, while his host had a hard-boiled egg), the idea of a Council of Christian and Jews was presented.¹³⁶ The vision was for a joint organization that would serve “to witness to the values which Jews and Christians hold in common and in which there is no place for prejudice, persecution or discrimination.”¹³⁷

Hertz, with hesitation, and even with a threat to withdraw support during the seven months it took to actualize the vision, agreed to the establishment of CCJ with two conditions. First, each faith community would be responsible for addressing its own religious teaching. Jews should not interfere with the teachings of Christianity and vice versa. And second, he wanted Orthodox representation on the Council. Hertz’ extreme apprehension was likely a result of fear that interfaith programs would provide opportunities for proselytization and of his resolute opposition to liberal Judaism and threat he felt it posed to diluting Orthodoxy.¹³⁸ At first, Hertz agreed to be a joint President of CJJ, but illness prevented his attendance at meetings. The appointment to the Executive Committee of Dayan Harris M. Lazarus, Chief Dayan of the London Beit Din,

¹³⁶ By the November 1941 meeting between Temple and Hertz, Germany had invaded and occupied Poland (September 1939), Denmark (April 1940), Norway (April 1940), Belgium (May 1940), the Netherlands (May 1940), Luxembourg (May 1940), France (May 1940), Yugoslavia (April 1941), and Greece (April 1941). Germany invaded but could not defeat the Soviet Union (June 1941). “German Conquests in Europe, 1939-1942, *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed, May 5, 2024, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/german-conquests-in-europe-1939-1942>.

¹³⁷ Marcus Braybrooke 1991, 11.

¹³⁸ Benjamin J. Elton 2015.

and Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman, then rabbi of Liverpool, would satisfy Hertz's demands.¹³⁹

On March 20, 1942, the Council of Christians and Jews was established. The resolution noted that the Council would be made up of representatives of the Christian and Jewish communities of Great Britain adopting the following aims: (a) To check and combat religious and racial intolerance. (b) To promote mutual understanding and goodwill between Christians and Jews in all sections of the community, especially in connection with problems arising from conditions created by the war. (c) To promote fellowship between Christian and Jewish youth organizations in educational and cultural activities. (d) To foster co-operation of Christians and Jews in study and service directed to post-war reconstruction.¹⁴⁰

It would be these two groups, the American NCCJ and the British CCJ that would play the primary role in drawing together existing Christian-Jewish groups and those starting to form in other countries as they invited participation in the Oxford Conference on Freedom, Justice and Responsibility, followed by the Seelisberg Conference. The academic expertise, the experienced interfaith leaders, and the structures of a growing number of collaborative Christian-Jewish organizations were in place to significantly advance their goals of post-Holocaust reconciliation.

Given Hertz's firm condition that each faith community would address its own religious teachings, it is surprising that a newcomer such as the Jewish historian Jules

¹³⁹ Harris M. Lazarus (1878 - 1962). Isser Yehuda Unterman (1886-1976). Unterman would later make Aliyah and be elected Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa in 1946 and as Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel in 1964.

¹⁴⁰ Marcus Braybrooke 1991, 13-14.

Isaac, rather than better known Christian scholars, would be invited to submit the framework addressing the most critical component of the Seelisberg Conference agenda: the task of the Churches to address “the tragic fact that certain theologically inexact conceptions and certain misleading presentations of the Gospel of Love, while essentially opposed to the spirit of Christianity, contribute to the rise of antisemitism.”¹⁴¹

Hertz’ conditions reflected the Orthodox stance of opposing religious exchanges that could challenge presumptions of truth held by the Jewish partners -- a position that was not upheld by the four rabbis assigned to Commission Three.¹⁴² The generosity of the Christian planners of Seelisberg in giving the primary platform to Isaac was perhaps a recognition of their complicity of silence during the Holocaust. It also attested to the seriousness with which the Christians addressed the problem of antisemitism.

Jules Isaac and the Others at the Table of Dialogue

Jules Isaac’s book *Jesus and Israel* opens with a dedication:

“IN MEMORIAM
To my wife and my daughter
Martyrs
Killed by Hitler’s Nazis
Killed
Simply because their name was
ISAAC”¹⁴³

Isaac notes that the book was “born of persecution.” Yet his aim was to birth a better future. In the preface to the 1948 edition, Isaac identifies the limitations of his

¹⁴¹ The International Council of Christians and Jews 1947, 13.

¹⁴² For background on the rabbis who were part of Commission Three, see pages 78-79.

¹⁴³ Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, xiii.

research that began in 1943 and concluded in 1946. It is not a textbook for exegesis of Scripture, he notes, for the library he was able to acquire from supportive colleagues while in hiding in Southern France during the Holocaust was far from expansive. Isaac largely relied upon the books and scholarship of French academics and theologians. Among them were a French theologian and Roman Catholic Biblical Scholar, Marie-Joseph Lagrange; Jesuit priest and pioneering Christian theologian of Judaism Father Joseph Bonsirven; and French Catholic, philo-Semite, and faithful friend of Isaac's, Charles Peguy.¹⁴⁴

Isaac was an accomplished historian holding one of the highest academic offices in France prior to the war. While motivated by his experience of suffering as a Jew, he was an assimilated Jew who identified as a person of no religion. "The reader may wonder to what religion the author belongs," Isaac posits. He then answers, "This is easy for him to answer: none. But this whole book witnesses to the fervor that inspires and guides him, fervor for Israel, fervor for Jesus, son of Israel."¹⁴⁵

Isaac provided a thorough analysis of historical-theological antisemitism that was grounded in Christian scripture, while at the same time illustrating that modern antisemitism was not aligned with the Gospels.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855-1938). Joseph Bonsirven (1880-1958). Charles Peguy (1873-1941).

¹⁴⁵ Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, xxiv.

¹⁴⁶ Isaac's thesis would be supported by the later writing of American author, and former associate professor of government and social studies at Harvard University, Daniel Goldhagen. In his well-known volume *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, Goldhagen argues that an "eliminationist antisemitism" that fueled the Holocaust was rooted in medieval religious antisemitism that became secularized. It should be noted the book had many critics. Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, (Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

James Parkes had written his doctoral dissertation in this field and by the time of the Seelisberg Conference, he had been immersed in the study of Jewish-Christian relations for 18 years, authoring dozens of articles on the topic.

Why was Isaac's the grounding research that would stand at the center of the critical work of reconciliation rather than Parkes? Because Isaac held the power of having lived experience. He had been victim to the harm caused by the weaponization of Christianity. Yet using the lens of historical and literary criticism, he was able to approach his research not with animosity, but with appreciation of the New Testament and in the spirit of reconciliation.

The members of Commission 3 were wholly receptive to Isaac's work. The majority of them had been either directly affected by or witness to the Nazi's toxic ideology. Rabbi Jacob Kaplan, Chief Rabbi of France, worked with the Resistance during the Nazi occupation. Rabbi Dr. Zwi Chaim Taubes, the Rabbi of Zurich and the Executive of the Swiss Council of Christians and Jews, had fled from Ukraine.¹⁴⁷

Rabbi William Rosenblum had been impacted by earlier waves of anti-Jewish hate fleeing Poland for the United States in 1892 at the age of five. He was part of a massive wave of two million Eastern European Jewish immigrants who came to America between 1880 and 1920, driven by economic hardship, persecution, and political and social upheaval.¹⁴⁸ As President of the Synagogue Council of America and as an official

¹⁴⁷ Jacob Kaplan (1895-1994) served as Chief Rabbi of France from 1950-1980. Zwi Chaim Taubes (1900–1966).

¹⁴⁸ Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger, *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader*, (Brandeis University Press, 2014), 129.

representative of B'nai B'rith, he had met in 1948 with Pope Pius XII with the aim of improving Christian-Jewish relations.¹⁴⁹

Then there were those Christian members of Commission 3 who had Jewish roots and family. Two of the Priests, Reverend Father Paul Démann and Reverend Father de Menasce, who were the principal draftsmen in reworking Isaac's Eighteen Points into the final Ten Points of Seelisberg, were Jewish converts to Catholicism.¹⁵⁰ While many who leave Judaism may display an antipathy towards their prior faith, these converts serving on Commission 3, had a sympathy for their past religious tradition and were committed to expanding the safety of the community to which they once belonged.

Reverend Adolph Freudenberg's wife Elsa was of Jewish descent. Freudenberg, a member of the Confessing Church in Germany and close friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, managed to emigrate to England in March 1939. Freudenberg would lead a refugee agency for the Ecumenical Council of Churches first in England and then later in Geneva, which was his post when attending the Seelisberg Conference. He had been part of the first ecumenical delegation leading to the 1945 Stuttgart Confession of Guilt. After the Seelisberg Conference, he'd return to Germany and serve as a Pastor for refugee

¹⁴⁹ William F. Rosenblum (1892-1968) was ordained at the Hebrew Union College in 1926. He served as Rabbi of Temple Israel in New York City from 1930 until 1963. In meeting with Pope Pius XII, the Synagogue Council of America and the ADL requested the Vatican revise its teachings surrounding the Jewish connection to the death of Jesus. In response the Vatican issued a statement identifying anti-Semitism as a Cardinal Sin. Rosenblum also met with Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. "William F. Rosenblum Papers," *Center for Jewish History*, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/3/resources/2750>.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Démann (1912-2005) was born into an assimilated family. His mother was murdered in a concentration camp during the Holocaust. He was ordained as Priest in 1944 and was trained as a theologian. From 1947 to 1957, he directed *Cahiers Sioniens*, a journal that ran from 1946 to 1957 and explored Catholic-Jewish relations in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Jean de Menasce (1902-1973) was a French Catholic priest, of the Dominican Order, an author and academic. Norman Tobias 2017, 108-109.

settlement. He lived the journey from survival to resistance to reconciliation – and stirred his Christian community to do the same.¹⁵¹

The Jewish members of the Commission and those with Jewish roots or relatives were matched by their equally sympathetic and receptive non-Jewish committee partners. The Chair of Commission 3, Reverend Father Calliste Lopinot, had worked from 1940 to 1943 as spiritual advisor to Christian internees at Ferramonti Di Tarsia, the largest of 15 concentration camps in Italy. While conditions there were not as brutal as those in other countries, Lopinot was well aware of the terror facing Jewish prisoners. According to the “Acts and Documents of the Holy See” related to the Second World War (an eleven-volume collection of Vatican archival documents related to the papacy of Pope Pius XII during World War II), on September 10, 1942, Lopinot wrote to the Italian Cardinal Francesco Borgongini Duca. Lopinot reported that internees there had heard of massive deportations of Jews from Germany and France to locations in Poland. Jews in Ferramonti with family member in Slovakia, Germany, Holland and France were panicked. As they learned of persecution spreading to France, they feared their own deportation and death. Lopinot wrote to his contact at the Holy See, “I feel obliged in conscience to warn Your Excellency of this state of souls and I ask you on behalf of all the internees to intervene so that such inhuman measures are not taken by the Government of Italy. Precisely at this moment the internees feel that the See is their only

¹⁵¹ Reverend Adolph Freudenberg (1894-1977). Dr. Richard Harvey, “7 January 1977 Passing of Adolph Freudenberg – Friend of Bonhoeffer, Lawyer, Pastor, Ecumenist #otdimjh,” *On This Day in Messianic History*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://jewinthepew.org/2020/01/07/7-january-1977-passing-of-adolph-freudenberg-friend-of-bonhoeffer-lawyer-pastor-ecumenist-otdimjh/>. Dr. Richard Harvey holds a PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Wales (Lampeter) with a dissertation on “Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach.”

support; with full confidence they turn to me Your Excellency and they are sure that their fate is in good hands.”¹⁵²

Lastly, the only woman on the Commission, Marie Magdeleine Davy, a scholar of medieval mysticism who taught clandestinely as part of a resistance movement during the war in Paris, had integrated Jewish thought into her research.¹⁵³

With the vast majority of those on the Commission 3 being proximate to the Holocaust, there was a clear courageous call for a revisioning of Christian theology. The work was victim-centered from the research of Isaac to the Seelisberg Conference resolutions calling for human rights legislation, restitution for confiscated Jewish properties, governmental commitments to rooting out antisemitism in Occupied Territories, to a commitment to giving Displaced Persons the ability to make their new homes wherever they wished.

Ten Points on the Path to Reconciliation

The Ten Points of Seelisberg was a seminal document that would ground the work of Christian, and especially Catholic, thought and education, from 1947 forward to today. Theologian Victoria Barnett notes, “The unique feature of Seelisberg is that it was

¹⁵²Reverend Father Calliste Lopinot (1876 – 1966). “Le P. Lopinot au nonce en Italie Borgongini Duca,” Ferramonti-Tarsia, September 10, 1942, *Acts and Documents of the Holy See Relative to the Second World War*, Volume 8, 642, accessed May 7, 2024, Volume-8.pdf (vatican.va).

¹⁵³ Marie Magdeleine Davy (1903-1998), Brenna Moore, “The Extraordinary Marie Magdeleine Davy,” *Genealogies of Modernity*, September 21, 2021, accessed May 7, 2024, <https://genealogiesofmodernity.org/journal/2021/9/21/extraordinary-marie-magdeleine-davy>.

the product of conversation between Christians and Jews – really a Christian reply to the Jewish challenge in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.”¹⁵⁴

The Christian members of Commission 3 would rework Isaac’s submission, crafting it into a succinct, direct, and compelling document, reviewing each draft with the Jewish members to solicit feedback.

The first four points of the document begin with the word “remember” as they highlight the rootedness of Christianity in Judaism: the notion of one God who speaks through the Old Testament that is foundational to the New Testament; the Jewishness of Jesus, his mother, the disciples, apostles and first martyrs; and the principal commandment to love God and one’s neighbor that is binding upon Christians and Jews.

The word “remember” (in Hebrew, *zachor*) is a highly resonant Jewish word that appears in the Hebrew Bible 228 times. It relates not only to positive Jewish observance such as remembering Shabbat but to remembering the harshest moments of Jewish history - the Israelites’ enslavement in Egypt and being victims of assaults by its greatest enemies such as Amalek and Haman. In Judaism, the word “*zachor*” is not passive but active -- memory calls one to action, to blot out evil and to prevent violence and genocide, especially aimed at Jews. The two primary authors who distilled Isaac’s 18 points into 10 recognized the historic power of this command.

The first four points reflect positive directives reminiscent of the positive commandments of Judaism and the Torah (known in Hebrew as “*mitzvot aseh*,” commandments of required action) and the final six points are negative directives

¹⁵⁴ Victoria Barnett, “Seelisberg: An Appreciation,” *Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations*, 2:2, (2007), 56.

bringing to mind Judaism's negative commandments (*mitzvot lo ta'aseh*, commandments prohibiting action). Do not disparage Biblical and post-Biblical Judaism. Do not use the word *Jews* to depict the enemies of Jesus and reflect the entire Jewish people. Do not present the Passion, Jesus' crucifixion, in a way that elicits hatred toward the Jews and puts the responsibility for Jesus' death upon them. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to teach the Passion in a way that does not create indiscriminate Jewish hatred today. Do not mention the Scriptural curse upon the Jews in Matthew (27:5) without remembering Jesus' forgiving response in Luke (23:34). Do not advance the "superstitious notion" that the Jewish people are degenerate, cursed and destined for suffering. Do not speak of the Jews without recognizing that the first members of the Church were Jews.

The Ten Points included an introductory four paragraphs acknowledging the Christian environment in which the extermination of millions of Jews took place and the force of antisemitism that continued to threaten the post-Holocaust Jewish world and persist in poisoning Christian minds. Yet at the same time, the text skirted the issue of the Church's complicity by asserting, "The Christian Churches have indeed always affirmed the anti-Christian character of antisemitism, but it is shocking to discover that two thousand years of preaching of the Gospel of Love have not sufficed to prevent the manifestation among Christians, in various forms, of hatred and distrust towards the Jews."

German Theologian Katharina von Kellenbach disputes this assertion: "It is simply not true that the Christian churches have 'always affirmed the anti-Christian

character of antisemitism.' Wishful thinking bends the facts to conform to desires for moral innocence and flawless integrity.”¹⁵⁵

The Ten Points conclude with three recommendations involving the revision of educational materials for every stage to ensure a more sympathetic approach to the “Jewish problem” rooted in a deeper study of the biblical and post-biblical history of the Jewish people. The document closes with a text from Romans 11 that is essential for reversing the historical teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism. “They are beloved for the fathers' sake. For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.” (Romans 11:28-29)

While the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were not in the room when the Ten Points were prepared, they were part of the dialogue. Their hand, scribed through grief, was in the initial draft, and their feedback was elicited with each unfolding draft calling for a radical correction of Christian teaching. Von Kellenbach notes the power of this direct confrontation between Christians and Jewish victims:

“For the first time in Christian history, animosity towards Jews was declared a problem. This point deserves repeating: Before 1945, respectable Christian theologians felt no shame teaching and preaching contempt for the Jewish people and religion. It was only after the Final Solution of the Jewish Question, that rabid denunciation and defamation of Jews and Judaism became problematic and shameful. The destruction of European Jewry forced Christian theologians and church leaders to consider the role of triumphalism and supersessionism in the genocidal violence unleashed by Nazism.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Katharina von Kellenbach (1960 -) is a German theologian and Professor Emerita of Religion at St. Mary's College of Maryland. A native of West Germany, she studied Evangelical Theology in Berlin and Göttingen (1979-1982) and received her PhD in 1990 at Temple University. Katharina von Kellenbach, "Guilt and the Transformation of Christian-Jewish Relations," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 15.1 (2020), 13.

¹⁵⁶ Katharina von Kellenbach 2020, 13.

The Holocaust, that decimated one half of European Jewry and one third of global Jewry, moved these Christians to a self-reckoning requiring a reconsideration of Christian theology. A “new” covenant could no longer simply replace an “old” covenant leaving the Jewish people outside the fold and outside the bounds of safety and protection.

The impact of the Seelisberg Conference would be expansive, and its positive outcomes would be long-lasting. In part because Isaac, for one, would not rest on the laurels of the Ten Points of Seelisberg or on the publication of *Jésus et Israël*. He would work tirelessly as a scholar, author and activist for the next 16 years until his death at the age of 85 to transform Christian teaching and keep Jews safe from religiously-sanctioned persecution.

At the 1947 meeting, when Pierre Visseur first visited Isaac to invite his participation at the Seelisberg Conference, Visseur suggested the creation of a French affiliate of the ICCJ. The year after the Seelisberg Conference, Isaac became a founder and facilitator of the Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France (AJCF) in Paris.¹⁵⁷ Groups were later established in Lille, Aix-en Provence, and in many towns. Today it has a federation of 40 groups.

Remarkably, Isaac would gain audiences with two Popes—Pope Pius XII in 1949 and Pope John XXIII in 1960. The unprecedented dialogue during that latter meeting would be a most notable step on the path to the watershed Catholic Vatican declaration *Nostra Aetate*, confronting the Church’s anti-Jewish teachings.

¹⁵⁷ Judeo-Christian Friendship League.

John L. Allen, Jr., the American journalist and Vatican correspondent, noted: “60 years ago, a Pope met a Jewish icon and the world changed.” When Pope John XXIII announced his plans for Vatican II in January 1958 (more than ten years after the Seelisberg Conference), Isaac seized the opportunity to meet with the Pontiff, petitioning him to address Jewish–Christian relations with the world’s bishops. He presented the eighteen points from his research, hopeful that they would “undergird Christian education about Judaism, such as ‘Jesus was a Jew’ and ‘the trial of Jesus was a Roman trial, not a Jewish trial.’”¹⁵⁸

Isaac’s work and words would echo in the declarations of dialogue that would follow, and his influence on the academic study of the New Testament endures. He coined the term “the teaching of contempt,” and the term “supersessionism” appeared for the first time in the English translation of his six-hundred-page tome, *Jésus et Israël*.¹⁵⁹ He authored two more significant books: *Has Anti-Semitism Roots in Christianity?* in 1961 and *The Teaching of Contempt* in 1964.

¹⁵⁸ John L. Allen, Jr., “60 Years Ago, a Pope Met a Jewish Icon and the World Changed,” *Crux*, <https://cruxnow.com/news-analysis/2020/06/60-years-ago-a-pope-met-a-jewish-icon-and-the-world-changed>.

¹⁵⁹ Isaac identified three teachings of contempt rooted in the teachings of the early church: Jewish dispersion was providential punishment for the crucifixion, the deterioration of Judaism was due to the legalism of the Pharisees, and the Jews were responsible for deicide. The term “supersessionism, often used interchangeably with “replacement theology,” is the claim that God’s covenant with the Jews has been replaced by a new covenant through Jesus and with the Church. R. Kendall Soulen, professor of Systematic Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary writes: “Although never formally defined as a doctrine by the early Church, supersessionism has stood at the centre of Christianity’s understanding of its relationship to the Jewish people from antiquity until recent times.” Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 1964). R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 413–14.

The Seelisberg Conference marked the beginning of an explosion of scholarship on the Jewishness of Jesus, the place of Judaism in the New Testament, and a discernable advance in interfaith dialogue. Yaakov Ariel, professor of religious studies at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and expert in Christian-Jewish relations, notes:

“Interfaith dialogue and systematic attempts at reconciliation between the two sister faiths have been relatively new developments. Such attempts began at the turn of the twentieth century, and while the century included historical low-peak moments in Christian–Jewish relations, it also saw the coming of age of a movement of interfaith dialogue that eventually brought about the clearing of air and rapprochement between the faiths. Interfaith dialogue made some progress in the decades between the two world wars, and advanced considerably in the years after the Second World War, reaching a ‘golden age’ in the late 1960s and 1970s, when unprecedented momentum for reconciliation and dialogue flourished in Europe, America, Israel and other countries. Although the movement of interfaith dialogue has since witnessed setbacks and lost much of its momentum, it has nonetheless made a profound impact on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, bringing about great improvements in the manner the different communities of faith relate to each other.”¹⁶⁰

In terms of the broader impact of the Seelisberg Conference, the development of an International Conference of Christians and Jews, would not progress as quickly. It would take 27 years for the organization to become an independent legal entity. Originally headquartered in London, the ICCJ headquarters would move in 1979 to the Martin Buber House in Heppenheim, Germany. It was fitting that the ICCJ would be centered in Germany given that post-Holocaust reconciliation was a central component of the

¹⁶⁰ Yaakov Ariel, “Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in Catherine Cornille 2013, 205.

organization's creation and that it would be situated in the home where Buber composed *I and Thou*, capturing Buber's philosophy of dialogue.

Everett Clinchy, who had founded the National Conference of Christians and Jews in America, and who was initially an enthusiastic proponent of an international effort, was advised by UNESCO that there was a "political connotation of the word 'Christian.'" So Clinchy instead developed a broader organization called "World Brotherhood." The British, Swiss and French Jewish-Christian organizations declined Clinchy's invitation to join. The World Brotherhood effort had a bold and impressive start but due to inadequate resources was a short-lived initiative. Its creation negatively impacted both the international ICCJ and the American NCCJ.¹⁶¹

Additionally, a 1950 Vatican directive to the Catholic Hierarchy which warned against involvement with an International Conference of Christians and Jews also impeded the ICCJ's progress.¹⁶² The Vatican prohibition remained in place for many years until Catholic engagement with ICCJ was happily restored in 1964.¹⁶³

Even though the success of Seelisberg Conference was significant, the Ten Points document itself is not widely known. It was rather the 1965 *Nostra Aetate* that would take the message of religious reconciliation worldwide. The ICCJ, a brand-new organization in 1947, did not and could not match the reach of the Catholic Church.

A little more than sixty years later, in July 2009, at an International Conference of the International Council of Christians and Jews, a follow-up document "The Twelve Points

¹⁶¹ William W. Simpson and Ruth Weyl 1997, 25.

¹⁶² William W. Simpson and Ruth Weyl 1997, 25-26.

¹⁶³ William W. Simpson and Ruth Weyl 1997, 29-30.

of Berlin” would be issued. This much more extensive document began with a call to Christians and Christian communities to combat religious antisemitism (prejudice against Jews based on religious difference), racial antisemitism (prejudice against Jews based on the pseudoscientific belief that Jews are a distinct race and that the characteristics they hold are inferior) and all forms of antisemitism; promote interreligious dialogue with Jews; develop a positive theological understanding of Jews; and pray for the peace of Jerusalem. It continued with a call to Jews and Jewish communities to acknowledge the efforts of Christians over the decades to change their attitudes towards Jews; to examine their own Jewish texts in light of these changes; to recognize the line between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism; and to encourage Israel to actualize the ideals of its founding documents. The Twelve Points of Berlin lastly issued a call to Jews and Christians together, to engage in interreligious dialogue, to nurture interfaith friendships and cooperation, to converse with political and economic bodies and to address environmental issues as interfaith networks.¹⁶⁴ The Twelve Points of Berlin sought to remind its audience that documents of dialogue need updating. They need to advance interfaith initiatives, to challenge respective communities to act with even greater courage, and to speak to contemporary times and issues.

In sum, Jules Isaac, bereft scholar whose family fell victim to the Nazis, was invited into the circle of Christian leaders to help turn around the tarnished and violent history of the Church. The Church was complicit at best and culpable at worst to the proliferation

¹⁶⁴ International Council of Christians and Jews, “A Time for Recommitment: Building the New Relationship between Jews and Christians,” July 05, 2009, Accessed May 14, 2024, https://www.iccj.org/fileadmin/ICJ/pdf-Dateien/A_Time_for_Recommitment_engl.pdf.

of antisemitism fueling the Holocaust. Yet Isaac's success could not have happened without the work of Parkes, Simpson, Clinchy, and the active support of dozens of other Christian scholars and leaders who came to the Oxford and Seelisberg Conferences with a commitment to advance human rights, justice, and religious freedom. The radical transformation of approaches to the religious other could not have happened without leaders who were deeply engaged in the study of their religious counterparts. The Chief Rabbi of Great Britain Joseph Hertz sanctioned a Jewish-Christian Council on the condition that the scope of the partnership be limited to collaborative action and not include theological and religious discussion. Yet it was precisely that deep learning and theological wrestling and reckoning that would enable the Jewish-Christian collaborative efforts at the Seelisberg Conference to overcome the millennia of misunderstanding leading to prejudice and often violence and author one of the most influential transformative interreligious documents of dialogue to date. While some collections of documents of dialogue have categorized the Ten Points of Seelisberg as Ecumenical Christian, it is clear that it is a Jewish-Ecumenical Christian document. Jules Isaac wrote the draft of the text and Jews (including four rabbis) and Christians were part of Seelisberg's Commission Three that drafted the text.

Jules Isaac's tireless efforts to awaken the Christian world to atonement and reconciliation earned him his place in history as the most influential individual in the transformation of Christian-Jewish dialogue. His work would provide concerned interfaith collocutors with a roadmap that would initiate the long journey toward religious reconciliation. The Roman Catholic and Reformed churches, and the European and American Jewish communities were aware that the time was ripe, after the horrors of the

Shoah, to face this darkest side of religious history and European culture. They desired to put an end to a 1,900-year-old record of distrust and enmity.

Pope Francis, in a December 2022 address to the *Amitié Judeo-Chrétienne de France* celebrating its 75th anniversary, acknowledged the leading role Jules Isaac played “in the rapprochement between Jews and Christians after the tragedy of the second world war.” In reflecting on the journey from the Seelisberg Conference, the Pope offered gratitude for the considerable progress along the path to reconciliation that had been made, helping Jews and Christians to rediscover their familial bonds “as brothers, children of the same Father.” Pope Francis advised that the task is not complete and the work is fragile “with the worrying reappearance of anti-Semitism, in particular in Europe, as well as violence against Christians.” He urged Jews and Christians to persevere on the path to dialogue.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Members of ‘*Amitié Judeo-Chrétienne de France*,’” Consistory Hall, December 12, 2022, *The Holy See*, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/december/documents/20221212-amitie-judeo-chretienne.html>.

Chapter Three

The Catholic Approach to Atonement and a New Era of the Church: *Nostra Aetate* (October, 1965)

Pope John XXIII's words at the opening of Vatican II on October 11, 1962, reflected the foundation of ecumenicism required for declarations of dialogue.¹⁶⁶ As a leading Italian newspaper summed up his inaugural address at the first of four deliberative sessions: "The great merit of John XXIII is of having noted that anathemas are of little value and that much more productive is the dialogue, comprehension, confrontation of different points of view; and the realization that truth is one but the roads to it are infinite."¹⁶⁷

In calling for the Council three years earlier, on January 25, 1959, John XXIII used the term "*aggiornamento*, updating," with a vision of modernizing the thinking and practices of the Catholic Church (the "Church") so that it could address the enormous demographic, political and social changes that had occurred since the ecumenical council

¹⁶⁶ Ecumenism is the movement within Christianity that strives for unity and collaboration among the denominations. During Vatican II, there were some who understood the "ecumenical age or spirit" to include Jews. Rev. Edward H. Flannery (1912-1998), Roman Catholic priest and journalist who was the first director of Catholic-Jewish Relations for the U.S. Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, argued that, "Indeed there is actually a special obligation incumbent upon us to include Jews in our dialogues. Following the lead of Pius XII, John XXIII, and Paul VI, the Vatican Council has called for conversations with all men of goodwill. But we are tied to Jews by a double bond, a bond of guilt and a bond of affection. The bond of guilt tells of our anti-Semitism; the bond of affection, of our Judaic roots. Because of these bonds, the dialogue with Jews should occupy a prominent place in our ecumenical efforts." Edward H. Flannery, "The Church, the synagogue, and the ecumenical movement." *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* (1966), 315, accessed November 17, 2024, file:///C:/Users/schindlerj/Downloads/nadams,+19660620_21_315-322%20(4).pdf.

¹⁶⁷ Zachariah Shuster (1902-1986) directed the European office of the American Jewish Committee from 1948 to 1974. Zachariah Shuster, "Memorandum on Ecumenical Council," October 18, 1962, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 2, Vatican Council II, 1962-1964.

90 years prior.¹⁶⁸ The result, which John XXIII himself would not live to see, was the revolutionary document *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Time”), the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, that would transform the Catholic Church’s approach to the Jewish people and those of other religions.¹⁶⁹

The path to this tectonic Catholic shift in interfaith relations was not short. Transformative documents of dialogue are not written overnight. They are the culmination of many thinkers and actors – individuals and collectively. These facts are certainly evident in *Nostra Aetate*, the most significant document in the history of Jewish-Christian relations.

Countless volumes have been written and academic conferences have been held on *Nostra Aetate* over the past 60 years. Utilizing the extensive Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum archives at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio,¹⁷⁰ the focus of this chapter and the next is on the interfaith partnership that sustained the strong advocacy required to bring this seminal document to fruition. This chapter will examine the path to *Nostra Aetate* with a primary focus on the Catholic side of the conversation; the next chapter will explore the journey to *Nostra Aetate* through the lens of the key Jewish actors. Since the two voices are in conversation

¹⁶⁸ During the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), two doctrinal constitutions were produced: *Dei Filius* (translated as “Son of God”) addressed the compatibility of faith and reason, and *Pastor Aeternus* (translated as “Eternal Shepherd”) affirmed the authority, universal jurisdiction and infallibility of the Pope. While Vatican I sought to elevate faith and the authority of the Church in the face of modernity, the goal of Vatican II was the opposite -- it put forth a vision for engaging with the modern world.

¹⁶⁹ Pope John XXIII (1881-1963).

¹⁷⁰ On the Tanenbaum archives, see footnote 15.

throughout the six years leading to *Nostra Aetate*, it is impossible to fully tease them apart.

Tanenbaum worked at the American Jewish Committee (AJC) for three decades, first as the national director of interreligious affairs and later as the director of international affairs. Tanenbaum would become a central figure in organizing the Jewish leaders who would serve as consultants to the Church on what would become known as the “Jewish declaration” that repudiated the ancient and lethal charge of collective Jewish guilt for Jesus’ crucifixion. The roadblocks were many – coming not only from conservative theologians and from bishops in Arab lands, but also, at times, from Jews across the denominational spectrum in America. The strategic roadmap would require constant recalibration. From the opening of the first session of Vatican II in 1962 to when the final vote was cast on October 14, 1965, and the declaration was officially promulgated two weeks later, it was never certain that there would be an official and historic about-face by the church on its theological understanding of its historical and modern ties with Judaism and with the Jewish people.

Pope John XXIII determined the vision and oversaw the preparation and initial leg of the journey. After his death, Pope Paul VI directed the final stretch. Cardinal Augustin Bea would be the driver at the wheel navigating the detours at each roadblock that would ultimately bring a Jewish declaration to fruition. Jules Isaac provided the spark, and a handful of skilled and learned Catholic and Jewish leaders continued to refuel the vehicle that would keep the Jewish question on the table continuously elevating its critical consequence.

On October 28, 1958, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, at the age of 76, became Pope. Described as liberal-minded, he took on the name John XXIII both for the disciple whom he admired and because that name was taken on by a long list of predecessors whose time in the papacy had been short. He was elected as a transitional pope, but his Papal leadership would be nothing short of transformative, marking not only a turning point for the Church but also for Jewish-Christian relations.

To a small group of cardinals gathered in Rome on January 25, 1959, the Pope announced a call for an ecumenical council, the twenty-first one in the history of the Roman Catholic Church and the first one in nearly a century. He looked out to the city of Rome, noting that over the prior 40 years, it had been radically transformed with growth of houses and people, becoming a “real human beehive from which emerges an uninterrupted buzz of confused voices in search of harmony, a hubbub in which they easily become mixed and lost.” In his view, this was just a microcosm of the global pursuit of materialism causing moral and spiritual decay, the type which had, in times past, historically caused the ruin of nations. He identified two specific goals: “the enlightenment, edification and happiness of all Christian people,” and “a renewed invitation to the faithful of the separated communities that they also may follow us amiably in this search for unity and grace, to which so many souls aspire in all parts of the earth.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Pope John XXIII, “Announcement of an Ecumenical Council,” *Vatican II – The Voice of the Church*, accessed June 16, 2024, <https://vatican2voice.org/91docs/announcement.htm>.

While the number of Christians was growing numerically, proportionally it was diminishing in relation to the world's population. Within Christianity, Protestantism was growing at a faster pace.¹⁷²

Even though Pope John XXIII reported that the idea of an ecumenical council came to him “like a flash of heavenly light,” the two papal leaders before him had moved in that direction. In 1922, Pope Pius XI¹⁷³ upon becoming Pope, acknowledged the value of convening the world's bishops as a council to address the struggles of the world in the wake of World War I. He had corresponded with all cardinals, residential archbishops, prelates and abbots about whether it was a good opportunity to reconvene the First Vatican Council (which was suspended because of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War). Of the 1165 responses received, over 900 of them responded in favor, 63 wanted to delay a reconvening and 34 were opposed.¹⁷⁴ Pius XI went as far as developing topics that would be addressed.

In 1948, Monsignor Alfredo Ottaviani proposed an ecumenical council to Pope Pius XII¹⁷⁵ who authorized the former to secretly (within the Holy Office) engage in preparatory work. Over the course of three years, five preparatory commissions and a

¹⁷² Zachariah Shuster to Dr. John Slawson, Memorandum, October 18, 1962, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 2.

¹⁷³ Pope Pius XI (1857-1939).

¹⁷⁴ Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviani (1890-1979) was an Italian cardinal who would serve as Secretary (head) of the Vatican's Holy Office under Popes Pius XII and John XXIII. During Vatican II, he was a member of the Central Preparatory Commission and President of the Preparatory Theological Commission and of the Doctrinal Commission. Joseph A. Komonchak, “Popes Pius XI and Pius XII and the Idea of an Ecumenical Council,” Self-Published, 2011, accessed May 27, 2024. (The author, Dr. Komonchak, is Professor Emeritus of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America.) <https://jakomonchak.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/pius-xi-pius-xii-on-a-council.pdf>, 4-5.

¹⁷⁵ Pope Pius XII (1876-1958).

Central Commission convened developing a framework for an ecumenical council. In 1951, for reasons that remain uncertain, Pope Pius XII would terminate the preparatory process and all the corresponding materials would be placed in the Vatican archives.¹⁷⁶ It was work upon which Pope John XXIII would build.

Pope John XXIII's sensitivities to Catholic liturgical portrayal of Jews was evident early on. In March 1959, five months after becoming Pope, John XXIII altered the Good Friday liturgy so that, for the first time in 15 centuries, Jews would no longer be referred to negatively as "perfidious," "infidels," or as "unbelievers."¹⁷⁷

In preparing for the Second Vatican Council,¹⁷⁸ on June 5, 1960, Pope John XXIII created the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) as one of eleven preparatory commissions and appointed August Cardinal Bea, an octogenarian and Jesuit Cardinal from Germany, as the Secretariat's president.¹⁷⁹ The Pope would appoint Bishop Johannes Willebrands as the SPCU Secretary along with two full time staff, fifteen

¹⁷⁶ The five preparatory commissions included for dogmatic and speculative theological matters, for practical theological matters, for disciplinary and liturgical matters, for the missions, and for Christian action and culture. Sources close to Pius XII suggested that "problems of the postwar years, as well as his [Pope Pius XII's] own personal indecision and general approach to the papacy, had combined to delay the decision." Joseph A. Komonchak, "Popes Pius XI and Pius XII and the Idea of an Ecumenical Council," 6-12.

¹⁷⁷ "It may have been the force of habit, or perhaps it was forgetfulness, but in April 1963, the bishop who celebrated the Good Friday liturgy in Rome's St. Peter's Basilica recited the old text, '*pro perfidies Judaeis*.' Pope John quietly halted the service and had the celebrant start from the beginning of the intercessory prayers." John Rothmann, "An Incomparable Pope – John XXIII and the Jews," *Inside the Vatican*, April 1, 2014, <https://insidethevatican.com/magazine/vatican-watch/incomparable-pope-john-xxiii-jews-long/>.

¹⁷⁸ Vatican II is also known as the Second Vatican Council because it was the second ecumenical council to be held at the Vatican. Prior to Vatican I, general councils were held at the Lateran palace and basilica in Rome and were known as the First through Fifth Lateran Councils (Lateran I - V). They were held respectively in 1123, 1139, 1179, 1215, and 1512-17.

¹⁷⁹ Augustin Bea (1881–1968) was former Rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute from 1930 to 1949. Bishop Johannes Willebrands (1909-2006), prior to Vatican II, had been active as a religious leader and scholar in ecumenical concerns and Christian unity in Holland. In 1969, Pope Paul VI would proclaim him cardinal. That year he would also become president of the SPCU, a position he would hold for two decades.

bishops and twenty consultors as members. Most were known for their expertise in ecumenicism or Jewish-Christian relations. The initial mandate was simply to support other Christians “in following the work of the council.”¹⁸⁰

On June 13, 1960, Jules Isaac’s audience with Pope John XXIII would broaden the latter’s vision for Vatican II. Isaac’s first audience with a pope was with Pope Pius XII, eleven years prior on October 16, 1949. Moved by Pope Pius XII’s charge that in the Good Friday prayer for the Jews, the term *perfidis* would not be translated as perfidy meaning “deceitful or untrustworthy” but instead it would be translated as “unbelief in Christian revelation,” Isaac would ask Pope Pius to go further in altering liturgy that could create negative views of Jews. Isaac presented the Pontiff with the Congress of Seelisberg brochure and the first two issues of the journal *Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne*. Issue No. 1 had the text of the Ten Points of Seelisberg and Issue No. 2 spoke of the apostolic act on the prayer *pro perfidis Judaeis* (the perfidious Jews). With respect to the latter, Isaac noted that the suppression of the genuflection, the bowing in prayer as a sign of respect, “was a greater cause for concern,” and that the reinstatement of that act could have a “profound resonance within Jewish hearts.”¹⁸¹ Pope Pius XII would indeed restore

¹⁸⁰ As a young priest, Thomas Stransky (1930-2019) was one of the two full-time staff serving the SPCU. Stransky served as president of the Paulist Fathers from 1970 to 1978 and rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies from 1988-1999. Thomas Stransky, “The Genesis of Nostra Aetate: Surprises, Setbacks and Blessings,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, 193, no. 12 (2005): 9.

¹⁸¹ Genuflection in Catholic prayer (originating from the Latin “*genu flectere*” meaning “to bend the knee”) entails bending the right knee to the ground conveying respect, humility, and adoration. Jules Isaac shared with Pope Pius XII that it was “difficult to know with certainty as a matter of history” the cause and timing of the suppression of the genuflection for only the *Oremus* [meaning ‘let us pray’] for the Jews amid a series of Good Friday petitions for people of the world. The act of bowing in prayer for a broad litany of people then standing up just when praying for the Jews could be viewed as a physical embodiment of distinction and disrespect – an act that could, perhaps, even convey disdain. Norman Tobias 2017, 166-167.

the genuflection in 1955 leading Isaac to note in his writing, “I do not claim that my request was the cause of the decision... However, the Pope must have retained a memory of it, because shortly after my audience, he made a speech in which he spoke of Israel in uncharacteristic terms.”¹⁸²

Isaac’s second Papal audience with John XXIII on June 13, 1960, would have an even greater impact in advancing the Catholic journey to reconsider its relationship with Jews and hence secure greater Jewish safety. The idea for an audience with Pope John XXIII was that of Cletta Mayer, her husband Daniel Mayer, who was a French politician and activist for the cause of human rights, and Jean Pierre-Bloch, a French politician who served as French resistance fighter in World War II.¹⁸³ The Mayers and Pierre-Bloch invited Isaac to a meeting at the Hôtel Terminus in Paris where they proposed the idea. Isaac later recalled his initial thoughts, “When favourable circumstances present themselves, they must be seized... One does not find a Pope John every day,”¹⁸⁴

Eight months later, that meeting would come to fruition. As Isaac prepared for his audience with Pope John XXIII, he reflected on the challenge before him, “But how, in a

¹⁸² On Christmas Eve, 1950, Pope Pius XII welcomed Christians separated from Rome including the Jews. According to John Oesterreicher’s reflection 20 years later, “...the Pope’s invitation, despite its defective wording” was “a great advance. It is the first ecclesiastical text that places the ‘Jewish question’ in an ecumenical framework.” Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher (1904-1993) was a youthful convert from Judaism whose parents were later murdered in Nazi death camps. He was a scholar, theologian, key member of the SPCU who helped to draft *Nostra Aetate*, and founding director of the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University. Norman Tobias 2017, 166-167.

¹⁸³ Daniel Meyer (1909-1996) was a journalist, a French socialist politician, and post-war minister of labor. At the time of his meeting with Isaac, Meyer was the president of the League for Human Rights. John Pierre-Bloch (1905-1999) was a resistance fighter during World War II who was arrested twice and faced incarceration first by the Nazis and second by the French police. Pierre-Bloch was president of the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism from 1968 to 1992. Richard Goldstein, “Jean Pierre-Bloch, 93, Is Dead; Resistance Fighter for France,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 1999.

¹⁸⁴ Norman Tobias 2019, 178-179.

few minutes, could I explain this spiritual ghetto in which the Church had ultimately confined old Israel – along with the physical ghetto?”¹⁸⁵

As Isaac understood it, there were two incoherent forms of antisemitism that served as bookends to the era of Christian antisemitism. On one end stood the illogical arguments of pagan antisemitism¹⁸⁶ that emerged from the ancient polytheistic world and on the other end was the equally illogical and most virulent Hitlerian racial antisemitism. In between was a clearly articulated form of Jew hatred: a Christian theology that taught contempt toward the Jews who were an impediment to Christian proselytization. It was one that, in Isaac’s estimation, urgently needed to be addressed and changed. Shortly after his meeting with John XXIII, Isaac recorded his notes:

Today there exists a purifying counter-current which grows stronger every day. However, recent inquiries have shown that "the teaching of contempt" still remains. Between these two contrary tendencies Catholic opinion is divided, remains floating. This is why it is indispensable that there be raised a voice from the highest possible level, from the "summit" — the voice of the head of the Church — to point out the right direction to everyone, and solemnly condemn "the teaching of contempt" in its anti-Christian essence.

... Then I present my Note *conclusive* and the suggestion to create a sub-committee to study the question. The Pope immediately responds, "Since the

¹⁸⁵ Norman Tobias 2017, 187.

¹⁸⁶ Pagan antisemitism was the hatred for Jews among Greeks and Romans in antiquity. While pagans first encountered Jews following the seventh century B.C.E. Babylonian Exile, written documentation does not emerge until the late fourth century B.C.E. and extends until 430 C.E. According to Erich Gruen, Gladys Rehard Wood Professor of History and Classics Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, some modern scholars understand pagan antisemitism as religious and ideological. Jews rejected paganism’s pluralism, multiple divinities, and imperial cultic worship of the emperor. Others viewed it as political (the isolation of Jews threatened civic solidarity), while others saw it as ethnic prejudice. Gruen notes we can only base our understanding on small fragments of text, “Not a single treatise devoted to Jews survives from pagan antiquity, and it is unclear whether anyone bothered to write one.” (Gruen 2023, 408) Ultimately, Gruen concludes that it was Jews’ distinctive character and cultural differences that made them more vulnerable to scapegoating during periods of political upheaval and war. See Erich S. Gruen, "Antisemitism in the Pagan World." *Antisemitism Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall, 2023): 405-426.

beginning of our conversation I've thought of that." Several times during my brief talk he had shown his understanding and sympathy....

But it's the end.... In telling him of all my gratitude for his welcome, I ask if I can carry away a bit of hope. He cries, "You have a right to more than hope!" Smiling, he adds, "I'm the chief, but I must also consult, have the offices study the questions raised. It isn't an absolute monarchy here." And we say good-bye, again simply shaking hands....¹⁸⁷

Jules Isaac's pain and plea would strike a deep chord with Pope John XXIII for the latter had been more than a firsthand witness to a measure of the plight experienced by the Jews during the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, Roncalli had worked as a Vatican diplomat in Turkey, Greece and France, issuing false baptismal certificates to Jewish children as a method of rescue.¹⁸⁸

Over the next two days, Isaac's papal audience would be followed by a series of meetings with high level Church leaders, most importantly with Cardinal Bea on June 15th. Cardinal Bea was a distinguished Old Testament scholar whose deep exploration of Jewish theology had led him to conclude in a 1921 academic paper that the gates of salvation are also open to the Jewish people.¹⁸⁹ On September 18th, the Pope and Cardinal Bea would evaluate Isaac's proposal and based on Bea's endorsement, John XXIII

¹⁸⁷ "Notes about a crucial meeting with John XXIII," *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed June 10, 2024, <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/jewish/isaac1960>.

¹⁸⁸ Chaim Barlas, served as Director of the Jewish Agency office in Warsaw from 1919 to 1925, Jewish Agency representative in Geneva in 1939 and 1940, and emissary to Turkey from 1940 to 1945. In that role he approached Roncalli, in 1942, to intervene on behalf of the Jews in Bratislava, Slovakia. Roncalli used his power to stop the deportations and create what Roncalli described as "a happy turn of events." Barlas described his first meeting with Roncalli, "...I realized that I stood before a man of lofty spiritual stature, who was truly interested in the sufferings that had befallen our people and who was prepared heart and soul to assist in whatever way he could. Whenever during my interviews he would hear of the news from Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, he would clasp his hands in prayers, tears flowing from his eyes." John Rothmann 2014. For more on Roncalli's efforts to rescue Jews during the Holocaust, see page 127.

¹⁸⁹ Norman Tobias 2017, 195.

directed the SPCU to also address “the Jewish question” as part of its preparation for Vatican II.¹⁹⁰

The first session of Vatican Council II (October 11 to December 8, 1962) would convene without discussion of Jewish-Christian relations. In addition to the official convening of 2,000 to 2,500 Catholic cardinals, patriarchs and bishops from throughout the world who were supported by 460 theological experts (*periti*), for the first time Protestants, Orthodox and other non-Catholic observers were invited. While the AJC had determined that it was inappropriate to send Jewish observers unless observers from other faiths were invited, on June 12, 1962, four months prior to the first gathering, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) announced that it had invited Dr. Hayyim Wardi, an Israeli government official, to serve as its representative. That created an uproar of criticism and protests by nine Arab states that had ties with the Holy See who deemed the declaration as a pro-Israel gesture. While a draft document on the Church’s relationship with the Jewish people, the “*Decretum de Iudaeis*” (the Decree on the Jews), had been completed by the SPCU in November 1961 (see Appendix C), the tumult in response to the WJC invitation likely caused the drafted document related to the Jewish declaration to be shelved.

On June 3, 1963, John XXIII passed away. On June 21st, the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montoni, taking on the name Paul VI, would continue the path of Vatican II. In a confidential unpublished twelve-page document sent from

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Stransky 2005, 9.

Rome to Tanenbaum and presumably others in the American AJC office, answers were provided to questions surrounding “the physiognomy of the new Pontificate and its relation with the ecumenical movement.”¹⁹¹ The pressing question that dominated all others was whether Pope Paul would be as revolutionary as his predecessor, Pope John, in combatting prejudice and in overcoming racial, ethnic, political, and religious antagonisms. The answer was affirmative. Evidence was provided that the same revolutionary spirit that guided Pope John XXIII was possessed by Pope Paul when he was a cardinal.

During the second session of the Vatican II Council (September 29 to December 4, 1963), a draft of the Jewish declaration would be distributed to 2,300 Council Fathers but would neither be debated nor voted on. An October 17, 1963, front page *New York Times* article first reported the document’s unveiling, noting that the document titled “De Catholicorum Habitudo ad non-Christianos et Maxime et Iudaeos” (“On the Catholic Attitude Toward Non-Christians, and Especially Toward Jews”) was about to be distributed to the Ecumenical Council.¹⁹² *The New York Times* article referenced the play, *Der Stellvertreter* (“*The Deputy*” or “*The Representative*” in English) written by Rolf Hochhuth that had opened in West Berlin on February 20, 1963. That same year the play

¹⁹¹ Pope Paul VI (1897- 1987). “Letters From Rome,” A twelve-page unpublished document “restricted for personal use – not to be classified in office nor published in any form.” Tanenbaum Collection, Box 42, Folder 3, Paul VI [Pope], 1963-1965, 1, 5.

¹⁹² See Appendix D for text of “On the Catholic Attitude Toward Non-Christians, and Especially Toward Jews.” Milton Bracker, “Vatican Council Paper Decries Blaming of Jews in Jesus’ Death, *New York Times*, October 17, 1963, <https://www.nytimes.com/1963/10/17/archives/vatican-council-paper-decries-blaming-of-jews-in-jesus-death.html>.

would be produced at theaters in Denmark, Finland, France, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom where it was performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company.¹⁹³

The controversial play portrayed the inaction and silence of Pope Pius XII in response to the Holocaust. While the archives detailing the Pope's wartime activities would not be unsealed until 2020, the details of the Pope's failures to respond to Nazi persecution of the Jews were already known in 1963.¹⁹⁴ There was no question that Pope Pius XII was aware of the deportation and "resettlement" of the Jews -- even of Catholics who converted from Judaism and even as they were rounded up in his proximity in Rome -- and the Pope said and did nothing.¹⁹⁵ There were those who argued that the Pope Pius XII's condemnations were made in generalities. While Hochhuth used historical characters to craft a fictional drama, he appended to the published version a sixty-five-page pamphlet of "historical sidelights" providing the historical basis for his play.¹⁹⁶ The

¹⁹³ Elizabeth Grenier, "Why the 1963 play 'The Deputy' was so explosive," *DW News*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-the-1963-holocaust-play-the-deputy-was-so-explosive/a-53437162>.

¹⁹⁴ In March 2020, Pope Francis opened the Vatican archives for the acts and documents of the wartime pontificate. An estimated sixteen million pages have become available for research. "New Documents from the Pontificate of Pope Pius XII," *Pontificia Universita Gregoriana*, accessed July 22, 2024, <https://www.unigre.it/en/judaic-studies/new-documents-from-the-pontificate-of-pope-pius-xii/>. David Kertzer, one of the many scholars researching these archives, lays out a clear case of the Pope's complicity with the Nazis and guilt. In the final pages of his book, Kertzer affirms the assessment of prominent European historian István Deák: "Fearful of Hitler's wrath, the Pope barely raised his voice against Nazi racism and anticlericalism, and spoke even less against Nazi antisemitism. He did not take a stand in defense of the suffering Polish Catholic nation, or of the Christian victims of the Nazi euthanasia program, or of the Jews of his own bishopric in Rome ... Pius XII made it his supreme purpose to assure the survival of the Catholic Church in a time of turmoil. In this, he was successful, although it is still not clear just how, when, and by whom that survival was threatened. Providing help to the victims of Nazi persecution, the Pope undertook much less than could have been expected of a person of his exalted position." David I. Kertzer, *The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler*, (Penguin Random House, 2022), 478.

¹⁹⁵ Hannah Arendt, "The Deputy: Guilt by Silent," (1964) in Bernauer, S.J.J.W. (eds) *Amor Mundi*. Boston College Studies in Philosophy, Vol 26., (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 51.

¹⁹⁶ Elizabeth Grenier 2020.

performance created global controversy and magnified the lens of focus on Vatican II's statement on the Jews.

Six days after *The New York Times* article depicting the complacency and complicity of Pope Pius XII was published, Cardinal Bea indicated to the AJC that "the time was now ripe" for Jewish organizations to advocate for the declaration with the Church leadership. An early, significantly detailed, and "strictly confidential" ninety-five page draft of the AJC's official historical record related to the Jewish declaration noted, "Lights burned late that night at Committee offices in New York, Paris, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, as the staff worked to mobilize the desired support. Within hours, numerous cablegrams to Bea himself, worded to help strengthen his cause before Pope Paul, were on their way from Jewish religious and communal leaders in Europe and the Americas. Simultaneously, spokesmen of the Committee sent messages to many of the American bishops, who, it had been learned, were about to hold a caucus."¹⁹⁷

On November 8, 1963, a summary rather than the official text of what was then known as Chapter IV of the Schema on Ecumenism was released. It noted four points:

"(1) The Church has its roots in the covenant made by God with Abraham and his descendants. (2) The responsibility for Jesus' death lies with all mankind. The part played by Jewish leaders in the Crucifixion cannot be charged to the Jewish people as a whole. The Jews are not deicides nor cursed by God. (3) The Church is mindful that Jesus, Mary and the Apostles are descended from Abraham's stock. (4) The New Testament accounts of the Crucifixion cannot give rise to hatred or persecution of the

¹⁹⁷ "Vatican Decree on Jews and Judaism and the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record," Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 11, Vatican Council II - "Vatican Decree on Jews & Judaism & the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record," 1964, 60.

Jews. Preachers and catechists are admonished never to present a contrary position, and are urged to promote mutual understanding and esteem.”¹⁹⁸

On November 18th, Bea would formally introduce the document to the Council noting that it was drafted in response to Pope John’s instruction and that Nazi crimes made this declaration a Church imperative. While the concept of a Jewish declaration was widely embraced, strong opposition from Arab and Conservative clerics caused the document to not be acted upon. Bishops and cardinals from Arab lands saw the document as a political tool and part of a “Zionist plot” to support the State of Israel. Conservative theologians opposed reforms and embraced a Christian supersessionist theology.¹⁹⁹ With hope, Cardinal Bea, remarked, “What is put off, is not put away.”²⁰⁰ From the very beginning of the Council and through its six years of development, deep divides and debates between progressives and conservatives were evident, not only with respect to the Jewish declaration but with many other of the Council’s documents.²⁰¹

In the midst of Vatican II, from January 4th to the 6th, 1964, Pope Paul VI would visit the Holy Land - a journey that would speak powerfully to his ecumenical aims. While he went with a stated intention of being a pilgrim, visiting Megiddo, Nazareth, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, his visit with Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch

¹⁹⁸ For the full text of Chapter IV that was submitted, see Appendix D. “The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Jews: A Background Report,” The American Jewish Committee, November 1965, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 12, Vatican Council II - “The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Jews: A Background Report,” November 1965, 22-23.

¹⁹⁹ For further discussion on Arab sentiment and conservative theology related to the Jewish declaration, see pages 110-113.

²⁰⁰ “The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Jews: A Background Report”, November 1965, 23-24.

²⁰¹ John Cogley, “Liberal Views Dominating Council: Conservatives in ‘Compromise Mood,’” *Religion News Service*, September 28, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 12, Vatican Council II [Session 3], 1964.

Athenagoras was reported to have broken “a silence of nearly a thousand years between the great Churches of East and West.”²⁰² The two leaders agreed to appoint theological commissions to continue the dialogue between them on issues surrounding doctrine, liturgy and church discipline.

There were Christian and Jewish leaders who viewed the Pope’s visit as embodying the ecumenicism and interreligious reconciliation that grounded Vatican II.²⁰³ Monsignor Luciano Giovannetti, in an introduction to a small volume on Pope John’s historic trip, commented that the Papal pilgrimage “contributed to the Second Vatican Council, not only from a theological and ecumenical point of view, but also from a

²⁰² Patriarch Athenagoras (1886-1972) from Greece served as Archbishop of America (elected by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate) from 1931 to 1948 when he became the Ecumenical Patriarch. He enjoyed a close friendship with Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. “Meeting of Pope, Patriarch Gives New Significance to 1964 Prayer Week,” *Religion News Service*, January 18, 1964, 1. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 42, Folder 8, Paul VI [Pope] - Holy Land visit, 1964.

²⁰³ In an October 1964 lecture at Loyola University, Tanenbaum clarified terms, “It should be said at the very outset that there is considerable confusion in the use of the term ‘Ecumenical’; confusion both within Christendom, as well as confusion between Christianity and Judaism. In its strictest technical sense, the term ‘Ecumenical’ applies to relationships between Christians - between Catholics, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox - and the ground of Ecumenism is the shared Christology which is particular to Christendom. It is a misnomer and a misapplication of the term Ecumenism to apply it to relations between Christians and Jews. One can apply it, of course, to Christian-Jewish relations in its broadest, most generic sense; but in its authentic theological meaning it is a term specifically applicable to relations within Christendom. In this application, it deals with the activities of Cardinal Bea’s Secretariat relating to the reunion of the ‘separated brethren.’ Yet having said that, at the same time one cannot really explore nor exhaust the full meaning of what Ecumenism means in its ultimate reaches without its application to relations between Christians and Jews, since the Hebrew Bible is the foundation of all monotheism. But for reasons of clarity, it is probably wise and prudential that we use the term ‘inter-religious relationships’ to describe the relations between Christianity and Judaism and between Christians and the Jewish people.” Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, Lecture, Second Annual Interreligious Institute Loyola University, October 5, 1964, Box 14, Folder 1, Catholic-Jewish relations, 1964-1974.

pastoral one. That journey marked a precise will: to go out to meet the Christians of the world, beginning precisely with the Christians of the Holy Land."²⁰⁴

While on the journey no official recognition was made of the political state of Israel, Israel's President Zalman Shazar and Prime Minister Levi Eshkol greeted Pope John at Megiddo.²⁰⁵ Calling the visit a high point in the movement toward greater Jewish-Christian understanding, Tanenbaum used the occasion to advance the Jewish declaration, noting that Pope Paul's pilgrimage and its positive reception was "one of the spectacular by-products of the intense consciousness that developed during the Ecumenical Council of Christianity's rootedness in Judaism as was elaborated in the text of the Jewish decree that was widely publicized and was the subject of intense discussion in the Vatican."²⁰⁶

In the nine-month lead-up to the third session, from January to September 1964, the Jewish declaration would face its most serious obstacles. During this time, the Jewish declaration was dramatically rewritten and "drastically watered down" causing Jewish leaders from across the denominational spectrum to voice grave concern and call into question the whole endeavor of interreligious engagement with Vatican II.²⁰⁷ On May 17,

²⁰⁴ Renato Burigana, "1964: Paul VI visits the Holy Land and leaves two concrete signs," *Fondazione Giovanni Paolo II*, <https://fondazionegiovannipaolo.org/en/1964-paolo-vi-visita-la-terra-santa-e-lascia-due-segni-concreti/>.

²⁰⁵ Zalman Shazar (1889-1974) served as the third President of Israel from 1963-1973. Levi Eshkol (1895-1969) served as Israel's third prime minister from 1963 until his death in 1969. Megiddo is a site of significance in the Hebrew Bible where many historic battles took place and a site mentioned in the New Testament (Revelation 16:16) where a final battle between good and evil will be waged.

²⁰⁶ "Rabbi Says Pilgrimage Promotes Jewish-Christian Understanding," *Religion News Service*, January 6, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 42, Folder 8, Paul VI [Pope] - Holy Land visit, 1964.

²⁰⁷ Robert Doty, "Vatican Said to Mute Its Text on the Jews," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1964, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1964/06/12/issue.html>.

1964, the Pope established a new Secretariat for Non-Christians deciding that this new body would be responsible for guiding the Church's relationship with Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and others.²⁰⁸

In June, the Coordinating Commission would revise the former Jewish declaration.²⁰⁹ Throughout the summer, portions of its contents were leaked, and a draft declaration appeared in the September 4 *New York Herald Tribune* with a rudimentary translation from its original Latin.²¹⁰ It became clear that this draft, written by the Coordinating Commission, would be put forth for debate. The Coordinating Commission had dramatically altered the text removing the deicide clause, broadening the scope to address additional non-Christian religions (first, Islam) and condemning hatred against all human beings. The Commission had also changed the status of the document from a

²⁰⁸ Robert C. Doty, "Pope Plans Link to Other Faiths," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1964, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1964/05/18/issue.html>.

²⁰⁹ It was at this point the Coordinating Commission made the decision to make the text on Catholic relations with Jews a separate declaration. Dr. John Borelli, special assistant for Catholic identity and dialogue to President John J. DeGioia (1957-) of Georgetown University, notes that this decision was mainly because it would require more time for approval. "...because *Nostra Aetate* is a declaration does not make it less authoritative than the four constitutions or nine decrees of Vatican II. It is the language within each text that gives clues to the importance of what is being said, expressions such as, 'the Church therefore exhorts...', 'this Sacred Synod pleads...', 'the Catholic Church rejects nothing that...','" John Borelli, "Correcting the *Nostra Aetate* Legend: The Contested, Minimal, and Almost Failed Effort to Embrace a Tragedy and Amend Christian Attitudes Toward Jews, Muslims, and the Followers of Other Religion," in Ellis, Kail C., *Nostra Aetate: Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 20-21.

²¹⁰ On August 25, Joseph Cardinal Ritter confirmed that the condemnation of the deicide charge against Jews had not been retained in the revised draft. On September 4, the *New York Herald Tribune* published an unauthorized version of the revised draft, which differed from Cardinal Bea's earlier version in several other critical particulars. "Cardinal Confirms Rejection Of Council Statement on Jews; Ritter Declares Crucifixion Is 'Unduly Emphasized' as Anti-Semitic Factor," *The New York Times*, August 25, 1964, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1964/08/25/106982092.html?pageNumber=6>. Norman Tobias 2017, 223. On declarations and constitutions, see footnote 211.

constitution to a declaration which had less *legal* authority (see Appendix E).²¹¹ Most troubling and offensive to many Jewish leaders was a statement that they interpreted as a call for conversion: “It is also worth remembering that the union of the Jewish people with the Church is a part of the Christian hope. Therefore, following the teaching of the Apostle Paul (cf. Rom. 11:25), the Church waits with unshaken faith and deep longing for the entry of that people into the fullness of the people of God established by Christ.”²¹²

The voices of disappointment and dissent were vociferous. On one side, were the Conservative Catholics and Catholics in Arab countries who opposed a Jewish declaration altogether but in the face of powerful waves of support, stood behind the diluted draft. Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the head of Pope John XXIII’s Holy See Office, was a key proponent of the diluted draft.²¹³ He and Cardinals Ruffini and Siri, would have the Pope’s ear, claiming that a statement on relations with Jews would lead to “heresy, atheism, and communism.”²¹⁴ On December 6, 1962, the Coordinating

²¹¹ A constitution includes ecclesiastical law that is binding on all or a portion of Christendom. A declaration articulates a Church teaching on subjects that were, until the date of being issued, confused or undefined. Father Zepeda, “The Documents of the Second Vatican Council,” *The Catholic Wire*, October 8, 2021, accessed March 1, 2025, <https://thecatholicwire.org/the-crisis-in-the-catholic-church/the-documents-of-the-second-vatican-council/>

²¹² Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hofmann and Joseph Sievers, ed., *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*, 1st ed. (Fordham University Press, 2007), 195.

²¹³ Ottaviani was consecrated as a bishop by Pope John XXIII in 1959. At that point he took on the Latin Episcopal motto “*Semper Idem*”—Always the same — signaling his conservative theology. On Alfredo Cardinal, see footnote 174.

²¹⁴ Ernesto Cardinal Ruffini (1888-1967), Archbishop of Palermo, was described in his 1967 *The New York Times* obituary as “one of the Roman Catholic Church’s most outspoken conservatives.” He was opposed to the Church’s involvement in contemporary social issues. “Ernesto Cardinal Ruffini Dead; Archbishop of Palermo Was 79; Conservative Prelate Fought Communism and Social Ills in Sicilian Diocese,” *The New York Times*, June 12, 1967. Cardinal Giuseppe Siri (1906–1989) was Archbishop of Genoa from 1946-1987. Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober, *Confronting Hate: The Untold Story of the Rabbi Who Stood Up for Human Rights, Racial Justice and Religious Reconciliation*, (Skyhorse Publishing, 2019), 100.

Commission was created with Cardinal Amleto Giovanni Cicognani as the chair.²¹⁵ They were a “supercommission” that would review draft texts and decide which would remain on the agenda and which would be left as post-conciliar decisions. Cicognani, who was also Secretary of State and Chair of the Secretariat for Extraordinary Questions, would be responsible for the Coordinating Commission’s decision to delete the deicide clause. The goal of these conservative leaders throughout Vatican II was to prevent both the document on the Jews and the document on religious freedom from coming to a vote and to remove them from Cardinal Bea’s domain.²¹⁶ They argued that the Jewish declaration went against prior papal teachings, granted salvation outside the Church, and diminished the role of missionizing.

A July 3, 1964 correspondence from American Jewish Committee’s Executive Vice President John Slawson noted that “Cicognani is the center of the curia problem in Rome.”²¹⁷ While Cicognani was an archconservative theologically, on a pastoral level he worked to protect Jews during the Holocaust. From 1933 to 1958, he served as an

²¹⁵ Amleto Giovanni Cicognani (1883–1973) was an Italian Cardinal who served as Vatican Secretary of State from 1961 to 1969. During Vatican II, he served as President of the Preparatory Commission on the Oriental Churches, and President of the Coordinating Commission.

²¹⁶ See the “Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965,” *The Holy See*, accessed July 21, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

²¹⁷ Dr. John Slawson (1896-1989), served as executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee from 1943 to 1967. He founded the AJC’s Institute of Human Relations and was part of a 1957 delegation that met with Pope Pius XII -- the first audience ever given to a Jewish organization by the Vatican. John Slawson to Jacob Blaustein, July 3, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 2, Vatican Council II - Blaustein, Jacob, 1964. Cook, Joan. "John Slawson, 93, Retired Leader of American Jewish Committee: [Obituary]." *New York Times*, Dec 14, 1989, Late Edition (East Coast).

Apostolic Delegate in the United States helping to intercede to rescue more than 15,000 Jews from Yugoslavia.²¹⁸

Leaders from across the Arab world saw support for Jews as synonymous with support of Israel. President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) of Egypt and the ambassadors of other Arab States to the Vatican pressured Vatican II against including Jews as part of an ecumenical statement.²¹⁹ In February 1964, the Paris office of the American Jewish Committee issued a memo on the Arab Press Reaction to the Ecumenical Council. It included an article by an Egyptian commentator Nasser Eddin Al-Nashashibi who reported on Cardinal Bea's work on the Jewish declaration of which Pope John XXIII had approved.²²⁰ The Egyptian journalist reported on the Arab response:

“The entire Arab people is stupefied by the manner in which the Council envisages relations between Christians and Jews...The Arab people is perfectly au courant of the efforts undertaken by Zionism vis-à-vis the Vatican during this past

²¹⁸ As an apostolic delegate working in Washington, DC, from March 1933 to 1958, Cicognani supported the rescue of 15,000 Yugoslavian Jews and was the first to make the Vatican aware of the crisis. “He tried to help 465 rabbinical students in Shanghai and successfully interceded with the Vatican to have South American visas validated for Polish Jews interned in camps in Germany and elsewhere... He communicated information between the Vatican and the Va'ad Hatzala regarding the plight of Jews in German and French camps and in Hungary.” Gershon Greenberg, “American Catholics During the Holocaust,” *Museum of Tolerance*, Accessed July 18, 2024, <https://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/archives-and-reference-library/online-resources/simon-wiesenthal-center-annual-volume-4/annual-4-chapter-6.html>.

²¹⁹ Zachariah Shuster, “Tradition and Change in Catholicism,” *Jewish Chronicle*, September 4, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 6, Vatican Council II, 1964.

²²⁰ Nasser Eddin Al-Nashashibi (1920-2013) was Palestinian. He was born and raised in Jerusalem. He received an MA in Economics and Political Science at the American University of Beirut and joined the Faculty of Law in Jerusalem but was unable to complete his education due to the 1948 War. He worked as Chief of Protocol and advisor to King Abdullah I of Jordan from 1949-1951, as General Manager of the Jordanian Radio in 1952 and manager of Akhbar Al-Yaum newspaper and journalist from 1953-58. During the time of Vatican II, Al-Nashashibi was working as the Chief Editor of Al-Jumhuriyya, serving in that role from 1959-1966. In 1966, he would become Ambassador at large for the Arab League. “Nasser Eddin Al-Nashashibi (1920-2013),” *News Fatah*, September 5, 2021, <https://en.fatehnews.org/2021/09/nasser-eddin-al-nashashibi-1920-2013/>.

two years, and striving to use religion for the benefit of its political objectives and aggression against the Arab world. Just as it falsified the Sacred Book to create a document giving it the right to illegitimate existence and to oppression of an Arab population reduced to hunger and misery, something no celestial religion permits...”²²¹

The proceedings of Vatican II were not free from the dissemination of explicit conspiracy-driven antisemitic materials to all Church leaders. Toward the end of the first session, each of the cardinals, patriarchs and bishops attending the session received a privately-printed 600-page book titled, *Il Complotto contro la Chiesa* (The Plot Against the Church), in his mailbox.²²² On December 3, on the last day of the second session a pamphlet was sent to the residence of each Bishop titled, “Gli Ebrei e il Concilio – Alla Luce della Sacra Scrittura e della Tradizione” (The Jews and the Council – in the light of the Holy Scriptures and Tradition), signed with the pseudonym “Bernardus.” The foreign office of the AJC deemed the 1963 pamphlet “to be much more insidious and much more dangerous than the much larger volume,” utilizing sophisticated theological language. The latter document even invented a Talmudic passage claiming Jewish supremacy.²²³

²²¹ American Jewish Committee Paris Office to Foreign Affairs Department, Memorandum, February 26, 1964. “Arab Press Reaction to Ecumenical Council,” Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 7, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1964.

²²² “Anti-Semitic Booklet Distributed at Ecumenical Council,” Memorandum from the AJC Paris Office to the AJC Foreign Affairs Department, December 10, 1963. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 5, Vatican Council II - Shuster, Zachariah, 1962-1965, 1.

²²³ The larger book, that rehashed themes from the infamous, fabricated and widely distributed early twentieth century Russian *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, was thrown in the trash by many Church leaders and created even stronger support for the Jewish declaration. The invented Talmudic passage of the smaller pamphlet proclaimed, “Only Jews can be called men. The other nations of the world do not deserve the name of men but that of beasts.” “Anti-Semitic Booklet Distributed at Ecumenical Council” 1963, 1-2.

On the other side of the debate stood the liberal cardinals who supported genuine Catholic *aggiornamento*, the updating of Catholicism to the modern world. While they came to Vatican II wary that the progress they envisioned would be actualized, it became clear even after the first session that they were in the majority. To everyone's surprise, "The conservatives of the Roman Curia and their sympathizers came out of that session stunned and shaken by the shock power of numbers strengthening the cause of the progressives. For their part, the progressives were equally stunned by the realization that they were actually in the majority."²²⁴

Even with the weight of the votes leaning towards liberalism, the doctrines and declaration on the table for third session, included some of the most serious theological issues and would elicit intense debate.²²⁵ The American bishops who were "shaped into a progressive bloc on several important issues" would have significant influence, especially when it came to the Jewish declaration.²²⁶

From the start, Cardinal Cushing of Boston emerged as a steadfast spokesperson for a statement on the Jews. In a 1962 eight-page memo from Zachariah Shuster detailing the first session of Vatican II, Shuster noted that as the bishops arrived in Rome, there was only one mention of unity with the Jews. Cardinal Cushing commented:

"In the United States there is a plurality of Protestant confessions, and all look with interest to this Council. No one expects the unity of the churches on this

²²⁴ John Cogley, "Liberal Views Dominating Council: Conservatives in 'Compromise Mood.'"

²²⁵ The agenda included collegiality (the Pope sharing in the governing of the Church in collaboration with the bishops of the local Churches) and religious liberty (the right of individuals to be free from coercion in religious matters. John Cogley, "Conservatives, Progressive Class on Collegiality, Religious Liberty," *Religion News Service*, September 28, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 12, Vatican Council II [Session 3], 1964.

²²⁶ John Cogley, "Liberal Views Dominating Council: Conservatives in 'Compromise Mood.'"

occasion, but all expect that an atmosphere favorable to reaching this unity will be created... When I speak of a favorable atmosphere, I mean that this is the occasion for Catholics, Protestants and Jews to better know each other. There are many differences, but even more things in common. I have always maintained that all those who have a common faith must form a common front against atheistic Communism.”²²⁷

While it was uncertain how the American caucus would respond to Cardinal Bea’s work with respect to Catholic-Jewish relations, at the caucus meeting of American cardinals and bishops, they pledged full support. Cardinal Cushing led that charge saying, “If it is necessary that I go to the Council in a yarmulka in order to support Bea’s plan in favor of the Jews, I shall be glad to do it.”²²⁸

In mid-September 1964, when the Jewish declaration was at its lowest point and the draft utilizing the weakest language was in circulation, the American bishops would step up. On September 18, 1964, about 170 of the 240 American bishops attended a meeting in Rome urging the Catholic Church to clear Jews of responsibility for Jesus’ death.

“In standing votes, the bishops overwhelmingly agreed that:

1. The Jews of today are not responsible for the death of Christ.
2. Even in the time of Christ the Jews could not be held responsible for the crucifixion. One bishop asserted that the Jews were no more responsible for killing Christ than were the people of Dallas for President Kennedy's assassination.
3. The declaration expected to come before the Council Fathers Sept. 23 should restore the original draft’s wording that the Jews are not a decide nation.”²²⁹

²²⁷ Cardinal Cushing (1895-1970) was the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston from 1944 to 1970. Zachariah Shuster to Dr. John Slawson, “Ecumenical Council,” Memorandum, October 18, 1962, 3-4. Box 49, Folder 2, Vatican Council II, 1962-1964.

²²⁸ Zachariah Shuster to Dr. John Slawson, “Ecumenical Council,” 5.

²²⁹ Sanche de Gramont, “U.S. Bishops Urge Council – Clear Jews,” *New York Herald Tribune*, September 18, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 5, Vatican Council II, 1964.

Rabbi Tanenbaum noted that when there was doubt concerning whether the statement on the Jews would be adopted, the United States cardinals even met with Pope Paul to make “a demand” that it be supported. Tanenbaum said that the late Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston told the Pope, “We are not going back to America unless we can bring home the bacon.”²³⁰

Many non-Catholics also joined the global debate. The extensive public and private Jewish voices of engagement will be addressed in depth in the next chapter. On one side, there were Jewish leaders who were adamantly opposed to and distrustful of the work from the start, and on the other side, there were those who understood the unparalleled opportunity Vatican II could provide for Jewish-Christian relations. Many of the ardent supporters altered their stance to one of condemnation when the 1964 revised and watered down text was made public. They feared it could do more harm than good.

The cardinals were highly sensitive to the ways in which Jews engaged with Vatican II and conservative leaders would capitalize upon Jewish leaders’ criticisms to support their own opposition. Though in the end, the efforts of the conservative leaders to radically rewrite or even remove the Jewish declaration would fail, they would ultimately succeed in weakening the document.

Protestant Former Confessing Church leader and theologian Karl Barth followed closely the Council’s Jewish declaration, read the two Latin drafts, and weighed in with a

²³⁰ Tracy Early, “Rabbi’s Role in Vatican II Document Told,” *NC News Service*, February 23, 1983, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 23, Folder 8, Heschel, Abraham Joshua, 1982-1989, undated.

three-page letter to Shuster of the AJC. Barth noted that he found the November 1963 text approved by the Council the “best text so far.” From Barth’s point of view, it made no difference whether the word *deicide* was mentioned in the repudiation of the Jews responsibility for Jesus’ death.²³¹

During the third session of the Vatican II Council (September 14 to November 21, 1964) two iterations of the Jewish declaration would be debated and the second would come to a vote. On September 28th, the adapted and highly contentious draft was deliberated on the floor with thirty-four Council members from twenty-two countries offering comments on it — the majority requesting a stronger document and calling for a return to the earlier language drafted by the SPCU.²³²

²³¹ Letter from Prof. Dr. Karl Barth to Zachariah Shuster, June 26, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 8, Vatican Council II, 1964. Karl Barth (1886-1968) on one hand believed strongly in the Jewishness of Jesus. In 1957, he wrote *I Church Dogmatics*: “There is one thing we must emphasize especially. ... The Word did not simply become any ‘flesh.’ ... It became *Jewish* flesh. ... The Church’s whole doctrine of the incarnation and atonement becomes abstract and valueless and meaningless to the extent that [Jesus’ Jewishness] comes to be regarded as something accidental and incidental. The New Testament witness to Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, stands on the soil of the Old Testament and cannot be separated from it. The pronouncements of the New Testament Christology may have been shaped by a very non-Jewish environment. But they relate always to a man who is seen to be not a man in general, a neutral man, but the conclusion and sum of the history of God with the people of Israel, the One who fulfills the covenant made by God with his people.” On the other hand, Barth wrote in support of the social degradation of Jews: “The existence of the Jews, as is generally recognized, is an adequate proof of the existence of God. It is an adequate demonstration of the depths of human guilt and need and therefore of the inconceivable greatness of God’s love in the event in which God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The Jews of the ghetto give this demonstration involuntarily, joylessly and ingloriously, but they do give it. They have nothing to attest to the world but the shadow of the cross of Jesus Christ that falls upon them. But they, too, do actually and necessarily attest Jesus Christ Himself.” Karl Barth, “The Judgment and the Mercy of God,” in *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1957), II, 205-213, reproduced in Talmage, *Disputation*, 43.

²³² Session No. 3, News Bulletin 10, General Congregation No. 89, *Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, September 28, 1964, 3-6. Session No. 3, News Bulletin 11, General Congregation No. 90, *Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, September 29, 1964, Box 50, Folder 7, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1964 “The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Jews: A Background Report,” The American Jewish Committee, November 1965, 35.

The conservatives who took the floor upheld a traditional theology: the Jews were errant in their failure to acknowledge the salvation of Jesus and responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. It was a guilt that would be transmitted generationally upon Jews from Jesus' time to today. The only path for redemption was through Christ. While not allies, the concerns of the conservative block paralleled that of the prelates in Arab countries. Both viewed the earlier drafts of the declaration as political – serving to dangerously distance the Church leaders from the exclusively spiritual aim of the Council. There was an articulated animosity and distrust of Jews. Cardinal Ruffini stated, “It would be likewise in order to urge Jews to love Christians, particularly Catholics, and to desist from offensive practices such as have characterized the past. It is a known fact that most Jews follow the Talmudic text which inculcate contempt for all who are not Jews.”²³³

The liberals, especially the American bishops, argued for a theological reconstruction or remodeling (termed a “metanoia”). The Church needed to affirm its Jewish origins and strong Jewish bond.²³⁴ From their perspective, the persecution of Jews came out of false philosophies and erroneous interpretation of Christian Scripture. In the same way that the Apostle Paul taught that “God did not reject the people whom he had

²³³ The alleged Talmudic reference to which Ruffini refers does not exist. On the false Talmudic reference, see footnote 223. Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini, Italy. Session No. 3, News Bulletin 10, *Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, September 28, 1964, 4.

²³⁴ Archbishop Franjo Seper, of Zagreb, Yugoslavia stated, “We must not forget that we all have the same history of salvation, that the first nucleus of the Church was made up of Jews and that the beginning and the end of both the Jewish people and the Church aims at one same goal.” Session No. 3, News Bulletin 11, *Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, September 29, 1963, 2.

chosen,” (Romans 11:2), the Church had an obligation to say the same of Jews in ancient times and today.

In September 1964, Cardinal Bea, in introducing the Jewish declaration in the Council chamber rejected the charge of the Jewish people’s culpability for the death of Christ: “The leaders of the people in Jerusalem did not fully understand the divinity of Christ in such a way that they could be formally called deicides... whatever we may say of the knowledge of the leaders in Jerusalem, the whole Jewish people of that time as such never can be charged with what was done by the leaders in Jerusalem to bring about the death of Christ. It is a statistical fact that in Apostolic times the Jewish diaspora in the Roman Empire numbered about 4,500,000. Are all these to be accused of the deeds done by the members of the Sanhedrin on that sad Friday? ²³⁵ Moreover, the United States bishops argued that the notion of killing God is a theological and philosophical absurdity -- “as though anyone could kill God.”²³⁶ It was the Christian’s role to imitate Jesus and absolve whomever was responsible for the death on the Cross by affirming, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34). In response to the historical harm caused by the Church, the time had come to make reparation and bring about genuine dialogue.

²³⁵ Unofficial English translation of the report given by Augustin Cardinal Bea on September 25 as he introduced in the Council chamber the declaration concerning the Jews and concerning non-Christians, Tanenbaum, Box 50, Folder 7, 2-3.

²³⁶ “US Prelates Continue Plea for Strong Statement,” *Religious News Service*, September 29, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 2, Vatican Council II, 1962-1964., Session No. 3, Bishop Stephen Leven, Auxiliary of San Antonio, Texas, News Bulletin 11, *Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, September 29, 1963, 4.

During that third session debate, several speakers from the liberal camp urged that the declaration be broadened to include other faiths: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Confucianism. It was advised that attention be given not only to the twelve million Jews but to the four hundred million Muslims who have a “better understanding than others of the Mystery of Christ and of Mary.”²³⁷ It was recognized that non-Christian students attend Christian schools and that their cultures should not be belittled. “The Church needs to assimilate unto itself whatever is good in every culture. In a word, the Church must [be] incarnated in every culture.”²³⁸

Antisemitism fueled the passions of some of those seeking to defeat a Jewish declaration. During this third session, two more antisemitic pamphlets were distributed: a thirty-page long booklet titled, “The Killers of God and the Jewish People,” and a pamphlet titled, “Actions of Jewish Freemasons at the Council.” The latter document claimed: “The Jews who have reached high position in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church have convinced by fraudulent methods the Pope John XXIII to form a Secretariat for the unity [*sic*] of Christians which was used by them as a springboard to carry on all kinds of propaganda in favor of the Jews, the eternal anti-Christ. Among those Jews are Cardinal Augustin Bea and the Monsignores Oestreicher and Gregory Baum...”²³⁹

The liberals prevailed in the theological wrestling match with the conservatives. On October 14, 1964, Pope Paul VI intervened on the side of fifteen progressive cardinals

²³⁷ Bishop Yves Plumey of Garoua, Cameroons, Session No. 3, News Bulletin 11, *Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, September 29, 1953, 3.

²³⁸ Archbishop Joseph Parecatil of Ernakulam, India, Session No. 3, News Bulletin 11, 5.

²³⁹ Letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson, October 16, 1964. Tanenbaum Collection. Box 49, Folder 2, Vatican Council II, 1962-1964.

who had written the Pope, complaining about the actions of the “Vatican Council ‘conservatives’ who sought to water down” the draft declaration. The Pope assured Cardinal Bea that his secretariat could revise and presumably strengthen the text on the Jews without interference from the Coordinating Commission that was biased by the three well-known conservative prelates.”²⁴⁰

On November 20, 1964, Bea presented the Declaration on the Church’s Relationship to Non-Christian Religions in the name of the SPCU to the Council Fathers for a vote (see Appendix F). In introducing the text, Bea observed that they could “... apply to the declaration the biblical comparison of the grain of mustard seed. It was first intended as a brief declaration on the Church and the Jewish people. But in the course of time this little seed had become almost a tree in which many birds were finding nests. That was to say in which all non-Christian religions were finding their proper place.” Bea concluded his statement saying, “For the first time in Conciliar history principles dealing with non-Christians were set forth in solemn form. The Church had a serious obligation to initiate dialogue with the one billion men who knew not Christ or his work of redemption. It was the task of the Church to help them to obtain a full share of the riches of Christ.” ²⁴¹

This newest version of the Jewish declaration condemned antisemitism, affirmed the validity of Judaism as a religious way of life with which Catholics must

²⁴⁰ “Pope Backs Proponents of Collegiality, Religious Liberty, Statement on Jews,” *Religious News Service*, October 14, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 2.

²⁴¹ “The Third Session and After, September-December 1964,” *Camden Fifth Series* 43 (2013): 305–402. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116313000067>.

establish relations of “mutual understanding and respect,” and repudiated the idea of “the Jewish people as one rejected, accursed, or guilty of deicide.” On that final day of the third session, the assembled bishops representing the uppermost legislative body of the Roman Catholic Church approved the document with 1,770 in favor and 185 opposed.²⁴² The bishops came to a decision that would need to be ratified by Pope Paul VI with an official promulgation.

Why would this vote find such overwhelming approval? Judith Hershcopf Banki, then the former assistant director of Interreligious Affairs for the AJC aptly described this newest iteration an “omnibus” declaration.²⁴³ The declaration would now be part of a larger statement about the Catholic church’s stance toward non-Christian religions including Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism thus appeasing the majority of those minority communities who were opposed to it.

Vatican II’s declaration on the Jews would not experience smooth sailing from the third to the fourth and final session of Vatican II. In the aftermath of the November 1964 vote, immediate opposition was voiced by Arab nations. The Arab League conveyed its disapproval. Patriarch Kyrillos VI of Alexandria, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, called the approval of the November 1964 declaration “an imperialistic plot that has nothing to do with religion... The Holy Bible convicted the Jews and their children of

²⁴² Judith Hershcopf (Banki), “The Church and the Jews: The Struggle at Vatican Council II,” *American Jewish Yearbook* Volume 66 (1965), 99.

²⁴³ Judith Hershcopf Banki (1928-) helped author “The Image of the Jews in Catholic Teaching,” the memorandum submitted to Vatican II. She served as Assistant then Associate National Director for Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee. Judith Hershcopf (Banki) 1965, 99.

Christ's crucifixion and to absolve them of that crime would be open to refutation of the Bible."²⁴⁴

In early 1965, Cardinal Bea would make some final emendations based on feedback from the Council. Yet at the end of May 1965, Pope Paul VI directed the Coordinating Committee to remove the declaration on the Attitudes towards Non-Christian Religions (that had already been approved) from the agenda of the fourth session which would be held September 14 to December 8, 1965. The Pope explained:

“We of our authority have decided for reasons of sound pious doctrine, and reasons arising out of cordial relations with secular governments, to withdraw the document on the Attitudes towards Non-Christian Religions from the consideration of the Committee. And we reserve ourselves the final judgment [*sic*] as to the manner of disposing of the document.”²⁴⁵

The document was out of the hands of Cardinal Bea and his Secretariat and out of the hands of the Coordinating Committee. It rested with the sole authority of the Pope. The blame would be laid on both Arab and Jewish pressure.

On September 30th, a new text of the declaration on the Jews was handed to the Bishops as a bound document that included extensive commentary on why amendments suggested by the SPCU were rejected or accepted. The text was most responsive to the conservative critique.²⁴⁶ On October 14, the amendments would be raised for debate and

²⁴⁴ Judith Hershcopf (Banki) 1965, 134.

²⁴⁵ “Recent Developments in Rome,” June 8, 1965. The Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 2, Vatican Council II - Blaustein, Jacob, 1964.

²⁴⁶ In an October 3, 1965 memo from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson, the former noted: “It was explained to me later by a prominent member of Cardinal Bea’s Secretariat that the major opposition

for a vote. The clause stating that the Jews were not collectively responsible for Jesus' death was approved by a vote of 1,875 to 188. The vote to omit the word "deicide" in that context was approved 1,821 to 245. The passage deploring antisemitism was passed by a vote of 1,905 to 199. And the entire schema was accepted by a vote of 1,763 to 250.²⁴⁷

Two weeks later Pope Paul VI promulgated the text of *Nostra Aetate* (Appendix G). It was seven years to the day of his predecessor Pope John XXIII's ascendancy to Pope. Below is Chapter IV of *Nostra Aetate*, the text of the Jewish declaration:

DECLARATION ON
THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS
NOSTRA AETATE
PROCLAIMED BY HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI
ON OCTOBER 28, 1965²⁴⁸

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ – Abraham's sons according to faith (6) – are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible

during the last period of the Council, came not so much from the Arab side as from the conservatives who insistently claimed that the previous text distorted the assertions made on this subject in the New Testament and that they will vote against the Declaration if all important, relevant assertions are not referred to in the Declaration." Memorandum from Zachariah Shuster to Dr. John Slawson, October 3, 1965. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 5, Vatican Council II - Shuster, Zachariah, 1962- 1965.

²⁴⁷ "The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Jews: A Background Report," The American Jewish Committee. November 1965, 47-48.

²⁴⁸ Pope Paul VI, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*," *The Holy See*, October 28, 1965, accessed May 12, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nost-aetate-en.html.

mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles. (7) Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself. (8)

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).(12)

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the

cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.²⁴⁹

While *Nostra Aetate* was the shortest of the Vatican II's sixteen documents, it remains one of the most prominent. It represented a watershed document of interreligious relations – a theological turning point of the Church where the doors opened recognizing the validity of other religions and the notion that each can hold its own ray of truth. The Catholic Church recognized the positive contributions and merits of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. The document unequivocally rejected antisemitism along with discrimination against those of any race or religious group. A mandate was given for the revision of educational materials so that the cycle of teaching and preaching prejudicial images of Jews would cease. Vatican II not only laid the foundation for progress in interreligious relations, education and dialogue for the Catholic Church, it would inspire other faith movements to consider similar paths of theological and educational self-reckoning.

An overarching analysis of the “roadmap to reconciliation” set forth in this chapter can be broken down into the following categories: guilt and contrition, advocates with a personal investment bringing about social and religious change, moral leadership and moral courage, and a transformative guiding document.

²⁴⁹ Reference notes within *Nostra Aetate* (“Cf” is Latin for either confer or conferatur, both meaning “compare”: 6. Cf. *Gal.* 3:7, 7. Cf. *Rom.* 11:17-24, 8. Cf. *Eph.* 2:14-16, 9. Cf. *Lk.* 19:44, 10. Cf. *Rom.* 11:28, 11. Cf. *Rom.* 11:28-29; cf. dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of Nations) AAS, 57 (1965) pag. 20, 12. Cf. *Is.* 66:23; *Ps.* 65:4; *Rom.* 11:11-32, 13. Cf. *John.* 19:6

The road to reconciliation starts with guilt and contrition.

The journey to religious reconciliation is long and arduous. It requires an understanding of the harm caused by existing systems and it necessitates regret. As mentioned previously, Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli, long before becoming Pope John XXIII, worked to save Jews from persecution. In 1934, when Roncalli was Apostolic Delegate to Turkey and Greece and titular archbishop of Mesembria, Bulgaria, he used his position to assist the Jewish underground rescuing thousands of refugees in Europe. In 1940, he intervened with Bulgaria's King Boris III to stop the deportation of Greek Jews. From 1941 to 1944, when working as Papal Nuncio to Greece, he took part in supporting and rescuing thousands of Jews in Eastern Europe. He worked with the Agency for Palestine handing out their immigration certificates. He attested to having taken part in helping 24,000 Jews. He saw the Jewish plight and he responded.²⁵⁰

Yet even though there were many Catholic leaders like Roncalli who saved victims of the Holocaust from deportation and death, the conscience of the Catholic Church was far from clear. The Lateran Pact of 1929 signed by the Vatican and Italy, gave the Pope sovereignty over the Vatican City in Rome while acknowledging the sovereignty of the State of Italy, then led by fascist Benito Mussolini who had taken control of the Italian government in 1922. On July 20, 1933, the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (the future Pope Pius XII), and Germany's vice chancellor, Franz von Papen, would sign the *Reich Concordat*, on behalf of Pope Pius XI and President Paul von

²⁵⁰ "Chronology of Holocaust Rescue in Turkey," *Rescue in the Holocaust*, accessed June 22, 2024, <https://www.holocaustrescue.org/chronology-of-rescue-in-turkey>.

Hindenburg respectively.²⁵¹ This agreement between the Vatican and the Third Reich was Hitler's first international treaty and represented the Church, a moral authority, legitimizing Hitler as a leader. Through the agreement, the Catholic Church renounced political activities and, in exchange, the rights of Catholics and the Catholic Church in Germany were guaranteed. Holocaust historian Doris Bergen noted that "The Concordat undermined potential Catholic opposition in Germany. How could parish priests criticize a chancellor who had been recognized by their pope?"²⁵²

During the preparatory stages of Vatican II, the trial of Adolph Eichmann, held in Jerusalem from April 10 to December 15, 1961, kept the images, narratives and crimes of the Holocaust front and center on the world stage. Eichmann, a primary architect of the mass murder of Jews in Eastern Europe who oversaw the deportations of millions of Jews to concentration camps and death camps, was being tried on fifteen counts, including "crimes against the Jewish people," "crimes against humanity," "war crimes," and "membership in a hostile organization." The prosecution provided detailed testimony for the world to witness with sixteen hundred documents and one hundred witnesses attesting to the stages of persecution, inhumanity, and systemic mass murder "country by country and camp by camp" illustrating Eichmann's engagement. Determining guilt for the

²⁵¹ Robert A. Krieg, "The Vatican Concordat With Hitler's Reich: The Concordat of 1933 was ambiguous in its day and remains so," *America: The Jesuit Review*, September 1, 2013, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2003/09/01/vatican-concordat-hitlers-reich-concordat-1933-was-ambiguous-its-day-and-remains>.

²⁵² Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 87.

Holocaust was pronounced in the headlines during the precise time that the 1961 Decretum de Iudaeis (“Decree on the Jews”) was being written.²⁵³

During the time of Vatican II, the question of complicity between the Catholic Church and Nazism was being addressed by scholars. Researchers harshly criticized the post-Holocaust Church narrative created by apologists who highlighted the Church’s heroic Holocaust presence and painted a picture that paled in contrast to the legitimacy of Hitler that the Church provided. On January 1, 1964, Guenter Lewy’s 415-page scholarly volume was published, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*. In the book Lewy “ripped away the veils of this carefully manufactured mythology” while at the same time recognizing that the true story would not be known until the Vatican archives for this tragic period would be made available to scholars for free and independent research.²⁵⁴ Unlike the German Protestant Church that underwent a *Kirchenkampf* (literally, “church struggle”), an ideological struggle between the German Christian Church movement (that embraced Nazi ideology) and the Confessing Church, the German Catholic Church never experienced that divide.

Though Guenter Lewy was a Holocaust refugee himself who fled Germany to Palestine in 1939 and then to the United States in 1947, with an academic lens he gives credit where credit is due. One example was when Church leaders encouraged harboring Jews to prevent them from roundup by the Nazis starting in 1943. He objectively weighs

²⁵³ “About the Eichmann Trial,” *Yad Vashem The World Holocaust Remembrance Center*, accessed June 8, 2024, <https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/eichmann-trial/about.html>.

²⁵⁴ Gordon C. Zahn, “The Church Under Hitler,” *The Commonwealth*, July 3, 1964, 446-447. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 13, Folder 18, Catholics and Nazis, 1961-1964. See footnote 194 on the Vatican archives for the acts and documents of the wartime pontificate that were unsealed in 2020.

whether protest would have been effective noting three cases when protest countered Nazi efforts: stopping the gassing of those with disabilities (after 70,000 individuals had been murdered), stopping the required divorce of Catholics who were married to non-Aryans (Jews), and when the Aryan wives protested the arrest of their non-Aryan husbands for deportation and the protest led to their release.²⁵⁵ Lewy concludes that the stories of heroic resistance by Catholic leaders were isolated, enacted by leaders acting independently with no support from their superiors.

Pope John XXIII acknowledged the stirring of his conscience and inclination towards reconciliation even before Jules Isaac proposed that Vatican II address its relationship with Jews at their June 1960 meeting. One month after appointing Bea as the leader of the Secretariat, he greeted a delegation of 130 American Jews connected to the United Jewish Appeal, with the text from Genesis that reflected the moment of the Biblical Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers saying, "I am Joseph, your brother." (Genesis 45:4)²⁵⁶

Cardinal Bea, who labored to bring the Jewish declaration to fruition, was the personal priest-confessor to Pope Pius XII from 1945 until 1958. As Pope Pius XII's level of culpability becomes even clearer as scholars continue to mine through the sixteen million documents in the Vatican Archives for the acts and documents of the wartime pontificate, one wonders whether guilt weighed on Pius XII's conscience as the depths

²⁵⁵ Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, (McGraw Hill Book Company, 1964), 289-293.

²⁵⁶ "John XXIII: 'I am Joseph, your brother,'" *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 19, 1960, translated by Dr. Philip Cunningham and Murray Watson, *Council of Center on Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/second-vatican-council/naprecursors/j231960oct19>.

and enormity of Nazi atrocities were becoming known to the world.²⁵⁷ As the Pope who led the Catholic Church from 1939 through 1958, the ultimate responsibility for the Church's actions and inaction were ultimately his. Did Pope Pius XII confess guilt to his papal confessor, Cardinal Bea? And if so, Bea would likely have carried that understanding with him as he led Vatican II's sacred task of fashioning the Church's new relationship with the non-Catholic and non-Christian world.

Social and religious change is often led by those who have a strong personal connection to the issue

The drive to create the Jewish declaration that theologically reframed Catholic relations with Jews was not an academic matter. Like those who drafted the 1947 Ten Points of Seelisberg, for many of the key players it was a matter of personal concern.

Like in Stuttgart and Seelisberg, several of the key SPCU leaders responsible for drafting, redrafting, and for stewarding the document had a personal or familial connection to Judaism. Two of the core SPCU committee members addressing the Jewish question had Jewish family members.

Gregory Baum, the first member to join the subcommission for addressing Jewish relations, was the author of the first draft of *Nostra Aetate*. He was born as Gerhard in 1923 in Berlin to a Jewish mother and Protestant father and raised in the Protestant culture. He only learned of his Jewish background with Hitler's rise to power. He became categorized as a Jew by the 1935 Nuremberg Laws and was forced to escape the Nazis at

²⁵⁷ David I. Kertzer 2022.

the age of 17 on a children's transport to England. He was interned in Britain as an enemy alien, then later moved to an internment camp in Canada in 1940 and released in 1942. He later converted to Roman Catholicism, became a priest, and took the name Gregory. His familial history no doubt led to his academic passion and expertise in interreligious dialogue – serving as an esteemed professor at University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto and later at McGill University in Montreal. At the time of his appointment to the SPCU, he had already published *The Jews and the Gospel: A Re-examination of the New Testament* in 1961 (which in 1965 was reprinted under a new title *Is the New Testament Antisemitic?*).²⁵⁸

The Priest Johannes M. Oesterreicher was the one whom Stransky described as working the hardest on the text – especially on section IV.²⁵⁹ Oesterreicher was born and raised as a Jew in Moravia. In his youth, he was active in Zionist scouting and in High School was elected to represent the Jewish community. At the age of 20, for unknown reasons, he “fell in love with Christ” and converted to Catholicism. Three years later he dedicated his life to the priesthood. He worked to combat the Nazis on the radio and in print. His thesis was that in the future, the Nazis would attack Catholics and Protestants in the same manner they attacked Jews. While he was able to flee West, both his parents were taken to Theresienstadt where his father died of disease. His mother would be murdered in Auschwitz. In 1940, he made it to America where he made a lifelong

²⁵⁸ Gregory Baum (1923-2017). Michael W. Higgins, “The Journalist as Theologian: A Tribute to Gregory Baum,” *Commonweal Magazine*, November 21, 2011, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/journalist-theologian>.

²⁵⁹ John Borelli, “*Nostra Aetate*: Unanswered Questions: Then and Now,” YouTube, *Georgetown University*, November 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTj2TbzFfcE>.

commitment to interreligious dialogue serving as a research professor at Manhattanville College and then establishing the Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University in 1953 which he would continue to support until his death. He would become a leader and expert in Jewish-Catholic relations.²⁶⁰

While in his early years, Oesterreicher believed that salvation of the Jews would be achieved through conversion, the Holocaust challenged and changed his theology. Had he not escaped Austria in 1938 and from France in 1940, he, too, would have been murdered by the Nazis. At the decisive moment in October 1964 when the Jewish declaration would be rewritten, Oesterreicher, Baum and Bruno Hussar²⁶¹ would assemble the final text. Oesterreicher would personally craft the words that would end the Church's missionary stance to Jews, "The Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and 'serve Him shoulder to shoulder.'" (Zeph. 3:9).

Dr. David Novak, who was a student of Jewish theologian and AJC advisor Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in the early 1960's, reported that Heschel adamantly opposed

²⁶⁰ Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies, "The Legacy of Msgr. John Oesterreicher," Video, Facebook, November 2, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1471301522905122>.

²⁶¹ Born André Hussar (1911-1996). Bruno Hussar, who had a hand in the near final wording of the declaration in 1964, was also a Jewish convert to Catholicism who identified himself as both a Christian and a Jew. Hussar was born in Egypt to a Hungarian father and a French mother, both of whom who identified as secular Jews. He moved to France after High School and become baptized in 1935. Hussar experienced the harshness of France's antisemitism in the 1930s and 40s. Ordained as a Dominican priest in France in 1945, Hussar would move to Israel in 1953 and become a citizen in 1966. He founded the House of Isaiah, Center for the Study of Judeo-Christian Relations, in Jerusalem and would begin Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, which means Oasis of Peace in Hebrew and Arabic, in 1973. It thrives until this day as a village of Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel committed to building justice, peace and equality in Israel and the region. Wolfgang Saxon, "Father Bruno Hussar, 84, Dies; A Font of Jewish-Arab Amity," *New York Times*, February 16, 1996.

the engagement of any priest who had converted from Judaism in working on the Jewish declaration. Novak reflected, “Abraham Joshua Heschel made a precondition which Baum and Oesterreicher never forgave him for, that in the negotiations at the time of *Nostra Aetate* that there would be no Jewish Christians. He said that that would sink it, sink the ship, before it was launched.”²⁶² That was clearly not the case.

On February 16, 1964, John Oesterreicher received the brotherhood award for the year 1963 from the Brotherhood of Congregation Agudath Achim of Taunton, Massachusetts, in conjunction with the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The award citation honored Monsignor Oesterreicher for: “his painstaking dedication to the reconciliation between Jew and Christian” and “his intense labor in the preparatory work for the Second Vatican Council as a member of the Secretariat for Christian Unity.” It also commended his contribution to the draft presented to the bishops at Vatican II’s second session (“On the Attitude of Catholics Toward Non-Christians and Especially Toward Jews”).²⁶³

Oesterreicher opened his acceptance speech affirming his pride in his Jewish Christian identity:

“For this gathering of Jews and Christians is altogether unique in that it revolves around one who is himself a Jew and a Christian. Normally, I do not relish talking

²⁶² Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), Professor of Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary was a leading twentieth century Jewish philosopher and theologian. David Novak (1941-), theologian, ethicist and scholar of Jewish philosophy and law, was part of a small program of four rabbinic students studying with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel at the Jewish Theological Seminary in the early 1960s. At that time, Novak was privy to Heschel’s reflections on his secret meetings, respectively with Cardinal Bea and with Pope Paul VI. David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

²⁶³ John M. Oesterreicher, “The Brotherhood of Christians and Jews: An address given at the Jewish Community House of Taunton, Massachusetts,” February 16, 1964, 3. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 5, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1963-1964.

about myself but today's encounter seems to demand a confession. Let me begin by saying that I am proud of, and profoundly grateful for, my ancestors. If you had known my father, for instance, a man in whom there was no guile, a man gentle, just, and true, or his parents in their radiant goodness -- who, incidentally, lived in one of the last strongly Jewish communities of Moravia - you would realize how utterly impossible even a feeling of reserve or distance toward them would have been. Were they still alive, I would not feel alien in the midst of them whose flesh and blood I am.

Lest you think my affection for them and for the Jewish people purely sentimental, let me add that it rises out of the roots of my being. I should cease to be what I am if I did not appreciate the genius of the Hebrew language, though my once fair use of it is no longer what it was. It is a language with striking idioms like this one: *halach beemet*, 'to walk in truth, in faithfulness.' For the ancient Greeks, *aletheia*, 'truth,' was something to be thought of, to be pondered over, or to be uttered; for the ancient Hebrews, however, *emet*, 'truth,' was something to be done, to be lived."²⁶⁴

Oesterreicher lived that search for truth as he researched Christian Scripture and led the crafting of *Nostra Aetate*. His hand in authorship and advocacy, along with that of his fellow former Jews, Baum and Hussar, would change the course of Christian history and change the course of Christian-Jewish relations. While the vast majority of those who advocated for a transformed Catholic theology did not have Jewish family ties, having individuals with a strong personal connection to the issue of focus for advocacy standing at the center can fuel movements for social and religious change.

Religious change requires moral leadership and moral courage.

The most essential element needed for monumental religious change is moral leadership and moral courage. While the legacies of Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII who led the Church during the Holocaust remain under intense scrutiny, the memories of the

²⁶⁴ John M. Oesterreicher 1964, 4-5.

two popes who led Vatican II would be celebrated.²⁶⁵ On April 27, 2014, Pope Francis would elevate both John XXIII and Paul VI to Sainthood. The title is reserved for those who lived a heroically virtuous life and requires that two miracles acquired through the candidate's intercession occur.²⁶⁶ Over the course of the last 900 years, only three other popes were given such an honor.

It was significant that the ceremony took place both on Divine Mercy Sunday (a day of forgiveness of sins for all who go to confession and receive Holy Communion) and on the eve of Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day (the day of Holocaust remembrance established on a fixed date each year by the State of Israel) thus connecting the notions of Catholic atonement with Holocaust memory. Roncalli's efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust and his later efforts to bridge the relationship between Catholic and Jews may also have had some role in his being proclaimed a Saint on those significant days of commemoration.

²⁶⁵ Pope Pius XI, who served as supreme pontiff from February 6, 1922 to February 10, 1939, is not on the path towards sainthood. Pope Pius XII's status similarly remains controversial. Kevin Di Camillo, "Benedict XV and Pius XI — the Popes Who Would Not Be Saints," *The National Catholic Register*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/benedict-xv-and-pius-xi-the-popes-who-would-not-be-saints>. See David I. Kertzer 2022.

²⁶⁶ "Pope Francis approved sainthood even though the Vatican was unable to determine a second miracle which could be attributed to John. Vatican spokesman Rev. Federico Lombardi explained that the move to approve the canonization was made 'despite the absence of a second miracle, it was the Pope's will that the sainthood of the great Pope of the Second Vatican Council be recognized.' There was, in fact, a second miracle that occurred during John's papacy. That miracle was his decision to completely reframe the relationship between Catholics and Jews. Called 'the good Pope,' the relationship between John and the Jews is an incredible story of triumph of truth and justice that needs to be told and remembered." John Rothmann 2014.

The transformative document that said so much and so little.

Over the next 60 years, analysis of each word of the document by Jewish and Christian scholars across the globe would be extensive. John Borelli, a Catholic scholar and expert on Vatican II, recently noted: “Like a hot potato toss, *Nostra Aetate* survived because it declared only a minimum. For nearly every topic it addresses, there is a long list of unanswered questions.”²⁶⁷

The most notable omission of *Nostra Aetate* is any mention of Israel which was the most controversial of all issues associated with the Jewish declaration. Hence, while the 1961 draft acknowledged that the beginnings of the Christian faith “go as far back as to the Israel of the Patriarchs and Prophets,” the word “Israel” would not appear in later drafts. *Nostra Aetate* would make no mention of the Holocaust nor would there be an explicit negation of proselytization, the concept that Catholics should not aim to convert Jews. When noting that what happened in Jesus’ death cannot be charged against all the Jews then or today, the word “deicide” would be omitted. Lastly, rather than condemning antisemitism, in *Nostra Aetate*, the church instead “decried” it.

On the positive side, *Nostra Aetate* was an almost complete acceptance of Isaac’s challenge laid out five years earlier to Pope John XXIII and crafted eighteen years earlier by the international gathering of Christians and Jews in Seelisberg. Borelli notes that if you craft each one of the 1947 Ten Points of Seelisberg into a question, “You might say

²⁶⁷ John Borelli 2015.

that *Nostra Aetate* gives a resounding ‘yes!’ to 9 ½ of these ten points when made into these questions.”

1. “Does the one God speak to Christians and Jews through the New and Old Testaments?”

Borelli notes that the answer to this question would be qualified. Herein lies the half rather than full positive response. The Divine promise of the land as a sign of the covenant within the Hebrew Bible would be avoided as this was the most highly contentious topic among Church leaders in Arab lands.

2. “Was Jesus a Jew and does his love and forgiveness embrace his own people as well as the whole world? Yes.”
3. “Were the first martyrs and apostles Jews? Yes.”
4. “Is the fundamental commandment to love God and one’s neighbor already proclaimed in the Old Testament binding on both Jews and Christians? Yes.”
5. “Can the Gospel of Christ be proclaimed and the Church extolled without misrepresenting Biblical or post-Biblical Judaism? Yes.”
6. “Is it incorrect to say that Jews were exclusively enemies of Jesus and thus conclude that the enemies of Jesus include the whole people of Judaism? Yes.”
7. “Can the passion of Jesus be proclaimed without charging the death of Jesus to the whole Jewish people or exclusively to Jews? Yes.
8. “Does Jesus’ act of asking the father to forgive his persecutors outweigh Scriptural curses or any cry for his blood to be upon them and their children by the mob of Jewish witnesses? Yes.”
9. “Is it wrong to argue that because of the Passion and death of Jesus Jews are an accursed and sinful people destined to suffer without end? Yes.
10. “Were not Jews the first members of the Church, member of the following of Jesus? Yes.”²⁶⁸

What began, in 1960, as a one-on-one conversation between Jules Isaac and Pope John XXIII would expand to include the 2,000 to 2,500 Church Fathers and 460 experts of Vatican II, and the avid and invested allies, advocates and adversaries in a larger circle

²⁶⁸ John Borelli 2015.

of conversation over the next five years. *Nostra Aetate* would indeed answer the call to conscience of Stuttgart and the call for transformation of Church teachings of Seelisberg.

The aftermath of *Nostra Aetate* would prove to be a first step to a transformed relationship between Christians and Jews. Pope Paul VI would make the SPCU a permanent department of the Holy See in 1966. It would be led by Cardinal Bea until his death in 1968 at which point Cardinal Willebrands would become President for 20 years. It continues to function today and is led by Archbishop Flavio Pace.²⁶⁹

In 1974, Pope Paul VI established the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Jews that would continue to maintain theological ties with Jews. The commission continues to function today under the leadership of Father Norbert Hoffman.²⁷⁰ It is distinct from acts “within the ambit” of the Secretariat for Christian Unity (now the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, PCPCU).²⁷¹

While several significant documents would be issued by the Vatican in the six decades following Vatican II, two are noteworthy responses to omissions that failed to be included in *Nostra Aetate*.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Following Willebrands, Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy was named President of this Pontifical Council. In 2001, Cardinal Walter Kasper became President, and he was succeeded in 2010 by Cardinal Kurt Koch. “The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity,” *The Holy See*, accessed December 25, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_pro_20051996_chrstuni_pro_en.html.

²⁷⁰ Father Norbert Hoffman has led the The Commission for Religious Relations since 2002.

²⁷¹ “Commission for Religious Relations with Jews,” *Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity*, accessed July 23, 2024, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/en.html>.

²⁷² Notable Vatican documents on relations with Jews include: Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (1974), Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church (1985), The Jewish People and

The “Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel” would be issued by the Secretariat of State of the Holy See and the State of Israel on December 30, 1993, and establish full diplomatic relations between the two sovereign states.²⁷³ While clearly political in nature, the agreement’s language transcended that of international diplomacy. Its roots could be traced to Vatican II. It affirmed “the unique nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and of the historic process of reconciliation and growth in mutual understanding and friendship between Catholics and Jews.” Both partners committed to combating all form of antisemitism, racism and religious intolerance and to work toward the “peaceful resolution of conflicts among States and nations, excluding violence and terror from international life.” The document protected Christian holy places and freedom of religion, expressed interest in supporting Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and other matters. At the 25th anniversary of the agreement, Israeli Ambassador Dani Dayan noted that the Fundamental Agreement, is "not merely an agreement between two states, but a rapprochement between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people."²⁷⁴

“We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” (1998) would emerge from the Commission for Religious Relations with Jews. It explicitly laid out the tragedy of the

Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible (2001), *Deus Caritas Est* ("God is Love") (2005), The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate (No. 4) (2015).

²⁷³ Conventio Inter Apostolicam Sedem Atque Israelis Statum Fundamental Agreement Between the Holy See and the State of Israel, *The Holy See*, December 30, 1993, accessed July 23, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/archivio/documents/rc_seg-st_19931230_santa-sede-israele_en.html.

²⁷⁴ “Celebrating 25th Anniversary of Vatican Israel Accord,” *Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the Vatican*, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://holyseemission.org/contents//events/5d10f9fa5bda5.php>.

Holocaust thus combatting Holocaust denial. The statement briefly addressed historic Christian anti-Jewish interpretation of the New Testament that engendered hostility against Jews noting that such interpretations were definitively rejected by the Second Vatican Council. The statement unequivocally condemned antisemitism in a way that Vatican II had not. It highlighted Church leaders and laity who used their voice and power to denounce antisemitism and resist Nazi violence including Pope Pius XI and XII. In “an act of repentance (*teshuva*)” the statement expressed a commitment to a “new future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians or anti-Christian sentiment among Jews, but rather a shared mutual respect...”²⁷⁵

A lengthy critique in a statement issued by the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) would itemize the numerous and glaring deficiencies of “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.” It failed to answer the important questions as to whether Nazi persecution was made easier because anti-Jewish teachings had embedded prejudicial attitudes in the minds and hearts of Christians. It dramatically minimized the failures of Catholics to protest Nazi persecution of Jews. It elevated the protector role of Pope Pius XII stating he was responsible for saving hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives, a claim that was unsubstantiated. Yet in the end, IJCIC praised the Vatican’s work of clearly indicting the past. The statement’s clear condemnation of antisemitism would serve as a “milestone-guideline” for the future.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” Franklin Sherman, *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue, Volume Two*, 250-259.

²⁷⁶ Founded in 1970, IJCIC represents world Jewry in dialogue with the Vatican, Ecumenical Patriarchate, World Evangelical Alliance, and World Council of Churches. International Jewish Committee on

In social and religious justice, advances are not always maintained. A pendulum effect can occur where progress is followed by regression. One example was in 2008, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI would reintroduce the Tridentine prayer for Good Friday, which says “illumine [Jewish] hearts, so that they will recognize Jesus Christ, the Savior of all men.”

Immediate advocacy moved the Pope to reverse that decision, highlighting the need for continued dialogue and vigilance with respect to understanding and, at times, challenging the rhetoric of religious leaders on all sides.²⁷⁷

It is fitting to conclude this chapter with the recognition that *Nostra Aetate* was a *tikkun*, a repair and an amending of a theology that caused centuries, if not millennia, of harm. It is worth noting that during the history of the Catholic Church there were other papal leaders who sought to use their places of power to protect Jews. For example, the Fourth Catechism of the Council of Trent (1545-63) declared, in part: "It was the peculiar privilege of Christ the Lord to have died when He himself decreed to die, and to have died not so much by external violence as by internal assent."²⁷⁸ *Nostra Aetate* would take the repudiation of Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death significantly farther.

Interreligious Consultations, "Response to Vatican Document 'We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,'" March 31, 1998, *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/jewish/ijcic1998>. For more on IJCIC, see pages 186-188.

²⁷⁷ George Conger, "Pope rewrites prayer following Jewish protest," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 3, 2008, <https://www.jpost.com/jewish-world/jewish-news/pope-rewrites-prayer-following-jewish-protest>.

²⁷⁸ Rev. J. Donovan, D.D., *Catechism of the Council of Trent Translated into English*, (James Duffy and Co., Ltd., 1908), 54.

While nearly 2000 years of teachings of contempt could not be erased with one document, through a sincere confrontation with the tragedies caused by Holocaust and a willingness to wrestle with Scriptural interpretations that led to failures of the Church and Catholics to act in the face of injustice and brutality, a new hermeneutic and new theology would come to light. It was a theology that would acknowledge the truth of other faiths. Like the Biblical Jacob, whose wrestling with an angel foreshadowed his upcoming human-to-human encounter of reconciliation with his brother, Esau (Genesis 32:22-31), the Catholic Church theologically grappled with its prior teachings of contempt by engaging in dialogical encounters with Jews — not only with Jews who had converted to Catholicism within the Church but with Jewish leadership outside the Church.

Chapter Four

Jewish Voices Speaking to Catholic Change: *Nostra Aetate* and External Advocacy

It was Claire Huchet Bishop,²⁷⁹ a devotee of Jules Isaac, who approached the American Jewish Committee (AJC) shortly after the announcement of Vatican II, pressing them to engage in advocacy “for the repudiation ‘at the highest level of the Church’ of that anti-Jewish and Antisemitic tradition of teaching and preaching whereby Jews had been segregated, degraded, charged with wicked crimes, and valued only as potential converts. Ecumenical councils are few and far between, she said, and this is a historic opportunity. ‘Seize it.’”²⁸⁰

Seize it they did. The AJC did not need to be sold on the work of advocating for religious rights. It had been founded on November 11, 1906, in response to waves of antisemitic violence in Czarist Russia – most specifically the 1903 and 1905 Kishinev pogroms – and had been fighting for religious and civil rights for Jews and others ever since.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Claire Huchet Bishop (1898-1993), French author of children’s book, lead advocate against antisemitism, who translated Isaac’s *Jésus et Israël* into English (1971). Bishop served as the president of the International Council of Christians and Jews from 1975 to 1977 and of the Jewish-Christian-Fellowship of France from 1968 to 1981.

²⁸⁰ Judith Hershcopf Banki, “*Nostra Aetate*: Reflections from an Eyewitness,” (Lecture, ICCJ Conference, Rome, June 29, 2015), <https://www.iccj.org/library/pdf/judith-hershcopf-banki-iccj-conference-rome-plenary-session.html>, 1-2.

²⁸¹ The 1903 Kishniev pogrom that took place the day after Easter was sparked by rumors of a Jewish ritual murder. Over the course of day and half, 49 Jews were murdered, an untold number of Jewish women raped, and 1,500 Jewish homes were damaged. The 1905 Kishniev pogrom left 19 Jews murdered and 56 wounded. It was a part of a larger wave of October 1905 pogroms that occurred mostly in the land of modern Ukraine from October 18 to October 29. There 690 pogroms occurred in 660 cities, leaving

The AJC leadership immediately recognized the potential benefit of a Vatican document of “*aggiornamento*, updating” that would modernize Catholic theological understanding of Judaism. Over the course of their five-year engagement with Vatican II, culminating in the issuing of *Nostra Aetate*, the AJC sought counsel from foremost authorities in Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewry, convening leaders, crafting educational materials and gatherings, and utilizing the media when needed to educate and mobilize supporters. The AJC would continually correspond with Cardinal Bea and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) and organize advocacy, including arranging audiences with the Pope at critical junctures, to advance a Jewish declaration.

Why did the American Jewish Committee emerge as the lead organization?

The AJC had a long history of collaboration with Catholic groups. In 1925, the AJC president and constitutional lawyer, Louis Marshall, had filed a brief in a Supreme Court case that struck down an Oregon law that outlawed Catholic parochial schools.²⁸²

The AJC had a long history of engaging in research on bias in religious textbooks. Since 1932, the AJC had partnered with academic and religious organizations (with Drew Theological Seminary and the National Conference of Christians and Jews among them) to study Protestant teaching materials and understand their portrayal of Jews.²⁸³ In the

3100 Jews murdered, 2000 Jews severely injured and 15,000 wounded. Corydon Ireland, “The pogrom that transformed 20th century Jewry,” *The Harvard Gazette*, April 9, 2009, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/04/the-pogrom-that-transformed-20th-century-jewry/>. Khiterer, Victoria. “The October 1905 Pogroms and the Russian Authorities.” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 5 (September, 2015): 788-803.

²⁸² Louis Marshall (1856-1929) served as president of the AJC from 1912 to 1929. “Pierce v. Society of Sisters,” *Casetext*, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://casetext.com/case/pierce-v-society-of-the-sisters-of-the-holy-names-of-jesus-and-mary-same-v-hill-military-academy>.

²⁸³ “Vatican Decree on Jews & Judaism & the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record,” 1964, 7.

1950s, AJC worked with a private foundation to finance a study with social scientists from St. Louis University on anti-Jewish bias in Catholic textbooks. The results were edited and abridged by Judith Hershcovf Banki of the AJC's Department of Interreligious Affairs and disseminated to Catholic educators throughout the country.²⁸⁴ The AJC had compiled significant research on antisemitism that would be of value to Vatican II.

The AJC had deep-rooted relationships with academic leaders in Rome. Dating back to 1950, the AJC had developed an affiliation with Rome's Pro Deo University – an international university that trained civic and business leaders mostly from underdeveloped countries giving them an understanding of democracy as an alternative to communism. The university's founder, Father Felix A. Morlion had reached out to the AJC to help form an American based support group called the American Council for the International Promotion of Democracy under God (CIP). AJC's officers and leaders – Alan Stroock, Paul Warburg, Ralph Friedman and David Danzig -- would serve on that committee as individuals and not as AJC representatives.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ "Vatican Decree on Jews & Judaism & the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record," 1964, 7.

²⁸⁵ Reverend Andrew Felix Morlion (1904-1987) was a scholar, theologian, diplomat and social reformer. In 1932, he founded an organization called Pro Deo Union ("United Peoples Movement") fostering ecumenicism among global educational, religious, political and cultural leaders. In 1945, with Pope Pius XII's support he started and directed Pro Deo University and assisted five popes as their private emissary. Alan Stroock (1908-1986) was a lawyer, philanthropist, civic, educational and literary leader who served as chair and President of the Board of the corporation of the Jewish Theological Seminary, was a life trustee of New York University, founded *Commentary* magazine, and served as Vice President of the AJC. Paul Warburg (1904-1965) was a financier and philanthropist. Ralph Friedman (1903/4-1992) served as chairman of the AJC's national board from 1964-1966 and was a financial executive (senior general partner of Friedman & Company, a member of the New York Stock Exchange, from 1933 to 1947). David Danzig (1911-1969), an internationally recognized authority on intergroup relations, served as program director and then associate director of the AJC from 1947 to 1969. Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober 2019, 55. "Covert Action: Special: Nazis, the Vatican, CIA," *Central Intelligence Agency*, December 22, 2015, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp90->

Those working relationships with Pro Deo enabled ten AJC representatives to have an audience with Pope Pius XII in June 1957, to thank him for the aid he provided Jews during the Holocaust, to request his support in combating antisemitism among clergy in Poland, and to ask that Latin America open its doors to grant asylum to Jewish refugees from Egypt in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez Crisis. The Pope's subsequent statements condemning antisemitism and calling on the world's nations to welcome Jewish refugees yielded positive results.²⁸⁶

The AJC's leadership had a strong network of relationships with Jewish and Christian organizational leadership. Prior to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum joining the AJC as the director of Interreligious Affairs in March 1961, he had held the position of Executive Director of the Synagogue Council of America (SCA, the umbrella organization of synagogue and rabbinical organizations made up representatives from the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements) for seven years.²⁸⁷ He brought with him to the AJC not only a strong network of relationships within American rabbinic and denominational leadership but, in having served as a leader of the 1957 White House Conference on foreign aid and trade, the 1960 White House Conference on Children and

00845r000100170004-5. "Alan M. Stroock, 77, Lawyer and Jewish Leader, is Dead," *The New York Times*, March 30, 1985, 29.

²⁸⁶ Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober 2019, 56.

²⁸⁷ The constituent organizations of the Synagogue Council of America (SCA) were the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and its Rabbinical Council (Orthodox), the United Synagogue of America and its Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative) and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform). The SCA was founded in 1926 and dissolved in 1994 due to lack of funding and the rise of many other Jewish organizations' engagement with interreligious work. "Synagogue Council is Dissolving After 68 Years: New Group to Be Formed," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Volume 72, Number 214, <https://www.jta.org/archive/synagogue-council-is-dissolving-after-68-years-new-group-to-be-formed>.

Youth, and the 1961 White House Conference on Aging, he had formed a network of relationship with leaders of national Christian organizations.²⁸⁸

Lastly, according to a seven-page timeline outlining the AJC's engagement with Vatican II, the AJC identifies 1947 as its first year of involvement with Zachariah Shuster helping to plan the Seelisberg Conference.²⁸⁹ While Shuster did not become Director of the AJC's European office until 1948 and did not attend Seelisberg, he was sent by the AJC to Paris in the 1940s to work on Jewish international relations, so it is reasonable to assume its European office would have been involved in meetings related to the conference.

When in 1962, the World Jewish Congress announced that it had invited Dr. Hayyim Wardi, an Israeli government official, to represent it at Vatican II as an unofficial observer, the AJC was quick to intervene behind the scenes with confidential communications to international Jewish leaders with the aim of denouncing the WJC's actions and ensuring the AJC's primacy in leading the strategy and convening Jewish leaders as consultants to Vatican II.²⁹⁰ The communication with the Vatican required the highest levels of nuance, strategy and confidentiality. Having two different Jewish organizations directing the work would negatively affect the outcome. According to

²⁸⁸ Judith Schindler, "An Unsung Hero of Black-Jewish Relations: Lessons Learned from Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum in Deepening Understanding and Relationships Across the Divide," *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly Symposium on Politics and the Rabbinate*, Summer 2019, 53-54.

²⁸⁹ Shuster was not listed as a participant in either the 1946 Oxford Conference or the 1947 Seelisberg conference reports. "The AJC and Vatican II: A Chronology of the Agency's Involvement," 1. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 11, Folder 4, "AJC and Vatican 11: A Chronology of the Agency's Involvement," 1984.

²⁹⁰ Confidential memo to members to the AJC Board and the Chapter and Unit Executive Boards from A. M. Sonnabend, AJC President, August 16, 1962, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 1, Vatican Council II, 1962.

Vatican II historian John Borelli, the only credentialed observers were Christians.²⁹¹

Publicly announcing non-Christian observers was not aligned with these goals.

Dialogue and Advocacy From A Distance

The interfaith dialogue that would support the evolution of a Jewish declaration would prove far more challenging with Vatican II than in Seelisberg. In the case of the Ten Points of Seelisberg, while the pioneering document would be in the hands of the Protestant and Catholic authors to finalize, Jews were a part of the commission tasked with its writing and at the table engaging in direct dialogue and offering input at every step of the document's development.

With respect to Vatican II, the Jewish partners would, in large part, engage in dialogue from a distance. There was the exception of a handful of direct audiences with Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, and Cardinal Bea, that were well-timed for impact -- with Jules Isaac's June 1960 conversation serving as the spark that would ignite the process. Yet outside of those face-to-face encounters, the five year process of the Jewish engagement with Vatican II would involve intensive research; focused advocacy with those who have the power to make the desired change; a deep dialogue created both through encounters with representatives of the Church that took place outside of Rome and through written correspondence; the development of real relationships built over time and based on honesty and trust that could sustain disappointments; and the use of the media to change public opinion and to amplify positive messages emerging from the

²⁹¹ John Borelli 2021, 19.

Vatican Council and Catholic allies related to the Jewish declaration. From the Jewish side, advocating for the document would require an unparalleled partnership, persistence and patience.

Early Preparations

As Catholic preparations for Vatican II were underway and were undergirded by the research and preparatory work with eleven commissions that would come to be staffed by Bishops and 479 experts (with theological, academic, pastoral, political, and media experience), the AJC prepared as well.²⁹² Zachariah Shuster, director of AJC's European Office, would get the lay of the land by meeting with Jewish and Christian experts in interreligious affairs: among them Paul Démann, James Parkes, and Jules Isaac. AJC Consultations (led by international AJC leaders) additionally included Claire Huchet Bishop, Dr. Elio R. Toaff, Chief Rabbi of Rome; Dr. Jacob Kaplan, Chief Rabbi of France; Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik; Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA), Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Dr. Salo W. Baron, Professor of Jewish History at

²⁹² Gregory Dipippo, "The Periti of Vatican II: A New Research Project by Sharon Kabel," *New Liturgical Movement: Sacred Liturgy and Liturgical Arts*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2023/01/the-periti-of-vatican-ii-new-research.html#:~:text=The%20Periti%20of%20Vatican%20II%20is%20a%20new%20project%20cataloging,of%20several%20dozen%20private%20periti.>

Columbia University.²⁹³ The Jewish advisors in Europe were chief rabbis and the Jewish advisors in America, while some were rabbis, all were serving as academics.²⁹⁴

Through that preliminary work, enough background information was gleaned to determine how to stay abreast of Vatican II as it took up a Jewish declaration and how to use the voice of Jewish theologians and leaders to advocate for content that would counter Catholic anti-Jewish teachings that have historically endangered Jewish communities where Jews and Catholics collectively lived. The AJC needed to maintain a delicate balance of helping guide the process while not exerting too much external pressure.

The American Jewish Committee was on hand with research and education

On December 15, 1960, AJC's President Herbert B. Ehrman wrote to Pope John XXIII, offering gratitude for the Pope's leadership in adapting the Good Friday liturgy and noting that it might pave the way for further improvements. To advance that process, Ehrman suggested that the Church might find it advantageous to confer with Jewish scholars and theologians about texts that were impediments to understanding between

²⁹³ Paul Démann (1942-2005), a Roman Catholic Priest, authored *La Catéchèse Chrétienne et le Peuple de la Bible*, a study of French catechetical materials. His research was influenced by Jules Isaac's scholarship. He emphasized a "balance portrait of Judaism in the Catechism since it is there that students often encounter Jewish religion and life for the first time." Démann was a converted Hungarian Jew. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 44, Folder 5, Religious education and prejudice, 1969. John Connelly, "Converts who changed the Church," *The Forward*, July 30, 2012, <https://forward.com/opinion/159955/converts-who-changed-the-church/>. Dr. Elio R. Toaff (1915-2015), Dr. Jacob Kaplan (1895-1994), Rabbi Louis Finkelstein (1895-1991); and Dr. Salo W. Baron (1895-1989). "Vatican Decree on Jews & Judaism & the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record", 1964, 18.

²⁹⁴ Reuven Kimelman, "Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish-Christian Relations," *Modern Judaism* Volume 24, No. 3, October 2004, 253.

Jews and Catholics and offered AJC's assistance with establishing contacts. Within a week, a positive response was received noting the Pope's receptivity to that idea.²⁹⁵

On July 4, 1961, Ralph Friedman and Zachariah Shuster, representing the AJC, met with Cardinal Bea in his study in Rome.²⁹⁶ On November 17, 1961, they followed up by sending Bea a 23-page report on "Anti-Jewish Elements in Catholic Liturgy." The report, researched and written by Dr. Eric Werner of the Hebrew Union College, identified the various places in Catholic liturgy, in the New Testament Lectionary for Holy Week, and in patristic literature, that perpetuate negative images of Jews and have historically caused harm. The report recommended that they be revised: "We respectfully request that the Church, [*sic*] rectify, according to its own precedents and through its own methods, the passages in liturgy and teaching which, in themselves, or by way of homily, stimulate and reinforce the slanderous concept of the Jews as a cursed, despised, deicide people. At this critical time in human history, the adherents of the great monotheistic, revealed religions must bend their efforts to do away with the barriers of suspicion and prejudice which have created bitterness and bloodshed in the past."²⁹⁷ The memo specifically noted that the charge of deicide had been central to antisemitism in Western civilization.

²⁹⁵ Herbert Ehrman (1891-1970) was chairman of the AJC's Boston Chapter. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 11, Vatican Council II - "Vatican Decree on Jews & Judaism & the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record", 1964, 19-20.

²⁹⁶ "Vatican Decree on Jews & Judaism & the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record," 1964, 21.

²⁹⁷ American Jewish Committee, "Anti-Jewish Elements in Catholic Liturgy: A Memorandum to the Secretariat for Christian Unity," November 17, 1961, American Jewish Committee, Tanenbaum Collection. Box 12, Folder 7, Bea, Augustin [Cardinal], 1961, 22.

A second 32-page report on “The Image of the Jews in Catholic Teaching,” was submitted alongside it. The document, drafted by Banki, was based on findings of a self-study of Catholic textbooks undertaken by Sr. Rose Thering O.P. This second study concluded that “Catholic religious teaching today contains defamatory misstatements and omissions which may encourage hostility and contempt for Jews.” The report recommended that the positive liturgical advances already made by Pope John XXIII and his predecessors be continued with revisions to books and teaching materials.²⁹⁸

On November 26th, Cardinal Bea met in Rome with Rabbi Heschel, Zachariah Shuster and Dr. Max Horkheimer, Professor of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Frankfurt to discuss the two studies. Heschel and Bea formed an instant friendship and spiritual bond. They were both from Germany and communicated in German. They shared reflections on the Biblical Song of Songs for which both, as Biblical scholars and theologians, had passion and deep knowledge, and they discussed a “large number of moral, theological, social and particularly historical events that brought about the discord and rift between Christianity and Judaism.”²⁹⁹

Bea warmly accepted Heschel’s offers to submit the highlights of their discussion in written form. Six months later, on May 22, 1962, Heschel would fulfill that

²⁹⁸ American Jewish Committee, “The Image of the Jews in Catholic Teaching: A Memorandum to the Secretariat for Christian Unity,” Tanenbaum Collection. Box 12, Folder 7, Bea, Augustin [Cardinal], 1961, 4, 28.

²⁹⁹ Dr. Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) was a Jewish-German philosopher who served as director of the Institute and Professor of Social Philosophy at the University of Frankfurt from 1930–1933 and then again from 1949–1958. Eliezer Greenberg, “The Ecumenical Council and the Role of Jewish Organizations: A Special Memorandum,” January 23, 1963. Tanenbaum Collection: Box 49, Folder 3, Vatican Council II, 1963–1964, 11–12.

commitment by sending to Bea and Vatican II a 13-page document, “On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations.”³⁰⁰ He wrote of the anguish of the prophets, the sin of hatred, and offered a four-pronged proposal to better the relationship. First, that the Ecumenical Council issue a strong declaration that antisemitism and Catholicism are incompatible and reject the assertion that Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus and therefore accursed. Second, that the Council affirm “the integrity and permanent preciousness of Jews and Judaism.” Third, in recognition that “Ignorance breeds suspicion, just as false knowledge generates distortion,” Heschel called for educational forums for priests to learn about Judaism, collaborative academic projects with Jewish and Christian scholars, and a reaffirmation of earlier Papal and Vatican pronouncements encouraging collaboration in the civic realm. And lastly, Heschel noted that while sacrificial work was done by individual Catholics to save Jews during the Holocaust, “for every Catholic who came to the aid and assistance of Jews, there were hundreds of others – also loyal Church members – who were at best indifferent to the fate of the Jewish community, and who failed to resist or condemn anti-Jewish utterances and atrocities, particularly during the time of the Nazi era.” Heschel thus requested that a high-level commission be established at the Vatican to combat antisemitism and watch over Christian-Jewish relations the world over.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Heschel’s article was never published. It can be found in both the Tanenbaum archives at the AJA and in the online resources at the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations. Abraham Joshua Heschel, “On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations: A Memorandum to His Eminence Agostino Cardinal Bea President The Secretariat for Christian Unity,” May 22, 1962, Tanenbaum Collection: Box 12, Folder 8, Bea, Augustin [Cardinal], 1962-1963. *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed October 13, 2024, https://ccjr.us/images/stories/Heschel_On-Improving-Catholic-Jewish-Relations.pdf.

³⁰¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations: A Memorandum to His Eminence Agostino Cardinal Bea President The Secretariat for Christian Unity,” 1962.

The language one employs to approach the religious other matters. Heschel spoke of his concerns with a spiritual, theological, and prophetic language that the Church leaders could clearly hear – a way that was able to garner “respect and appreciation on the part of Catholic leaders in regards to Jews and Jewish values.”³⁰² While at first Heschel’s memorandum was studied with great caution, Bea would ultimately use significant segments of Heschel’s words in drafting his “Jewish paper” for the Council. A 1962 entry to a report by journalist Eliezer Greenberg notes that Heschel’s words stood in contrast to those of Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregation, who addressed an assembly in Baltimore and “sharply attacked the Ecumenical Council for ‘ignoring Jews,’ and for ‘not inviting Jewish observers to the Conference.’”³⁰³ Eisendrath’s words were referred to by the Vatican as a “vicious slur.”³⁰⁴

Heschel’s words, on the other hand, were received enthusiastically by Bea and the priests. Like Jules Isaac, Heschel approached his dialogical mission with the highest levels of the Vatican not with malice but with the authentic stance of collaborative concern and reconciliation. The paper he submitted opened with these words: “With

³⁰² Eliezer Greenberg, “The Ecumenical Council and the Role of Jewish Organizations,” Memorandum for the American Jewish Committee, January 23, 1963, Tanenbaum Collection. Box 49, Folder 3, Vatican Council II, 1963-1964, 11-12.

³⁰³ Maurice Eisendrath (1902-1973) was ordained by the Hebrew Union College in 1926. He led the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from 1943 to 1973 stewarding the movement’s growth from several hundred congregations to 700 congregations. Eisendrath was committed to interfaith activities and had attended the 1946 Oxford Conference. He was an outspoken advocate for civil rights for Blacks, nuclear disarmament, and ending the Vietnam War.

³⁰⁴ Eliezer Greenberg 1963, 12-13.

humility and in the spirit of commitment to the living message of the prophets of Israel, let us consider the grave problems that confront us all as the children of God.”³⁰⁵

In addition to the three reports, the AJC sought to create a public forum for education within Europe. In 1962, the AJC utilized its French-language magazine, *Évidences*, to publish discussions from a symposium at which Catholic and Protestant scholars and leaders tackled issues surrounding Christian teachings on Judaism. This was the first such effort in European journals.³⁰⁶

Mixed Reactions from U.S. Jewish Leaders

As would be expected, Jewish leaders wavered in their support of and opposition to the Jewish community engaging with the work of Vatican II broadly and with advocating for a Jewish declaration on Jewish-Christian relations specifically. Their questions for Jewish debate included who should represent the Jewish community and the topics that were appropriate for such engagement. Early in the process, the American Jewish Committee, would reach out to a handful of Jewish scholars and theologians to provide input both on the process of engaging with Vatican II and on the memoranda that would be submitted to Vatican II.³⁰⁷

While the next chapter on *Dabru Emet* will delve more deeply into historical Jewish perspectives and contemporary Jewish denominational approaches to Jewish-

³⁰⁵ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations: A Memorandum to His Eminence Agostino Cardinal Bea President The Secretariat for Christian Unity,” 1.

³⁰⁶ “AJC and Vatican 11: A Chronology of the Agency's Involvement,” 2.

³⁰⁷ While it was not stated explicitly, the AJC must have felt that academics (Jewish philosophers and theologians) rather than denominational religious leadership had the stronger skillset for addressing the nuance required.

Christian relations and dialogue, this chapter will focus on the two central rabbis, theologians and philosophers: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik³⁰⁸ and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Soloveitchik and Heschel reflected two opposing and consequential positions related to the Jewish-Christian relations. From their 1961-1962 correspondence with the AJC offering feedback on the reports that would be sent to the SPCU to their responses to the highly contentious and watered down September 1964 draft authored by Vatican Council's Coordinating Commission, Soloveitchik's and Heschel's influential treatises on interfaith dialogue emerging from their experiences with Vatican II would influence generations of Jewish stances on interreligious dialogue.³⁰⁹

Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik: Judaism is a “totally independent faith community”

On May 9, 1961, in the residence hall of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Tanenbaum would have a two-hour interview with Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, a 20th century leading Orthodox rabbinic authority. Tanenbaum shared with him the AJC rationale for engagement with the Ecumenical Council and the AJC strategy of asking Jewish scholars to prepare “theological” statements on what they’d like to see emerge from Vatican II.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Rabbi Joseph Ber (Yosef Dov) Soloveitchik better known as Rav Soloveitchik (1903-1993) was an American Orthodox leader, Talmudist, and philosopher. He was Rosh Yeshiva at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University and a recognized spokesperson for halakhic Judaism.

³⁰⁹ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1964), 5-29, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23256100?seq=25>. Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, Part I, January 1966, 117-134.

³¹⁰ “Interview with Rabbi Soloveitchik Re Ecumenical Council,” Dr. John Slawson, David Danzig, Simon Segal, Zachariah Shuster, Judith Herschopf, Milton Himmelfarb, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, Confidential Report, May 10, 1961, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 6, Vatican Council II - Soloveitchik, Joseph, 1961- 1964. 1-2.

In a confidential two-page memo, Tanenbaum noted Soloveitchik's concerns and advice. Soloveitchik opposed a "theological" presentation to the Vatican on the grounds that the Church would resent recommendations from rabbis and Jewish scholars that the Vatican revise fundamentals of their faith. He felt the engagement would become a theological disputation and Soloveitchik wanted no part of it. He felt that there would be "theological traps" ...already suggested by the public statements on the 'Christian-Jewish Continuum' issued by Cardinal Bea" and others. Soloveitchik added:

"None of us are as strong as our fathers were in their religious commitment. The line separating Christianity from Judaism has become increasingly thin, so much so that distinctions that separate Christians and Jews are primarily abstractions. Should the Ecumenical Council seek to minimize these abstract distinctions by emphasizing the continuum between Christianity and Judaism and that the New Testament is the progressive revelation of the Old, we will find that this will over the years become a peril for the many thousands of our people who are weak in their Jewishness."³¹¹

While fearful and opposing any theological dialogue that might lend to the softening of borders between Judaism and Christianity, Rav Soloveitchik was supportive of the AJC's broad efforts working with Vatican II. Soloveitchik believed that "a new temper prevails in the Vatican and that the Ecumenical Council provides an opportunity for removing the basis of credal anti-Semitism."³¹²

Soloveitchik advised that the memorandum the AJC submits should address the social and human relational consequences of the Church's teachings and attitudes toward the Jews. Soloveitchik reported discussing his stance with philosopher of religion and leading scholar on comparative religion at Harvard University, Harry Wolfson, who

³¹¹ "Interview with Rabbi Soloveitchik Re Ecumenical Council," 1961, 1-2.

³¹² "Interview with Rabbi Soloveitchik Re Ecumenical Council," 1961, 1-2.

agreed with this approach and advised that the memoranda be submitted through a layman rather than a cleric to minimize the theological context of this work.³¹³

Two days later, Tanenbaum sent Soloveitchik a copy of a memorandum being prepared for the Ecumenical Council and asked him to share it with Professor Wolfson. On June 5, 1961, Soloveitchik phoned Tanenbaum with feedback on the memorandum and to discuss the Jewish Telegraphic Agency's (JTA) reporting of an initiative of Dr. Nahum Goldmann, a founder of the World Jewish Congress, to convene a committee of Hebrew University professors to draft a memorandum for Vatican II.³¹⁴ Soloveitchik offered to intervene by calling the Chief Rabbis of Britain and France to urge them to dissociate from Goldmann's efforts.³¹⁵ Tanenbaum reported that the chief executives of the Orthodox and Conservative rabbinic organizations felt similarly. The lobbying efforts to maintain the AJC's leading role as the Jewish key convener and advisor to Vatican II would succeed.

By June 20, the AJC had a two-page single-spaced detailed document outlining the collective edits offered by Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, Professor Harry Wolfson, Jewish scholar Mr. Abraham Carmel (formerly Father Kenneth Cox, a Catholic priest who

³¹³ Harry Austryn Wolfson (1887–1974) was a scholar, philosopher, and historian at Harvard University, the first chairman of a Judaic Studies Center at a secular University in the United States. He received his BA, MA and PhD from Harvard and spent his entire career as an esteemed academic there.

³¹⁴ Nahum Goldmann (1895-1992) was a Zionist leader. He was founder and served as the president of World Jewish Congress from 1951 to 1978. He served as president of the World Zionist Organization from 1956 to 1968. Goldmann also founded the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations. He was buried in Jerusalem's Har Herzl in an area reserved for Zionist leaders. Reuters, "Nahum Goldmann, a Leader Zionist, Dies at 87," *The New York Times*, August 31, 1982.

³¹⁵ Confidential Memo to Dr. J. Slawson, D. Danzig, Z. Shuster, S. Segal, J. Herschcopf, June 6, 1961, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 6.

converted to Orthodox Judaism) and Rabbi Soloveitchik's son-in-law, a scholar of Jewish literature at Yeshiva University, Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein.³¹⁶

In an August 3, 1962, handwritten letter, Soloveitchik shared his response to a proposed letter from Jewish leaders to Cardinal Bea saying that it was too apologetic, "bordering on servility." The Jewish community should not be approaching Bea as if he were a benefactor. Soloveitchik wrote, "the elimination of inciting and prejudicial sections from Catholic liturgy is not our problem but theirs. Let no church dignitary be led to believe that our destiny and future are dependent on his good will."³¹⁷ Soloveitchik said that he could envision a different letter that he might sign.

In an August 7, 1962, handwritten letter from Soloveitchik to Tanenbaum regarding the issue of Vatican II's proposed calendar reform,³¹⁸ Soloveitchik went even further expressing his disapproval tipping the scale toward outright distrust of what he described as the "time honored pattern of Vatican policy which has always been elusive

³¹⁶ Abraham Carmel was a former Catholic priest who converted to Orthodox Judaism in 1954. Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein (1933-2015) would serve as Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva University and then at Har Etzion Yeshiva. Shalom Goldman, "The Catholic Priest Who Became an Orthodox Jew," *Tablet Magazine*, May 18, 2018, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/the-catholic-priest-who-became-an-orthodox-jew>. "Comments on our Ecumenical Council Memorandum from Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, Professor Harry Wolfson, and Others," June 20, 1961.

³¹⁷ Hand-written letter from Soloveitchik to Marc Tanenbaum, August 3, 1962, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 6.

³¹⁸ The calendar reform aimed to have Easter and other holidays fall on the same fixed date every year. It would have radically changed the Gregorian Calendar which went into use in 1582 with the bull 'Inter gravissimas' of Pope Gregory XIII. The proposed calendar system would have included an extra "blank day" each year that was not associated with any specific day of the week. It would have disrupted the alignment of the Jewish Sabbath with the regular weekly cycle, possibly causing it to fall on a different day each year and violating Jewish religious practice of observing Shabbat on the seventh day. Sidney B. Hoenig, "A Jewish Reaction to Calendar Reform," *Tradition: A Journal of Jewish Orthodox Thought*, Spring 1965 Issue 7.1, <https://traditiononline.org/a-jewish-reaction-to-calendar-reform/>.

and devious. I am afraid that it would border on almost criminal negligence if we were to put naively our trust in declarations which don't say much and promise nothing."³¹⁹

In late 1963 and early 1964, Soloveitchik's evolved stance would become public and would become a stake in the ground compelling most Orthodox leaders to shun Jewish interreligious dialogue for the next 50 years. In a December 1963 address to the students and faculty at Yeshiva University, Soloveitchik called for a united front against what he understood to be the missionary agenda of the Church and called for anti-missionary activity.³²⁰ He referenced the rabbinic lens on the Biblical struggle between Jacob and Esau, comparing the contemporary Church – both Protestant and Roman Catholic – to Esau in a “new guise” who “suggests to us directly and indirectly a revision of our 2000 years old decision against Christianity and its founder...” with the aim of conversion. In his zealous critique of a potential declaration and what he viewed as an evangelical document, Soloveitchik cited one of Vatican II's Conservative leaders, Cardinal Ruffini, who asked the Ecumenical Council why a Jewish declaration should be included in a document on Christian unity in the first place.³²¹

In February 1964, in his address to hundreds of rabbis gathered at the Midwest Conference of Histraduth of Rabbis, Soloveitchik declared that he had “carefully studied the Ecumenical Document, both in Latin and English, and, on this basis, he has arrived at the conclusion that the Document is actually nothing more than Christian propaganda,

³¹⁹ Hand-written letters from Soloveichik to Mark Tanenbaum, August 7, 1942, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 6.

³²⁰ Steven Prystowsky, “Rabbi Soloveitchik Wants United Action Against Missionary Threat,” *The Commentator: Official Undergraduate Newspaper of Yeshiva College*, December 4, 1963, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 6.

³²¹ Steven Prystowsky 1963.

hoping that Jews will convert to Christianity.”³²² He added a strong injunction: "Jews do not and must not carry on religious dialogues with the Church. In questions of social problems and politics we may dispute, but not on theology. Dialogues between great Jews and Christian theologians were imposed upon us, and from our side we have never sought or encouraged such matters.”³²³

At the 1964 Mid-Winter Conference of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the official rabbinical organization of Modern Orthodoxy in the United States,³²⁴ Soloveitchik presented portions of what would become a famous discourse on interfaith relations titled, “Confrontation.” Based on Soloveitchik’s words at that gathering, the RCA would issue an official statement opposing interfaith dialogue (see Appendix H).³²⁵

The AJC viewed Soloveitchik’s public stance as dangerous and playing into the hands of the Arab States and conservative curia. The AJC worked to neutralize Soloveitchik’s negative impact. The *London Jewish Chronicle* noted that “Jewish circles” claimed that until early 1964, Rabbi Soloveitchik was “consulted on, and approved of, every step taken by American Jews to make their views known to the Vatican.”³²⁶

³²² “Rabbi Soloveitchik Requests Anti Missionary Action,” *The Yeshiva College Alumni Bulletin*, January 1964, Box 50, Folder 6, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1964. “‘The Jewish Document at the Ecumenical Council is Nothing More Than Christian Propaganda,’ Declares Rabbi Soloveitchik at Conference of Histadruth of Rabbis,” *Day Jewish Journal*, February 5, 1964. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 7, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1964.

³²³ “Rabbi Soloveitchik Requests Anti Missionary Action,” 1964.

³²⁴ Established in 1923 as the Rabbinical Council of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, the organization changed to the Rabbinical Council of America in the 1936, when it merged with the Rabbinical Association of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (now Yeshiva University).

³²⁵ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation.”

³²⁶ Correspondent, “Soloveitchik Under Fire,” *London Jewish Chronicle*, February 14, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 6.

In a letter dated June 18, 1964, Tanenbaum conveyed to Soloveitchik that he was publicly responding to outdated information. The Jewish decree was no longer part of a statement on Christian ecumenicism, but an independent declaration. The Jewish declaration was not evangelically motivated, and Cardinal Bea's team had been at work to alter the text. Tanenbaum successfully persuaded Soloveitchik to refrain from asking the RCA, at their upcoming convention, to call for the Jewish declaration to not be passed.³²⁷

Theology emerges from lived experience. Through Soloveitchik's four years of engagement with the AJC on the issue of the Jewish declaration, his evolving stance from one of skepticism to one of cynical distrust of the Catholic Church, was rooted in his own biography that included his family's escape from the stranglehold of Eastern European antisemitism.

Born in Pruzhany, Belarus, in 1903, and raised in an illustrious family of scholars, Soloveitchik was the grandson of Rabbi Chaim of Brisk and descended from the Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin – the Netziv. Soloveitchik grew up in the town of Choslovitch, Belorussia, as a child prodigy mastering Jewish Law under the tutelage of his father. At the age of 22, he began his secular studies of philosophy in Warsaw and continued at the University of Berlin, where he received his doctorate in 1932.³²⁸ As Poland became more nationalistic instituting restrictive legal measures targeting Jews, Soloveitchik's father,

³²⁷ Tanenbaum letter to Soloveitchik, June 18, 1964, 1-2, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 6.

³²⁸ Rav Reuven Ziegler, "Life and Thought of Rav Soloveitchik (1)," *Torat Har Etzion*, accessed November 7, 2024, <https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/great-thinkers/rav-soloveitchik/life-and-thought-rav-soloveitchik-1>.

Rabbi Moshe Soloveichik, accepted an invitation to serve as head of the faculty of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in New York City. RIETS later became Yeshiva University. Soloveitchik, after his marriage in 1932, moved to America to be with his family and established the Maimonides School in Boston. Upon his father's death, Rav Soloveitchik would become Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University from 1941 to 1993 where he would ordain over 2000 rabbis.³²⁹

The Holocaust would end five centuries of Jews living in Pruzhany, Soloveitchik's birthplace. In 1941, Pruzhany would become a Nazi mandated ghetto with 18,000 residents who had lived in Pruzhany itself or were deported there from outside villages. In early 1943, the 12,000 survivors who hadn't died from illness and starvation, were deported to Auschwitz.³³⁰ The community of Choslovitch, where Soloveitchik was raised, would first be terrorized by waves of Communist violence in the late 1920's and early 1930's that closed synagogue after synagogue turning one into a stocking producing factory. The parchment of the community's Torah scrolls were used for manufacturing drums. Those Jews who remained would fall victim to Nazi ghettoization, torment, torture and murder in 1941.³³¹

Soloveitchik feared the threats of the religious other and conveyed that caution through his 1964 landmark essay titled "Confrontation" which was published in its

³²⁹ "Joseph Soloveitchik," *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed November 7, 2024, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/joseph-soloveitchik>.

³³⁰ "The Pruzhany Ghetto," *The Virtual Museum of the History of the Jews in Białowieża*, accessed November 12, 2024, <http://www.jewish-bialowieza.pl/memory-spaces/the-pruzhany-ghetto/>.

³³¹ "Chislavichi," Shlomo Gurevich's family history and genealogy, accessed November 7, 2024, <https://shl2gur.tripod.com/Chislavichi/Chislavichi.htm>.

entirety in the Spring-Summer 1964 issue *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*. In his mind, the dialogue the Catholic Church promoted was built on a debate or disputation between a majority religion seeking to dominate a minority religion.

Soloveitchik's "Confrontation is not a Jewish legal decision (*responsum/p'sak halachah*). It is not written in Hebrew and does not have Talmudic references and precedents required for Jewish legal rulings. In fact, Rabbi Soloveitchik was asked by Rabbi Feinstein who authored a 1967 *responsum* "declaring an absolute and clear prohibition" against Jews participating in interfaith dialogue and there is no documentation of a response.³³² Soloveitchik's essay is a philosophical discourse based on the idea that humanity is evolving in the ways it is confronted by society. His argument begins with Adam and works its way to interfaith dialogue.

In Genesis 2, Adam is at one with his environment, knowing "no responsibility, no opposition, no fear, and no dichotomy, and hence he is free from carrying the load of humanity. In a word, he is a non-confronted being."³³³

At the next level, Adam is confronted with a sense of aloneness and separation. He is displaced from the garden, estranged and dislocated from nature, faced with his finitude, and confronted with the sense of otherness he experiences vis-à-vis his environment.

³³² Eugene Korn, "The Man of Faith and Religious Dialogue: Revisiting 'Confrontation' After Forty Years," Paper presented at conference on Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik on Interreligious Dialogue: Forty Years Later at Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, November 23, 2003, accessed November 3, 2024, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/Korn_23Nov03.htm.

³³³ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," 6-7.

Lastly, there is the third level of confrontation which humans face in relationship and in communication with another. It is communication that builds community, on the one hand, and creates barriers of isolation, on the other. This confrontation is paradoxical, “each human being lives both in an existential community, surrounded by friends, and in a state of existential loneliness and tension, confronted by strangers.”³³⁴

The Biblical phrase describing the creation of a second human being as an “*ezer k’negdo*, a help meet opposite him” (Genesis 2:18) captures the tension. This confrontation can be supportive on one side and confrontational on the other. Quite often, Soloveitchik notes, there can be “a harmony of interests, -- economic, political, social -- upon which two individuals focus their attention. However, two people glancing at the same object may continue to lead isolated, closed-in existences. Coordination of interests does not spell an existential union.”³³⁵ It is at this level of reciprocal confrontation that renders interfaith dialogue flawed and unacceptable since faith is private and incomprehensible to the non-believer.

In referencing Jacob’s wrestling, Soloveitchik’s essay reflects his own wrestling with interfaith dialogue. His essay states in unequivocal terms that Jews “are a totally independent faith community. We do not revolve as a satellite in any orbit. Nor are we related to any other faith community as ‘brethren’ even though ‘separated.’”³³⁶

³³⁴ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” 15.

³³⁵ Rashi commenting on Genesis 2:18 notes “a help meet for him – *k’negdo* literally, opposite, opposed to him). If he is worthy, she shall be a help to him; if he is unworthy, she shall be opposed to him, to fight him (Yevamot 63a). Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” 15-16.

³³⁶ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” 21.

While Judaism has been culturally influenced by the many faith communities alongside which it has lived throughout the millennia and while both Judaism and Christianity have influenced the Western World, religion exists on a different plane. Soloveitchik argues that the multifarious language of religion cannot be universalized.

Even though Soloveitchik's essay argued against Jews engaging in theological dialogue, the late Rabbi Professor Pinchas Peli claimed that Rabbi Soloveitchik told him explicitly that his concern was to ensure that only those rabbis well educated enough to engage in theological dialogue with Christians be encouraged to do so. While for the most part Soloveitchik's participation did not involve direct interactions with Church officials, Soloveitchik was engaged with Vatican II.³³⁷ He understood its potential benefit and harm.

Soloveitchik's essay echoed the themes of his four years of correspondence with the AJC and the statements uttered in his diatribes against what he deemed the diluted and dangerous 1964 version of the Jewish declaration authored by the conservative prelates running Vatican's II Coordinating Commission (see Appendix E). Jews cannot command the respect of their confronters by displaying a servile attitude. The Jewish commitment to their pillars of belief are unequivocal. He concludes his article using the Jacob and Esau relationship as a model. On temporal issues Jacob and Esau can collaborate yet in the metaphysical and spiritual realm, Jacob and Esau, as metaphors for

³³⁷ Rabbi Bernard Rosensweig reported that there was a 1962 meeting between Soloveitchik and Monsignor Johannes Willebrands, secretary of the SPCU, to discuss the prospect of a dialogue between Christians and Jews. Reuven Kimelman 2004, 254.

Jews and Christians respectively, have different covenants.³³⁸ The Biblical Jacob and the Jewish people have an eternal bond with God.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: No Religion is an Island

Abraham Joshua Heschel's biography, in part, mirrored that of Rabbi Soloveitchik. Yet his response to the historic and violent antisemitism that destroyed his community of birth moved him to draw the opposite conclusion. Heschel's past compelled him to dialogue with the religious other to find common ground and appreciate the universality that connected all religions.

Like Soloveitchik, Heschel was born in Poland (Warsaw) and descended from a line of renowned scholars including his namesake the Apter Rav and Dov Baer of Mezeritz.³³⁹ Heschel had a prodigious memory and was trained from the youngest of ages with private tutors in both text and piety. He published his first commentary on the Talmud at the age of 15 and was ordained at the age of 16. He would receive his Ph.D. from the University of Berlin and a second ordination from the non-denominational Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Higher Institute for Jewish Studies) after which he'd teach at the Frankfurt Lehrhaus. As the situation for German Jews became increasingly oppressive and fearful, Heschel searched for an academic post outside Germany. He was arrested by the Gestapo in Frankfurt on October

³³⁸ For more on the origin and history of the dichotomy of Esau and Jacob in Jewish thought see Gerson Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in Alexander Altmann (ed.), *Jewish medieval and Renaissance Studies*, (Harvard University Press, 1967), 19-42.

³³⁹ Rabbi Abraham Yehoshua Heschel (1748–1825) of Apt (in Polish, Opatow). Edward K. Kaplan, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Mind, Heart, Soul*. (The Jewish Publication Society, 2019), 4.

28, 1938, and along with thousands of others with Polish passports, was forced onto a transport to the border between Poland and Germany.³⁴⁰ Ultimately his family worked to gain his release and return to Warsaw. It was then that a lifesaving appointment came from Hebrew Union College's President Julian Morgenstern in Cincinnati³⁴¹ with an offer for Heschel to become a professor. Heschel would reach London in July 1939 less than two months before Germany invaded Poland.

While working at the Hebrew Union College from 1940 to 1945, Heschel was agonizingly aware of his mother and sister's conditions trapped in the Warsaw Ghetto. He knew of the liquidation of the ghetto, of his mother dying of a heart attack when the Nazi soldiers stormed their apartment, and of his sister's deportation and murder in Treblinka. He would learn of the deaths at the hands of the Nazis of two of his three other sisters, numerous members of his extended family, countless friends and colleagues. With the sensitivity of the Biblical prophets whom he studied so intently, Heschel endured the deadliest stages of the Holocaust from afar as an anguished soul.

Hence Heschel opens his 1965 theological treatise, "No Religion is an Island,"³⁴² with his autobiographical narrative:

"I speak as a member of a congregation whose founder was Abraham, and the name of my rabbi is Moses. I speak as a person who was able to leave Warsaw, the city in which I was born, just six weeks before the disaster began. My destination was New York, it would have been Auschwitz or Treblinka. I am a brand plucked from the fire, in which my people was burned to death. I am a

³⁴⁰ Edward K. Kaplan 2019, 95.

³⁴¹ Julian Morgenstern (1881-1976) was a Biblical scholar who served as president of the Hebrew Union College from 1921 to 1947.

³⁴² In 1965, Heschel served as the first non-Christian visiting professor at New York's Union Theological Seminary. His theological discourse "No Religion is an Island" was his inaugural address.

brand plucked from the fire of an altar of Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory, and on which so much else was consumed: the divine image of so many human beings, many people's faith in the God of justice and compassion, and much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible bred and cherished in the hearts of men for nearly two thousand years.”³⁴³

In Heschel's eyes, Nazism represented an assault on Judaism and on Christianity.

Nazi ideology aimed to annihilate the Jews and to annihilate the Christian faith. The fates of both religions are interconnected and interdependent. Religions are no more independent than individuals or nations. We are all impacted by one another intellectually, morally and spiritually. Heschel asserted, “We must choose between interfaith and inter-nihilism.”³⁴⁴

Highlighting the oneness and equality of all humanity, Heschel quoted the Babylonian Talmud, stating that man was created as a single entity, whereas all other species were created in multiples, so “that there should be peace among human beings; one cannot say to his neighbor, my ancestor was nobler than thine.” (Sanhedrin 37a)³⁴⁵

Heschel taught that both Christianity and Judaism are heirs to a mutual distrust and mutual contempt that must be overcome. The two faiths are historically bound as family. Israel is “the father and mother of the very being of Christianity. The children did not arise to call the mother blessed; instead, they called the mother blind... A Christian ought to realize that a world without Israel will be a world without the God of Israel. A

³⁴³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” 117.

³⁴⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion is An Island,” 119.

³⁴⁵ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion is An Island,” 121.

Jew, on the other hand, ought to acknowledge the eminent role and part of Christianity in God's design for the redemption of all men."³⁴⁶

Heschel argued that Judaism, as the mother of Christianity and Islam, has a stake in its offsprings' destiny. The Church helped to transmit a love of God to the gentiles across the world. The diversities of religions reach the same end through different means. As the Talmud teaches that "Torah speaks in the language of man,"³⁴⁷ each faith has its own understanding of revelation. "One truth comes to expression in many ways of understanding."³⁴⁸ In other words, pluralism is part of the Divine plan.³⁴⁹

The primary aim of dialogue is to ask how Jews and Christians, grounded in their respective religious commitments to their faiths can find a common religious ground to cooperate on moral and spiritual issues. Using Maimonides³⁵⁰ as a prooftext, Heschel writes, "Christianity and Islam, far from being accidents of history or purely human phenomena, are regarded as part of God's design for the redemption of all men."³⁵¹

³⁴⁶ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is An Island," 124.

³⁴⁷ Heschel is referencing Brachot 31b.

³⁴⁸ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is An Island," 127.

³⁴⁹ "What will save us?" Heschel asked. He answered: "God and our ability to stand in awe of each other's faith, of each other's commitment...This is the agony of history: bigotry, the failure to revere each other's faith. We must insist upon loyalty to the unique treasures of our own tradition and at the same time acknowledge that in this eon religious diversity may well be the will of God." Gary Spruch, "Wide Horizons: Abraham Joshua Heschel, AJC, and the Spirit of Nostra Aetate," American Jewish Committee: 2008, 14, https://www.ajc.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2017-09/Project_Highlight_Wide_Horizons.pdf.

³⁵⁰ Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204), known by English speakers as Maimonides and as Rambam by Hebrew speakers, was a medieval Jewish philosopher, jurist and physician. He was born and raised in Cordoba, Spain. Fleeing persecution his family moved to Morocco, then Palestine, and finally settled in Egypt. Maimonides is considered the utmost Jewish philosopher of the medieval period. His legal decisions rendered in the *Mishneh Torah*, a 14-volume compendium of Jewish law, remain one of the most comprehensive and influential sources of Jewish Law today.

³⁵¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is An Island," 132.

Like Soloveitchik's "Confrontation," Heschel's "No Religion is an Island," is a crystallization of the interfaith theology he lived and led throughout Vatican II. In 1945, Rabbi Heschel would join the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary as associate professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism. Marc Tanenbaum, as one of Heschel's students, formed a close bond with Heschel. In 1960, while Tanenbaum was serving as vice chairperson of the White House Conference on Children and Youth, he invited Heschel to make a presentation. In observing Heschel's address to the 1,700 people in attendance, Tanenbaum witnessed the power of Heschel's words. He had "a penetrating way at getting at issues, especially values, ideals, morals, the cultural condition..."³⁵²

Tanenbaum would bring Heschel on as the key and most active Jewish consultant arranging a first visit to Rome in November 1961 to meet with Bea and his colleagues. Not only would Bea be enchanted with Heschel's mind and spirit but Heschel, in turn, would be enthralled with interreligious work. AJC's European Director Shuster reported back to the New York office on Heschel's expressed strong desire to work closely with the AJC and its work with Jewish-Christian relations and recommended Heschel serve as consultant, whether on a formal or informal basis. Heschel's voice would become a primary voice providing feedback on the evolution of the Jewish declaration with eloquent letters to Bea passionately weighing in on the wording of a given draft. Heschel

³⁵² At the time, Tanenbaum was the director of the Synagogue Council of America, an umbrella organization that represented synagogues and rabbinical organizations of the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements on issues of social policy and intergroup relations. "Oral History—Marc H. Tanenbaum," October–November 1980, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 3, Folder 42, Tape 1, 27.

struggled to ensure that missionizing to the Jews would be eliminated and that the Jewish people's responsibility for Jesus' death would be eliminated.³⁵³

In 1962, Heschel published his 518-page magnum opus of Biblical scholarship, *The Prophets* that explores in-depth the consciousness of the literary Prophets and reflects on their contemporary significance. As a result of his academic immersion in the Prophets, Heschel felt a prophetic urgency in the work of Vatican II, utilizing vivid imagery and strong language like that of the Biblical prophets in his correspondence with Cardinal Bea.

In March 1963, Heschel would chair an unprecedented, private and unpublicized meeting with American Jewish leaders representing the three major Jewish denominations for a candid conversation with Bea surrounding the work of the SPCU.³⁵⁴ In attendance was Louis Finkelstein, Theodore Friedman, President of the Rabbinic Assembly of America (Conservative), Julius Mark, President of the Synagogue Council of America, Albert Minda, President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform), Joseph Lookstein of Bar Ilan University and Emanuel Rackman, former president of the Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox) and assistant to the president

³⁵³ Heschel letter to Bea, November 22, 1963, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 23, Folder 7, Heschel, Abraham Joshua, 1952-1964.

³⁵⁴ Between sessions one and two, the AJC partnered with Pro Deo's American Council for the International Promotion of Democracy under God supporting the logistics of an agapé conference, a fraternal banquet of clergy and others concerned with religious matters. The March 1963 agapé on the theme of "Civic Unity and Freedom Under God" would bring Cardinal Bea to New York City giving the AJC an opportunity to gather a select group of American Jewish leaders.

of Yeshiva University.³⁵⁵ Rabbi Soloveitchik could not attend due to his wife's needing surgery the next day nor could Solomon Freehof, a prominent Reform rabbi and expert in Jewish legal interpretation. In opening the meeting, Heschel noted that both Freehof and Soloveitchik had endorsed the meeting's agenda.³⁵⁶ At that gathering, Bea would share his compelling commitment to Catholic theological transformation that would uproot Jewish degradation from Church dogma and education and set up permanent structures to support ongoing interreligious studies and interreligious communication and cooperation.

While Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel had supported Vatican II as a Jewish expert consultant from the start describing early drafts of the Jewish declaration as "momentous," his optimism would fade when the 1964 unauthorized draft crafted by the Coordinating Commission (which many Jews saw as calling for conversion of Jews) was released in the *New York Herald Tribune*. Knowing what was at stake, Heschel became dejected and desperate. Rather than staying in line with the AJC's strategy, he abandoned diplomacy crafting his own statement and sending it to Catholic colleagues

³⁵⁵ Theodore Friedman (1908-1992) was president of the Rabbinical Assembly, the organization of Conservative rabbis, from 1962 to 1964. Julius Mark (1899-1977) was Senior Rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in New York and served two terms as president of the Synagogue Council of America. Rabbi Albert G. Minda (1895-1977), a highly respected spiritual leader of Temple Israel in Minneapolis, served as president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (1961-63), concurrently with holding the position of vice president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. Julius Lookstein (1902-1979) was the rabbi of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York's Upper East Side for almost 56 years. served as the President of Bar-Ilan University from 1957 to 1967. Emanuel Rackman (1910-2008) held positions as the rabbi of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, the provost of Yeshiva University, the head of Jewish Studies at the City University of New York, and the first American president of Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

³⁵⁶ Solomon Freehof (1892-1990) leading interpreter of Jewish Law who led Pittsburgh's Rodef Shalom Temple from 1934 to 1966. Edward K. Kaplan, *Spiritual Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel in America, 1940-1972*. (Yale University Press, 2007), 248. For more on Solomon Freehof see Joan S. Friedman, *Guidance, Not Governance: "Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof and Reform Responsa*, (Hebrew Union College Press, 2013).

and friends.³⁵⁷ His words would be picked up by the media including *Time* Magazine that quoted Heschel's consternation, "As I have repeatedly stated to leading personalities of the Vatican, I am prepared to go to Auschwitz at any time, if faced with the alternative of conversion or death."³⁵⁸

On September 14, 1964, both the opening day of Vatican II's third session and literally prior to the eve of Yom Kippur, the AJC arranged for a secret meeting between Heschel and Pope Paul VI in order to make a final appeal.³⁵⁹ While it was untraditional for a rabbi to meet so close to such a holy day, Heschel understood the meeting as serving both *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life, and as *kiddush ha-Shem*, a sanctification of God's name.³⁶⁰ For Heschel, a strong Jewish declaration was paramount in its potential to save Jewish lives.

In the thirty-five-minute meeting, the two delegates (Schuster and Heschel) made three requests of Pope Paul VI. First, Heschel asked the Pope to reconsider the ways in which the 1964 text drafted by the Coordinating Commission could be interpreted to promote conversion of Jews to which the Pope responded that it was created out of a spirit of benevolence and friendship towards the Jewish people and does not contain

³⁵⁷ Edward K. Kaplan 2007, 260.

³⁵⁸ John Borelli 2021, 23. Richard Yaffe, "Revised chapter on Jews causes deep dismay," *Jewish Chronicle*, September 11, 1964. Religion News Service, "Jewish Community Reacts Sharply, Critically To Reported Vatican II Draft Statement," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, September 10, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 6, Vatican Council II, 1964. Shuster reported that he was told by reliable sources that Cardinal Bea "was furious over Dr. Heschel's statement on conversion which used the phrase about Auschwitz." John Slawson and Marc Tanenbaum, "Report on Telephone Call from Zach Shuster," October 19, 1964. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 8, Vatican Council II, 1964.

³⁵⁹ "Audience with the Pope of Dr. Heschel and Mr. Shuster," October 14, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 8, Vatican Council II, 1964.

³⁶⁰ Reuven Kimelman 2004, 255.

anything offensive. Second, Heschel requested a stronger condemnation of antisemitism deeming it as “a unique evil unlike any other kind of discrimination.” The Pope noted that the second statement, too, was in the spirit of friendship and there was no danger in misinterpretation. Shuster then pointed out that the statement that the Jews of today were not responsible for the crucifixion implies that the Jews in Jesus’ day were responsible. While the conversation was summed up as having the spirit of give-and-take with no restrictions, the Pope was reported to have stood his ground. The Pope affirmed that the statements within the draft declaration were all grounded in the New Testament and that the declaration is religious and cannot be influenced by unsolicited advice and counsel from outside the church. Too much consultation, he cautioned, would lead to the declaration being removed from the agenda.³⁶¹

Schuster wrote up two reports describing that meeting with the Pope. The first was a moderate document that would become part of the public historical record (reflected above). The second report was an extremely harsh and critical super confidential rendering of the meeting that focused on Heschel’s unbecoming and unbalanced behavior. Heschel’s Holocaust past no doubt haunted him and triggered his panicked response. A Church document that could be interpreted as supporting conversion of the Jews could cause a repeat of Jewish history where Jews were demeaned and persecuted.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Heschel left a two-page memo with the Pope summing up his requested changes to the declaration. “Memo from Heschel to Pope Paul VI,” September 14, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 6, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1964.

³⁶² Additionally, Heschel was grieving over the recent death of his only surviving sister, Sarah Bracha Heschel, who had died two months’ earlier which left Heschel in a shaken frame of mind.

Even with the Pope's admonition and a deeply flawed meeting that would distance Heschel from Bea, the Pope and the AJC for the remainder of Vatican II, Heschel would continue to independently and controversially disclose details about the confidential meeting with the Pope which would be leaked to the media. Heschel's lack of restraint would evoke the deepest levels of unease and dismay by the AJC.³⁶³

Still, Heschel's place in the history pages of Vatican II would remain prominent. His voice no doubt continued to deeply move Pope Paul VI. It was reported that when the Pope died in 1976, Heschel's book *God in Search of Man* was on his night table.³⁶⁴

Unsolicited Input

Throughout the years of Vatican II's grappling with its relationship with Judaism, the Jewish community would respond, at times with support, and at other times with critique. In the summer of 1964, the feedback on the leaked conservative draft of Vatican II's Jewish declaration would be extensive. Condemnations could be heard far and wide – from pews to organizational publications to national newspaper and conventions.

Reform Jewish leader and President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from 1943, Maurice Eisendrath, was an early supporter of a Jewish declaration asking Jews to reach across the interreligious aisle and to see their own shortcomings and responsibility for lack of good-faith interfaith dialogue. At the 1963

³⁶³ Edward K. Kaplan 2007, 267-268.

³⁶⁴ David Novak (1941-), is an American theologian, rabbi, and leading authority on Jewish law. Novak received his BA from the University of Chicago, his rabbinical ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1966, and his PhD from Georgetown University. He is Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto, having held the J. Richard and Dorothy Shiff Chair of Jewish Studies since 1997. David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

biannual convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Eisendrath responded positively to the Ecumenical Council's consideration of condemning antisemitism and of vindicating Jews of guilt for Jesus' crucifixion noting that "inter-religious understanding, based on mutual respect, is not a one-way street."

"How long," he asked, "shall we continue pompously to aver that the chief contribution of Jesus' was simply a rehash of all that has been said before by his Jewish ancestors? How long before we can admit that His influence was a beneficial one—not only to the pagans but to the Jews of his time as well, and that only those who later took His name in vain profane His teaching?"

Needless to say, Jews never can and never will accept Jesus as the Messiah or as the Son of God. But, despite this constant reality, there is room for improved understanding and openness to change in interpreting Jesus as a positive and prophetic spirit in the stream of the Jewish tradition."

Eisendrath called upon Jewish academics to look internally at "our own statements, our own facts, our own interpretations of the significance of the life of Jesus, the Jew."³⁶⁵

Yet the tide would change and in 1964, many liberal Jewish leaders would preach against Vatican II's Jewish declaration to their respective communities. Dr. Theodore M. Lewis, the rabbi of the Progressive Synagogue in Brooklyn, in his August 31, 1964, bulletin column spoke of widespread disapproval by Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbinic organizational leaders of AJC's advocacy. These rabbis claimed that the AJC's representatives leading the effort were laymen not trained in theology and compromised

³⁶⁵ "Rabbi Eisendrath Advises Jews to Change Their Stand on Jesus," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 19, 1963, <https://www.jta.org/archive/rabbi-eisendrath-advises-jews-to-change-their-stand-on-jesus>.

the honor of the Jewish people by acting as “confused and self appointed [*sic*] leaders who assume responsibilities for which they are not qualified.”³⁶⁶

Rabbi Lewis wrote: “What was the most melancholy, the saddest event of the Jewish year just ended? Without doubt it was the persistent pressure, public and private, on the part of the American Jewish Committee to have the Vatican ‘exonerate’ the Jews of responsibility for the crucifixion. No event in recent Jewish history demeaned the Jewish community quite as much – demeaned, and lowered it in the public esteem.”³⁶⁷

Lewis spoke of Rabbi Leon Feuer’s Presidential address at the June 1964 Central Conference of Reform Rabbis Convention in Atlantic City which condemned the AJC’s work for pressing the Vatican Council to absolve the Jews of a crime they never committed. He called their work obsequious, lacking dignity and “revolting to the Jewish spirit and an insult to Jewish martyrdom.” The consensus was not that a document of Church contrition wasn’t needed, it was that it should have been demanded not begged for.

The American Jewish Committee’s Intervention

Through its five years of engagement with Vatican II, the AJC would work to keep the Jewish declaration on course deciding which tool in the toolbox of advocacy would be needed to right its path. In the spring, summer and fall of 1964, when the Jewish declaration was most in danger of being derailed, the AJC would respond with

³⁶⁶ Theodore N. Lewis, “From the Rabbi,” *Temple Topics*, Progressive Synagogue, August 31, 1964, 2, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 5, Vatican Council II, 1963-1965.

³⁶⁷ Theodore N. Lewis 1964, 2.

face-to-face meetings, correspondence with American bishops, and with the utilization of the media.

In April 1964, the AJC invited Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, dean of American cardinals, to address its Annual Meeting. There he issued a landmark speech on Catholic-Jewish relations acknowledging the Church's origin in Judaism and denouncing antisemitism which "can never find a basis in the Catholic religion." The noteworthy speech from Cardinal Spellman who was an identified "conservative theologian" was commended in *The New York Times*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Look* magazine and circulated and discussed in the U.S., Europe, and South America. The AJC printed 10,000 copies of the speech and sent it to Catholic educators, leaders, and publications. A similar number of copies were translated and circulated in Europe and Latin America.³⁶⁸

In May 1964, when conservative opposition reached its height threatening to eviscerate the declaration, Tanenbaum spoke to more than four hundred members of the American Catholic Press Association. Editorials would appear in every major diocesan paper in the United States urging the approval of the Jewish statement.³⁶⁹

On May 30, 1964, the American Jewish Committee met with Pope Paul VI. The delegation included AJC's highest officers: Mr. Morris Abram, U.S. Member of the U.N.

³⁶⁸ Judith Hershcopf (Banki), "The Church and the Jews: The Struggle at Vatican Council II," 120. American Jewish Committee, "In Our Time: AJC and *Nostra Aetate* A Reflection after 50 years," 9, *American Jewish Committee Archives*, accessed November 9, 2024, <https://www.ajc.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2021-09/In%20Our%20Time-%20AJC%20and%20Nostra%20Aetate%20%28UPDATED%207.21%29.pdf>.

³⁶⁹ "Excerpts from Address by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, National Director, Interreligious Affairs Department, American Jewish Committee, before the Catholic Press Association, May 29, 1964, Pittsburgh, Pa.," Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 9, Vatican Council II - Jewish response, 1964- 1965.

Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities; Ralph Friedman of New York, Chairman of the American Jewish Committee Executive Board; Philip E. Hoffman of Newark, N.J., Chairman of its Board of Governors; Dr. John Slawson of New York, Executive Vice President; and Rose Adler Sperry of Los Angeles, a member of the Executive Board.³⁷⁰ At that meeting, the Pope went “on record for the first time in denouncing anti-Semitism, rejecting the charge of deicide and acknowledging an intimate link between Christianity and Judaism.”³⁷¹

In September 1964, on the eve of the third session, and in response to the vocal and widespread opposition from across the Jewish denominational spectrum to the watered-down version of the document authored by the Coordinating Commission, the AJC worked to reach consensus among 14 Jewish groups and issued a joint statement of support for Catholic-Jewish relations. The statement noted that the Ecumenical Council was a convocation of Catholic religious leaders addressing contemporary issues surrounding Christian Unity and Catholic doctrine and it would thus be “improper for the Jewish community which is not part of Christianity or its Ecumenical movement to offer

³⁷⁰ Morris Abram (1918-2000) became President of the AJC in February 1964 upon the death of A. M. Sonnabend. Abram served as part of the American prosecution staff at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals. Philip E. Hoffman (1908-1993), a lawyer, served as national president of the American Jewish Committee (1969-1973), chairman of its board of governors (1963-1967), and an American Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Council (1972-1975). John Slawson (1896-1989) served as Executive Vice President of the American Jewish Committee (1943-1967). Rose Adler Sperry (1904-1972) was the widow of industrialist and civic leader, Leonard M. Sperry. Following the meeting at the Vatican, she established in memory of her husband the Leonard M. Sperry Center for Intergroup Cooperation at Pro Deo, the International University for Social Studies, in Rome. Sperry was the niece of Julius Rosenwald, the philanthropist. American Jewish Committee News Release, June 1, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 5, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1963-1964. “Statement for Audience with His Holiness, Pope Paul VI,” Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 7, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1964.

³⁷¹ “AJC and Vatican 11: A Chronology of the Agency's Involvement,” 3.

suggestions concerning religious doctrine to this Council.” The signatory organization expressed hope that the document would advance interreligious harmony and contribute to the elimination of antisemitism and all forms of prejudice. The AJC had feared that the rising Jewish voices of criticism would weaken the stance of the liberal bishops working in support of Jewish declaration and sought to address it publicly.³⁷²

In June 1965, when international newspapers reported that it was doubtful whether the Catholic Church would “exonerate the Jewish people from the charge of deicide and thereby make an end to Christian anti-Semitism which for centuries was tolerated and even promoted by saints and popes,” Shuster met with Visser ’t Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Lukas Fisher,³⁷³ official observer of the World Council at the Ecumenical Council in Rome. Visser ’t Hooft promised immediate action as an individual. In a confidential internal AJC letter, Shuster acknowledged that Jewish advocacy with the Vatican wouldn’t be effective and expressed anger with Heschel who was now acting as an independent force trying to get an audience with the Pope and Bea in ways the AJC deemed were “irresponsible and nefarious.”³⁷⁴

³⁷² The signatories included the AJC, American Jewish Congress, B’nai Brith, Canadian Jewish Congress, Jewish Labor Committee, National Community Relations Advisory Council, Rabbinic Assembly of America, RCA, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, United Synagogue of America, World Jewish Congress, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Jewish War Veterans of America. “A Statement to the Jewish Community,” Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 9, Vatican Council II - Jewish response, 1964- 1965.

³⁷³ Lukas Vischer (1926–2008), was an ecumenist, pioneer of the church environmental movement, and human rights advocate.

³⁷⁴ Personal and confidential letter from Shuster to Slawson, June 21, 1965, Box 51, Folder 5, 3. A 1965 memo from Shuster with edits to the AJC Vatican II Background Report recommended that “In light of recent developments it might be potentially harmful to declare that Rabbi Heschel acted officially on

Already in August 1964, the AJC was drafting its fifty-page report highlighting the AJC's consistent role in working with Catholics to expand interreligious understanding from as early as the war years and at Seelisberg.³⁷⁵ Tanenbaum and his colleagues at the AJC were experts in their strategic utilization of media. At every step, the AJC would track media coverage and utilize media releases and conversations with journalists to keep dialogue on the Jewish declaration on public minds, to highlight advances with Church leaders, and to push for the declaration when it faced obstacles. AJC staff would be in touch with American cardinals and bishops who supported the declaration and share their speeches with the press.

Even as late as the first two weeks of October 1965, after having seen the bound copy of the declaration with proposed amendments and commentary the night before its September 30th distribution, the AJC was actively engaged in both public and private advocacy. Shuster described the final draft as slanted "towards the theologically conservative side" and would issue statements to the European press and radio noting the rejection of the term "deicide" and advocating for the restoration of that word in the final declaration. In those final days leading up to the declaration's debate, Shuster arranged urgent meetings with Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore; Bishop Ed Murray of Boston, Monseigneur George Higgins of Washington, Father John Long of Cardinal Bea's

behalf of the AJC. The references to him should, therefore, in my opinion, be eliminated." All the references identified were noted. That decision would be reversed in the final publication. "Suggestions Changes Background Report Vatican II," Shuster communication to Morton Yaron of the AJC, January 23, 1965, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 5.

³⁷⁵ "Vatican Decree on Jews & Judaism & the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record," Draft August 28, 1964, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 11, Vatican Council II - "Vatican Decree on Jews & Judaism & the American Jewish Committee, A Historical Record," 1964.

Secretariat, Father Morlion and others to advocate for a clearer and more resolute stand rejecting the deicide charge and for the use of the word “condemnation” of antisemitism rather than the weaker admonition of “deploring” antisemitism.³⁷⁶

The years of focused advocacy, the elevation of Catholic voices in support of the declaration, and the convening of Jewish leadership when necessary to lend support to the Catholic leadership and counter Jewish reactions steeped in fear and distrust, would yield unprecedented results. The October 28, 1965, promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* marked a watershed moment in the Church’s history and in Jewish history.

Jewish Reactions to the October 1965 Promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*

On the day following the vote approving the Jewish declaration, Morris Abram, President of the AJC sent Cardinal Bea a telegram expressing the warmest appreciation for his leadership in bringing the declaration on non-Christians to a successful vote and adding, “While we have regrets about certain formulations in the adopted text it is our devout hope that the rejection of the collective guilt charge and the deploring of Anti-Semitism [*sic*] will have a purifying effect in Catholic relations with the Jewish people.”³⁷⁷

The same day, the AJC issued a public statement noting its disappointment (“We regret keenly some of the assertions in the declaration, especially those that might give

³⁷⁶ Cardinal Lawrence Joseph Shehan (1898-1984) was Archbishop of Baltimore from 1961 to 1974 and was made a Cardinal in 1965. Monsignor George Higgins (1916-2002), Father John F. Long, S.J. (1925-2005). Memorandum from Schuster to Slawson, October 3, 1965, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 5.

³⁷⁷ Telegram from Morris B. Abram, President, American Jewish Committee, to Agostino Cardinal Bea, October 15, 1965, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 49, Folder 4, Vatican Council II, 1963-1965.

rise to misunderstandings”) while celebrating those parts of the declaration that repudiated the guilt of the Jews for Jesus’ death and rejected antisemitism as an “act of justice long overdue.” The ultimate outcome would depend on “the manner and vigor with which the affirmative principles embodied in this declaration will be carried out.”³⁷⁸

Two weeks later, AJC’s tone would be much more positive and optimistic. Those who had labored long and hard would celebrate the monumental theological sea change.³⁷⁹ In a cover letter with the AJC’s Background report highlighting the AJC’s instrumental role in Vatican II, Tanenbaum stated, “While there are differences of views within the Jewish community regarding this declaration, it is my personal conviction that in the perspective of 1900 years of Jewish-Christian relations this document is a significant step forward. It provides the basis for a program of implementation to bring about real change in Christian teachings about Jews and Judaism.”³⁸⁰

Why the change in reaction to the Jewish declaration? Rabbi Noam Marans, AJC's Director of Interreligious Affairs, conjectures that the immediate reaction of critique followed a pattern that was set throughout the entire evolution of the document: immediate Jewish disappointment occasioning critical and harsh words followed by a more reasoned communication shared by judicious Jewish leadership who would ensure

³⁷⁸ “Statement by the American Jewish Committee on the Adoption of the Vatican Council's Declaration (October 15, 1965),” Tanenbaum Collection, Box 51, Folder 12, 3.

³⁷⁹ On the 40th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal, executive director of the National Council of Synagogues, used a metaphor borrowed from astronomy to express the sea change: “the main points of the statement [*Nostra Aetate*] represent a Copernican revolution in Catholic thinking about the Jewish religion and people.” Gary Spruch, “Wide Horizons: Abraham Joshua Heschel, AJC, and the Spirit of *Nostra Aetate*, American Jewish Committee,” 16.

³⁸⁰ Letter from Marc Tanenbaum to Colleagues, November 12, 1965, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 50, Folder 2, Vatican Council II - Jewish decree, 1963-1964.

that established interfaith relationships could continue to grow. The leaders of their day “ultimately listened to the Talmudic dictum, ‘*Tafasta merubeh, lo tafasta*,’ literally, if you grab too much, you’ll get nothing. Or in the idiom of the English language, they did not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. *Nostra Aetate* is not perfect, but it certainly is good, and there must have been sufficient trust that the good could become better.”³⁸¹

With each milestone anniversary since its original promulgation, *Nostra Aetate* has been celebrated and has been the center of conferences and of study. From the Jewish perspective, there were few greater moments in Jewish-Christian relations. While the statement did not go as far as it could have, it paved the way for decades of advances in education, in Jewish-Catholic partnerships, and in dialogue.

“*Nostra Aetate* did not just gather dust on the shelf. As a result of remarkable Catholic leadership in following up with “Guidelines,” “Notes,” “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” and a vast array of educational materials, *Nostra Aetate* was brought to life... It was ably supported by the explosion of academic interest in Catholic-Jewish studies, with dozens of institutions affiliated today with CCJR, the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations. And *Nostra Aetate* would become the gold standard by which all other Christian denominational documents on Judaism would be measured.”³⁸²

Structures were needed for continued conversation between the Vatican and Jewish representatives. In August 1969, in the aftermath of the Six Day War and

³⁸¹In the Talmud, the phrase “*tafasta merubeh, lo tafasta*” is a rationale that warns scholars that when it is feasible to establish a specific law from two different sources, one should base it on the narrower of the two sources to be safe. In modern Hebrew, the saying “*tafasta merubeh, lo tafasta*” reflects Marans translation, “If you try to do too much of something, you might fail to do it altogether.” Noam Marans (1959-). Noam Marans, “From Regret to Acclaim: A Jewish Reaction to *Nostra Aetate*,” *AJC Global Voice*, May 20, 2015, accessed November 10, 2015, <https://www.ajc.org/news/from-regret-to-acclaim-a-jewish-reaction-to-nostra-aetate>.

³⁸² Noam Marans 2015. On “Guidelines” and “Notes,” see footnote 272. On “We Remember,” see pages 140-141.

effective Jewish collaborative leadership in “interpreting Israel to the Christian community,” it was decided that a larger coordinating committee of national agencies was needed to formulate relations with the World Council of Churches and with the Vatican.³⁸³ In November 1969, a letter was sent from the World Jewish Congress to the Vatican explaining the four-fold vision and in May 1970 the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) would be established. IJCIC would concern itself with “a) Areas of common humanitarian and social concerns: international justice and peace b) Welfare and security of Catholic and Jewish communities throughout the world, especially promotion and protection of human rights and religious freedoms c) anti-Jewish elements in Catholic theology and instruction d) the State of Israel: theological and political implications.” IJCIC was originally composed of the World Jewish Congress, the Synagogue Council of America and its constituent agencies, and the American Jewish Committee.³⁸⁴ IJCIC continues to function today as the recognized

³⁸³ Memorandum from Rabbi Henry Siegman of the Synagogue Council of America to Rabbi Solomon Bernards, Rabbi Balfour Brickner, Rabbi Arthur Herzberg, Philip Jacobson, Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, Rabbi Israel Klavan, Morris Laub, Dr. Joseph Lichten, Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, Dr. Seymour Siegel, and Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, August 21, 1969. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 25, Folder 2, International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, 1969. Box 25, Folder 2, International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, 1969.

³⁸⁴ Memorandum from Dr. Gerhart M. Reigner and Rabbi Henry Siegman of the World Jewish Congress to Father Cornelius J. Rijk,” November 20, 1969. The Synagogue Council of America functioned from 1926 to 1994 and was comprised of representatives of six organizations: the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform), the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative), and the Rabbinical Council (Orthodox), the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform), United Synagogue of America (Conservative), and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 25, Folder 2, International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, 1969.

representative of world Jewry in its dialogues with the Vatican, Ecumenical Patriarchate, and World Council of Churches and includes eleven Jewish organizations.³⁸⁵

The number of conferences, lectures, books and articles on *Nostra Aetate* and the continued work of Catholic-Jewish dialogue are innumerable. And after the AJC's success with methodical and ongoing advocacy with American Catholic leadership leading to *Nostra Aetate*, the AJC recognized the potential powerful benefit of developing a relationship of depth with the evangelical community.³⁸⁶

In 1988, Heschel's treatise "No Religion is an Island" would echo through the Conservative Movement's Statement on Interreligious Relations. In that year celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the flagship seminary of Conservative Judaism, five central agencies of Conservative Judaism determined for the first time to jointly craft and publish an official statement of its philosophy titled *Emet ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative*

³⁸⁵ Representative agencies include American Jewish Committee (AJC), Anti-Defamation League (ADL), B'nai B'rith International (BBI), Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), Israel Jewish Council on Interreligious Relations (IJCIR), Rabbinical Assembly (RA), Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (OU), United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), and World Jewish Congress (WJC). "About," *International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations*, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://ijcic.net/about/>.

³⁸⁶ On June 23, 1969, during a ten-day Billy Graham Crusade at Madison Square Garden, the evangelical leader accepted an invitation by the AJC to his first formal meeting with American Jewish leadership. The Graham meeting with approximately thirty Jewish religious and community leaders, included rabbinical representatives of the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox movements. The "genuine feeling of rapport" reported by Jewish delegates present at that initial meeting would mark the beginning of a three-and-a-half-decade relationship of correspondence, private meetings, and formal conferences and ceremonies connecting Graham to the Jewish community. Press Release, "Billy Graham Confers with Jewish Leaders," Religion News Service, June 23, 1969. Tanenbaum Collection, Box 21, Folder 1. For more on the historical relationship between Billy Graham and the Jewish people, see Judith Schindler, "Cancel Culture, Billy Graham, and the Jews: Weighing Nearly Forty-Five Years of a Historical Record," *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 2022), <https://www.judyschindler.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Schindler-Cancel-Culture-Billy-Graham-and-the-Jews-CCAR-Journal-Winter-2022.pdf>.

Judaism.³⁸⁷ Within the thirty-eight-page document is a six-paragraph statement on the movement's vision of "Relations with Other Faiths" that is grounded in Heschel's theology.³⁸⁸

In 2015, after fifty years of honest efforts by the Catholic Church to evolve its teachings and practice related to relations with the Jews, the Orthodox Rabbinic community had the evidence they needed to reverse Soloveitchik's rejection of Jewish dialogue with Christians. That work will be addressed in the following chapter.

The work of religious change in the drive toward pluralism is an intergenerational relay wherein each generation of scholars and leaders is called to pick up the baton. Even though the pendulum sometimes swings and harmful words have, at times, been uttered by the highest ranks of Catholic leadership, the number of those committed to the work of using words, relationships and encounters to transform narratives into new attitudes of inclusion continues to increase.³⁸⁹ Building on the lessons learned in Seelisberg surrounding the interfaith partnership that enriches the process of authoring documents of dialogue, a network of deep relationships both in the United States and in Europe would help Catholics and Jews committed to interfaith healing and positive relations achieve their goal.

³⁸⁷ The five organizations who crafted *Emet ve'Emunah* were The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, The Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of America, Women's League for Conservative Judaism, and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs.

³⁸⁸ "Relations with Other Faiths." From *Emet ve'Emunah* ["Truth and Belief"]: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism, 1988, <https://merrimackvalleyhavurah.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/emet-ve-emunah-statement-of-principles-of-conservative-judaism.pdf>.

³⁸⁹ This would include both the growing number of Jewish scholars of the New Testament and Christian academics dedicated to interfaith studies and the growing number of U.S. Centers on Jewish-Christian relations.

In the final analysis, a debate remains as to whether the *Nostra Aetate* would have come to fruition without a Jewish partnership and Jewish advocacy.³⁹⁰ Distinguished Roman Catholic priest, academician, and Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, John T. Pawlikowski attributes the document's success to the collaborative work done between Christian and Jews in earlier decades. In a 1991 retrospective talk on Vatican II, he attributed the unified support of the American bishops to this earlier inter-religious effort to combat societal ills:

“It has to be said that Chapter Four of *Nostra Aetate* is certainly one of the primal contributions of American Catholicism to the Second Vatican Council. It was in many ways a document that probably would not have passed if it had not been for the strong, unified support of the American bishops at the Council. And I think the reason the American bishops had given it such strong support is because the American Catholic Church, during the '30s and '40s, had experienced a very positive working relationships [*sic*] with Jews and also with Protestants in confronting the social problems of this nation.”³⁹¹

While the passion, knowledge and skill of the leaders within the SPCU and the Church and their commitment to atonement, reconciliation, and paving the path for a positive relationship with Jews were unmatched, it is not certain that the few within the Church would have had the power to mobilize the many. From Jules Isaac's recognition

³⁹⁰ On this topic, Edward Kaplan author of four books on Heschel concluded, “After studying the archival documents and comparing them with published accounts and interviews with several of the actors, I have concluded that the Jewish input was important but not decisive. The machinations behind the scenes should not blind us to facts: Pope John XXIII purposely appointed Augustin Cardinal Bea, a learned scholar and a priest of saintly integrity, to rectify the church's millennial injustices toward Judaism and the Jewish people. When all is said and done, the positive effects of Vatican II are owing to humble, compassionate, and intelligent Christians—Merton, Cushing, Bea, and thousands of others—who were inspired by what was ‘Godly and right.’” Edward K. Kaplan 2007, 276.

³⁹¹ John T. Pawlikowski (1940-) John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M., Ph.D. is an American Servite priest, Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics, and Former Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program, part of The Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry, at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Father John T. Pawlikowski, “The Vatican and the Jews,” *Jewish Braille Institute Lecture Series*, May 8, 1991, Tanenbaum Collection, CD-1060 Transcription, The Vatican and the Jews, a dialogue with Father John T. Pawlikowski and Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum [1]. 1991.

that the door was open for a theological *tikkun*,³⁹² a doctrinal turning within the Catholic Church, to Schuster's scramble in October 1965 to meet with American bishops who might strengthen the final declaration's wording, Jewish engagement played an essential role. Pope John XXIII needed that push to awaken his conscience and Cardinal Bea and the committed members of the SPCU working on the Christian-Jewish relations needed a vast network of partners to support their work. Throughout Vatican II, the AJC would be that most significant partner. The process of advocacy required nuance and communication – knowing when to step back and when personal audiences with Church leadership would be effective. From the July 1961 AJC meeting in Rome with Cardinal Bea immediately upon his appointment to head the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity to meetings with American prelates in 1965, the AJC would continuously serve as a sounding board on the issues being addressed and on the language being utilized and as a catalyst that would push to the surface Catholic support for an “*aggiornamento*, updating” on its understanding of Christian-Jewish relations. Seven years from the day Pope John XXIII ascended to become Pope, *Nostra Aetate* was promulgated and the Church transformed in its relationship with the modern world. Pope John XXIII's vision had become a reality.

³⁹² A Rabbinic Hebrew term meaning “repair” or “amending.”

Chapter Five
Jewish Words of Truth About Christianity
Authored by Four Academics on Non-Jewish Campuses:
***Dabru Emet* (September, 2000)**

After fifty-five years, with dozens of documents emerging from leaders of Christian denominations committed to reconstructing their theologies in regard to Jews and Judaism, there was a notable dearth of substantive statements addressing interreligious relations from the Jewish community.³⁹³

Individual liberal denominations had addressed interreligious relations in their statements of principles. The Reform movement's first ideological statement, the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, affirmed in its sixth of eight principles:

We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past. Christianity and Islam, being daughter religions of Judaism, we appreciate their providential mission, to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ The Union of American Hebrew Congregations' 1969 Resolution on Interfaith Activity, 1972 Resolution on Christian "Missions," and 1984 Resolution on Interfaith Relationships and the Central Conference of American Rabbis' 1975 Resolution on Interreligious Activities and 1987 Resolution on Roman Catholic-Jewish Relations are practical in nature and do not address theology. "Resolutions," *Union for Reform Judaism*, <https://urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions>. "Resolutions," *Central Conference of American Rabbis*, <https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/resolution/>.

³⁹⁴ "The Pittsburgh Platform," 1885 Pittsburgh Conference, *Central Conference of American Rabbis*, accessed November 29, 2024, <https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-declaration-principles/>.

The Conservative Movement too, as noted earlier, included a small section on “Relations with Other Faiths,” in their statement of principles, “*Emet ve’Emunah* [Truth and Faithfulness].” The authors acknowledged the reciprocal relationship Jews have historically had, at times, with Christians, marked by fruitful exchange and mutual influence. In closing, the statement noted, “Theological humility requires us to recognize that although we have but one God, God has more than one nation.”³⁹⁵

Yet still neither of those denominational voices spoke broadly across denominational and interreligious lines. Filling that void would be four Jewish scholars with an expertise in the field of theology supporting Jewish–Christian dialogue: Dr. Tikva Frymer-Kensky of the University of Chicago Divinity School, Dr. Peter W. Ochs of the University of Virginia, Dr. David Novak of the University of Toronto, and Dr. Michael A. Signer of the University of Notre Dame.³⁹⁶ “*Dabru Emet* -- Speak Truth” would be the title of their pioneering Jewish declaration of dialogue. The phrase “*Dabru Emet*” appears in the book of Zechariah, wherein God enjoins moral directives on the

³⁹⁵ “Relations with Other Faiths.” From *Emet ve’Emunah* [“Truth and Belief”]: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism, 36.

³⁹⁶ Dr. Tikvah Frymer-Kensky (1943-2006) received her M.A. and Ph.D. from Yale University specializing in Assyriology and Sumerology, biblical studies, Jewish studies and women and religion. She was the director of biblical studies at Reconstructionist Rabbinical College from 1988 to 1995 when she became professor of Hebrew Bible and the History of Judaism at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Dr. Peter Ochs (1950-) is the Edgar M. Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia. He received his BA and PhD from Yale University and his MA from The Jewish Theological Seminary. He is a Jewish philosopher who developed the practice and field of “scriptural reasoning” through which people from diverse backgrounds study short scriptural texts together. Michael Signer (1945-2009) was ordained by the Hebrew Union College in 1970 and received his PhD from the University of Toronto. He was an expert in the fields of Jewish liturgy, the history of the Middle Ages, medieval interpretation of the Bible and Jewish-Christian relations. Signer was a professor of Medieval History and Commentaries at HUC’s Los Angeles campus from 1974 to 1991 and the Abrams Professor of Jewish Thought and Culture at the University of Notre Dame from 1992 to 2009. On Novak, see footnote 364.

Israelites who are seeking national redemption in the late sixth century BCE post-exilic world.³⁹⁷

What return was required of Jews? By the second half of the first century, Christian and Jewish teachings about the religious other were polemical at best and could sow the seeds of distrust and enmity at worst. The Jewish establishment responded to a new sect of Judaism, that would eventually part ways to become Christianity, with its own rhetoric of suspicion and rejection, if not contempt.³⁹⁸

During the decades following the Holocaust, as Christians were working to address their teachings of contempt towards Jews and Judaism, one could hear voices and statements, within those Christian conversations and texts, calling for Jews to likewise examine and address their respective negative teachings about Christianity. Amid the 1964 Vatican II session addressing the Jewish declaration, a conservative sentiment surfaced that there was an historic Jewish animosity and distrust of Christians. During the debate on the floor of Session 3, Cardinal Ruffini put forward that it would be in order “to urge Jews to love Christians, particularly Catholics, and to desist from offensive practices such as have characterized the past. It is a known fact that most Jews follow the Talmudic text which inculcate contempt for all who are not Jews.”³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ “אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים, אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ: דַּבְּרוּ אִתָּהּ, אִישׁ אֶת-רֵעֵהוּ--אֱמֶת וּמִשְׁפָּט שְׁלוֹם, שִׁפְטוּ בִּשְׁעֵרֵיכֶם. - These are the things that you shall do: Speak truth each person with their neighbor; and render truth and judgement of peace in your gates” (Zachariah 8:16).

³⁹⁸ For more on the Jewish and Christian parting of ways, see pages 63 to 66.

³⁹⁹ That supposed Talmudic reference does not exist. On the false Talmudic reference, see footnote 223. Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini, Italy. Session No. 3, News Bulletin 10, *Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, September 28, 1964, 4.

The March 1988 Vatican document “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah”⁴⁰⁰ was acknowledged as an act of repentance (*teshuvah*) calling for atonement for the failures of the Catholic Church during the Holocaust. It expressed a strong commitment to crafting a “new future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians or anti-Christian sentiment among Jews, but rather a shared mutual respect...”⁴⁰¹

Jews were being called to address their own texts that were xenophobic, ethnocentric or that devalued the religious other.⁴⁰² In a post-Holocaust world, where it was acknowledged that religious hierarchical ideologies had created fertile soil enabling a violent Nazi pseudoscientific doctrine of racial inferiority to take root, Jews were being called to denounce their own historic or contemporary doctrine that failed to affirm the equality of all and to promulgate a Jewish theology promoting pluralism.

A significant step leading Jews to engage in a theological self-reckoning would be the expansion of dialogue and the increase of Jewish academics devoted to the field of Christian-Jewish relations. Jewish scholars and leaders were being invited to interfaith tables and conversations not to give feedback on Christian declarations but to engage in

⁴⁰⁰ Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” Franklin Sherman, March 16, 1998, *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue, Volume Two*, 250-259. For more on “We Remember,” see pages 140-141.

⁴⁰¹ “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” 257.

⁴⁰² While historically these texts have rarely manifested in violence, they could be distorted in ways that lead to weaponization. For an accounting of and addressing of these texts in their context, see the Rabbinic Assembly’s *teshuvah*, responsa, addressing the status of non-Jews in Jewish Law that was unanimously approved by the Conservative’s Movement Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. Reuven Hammer, “The Status of Non-Jews in Jewish Law and Lore Today,” April 21, 2016, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/Hammer%20Teshuvah%20Final.pdf>.

theological discussions of depth requiring them to confront at the deepest levels the teachings of the religious other, and to convey to the religious other their own beliefs. The Jewish scholars who developed theology to ground their interreligious encounters of mutuality and friendship, would be inspired by the Protestant and Catholic lead.

In 1969, a Christian scholars group was established with the goal of addressing subjects relevant to Christian-Jewish relations both historic and contemporary. The group was founded by the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches and originally called the "Study Group on Christian-Jewish Relations." This was the origin of the Christian Scholars Group.

The "Study Group" was originally co-sponsored by the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and comprised of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox scholars.⁴⁰³ The group sought to foster scholarship on Christian-Jewish relations by creating a forum for sharing, constructively critiquing, and collaborating to advance this field of academic work. They additionally aspired "to assist the churches in reconsidering and reformulating their teaching regarding Jews and Judaism, and the Christian-Jewish relationship."⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Alice Eckardt and Franklin Sherman, "The Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations: Historical Sketch," February 18, 2002, *Boston College*, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/sites/partners/csg/history.htm.

⁴⁰⁴ "Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations," *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/ecumenical-christian/christian-scholars-group>.

Given the founding of the Christian Scholars Group in the wake of the Six Day War,⁴⁰⁵ their first proposed topic of study was "Israel: People, Land, State." This culminated in a 1973 "Statement to Our Fellow Christians"⁴⁰⁶ which courageously addressed Israel in a way that prior significant interreligious documents had not.⁴⁰⁷ Signatories of the 1973 statement signed as individuals and not as representatives of their respective organizations. Moreover, the document acknowledged that it represented a stage in the process — with the hope of it leading to a "fuller theological statement."

That same year (1973) a National Workshop on Jewish-Christian Relations that was the "brainchild of a local women's 'living room' dialogue group" would be born.⁴⁰⁸ This annual conference would be convened in different cities around the United States every year or two. Each conference would be dependent on the work of both national and local leadership. This initiative led to significant community engagement -- igniting a passion in many local communities to commit themselves to the work of interreligious relations. Professionals, lay people and even those who were newcomers to the work of

⁴⁰⁵ The Six Day War occurred from June 5-10, 1967. Prior to the War, Palestinian guerilla attacks increased from Syria and Jordan and Egypt. Egypt called for the removal of international forces from the Sinai and mobilized its forces to the Israeli border. Israel would launch a pre-emptive attack leading to a war in which Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria and captured the Sinai Peninsula, the Old City of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights.

⁴⁰⁶ Dr. Markus Barth et al. (eighteen prominent Christian theologians), "A Statement to our Fellow Christians," May 31, 1973, Tanenbaum Collection, Box 30, Folder 11, Jewish-Christian relations, 1973.

⁴⁰⁷ Among the eighteen prominent Christian theologians who authored the 1973 statement were two members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) who supported the writing of *Nostra Aetate*, Msgr. John M. Oesterreicher and Rt. Rev. Leo Rudloff. Leo Rudloff (1902-1982) was the second abbot of Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, that he led from 1953 to 1968 and founder of the Weston Priory of the Order of St. Benedict in Weston, Vermont.

⁴⁰⁸ Eugene Fisher, "National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations," *Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed November 23, 2024, <https://www.ibiblio.org/bgreek/archives/96-08/1004.html>.

dialogue would be invited to participate and the experience activated their interest in the work of interfaith dialogue.

The Ninth National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations was held in 1986 in Baltimore with more than 1,200 attendees, and it spurred a broad swath of the local community, including major Christian and Jewish denominational leadership, local colleges, corporate sponsors and philanthropic foundations.⁴⁰⁹ The conference provided the spark that would ignite the creation of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies (ICJS)⁴¹⁰ to ensure that substantive interreligious dialogue in Baltimore would endure. One year later, in 1987, ICJS would be founded with Christopher Leighton coming on board as its first Executive Director and serving there for thirty years — from 1987 to 2017.⁴¹¹

In its earliest years, the ICJS focused on combating antisemitism and anti-Judaism in Christian communities by facilitating dialogue between Christian and Jewish leaders. Their first initiative engaged more than 200 clergy, key educators and community leaders from ten denominations to take part in study groups, over the course of three years, that explored the history of Jewish-Christian relations from their ancient parting of ways in the first few centuries of the Common Era to today.

⁴⁰⁹ Christopher Leighton, *A Sacred Argument: Dispatches from the Christian, Jewish and Muslim Encounter*, (Wipf & Stock, 2024), 3.

⁴¹⁰ In 2016, the Trustees would broaden the institute's mission and change the name to the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies, although keeping the moniker ICJS.

⁴¹¹ Christopher Leighton (1950-) is an ordained Presbyterian minister. He was the founding Executive Director of the ICJS and led the organization for thirty-three years. He also served as an Adjunct Professor at Johns Hopkins University and St. Mary's Seminary and University. Leighton recently published an autobiography on his career. See Christopher Leighton, *A Sacred Argument: Dispatches from the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounter*, 2024.

At that same time, the Christian Scholars Group on Judaism was searching for a new home. They were severing their ties with the National Conference of Christian and Jews who had stepped in as their sponsor since 1973. According to Leighton, the scholars were unhappy with the ways in which they were trying to dictate what was done and how it was done. The funders supporting NCCJ's efforts with the Christian Scholars Group sought definable metrics of success while the scholars themselves were focused on the academic pursuits.⁴¹²

The ICJS decided from the get-go to bring the Christian Scholars under their auspices and to give them free reign in determining the scope of their work.⁴¹³ As the ICJS was engaging hundreds of Baltimore leaders in dialogue, Leighton felt they needed to have an esteemed and noteworthy cross-section of Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars who would be able to say, “‘This is legitimate. It’s imperative.’ And could back it up with both textual/scriptural investigations and historical study, as well as . . . contemporary theological musings and reflections.”⁴¹⁴

In 1990, the ICJS brought Rabbi Shira Lander on board as their inaugural Jewish Scholar to support their Christian denominational dialogues on Judaism.⁴¹⁵ It was at a dinner gathering several years later, when Lander hosted guests that included her HUC professor Dr. Michael Signer and colleague Christopher Leighton, that a conversation

⁴¹² Christopher Leighton, Person communication with Judy Schindler, March 4, 2025.

⁴¹³ The Christian Scholars Group would remain under the auspices of ICJS from 1988 to 2002 at which time they would partner with the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College where they remain today. Alice Eckardt and Franklin Sherman, “The Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations: Historical Sketch.”

⁴¹⁴ Christopher Leighton, Interview by Judy Schindler, September 10, 2024.

⁴¹⁵ Shira Lander (1962-) served as the Inaugural Jewish Scholar at ICJS from 1990 to 1994 and was the founding director of Jewish Studies and senior lecturer at Southern Methodist University.

was brought to the fore that had been on all their minds. For more than two decades, the Christian Scholars Group had been examining its historic and contemporary relationship with Judaism. Yet through the millennia, the Jewish community had not been living in a bubble. In Leighton's words, "either through accommodation or resistance, Jewish identity had been shaped dialectically."⁴¹⁶ While there had been trailblazing Jewish scholars on Christianity since the late 19th century, there had never been a "working group" of academics reflecting on Jewish theological attitudes on Christians.⁴¹⁷ At that table, it was decided that a Jewish scholars group on Christianity was needed to examine Jewish attitudes and behaviors towards and theological understanding of Jesus and Christianity.

Signer would chair the new Jewish Scholars Project, inviting colleagues, receiving a tremendous response, and bringing together approximately twenty-five academics including numerous preeminent North American Jewish scholars.⁴¹⁸ In Signer's 2003 article providing a contextual analysis of *Dabru Emet*, he notes that the group's first years were dedicated to exploring the question: "Was there something more than pure intellectual interests for those of us who were Jewish and made Christianity a

⁴¹⁶ Christopher Leighton, Interview by Judy Schindler, September 10, 2024.

⁴¹⁷ Among the earliest Jewish scholars on Christianity were Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), a pioneering scholar on Jesus and first century Judaism, and Claude Montefiore (1858-1938), a British scholar, who studied the New Testament and its relationship to Judaism. Among the next generation of Jewish New Testament scholars were the British academic Hugh J. Schonfield (1900-1988) and American academic Samuel Sandmel (1911-1979) who were key to the development of Jewish thinking about the New Testament and Jesus. Paula Fredriksen (1951-), Amy-Jill Levine (1956-), Michael Signer, and a multitude of other Jewish scholars carried Sandmel's and Schonfield's work forward. For more on Jewish scholarship on Christianity see, Joshua Garroway, (in press), "Jesus Scholarship by Jewish Scholars," *Oxford Handbook on the Historical Jesus*.

⁴¹⁸ Christopher Leighton 2024, 102.

central area of our research? In other words, did our commitment to Judaism contribute to restricting our perspective in research and teaching?”⁴¹⁹

The Jewish Scholars Project⁴²⁰ would meet three times over the course of two years (in 1997 and 1998) when they came to a critical juncture. First, it was clear that their lofty presentations were not going to speak to a broader Jewish audience and were, from Leighton’s vantage point, “irrelevant from the rough and tumble realities out there.”⁴²¹ Second, it was evident that there was a divide among the scholars. A larger segment of the group felt that the watershed Christian documents reflecting theological transformation such as the Catholic Church’s 1965 *Nostra Aetate* and the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland (FRG)’s 1980 document, “Towards the Renewal of the Relationship of Christians and Jews,”⁴²² were the work of a small group of elite academics, and that despite these efforts to overcome religious prejudices and stereotypes through interfaith dialogue, Christianity still posed a threat to Judaism. The organizers of the Jewish Scholars Project felt that there were ample academic conferences for these scholars to present their findings. By contrast, a smaller segment of Jewish scholars believed that a metanoia, a genuine spiritual conversion, had occurred within some ecclesiastical bodies and that a similar theological reckoning was required of Jews.

⁴¹⁹ Michael Signer, “*Dabru Emet*: A Contextual Analysis,” *Théologiques* 11/1-2 (2003), 188.

⁴²⁰ The group of authors were formally known as the National Jewish Scholars Project though commonly referred to as the Jewish Scholars Project.

⁴²¹ Christopher Leighton, Interview by Judy Schindler, September 10, 2024.

⁴²² In the 1980 document, the Protestant Church in Germany, a federation of twenty Lutheran, Reformed, and United Protestant regional churches, encompassing the vast majority of the country’s Protestants, acknowledged “Christian co-responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust -- the defamation, persecution and murder of the Jews in the Third Reich.” Evangelical Church of the Rhineland (FRG), “Towards the Renewal of the Relationship of Christians and Jews,” January 12, 1980, *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/eur/ecr1980>.

It was Modern Orthodox Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod⁴²³ who came up with the idea of a pioneering document. Leighton recalled Wyschogrod urging the Jewish scholars to refocus their activity: “There have been all these statements made by Christians that call for rethinking their attitudes and their behavior and their theological understandings of Judaism. Maybe the time has come for us to generate a document that shows that we're capable of some reciprocity.”⁴²⁴

Indeed, the time had come to craft a definitive Jewish statement on its relationship with Christianity and that would become the new mission of the Jewish Scholars Project. A self-selected cadre of scholars who identified with differing ideological approaches to Judaism coalesced as a working group: Frymer-Kensky, Novak, Ochs, and Signer. Building on an original working paper crafted by Novak that provided a Jewish justification for dialogue⁴²⁵ within the context of Jewish law, the group would meet under the auspices of the ICJS approximately six times in person over the course of two years. There were many online conversations and telephone calls in between. At some point along the way, Wyschogrod would part ways from the core group of authors over what

⁴²³ Michael Wyschogrod (1928-2015) was a Jewish German-American philosopher of religion, Jewish theologian and a leader in Jewish–Christian interfaith dialogue. He was raised in Nazi Germany and on Kristallnacht, the November 1938 pogroms, he witnessed the burning of the Berlin synagogue and the rolling out of the synagogue’s Torah on the Berlin city streets for people to trample on. He escaped to America in early 1939. He studied at City College of New York and received his PhD from Columbia University. David P. Goldman, “Michael Wyschogrod, Dean of Orthodox Jewish Theologians, Dies at 87,” *Tablet*, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/michael-wyschogrod-obit>.

⁴²⁴ Christopher Leighton, Interview by Judy Schindler, September 10, 2024.

⁴²⁵ David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

Signer stated was a “principled disagreement with the content.”⁴²⁶ The memory of that separation weighed heavy on every person at the table engaged with the work.⁴²⁷

The four authors determined early on that their statement had to be written in an accessible language that would speak to the broadest community of Jews possible.

Lander noted that their vision was to get it out to “the *amcha* (the people)” and their audience was intended “to be for the Jewish people writ large, global, *am Yisrael*.”⁴²⁸

She added that her teacher, Dr. Signer, always had that as a mission of his scholarship.

He always had “a kind of grassroots component and dimension to what he did... how do you take this really heady academic work and apply it to people in the pews?”⁴²⁹

Through their statement, the authors were not only speaking to the broader Jewish world but they were speaking to Christian theologians involved in Jewish-Christian relations with whom they had close professional and personal relationships. Their Christian colleagues had gone to great personal and professional risk to publish positive statements on Judaism and the four scholars felt pressure to reciprocate.⁴³⁰ Scholar and interreligious activist Rabbi David Sandmel sensed a frustration from their Christian counterparts: the “dialogue was kind of stuck at this sort of loop about all of the things

⁴²⁶ Michael Signer 2003, 192.

⁴²⁷ David Novak, David Sandmel and Christopher Leighton had different takes on whether it was lack of theological depth or the theology itself especially identified in the claim that Jews and Christians worship the same God. In a 2002 published letter, Wyschogrod would note his disappointment with the authors’ approach of focusing on the commonalities between Judaism and Christianity while evading the serious intractable theological differences, most notably “the divinity of Jesus and Christianity’s abrogation of Mosaic law...” Christopher Leighton, Interview by Judy Schindler. “Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *Commentary*, April 2002, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/and-critics/jewish-christian-dialogue/>.

⁴²⁸ Shira Lander, Interview by Judy Schindler, October 25, 2024.

⁴²⁹ Shira Lander, Interview by Judy Schindler, October 25, 2024.

⁴³⁰ David Novak, “Dabru Emet After Twenty Years: The Question of Authority,” *American Religion*, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://www.american-religion.org/dabruemet/novak>.

that Christians and Christianity have done wrong over the centuries. And there were people who were saying, ‘I’ve done that. I get it. I acknowledge it. I’m ready to move on to something more substantial.’”⁴³¹

Novak noted, “...Christian groups and thinkers have in the past 30 or 40 years come up with a major rethinking about Jews and Judaism and have issued statements about how they can respect the legitimacy of Judaism. It seems to us to behoove Jewish thinkers to respond accordingly.”⁴³² Signer reflected, “For me in particular there was the haunting question raised by Professor Peter von der Osten Sacken of Berlin, ‘Who are we Christians to you?’”⁴³³

The redefining of the mission of the Jewish Scholars Project casts a light of clarity on those academics who author documents of dialogue – they are *activist scholars*. Their work is not academic study for its own sake, but academic study aimed to propel their communities in a positive and pluralistic direction. The authors of *Dabru Emet* saw the need to have their voices heard outside the halls of academic conferences.

Their major task was not only coming to agreement on the eight fundamental statements about Christianity that would ground the document, but also to transform academic and theological concepts into language that was readily accessible to everyday

⁴³¹ David Sandmel was the Jewish Scholar at the Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies in Baltimore from 1998-2001 where he directed the National Jewish Scholars Project. He served as Director of Interreligious Engagement at ADL (2014-2022). He held the Crown-Ryan Chair of Jewish Studies at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago (2001-2014). He is currently President of the ICCJ. David Sandmel, Interview by Judy Schindler, August 5, 2024.

⁴³² Laurie Goodstein, “Leading Jewish Scholars Extend a Hand to Christians,” *New York Times*, September 8, 2000, <https://login.proxy143.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/leading-jewish-scholars-extend-hand-christians/docview/431550638/se-2>.

⁴³³ Michael Signer 2003, 191.

people. The group would publish a parallel book that in Leighton's terms would do "the theological heavy lifting" of theological categories such as land, exile, sin, and salvation that stand at the border of the two religions. The Jewish scholars would explore the Christian concept on a deep level and then reflect on the Jewish understanding of that notion with the goal of understanding commonalities and disparities and ultimately determining which were irreconcilable. The Jewish Scholars Project would oversee two books that supported the new declaration – addressing its content in a deeper, dialogical mode. *Dabru Emet: Christianity in Jewish Terms*,⁴³⁴ would model the theological conversations between Christians and Jews that were foundational to *Dabru Emet*, and *Irreconcilable Differences: A Learning Resource for Jews and Christians*⁴³⁵ was created as a textbook of sorts for Jewish and Christian adult learners in congregations and college courses.

To support the enormity and complexity of this project, Sandmel, who was completing his doctoral dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, was brought on to the ICJS staff in 1998, to serve as facilitator of the Jewish Scholars Project as the authors entered the final stages of crafting the statement. Sandmel would offer a literary hand, partner as an editor of the two corresponding publications, and manage the production and plan the rollout of the document itself.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ Tikvah Frymer-Kensky et al., *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, (Westview Press, 2000).

⁴³⁵ David F. Sandmel, Rosann M. Catalano, Christopher Magee Leighton, *Irreconcilable Differences: A Learning Resource for Jews and Christians*, (Westview Press, 2001).

⁴³⁶ Michael Signer identified Sandmel's role as "amanuensis and facilitator" who would often end debates "by sending the four of us out of the room to meditate in solitude." Michael Signer 2003, 194.

With the document being incubated at the ICJS, that housed both a Catholic and Protestant scholar and regularly convened Christian scholars, there were ample opportunities to include Christians in a feedback loop. One formal session was held for that purpose.⁴³⁷

Once the document was finalized, it was put in Sandmel's hands to choose the title. The group was concerned that it would end up being called the Baltimore Document or Baltimore Statement and confused with an ultra-conservative Episcopal Baltimore Declaration in 1991 claiming Christianity as the singular proprietor of truth.⁴³⁸ With a concordance in hand and with a couple of possible words that could capture the document's essence, Sandmel proposed the phrase from Zachariah (8:16). Sandmel noted that the prophet's exhortation "*Dabru Emet*, speak truth" does not have "*hey ha'yediah* [that functions like the definite article 'the' in the English language] and it could be an adverb rather than a noun."⁴³⁹

The framers of the statement loved Sandmel's suggestion for the statement's title. A public relations firm would be engaged and the result of their collective thought leadership would be an historic first cross-denominational Jewish declaration of dialogue titled "*Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity.*" On Sunday, September 10, 2000, it would be published as a full-page ad in the Sunday editions of

⁴³⁷ David Sandmel, Interview by Judy Schindler, August 5, 2024.

⁴³⁸ The 1991 Baltimore Declaration authored by six Episcopal priests from the Diocese of Maryland called for a return to Christian Orthodoxy advocating for masculine language when referring to God, Christian supremacy, and the proselytization of Jews. It was modeled on the 1934 Barmen Declaration and sought to renounce the false teachings of liberal leaders whom they felt were tainting congregations. It was issued shortly before a Phoenix Convention at which the ordination of gay priests would be debated but at that point in time not voted upon. See Christopher Leighton 2024, 51-61.

⁴³⁹ David Sandmel, Interview by Judy Schindler, August 5, 2024.

both the *New York Times* and the *Baltimore Sun* specifically timed prior to the High Holidays with the hope that it would be a topic of conversation in synagogues:⁴⁴⁰

Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity⁴⁴¹

In recent years, there has been a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish and Christian relations. Throughout the nearly two millennia of Jewish exile, Christians have tended to characterize Judaism as a failed religion or, at best, a religion that prepared the way for, and is completed in, Christianity. In the decades since the Holocaust, however, Christianity has changed dramatically. An increasing number of official Church bodies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have made public statements of their remorse about Christian mistreatment of Jews - and Judaism. These statements have declared, furthermore, that Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people and celebrate the contribution of Judaism to world civilization and to Christian faith itself.

We believe these changes merit a thoughtful Jewish response. Speaking only for ourselves — an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars — we believe it is time for Jews to learn about the efforts of Christians to honor Judaism. We believe it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity. As a first step, we offer eight brief statements about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another.

Jews and Christians worship the same God. Before the rise of Christianity, Jews were the only worshippers of the God of Israel. But Christians also worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; creator of heaven and earth. While Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews, as Jewish theologians we rejoice that, through Christianity, hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel.

Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book — the Bible (what Jews call “Tanakh” and Christians call the “Old Testament”). Turning to it for religious orientation, spiritual enrichment, and communal education, we each take away similar lessons: God created and sustains the universe; God established a covenant with the people Israel, God's revealed word guides Israel to a life of righteousness; and God will ultimately redeem Israel and the whole

⁴⁴⁰ According to Sandmel, these two publications were chosen because the *New York Times* is the paper of record and the *Baltimore Sun* is where the ICJS and many of its funders are located.

⁴⁴¹ “Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity,” *Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies*, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://icjs.org/dabru-emet-text/>.

world. Yet, Jews and Christians interpret the Bible differently on many points. Such differences must always be respected.

Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel. The most important event for Jews since the Holocaust has been the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land. As members of a biblically based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised — and given — to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God. Many Christians support the State of Israel for reasons far more profound than mere politics. As Jews, we applaud this support. We also recognize that Jewish tradition mandates justice for all non-Jews who reside in a Jewish state.

Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah. Central to the moral principles of Torah is the inalienable sanctity and dignity of every human being. All of us were created in the image of God. This shared moral emphasis can be the basis of an improved relationship between our two communities. It can also be the basis of a powerful witness to all humanity for improving the lives of our fellow human beings and for standing against the immoralities and idolatries that harm and degrade us. Such witness is especially needed after the unprecedented horrors of the past century.

Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon. Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi extermination of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians. We recognize with gratitude those Christians who risked or sacrificed their lives to save Jews during the Nazi regime. With that in mind, we encourage the continuation of recent efforts in Christian theology to repudiate unequivocally contempt of Judaism and the Jewish people. We applaud those Christians who reject this teaching of contempt, and we do not blame them for the sins committed by their ancestors.

The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture. Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition. That difference will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other; nor by exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians' faithfulness to their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.

A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice. An improved relationship will not accelerate the cultural and religious assimilation that Jews rightly fear. It will not change traditional Jewish forms of worship, nor increase intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, nor persuade more Jews to convert to Christianity, nor create a false blending of Judaism and Christianity. We respect Christianity as a faith that originated within Judaism and that still has significant contacts with it. We do not see it as an extension of Judaism. Only if we cherish our own traditions can we pursue this relationship with integrity.

Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace. Jews and Christians, each in their own way, recognize the unredeemed state of the world as reflected in the persistence of persecution, poverty, and human degradation and misery. Although justice and peace are finally God's, our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our world. In this enterprise, we are guided by the vision of the prophets of Israel:

It shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established at the top of the mountains and be exalted above the hills, and the nations shall flow unto it . . . and many peoples shall go and say, "Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in his paths." (Isaiah 2:2-3)

David Novak

University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

Peter Ochs

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Michael Signer

University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN

Tikva Frymer-Kensky

University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

National Jewish Scholars Project | Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies |
Baltimore, Maryland

The statement was signed by more than 170 rabbis and Jewish intellectuals (signatories grew to more than 220 over the following months). Signatories

included prominent leaders of American Jewry and Jews from across the denominational spectrum (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Jews) and on three continents. The majority of those who affirmed the document were from liberal denominations.⁴⁴² While there were some who had significant disagreements with elements of the statement, they understood its overarching importance.

A Turning from a Jewish Exclusivist to Inclusivist Theology

As noted in earlier chapters, the historic acrimony between Judaism and Christianity was long and not a one-way street. Already within first century teachings, the *Birkat haMinim*, the blessing of the sectarians, was included in the heart of the Jewish prayer service. Biblical scholar and Conservative Movement leader Solomon Schechter⁴⁴³ discovered a Palestinian *siddur* (prayerbook) in the Cairo Genizah⁴⁴⁴ written on paper and

⁴⁴² According to then HUC student David Reiner's analysis of the signatories, approximately 57% of the signers were congregational rabbis or listed congregational affiliation with their signature. Approximately 41% listed affiliation with organizations, institutions, or universities. Approximately 3% did not list any affiliation. Approximately 18% did not use the title "rabbi" (some of those may have been rabbis). An overwhelming number of signers, 92%, were from American institutions, whereas only 2.4% were from Canadian institutions. Thus, approximately 94% were from North American Institutions. By contrast, 3% were from Israeli institutions (all were non-native Israelis: two are American-born and the third is British) and 4.1 % of the signers were from British institutions. Leaders of the rabbinical organizations from the Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative movements, as well as professional leaders of the affiliated organizations, signed the statement. While several Orthodox rabbis signed the statement (Irving Greenberg, Tzvi Blanchard, Yechiel Eckstein, Barry Freundel, and David Rosen, to name a few), no Orthodox organizations are represented." David L. Reiner, "Social & Theological Contempt in the Jewish-Christian Encounter," (Rabbinical Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, 2009), 78-79.

⁴⁴³ Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) was a Talmudic scholar and theologian who in 1896 found the collection of valuable ancient manuscripts hidden in the genizah of the old synagogue at Cairo. He served as the second President of the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1902 to 1915. He founded the United Synagogue of America in 1913 which would grow from 23 to over 800 Conservative synagogues. "Solomon Schechter," *Britannica*, accessed December 7, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Conservative-Judaism>.

⁴⁴⁴ The word "genizah," meaning "hiding place" or "repository," is where a community's sacred texts that are no longer ritually fit are stored prior to being brought to a Hebrew cemetery for burial. In the late 19th century, over 350,000 medieval manuscript fragments were found in Fustat, Old Cairo, in the attic genizah

parchment by what he deemed were “very ancient hands” and represented “portions of the liturgy in their oldest form:”

For the apostates, let there be no hope. And let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our days. And let the *notzrim* [Nazerenes] and the *minim* [heretics] be destroyed immediately and be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed with the righteous. Blessed are You, O Lord, who humbles the arrogant.”⁴⁴⁵

It is undeniable that there are statements in Jewish liturgy, rabbinic literature, kabbalah and medieval texts that speak negatively about Christianity and Islam.⁴⁴⁶ While these teachings arose from and were reactions to ruling environments in which Jews were treated cruelly by non-Jews (from the early Roman Empire to the Crusades and beyond), an inclusive Jewish theology was needed both to respond to the changes within the Church and to address realities of the present day. It warrants noting that Judaism’s teachings on the inherent equality, sanctity, and value of all human beings are voiced throughout the Torah⁴⁴⁷ from the creation of every human being in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) to Moses’ honoring of his father-in-law Yitro, a Midianite Priest (Exodus 18) and incorporating Yitro’s wisdom on the judicial system into his leadership. The commandment of *ahavat ger*, loving the stranger, is found thirty-six times in the

of the Ben Ezra synagogue. The documents are dated from the 9th to the 19th century. “Cairo Genizah,” *University of Pennsylvania’s OPenn Library* (of Primary Digital Resources), accessed December 2, 2024, https://openn.library.upenn.edu/html/genizah_contents.html.

⁴⁴⁵ Solomon Schechter, “Genizah Specimens: Liturgy,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 10, no. 4 (July 1898): 657.

⁴⁴⁶ For an in-depth analysis of Judaism’s view of non-gentiles see Reuven Hammer 2016, “The Status of Non-Jews in Jewish Law and Lore Today.” See also, Ruth Langer, “The Censorship of Aleinu in Ashkenaz and its Aftermath,” in Blank, D.R. (Ed.), *The Experience of Jewish Liturgy*, (Brill Publishers, 2011).

⁴⁴⁷ See Reuven Hammer 2016, “The Status of Non-Jews in Jewish Law and Lore Today.”

Torah.⁴⁴⁸ The Mishnah teaches, “For the sake of peace among humankind, [only one human being was created in the world], so that one should not say to another, ‘My father was greater than your father. (Sanhedrin 4:5).’”

Just as Protestant and Catholic leaders, through their pioneering documents of dialogue, addressed on a doctrinal level, their liturgical and catechistic teachings that could be misconstrued in ways that could cause hierarchies and harm, the four academic authors of *Dabru Emet* recognized the need to do the same. While they did not have rabbinic authority to craft doctrine, they did have the academic authority to conceive of and publish new principles for relating to and teaching about Christianity in a positive light.

While a handful of modern liberal theologians addressed a positive relationship with Christianity in their theological and philosophical writings from Buber⁴⁴⁹ to

⁴⁴⁸ In Deuteronomy, the category of *gerim*, strangers, is included with orphans and widows, indicating that these are vulnerable populations fearing mistreatment.

⁴⁴⁹ Martin Buber (1878-1965) was an Austrian-Israeli philosopher author, scholar and activist. His most famous book, *I and Thou* (1923), offers a philosophy of dialogue that has grounded theologians of all faiths. See Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, (Harper & Brothers: 1960). Buber distinguishes between the I-It encounter marked by a detached and objectified relationship between one person and another and the I-Thou encounter marked by mutuality and togetherness while each person remains their authentic self. In its application to Jewish-Christian relations, Buber understood that God could not become incarnate in Christ. In his book *Two Types of Faith* (a study of Judaism and Christianity that contrasts the “faith of Abraham” with the “faith of St. Paul”) Buber notes that for forty years he has recognized the religious significance of Jesus: “From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother. That Christianity has regarded and does regard him as God and Saviour has always appeared to me a fact of the highest importance which, for his sake and my own, I must endeavor to understand . . . My own fraternally open relationship to him has grown every stronger and clearer, and to-day, [sic] I see him more strongly and clearly than ever before. I am more than ever certain that a great place belongs to him in Israel's history of faith and that this place cannot be described by any of the usual categories.” Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith: A Study of the Interpretation of Judaism and Christianity*, Translated by Norman P. Goldhawk, (The Macmillan Co., 1951), 12-13.

Rosenzweig⁴⁵⁰ to Heschel, and while the rabbinic scholars involved in the World Parliament of Religions had offered broad perspectives promoting religious pluralism, one of Heschel's students, David Novak would craft a Jewish systematic theology specifically supporting Jewish-Christian dialogue. Novak, founder and current President of The Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ),⁴⁵¹ an organization that provides a home for those who seek to live as *halachic* Jews rooting their practice in Jewish sacred texts that is informed by modern scholarship, would root his systematic theology in Jewish authoritative texts that are informed by modern philosophy and theology. The UTJ and Novak, as a theologian and one of UTJ's leaders, build their work on principles of the authority of Jewish Law; intellectual inquiry and integrity; the love and respect of fellow Jews and of all humanity. They eschew denominational labels.

In constructing his theology, Novak notes that there is no halachic barrier to dialogue with non-Jews,⁴⁵² which explains why Soloveichik's 1964 treatise does not put

⁴⁵⁰ Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) was a German-Jewish theologian. He was acculturated Jew who after spending the year from 1912 and 1913 studying Judaism, stood at the threshold of converting to Christianity. In making one last exploration of Judaism by experiencing Yom Kippur in a small *shtiebel*, a small traditional synagogue in Berlin, that daylong spiritual immersion moved him to return to a strong embrace of Judaism. His magnum opus *The Star of Redemption* (1921) taught that while Christians come to God through the son, Jews already dwell with God. Utilizing the six points of the Jewish Star, Rosenzweig outlines the elements that comprise Judaism: "God", "man", and the "world" are situated at the points of one triangle, and "creation," "revelation," and "redemption" are situated at the points of the other triangle. The inner line connecting God and the world is law. The inner line connecting God and humanity is love. The inner line connecting the world and humanity is hope. In the center is the eternal burning flame of Judaism. The eternal rays emanating from the star and reaching outward into history are Christianity. See Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, (University of Wisconsin Press: 2005). Michael Paley, "Franz Rosenzweig on the Notion of Revelation," YouTube, May 20, 2020, accessed December 9, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DkVvUNp6tQ&t=9s>.

⁴⁵¹ The Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ) is comprised of rabbis, scholars, and laypeople whose mission is to "advocate for a passionate, open-minded approach to Torah study and observance of Jewish law (Halakhah) rooted in classical religious sources and informed by modern scholarship." *The Union for Traditional Judaism*, accessed December 8, 2024, <https://utj.org/about-us/>.

⁴⁵² David Novak 1989, 23.

forth legal arguments as support for his rejection of dialogue. Novak rereads authoritative rabbinic and medieval texts through a new lens, requiring “radical research into the sources of Jewish tradition and an empathetic analysis of the Christian partner in the dialogue.”⁴⁵³ Novak notes that dialogue requires Jews and Christians to move beyond triumphalism and tolerance, avoid relativism, and embrace authenticity with neither the Jewish community abandoning its commitment to Torah nor the Christian community abandoning its commitment to Christ. This channel of communication requires, to some extent, that Jews “transcend the limits of historic Judaism” while Christians “transcend the limits of historic Christianity.”⁴⁵⁴

As a starting point, Novak examines the Noachide Laws – the seven basic laws that determined the permissibility of a non-Jew to live among Jews as a *ger toshav*, a resident alien. In Novak’s assessment, based on the teaching of Rabbi Meir,⁴⁵⁵ the only prerequisite to becoming a *ger toshav* is the renunciation of idolatry. Thus, the central question facing Medieval Jewish authorities surrounding Jewish-Christian relations was “whether or not Christianity is a form of proscribed idolatry – even for gentiles.”⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵³ David Novak 1989, 23-24.

⁴⁵⁴ David Novak 1989, 20.

⁴⁵⁵ Rabbi Meir, a second century C.E. scholar, was one of the early teachers (*Tannaim*) of the oral law and one of the most frequently quoted of the sages in the Mishnah.

⁴⁵⁶ David Novak 1989, 36-37.

In his early writings, the Jewish legal authority Maimonides held a negative view of Christianity: identifying it as idolatry,⁴⁵⁷ forbidding a Jew to enter a church,⁴⁵⁸ and characterizing both Christianity and Islam as a dilution or distortion of the original revelation. However, Novak observed that in his later writings, Maimonides acknowledged their commonalities that could ground dialogue.⁴⁵⁹ In the *Mishnah Torah*, Maimonides notes the role that Christianity and Islam play in preparing their followers and the world for the arrival of the Messiah. Novak rests his justification for Jewish-Christian dialogue on Maimonides' evolution of thought and on the Kabbalistic teaching of *sephirot*, the ten channels or emanations by which God is manifest to humankind, as a basis for exempting trinitarian worship as idolatry.⁴⁶⁰ "The fact is," writes Novak, "that

⁴⁵⁷ "Know that this Christian nation, who advocate the messianic claim, in all their various sects, all of them are idolators. On all their festivals it is forbidden for us to deal with them. And all Torah restrictions pertaining to idolators pertain to them. Sunday is one of their festivals. Therefore, it is forbidden to deal with believers in 'the messiah' on Sunday at all in any manner whatsoever; rather, we deal with them as we would deal with any idolators on their festival." Maimonides commentary on *Avodah Zarah* 1:3, Hebrew trans. Y. Kafih (Jerusalem, 1965), vol. 2, p. 225. For background on Maimonides, see footnote 350.

⁴⁵⁸ "Therefore, one must know that any one of the cities of the Christian nation that has in it a place of worship [bamah], namely, a church, which is, without a doubt, a house of idolatry: through that city one must not intentionally pass, let alone dwell there. But, the Lord has turned us over into their hands that we must sojourn in their cities against our will in order to fulfill Scripture's prediction, 'you will serve their gods that are the work of human hands: wood and stone.' (Deuteronomy 4:28). If this is the law pertaining to the city, all the more so does it apply to the house of idolatry itself, that it is minimally forbidden to look at it, let alone go near it, all the more so to actually enter it." Maimonides commentary on *Avodah Zarah* 1.4, vol. 2, p. 226.

⁴⁵⁹ "Nevertheless, the intent of the Creator of the world is not within the power of man to comprehend, for His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts, our thoughts. Ultimately, all the deeds of Jesus of Nazareth and that Ishmaelite who arose after him will only serve to prepare the way for Mashiach's coming and the improvement of the entire world, motivating the nations to serve God together as Tzeplaniah 3:9 states: 'I will transform the peoples to a purer language that they all will call upon the name of God and serve Him with one purpose.'"

Maimonides, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:7, Trans. by Eliyahu Touger, Moznaim Publishing, accessed December 7, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Kings_and_Wars.11.7?lang=bi.

⁴⁶⁰ A foundational teaching of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, is that there are ten creative forces and channels that reach from the Divine to the earthly realm such as wisdom, understanding, mercy, justice, and beauty.

the acceptance of much of Kabbalah, both consciously or unconsciously, made a strictly metaphysical rejection of Christian Trinitarian claim less plausible.”⁴⁶¹ Novak’s systematic theology serves as the foundation on which the four authors would build *Dabru Emet*.

In sum, there were theological and philosophical writings of nineteen and twentieth century Jewish thinkers that offered a positive theological lens through which to view Jesus and Christianity and grounded positive Jewish-Christian relations in Biblical, rabbinic and medieval Jewish texts. And there were also affirmations of interreligious relations by individual Jewish movements. And yet, these were not enough to speak to *amchah*, the broad Jewish world, nor to address the valid concerns of Christian academic partners who upheld their role as allies, advocates and friends. More was needed to advance a transformed Jewish theology that would influence actions, attitudes and education in how Jews related to Christians in the everyday lives and activities. *Dabru Emet* strived to meet that goal.

Speaking the Truth and the Areas of Tension Within *Dabru Emet*

Return and reconciliation are the themes of the text from Zachariah from which the title *Dabru Emet* emerges. The author of Zachariah, writing from 520 to 518 BCE upon Israel’s return from the first exile, was speaking about the new reality and new piety that was needed: “These are the things that you shall do: Speak truth each person with their neighbor; and render truth and judgement of peace in your gates” (Zachariah 8:16). The medieval commentator Rashi interprets the phrase “judgement of peace” to mean

⁴⁶¹ David Novak 1989, 50-51.

compromise.⁴⁶² The drafting of documents of dialogue require compromise – an intensive debate over each word that would move the needle of positive Jewish relationships with Christians forward, but not too far as to prevent consensus.

As a medievalist, Signer identified each statement of the document as a *Quaestio Disputata*, Latin translated as "disputed question," presenting an area that was subject to debate and offering a nuanced interpretation. Each of the eight topic sentences that introduce each statement "can be read both as a declarative sentence with a full stop at the end and it can be read as a question."⁴⁶³

In crafting and publishing *Dabru Emet*, there were two pronounced areas of internal controversy among the committee members (regarding the authority of revelation and regarding the State of Israel) and there were three prominent areas of external controversy (regarding the authority to issue a Jewish document, regarding whether Christians and Jews worship the same God, and whether Nazism was a Christian phenomenon). The external issues would become a topic of heated and public debate among Jewish leaders after the publication of the document, within the companion books published by the National Jewish Scholars Project, in op-eds, sermons, and public pronouncements.

The question of authority

There were two issues surrounding authority in the process of writing and disseminating *Dabru Emet*. The first was an internal argument among the authors about the authority of the Bible that grounds Judaism and Christianity, respectively, and the

⁴⁶² See Rashi's Commentary on Zechariah 8:16.

⁴⁶³ Michael Signer 2003, 195.

second was the external challenging of the authors' authority to publish such as a statement in the first place.

The internal argument regarding authority that led to the most heated theological debate centered on the second claim of *Dabru Emet* affirming that “Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book — the Bible.” The arguments between Frymer-Kensky and Novak were considerable,⁴⁶⁴ even described by Novak as “some knock-down drag-out battles,” adding “but nonetheless we pulled this off.” To the feminist scholar Frymer-Kensky, the term “authority” connoted a hierarchal patriarchy; whereas, she contended, in both Christianity and Judaism, the Bible functions and should function as a source of “religious orientation, spiritual and communal education.”⁴⁶⁵ To Novak, to say that the Bible was merely inspiring or enlightening failed to convey the weight of the text in each tradition. “Shakespeare’s inspiring to me,” Novak noted wryly.⁴⁶⁶

As a compromise position, in the final text the word “seek” rather than “find” was utilized to identify the authority which grounds Christian and Jewish belief and practice, thus removing authority from the divine realm and placing it in the human realm.⁴⁶⁷

In addressing the external issue of the authority of the overall document, Novak recalled the story of his Catholic teacher, Germain Grisez, who was an ethicist. Grisez begins his book on his responsa saying that he was once talking to a group and they said,

⁴⁶⁴ David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

⁴⁶⁵ David Novak, “Dabru Emet After Twenty Years: The Question of Authority.”

⁴⁶⁶ David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

⁴⁶⁷ David Sandmel, Interview by Judy Schindler, August 5, 2024.

“Who are you to tell people what to do?” Grisez replied, “Because they asked me. If you don’t want me to tell you what to do, then don’t ask me.”⁴⁶⁸

In Novak’s mind, the four scholars were asked and so they replied. Novak recalled that when questioned, “‘Who appointed you,’ I said, ‘We appointed ourselves. We were only speaking for ourselves. We’re not speaking on behalf of the entire Jewish community... If you disagree with us, write your own statement.’”⁴⁶⁹

Dabru Emet was not envisioned by its authors to be a *Teshuvah*, a responsum, a written decision of legal scholars applying *halachah*, Jewish law to modern society.⁴⁷⁰ It was not meant to be a *pesaq din* (a legal decision) or a *takkanah* (an “enactment” made by Jewish legal scholars revising or instituting a new ordinance for which existing law is inadequate or silent). Nor was it an official statement emerging from denominations or organizations -- a contemporary practice for establishing new positions and practices.

In answering the question about the authoritative nature of *Dabru Emet*, Leighton, who attended every session of the document’s drafting as an observer said:

“This was not meant to be a *Nostra Aetate*. It was not meant to be an apodictic proclamation that would be normative in terms of governing how Jews think about Christianity. Quite the contrary, it was to be a Jewish document, which is to say a statement that provokes and evokes ongoing serious exploration in conversation. So it wasn’t [intended] to be definitive. And so that a number of people who read this as though it was carved in stone totally misconstrued and

⁴⁶⁸ David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

⁴⁶⁹ David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

⁴⁷⁰ In Hebrew, responsa are called “*she’elot u’tshvuot*,” literally meaning “questions and answers.” Responsa are a 1000-year-old genre of Rabbinic literature of Jewish legal decisions applying *halachah* whereby a petitioner would be obligated to abide by the rabbinic pronouncement. Michael Signer, “Dabru Emet: Sic et Non,” Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations, October 28, 2002, <https://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analyses/dabru-emet-signer>.

confused the way in which Christians write documents and proclamations and the way in which a Jew would write responsa.”⁴⁷¹

The Question of Israel

The same questions of analysis can be asked about every document of dialogue: to what extent is the document theological/doctrinal and to what extent is it political? To what extent is it created by a political reality, does it have political consequences, and/or is it speaking to issues beyond those that are internal, spiritual and religious to the community of authors?

In the Jewish scholars’ eyes, the document was primarily theological. Its eight statements had a theocentric foundation that began with the notion of one God and ended with an eschatological vision. “It was meant to be theological,” Novak affirms. “All four of us, I think could be said, were theologians.”⁴⁷²

Sandmel expanded upon that notion: “I think anything that starts out talking about God is theological, so I certainly think it's theological. It's probably also somewhat political.” In explicating, Sandmel noted that the final sentence in the statement addressing Israel crossed the line from theology to politics. Addressing Israel was the most complicated to navigate and where personal difference of perspectives played a prominent role.

“We were all Zionists,” Novak noted so there was no debate there. The struggle emerged in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *Dabru Emet*’s third claim focusing

⁴⁷¹ Christopher Leighton, Interview by Judy Schindler, September 10, 2024.

⁴⁷² David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

on Israel is grounded in theology noting that Christians and Jews agree that the land was Biblically promised to Jews as the physical center of God's covenant. The compromise of the authors that produced the final sentence of the claim on Israel was clearly political: "We also recognize that Jewish tradition mandates justice for all non-Jews who reside in a Jewish state."

Finding wording on the topic of Israel that would speak to *Dabru Emet's* many intended audiences would be impossible. The authors faced the challenge of saying something concise about the Christian relationship with Israel, given diverse Christian opinions on Israel -- from evangelical to liberal Protestants. Moreover, the authors needed to find broad ground to speak to the diversity of Jewish minds on the topic. At the end of day, there were some Jewish leaders who refused to sign on over the failures to mention or address the Palestinian plight.⁴⁷³ In a critique, Yehezkel Landau,⁴⁷⁴ an interfaith educator with dual Israeli and American citizenship, noted that while the final language may have been the "most achievable rhetorical consensus" among the authors, the conditionality of the Jewish Biblical claim to Israel required the authors to address both Jewish and Palestinian territorial claims within an "inclusively just framework." Landau sees this as "not only a political challenge; it is a theological and moral imperative for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike."⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ David Sandmel, Interview by Judy Schindler, August 5, 2024.

⁴⁷⁴ Yehezkel Landau served as Associate Professor of Interfaith Relations and Holder of the Abrahamic Partnerships Chair at Hartford Seminary, CT from 2002-2016. He is a dual Israeli-American citizen and an interfaith educator focused on improving Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations and promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace-building efforts.

⁴⁷⁵ Yehezkel Landau, "Christian Solidarity With Both Jews and Palestinians: A Critical Response to Dabru Emet," *American Religion*, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://www.american-religion.org/dabruemet/landau>.

The Question of Whether Jews and Christians Worship the Same God

The first highly contentious claim that was debated externally and extensively upon the document's publication was the initial statement that Jews and Christians worship the same God. Novak acknowledges that this was a *machloket*, a disagreement, among medieval Jewish thinkers and that Novak and his colleagues with the Jewish Scholars Project fell to one side of the debate agreeing that though Christian worship of God through Jesus is not viable for Jews, it is for gentiles and is bringing over a billion people into a relationship with the God of Israel.

This was a claim which most Orthodox leaders, at the time of the document's dissemination, publicly rejected. Orthodox scholar David Berger, then Professor of History at City University of New York, was asked by the Orthodox Union (OU), the largest Orthodox organization in the U.S. representing 1,000 congregations, to write a response to *Dabru Emet* that was issued as a press release on September 14, 2000, by the OU Advocacy Center. Berger acknowledged the admirable effort of the authors for whom he had high regard yet labeled their efforts of "theological reciprocity" as "fraught with danger." With a primary focus on the first claim, Berger writes:

"...although it is proper to emphasize that Christians 'worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, creator of heaven and earth,' it is essential to add that worship of Jesus of Nazareth as a manifestation or component of that God constitutes what Jewish law and theology call *avodah zarah*, or foreign worship—at least if done by a Jew. Many Jews died to underscore this point, and the bland assertion that 'Christian worship is not a viable choice for Jews is thoroughly inadequate.'"⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁶ Rabbi Dr. David Berger (1943-) of Yeshiva University is an American academic and dean of Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies. He received his BA from Yeshiva College and MA and PhD from Columbia University. He is an expert on interfaith dialogue and medieval Jewish-Christian debate. The Orthodox Union asked him to write a response to *Dabru Emet*. David Berger,

Orthodox historian Professor Jon D. Levenson,⁴⁷⁷ in his scathing 5000+ word critique titled “How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue” published in *Commentary Magazine* in December 2001, wrote, “Participants in Jewish-Christian dialogue often speak as if Jews and Christians agreed about God but disagreed about Jesus. They have forgotten that in a very real sense, orthodox Christians believe Jesus is God.”⁴⁷⁸

Dabru Emet’s four authors would publicly express their disappointment in Levenson’s “contemptuous dismissal” and “unjust condemnation” of their work. They felt that Levenson rested his callous critique on the brief document alone without addressing the companion book, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, which provided the substantive debate that Levenson desired.⁴⁷⁹

The Question of Whether Nazism was a Christian Phenomenon

The roots and responsibility for the Holocaust and evaluating Christian complicity and culpability for the spreading of Nazi ideology was a final area of highly contentious

“Statement by Dr. David Berger regarding the New York Times ad by Dabru Emet,” *Orthodox Union Advocacy Center*, September 14, 2000, accessed December 14, 2024, https://advocacy.ou.org/statement_by_dr_david_berger_regarding_the_new_york_times_ad_by_dabru_emet/.

⁴⁷⁷ Jon D. Levenson has been the Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard University since 1988, having previously taught at the University of Chicago and at Wellesley College. His scholarship focuses on interpretations of the Bible, rabbinic midrash, philosophical and theological issues involved in Biblical studies, and ancient and modern Jewish-Christian relations.

⁴⁷⁸ Jon D. Levenson, “How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *Commentary*, Dec. 2001: Vol. 112 (5), <https://www.commentary.org/articles/jon-levenson-2/how-not-to-conduct-jewish-christian-dialogue>.

⁴⁷⁹ “Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *Commentary*, April 2002.

debate — in fact, according to Signer, it generated the most controversy of any of the statements.⁴⁸⁰ *Dabru Emet*'s authors assert, "Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi extermination of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians."

Already in 1945, when the first document of dialogue, The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, was issued, it began to broadly address the issue of Christian responsibility for the tragedies of the Holocaust (without using the term Holocaust as it was not until the 1960s that this word was commonly used to describe the murder of six million Jews).⁴⁸¹ The authors who were surviving members of the Confessing Church acknowledged their failure to stand up to Nazi tyranny. As addressed in chapter one, Canadian Holocaust scholar Doris Bergen supported *Dabru Emet*'s conclusion that Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon, noting that Adolph Hitler, Henrich Himmler (commander of the German Schutzstaffel, the SS, the Nazi Protection Squads), and other Nazi leaders considered Nazism and Christianity "irreconcilable antagonists."⁴⁸² Likewise, and in large part, the aim of the 1947 Ten Points of Seelisberg, was to show that antisemitism and Nazism are in no way an inevitable outcome of Christianity.

⁴⁸⁰ Michael Signer 2003, 197.

⁴⁸¹ Steve Friess, "When 'Holocaust' Became 'The Holocaust' An etymological mystery," *The New Republic*, <https://newrepublic.com/article/121807/when-holocaust-became-holocaust>.

⁴⁸² Doris L. Bergen 1996, 1.

The experiences of *Dabru Emet*'s four authors led them to conclude that Christian teachings could and did lead many down a different path. There were Christian leaders who protested. There were Christian rescuers who acted upon their faith, risking their lives to save Jews. And as seen by the hanging of anti-Nazi dissident German Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a key founding member of the Confessing Church, there were many Christian church leaders, who saw the destruction of the synagogues on Kristallnacht as "an attack not just on Jews but an attack on the God of the Old and New Testament and the Christian Church."⁴⁸³

Several vocal Jewish critics disagreed with this point of view and, consequently refused to sign on to *Dabru Emet*. Several Christian critics also responded negatively to the statement on Nazism as a Christian phenomenon. These Christian dissenters either saw this statement as an error or believed it might "have the effect of diminishing the Christian sense of responsibility for the Shoah."⁴⁸⁴

American Catholic theologian Rosemary Ruether's⁴⁸⁵ earlier writings taught that anti-Jewish laws of the Church were revived in Nazi Law:

The antisemitic heritage of Christian civilization is neither an accident nor a peripheral element. It cannot be dismissed as a legacy from 'paganism,' or as a product of purely sociological conflicts between the church and synagogue. Antisemitism in Western civilization springs, at its root, from Christian theological anti-Judaism. It was Christian theology that developed the thesis of the reprobate status of the Jew in history and laid the foundations for the demonic view of the Jew which fanned the flames of popular hatred. This hatred was not only inculcated by Christian preaching and exegesis. It became incorporated into

⁴⁸³ *Bonhoeffer*, directed by Martin Doblmeier (Distributed by First Run/Icarus Films), 56:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9vqxIjH6Ok.

⁴⁸⁴ Michael Signer 2003, 197-198.

⁴⁸⁵ Rosemary Ruether (1936-2022) was an American Catholic feminist theologian who taught at Howard University from 1965-1976 and at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and Northwestern University from 1976 to 2002 as the Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology.

the structure of Canon Law and also the civil law formed under the Christian Roman emperors...These anti-Judaic laws of the church and the Christian empire laid the basis for the debasement of the civic and personal status of the Jew in Christian society that lasted until the emancipation in the nineteenth century. These laws were, in part, revived in the Nazi Nuremberg laws of 1933.⁴⁸⁶

Similar to Ruether, other critics of *Dabru Emet* saw a direct line from Christian teachings to Nazi ideology and felt that the danger of exonerating Christians from their past could be that it would deter them from the present-day work of reconciliation. While the main goal of *Dabru Emet's* authors was to focus on commonalities, some critics, most vocally Levenson, argued that this was a dangerous mode of dialogue that minimizes, neglects and denies difference. When it came to the document's fourth claim, Levenson responded:

"The Nazi war against the Jews was based on race; to the murderers, whether the victims believed in Judaism in any sense was not pertinent, and people of Jewish ancestry who were altogether secular or who had converted to Christianity were sent to their deaths alongside their most observant kinsmen. For Christians without Jewish ancestors, by contrast, it was hardly difficult to avoid the genocidal scrutiny of Nazi Germany. Only those few believers who spoke out against the regime were in any danger.

...In suggesting that Christians, too, were intended victims of the Holocaust, the authors of *Dabru Emet* falsely put them in the same boat with Jews—or, to be more precise, on the same train to Auschwitz. To say the least, this is taking the interests of interfaith solidarity too far."⁴⁸⁷

The document itself and its companion books, acknowledged the irreconcilable differences between Christians and Jews that will not be resolved in this world. Yet at the

⁴⁸⁶ Rosemary Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism*, (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1990), 31. First published by Crossroad Publishers in 1981.

⁴⁸⁷ Jon D. Levenson, "How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue."

same time, the authors recognized the value that dialogue and collaborative action could bring. The brokenness of our world manifested through poverty, persecution and pain is ever-present. Shared action in the pursuit of justice and peace will hasten the “kingdom of God” envisioned by Isaiah for which both Jews and Christians yearn.

The Reception of *Dabru Emet*

With its publication in *The New York Times*, *Dabru Emet* received global coverage. It was translated into a dozen languages.⁴⁸⁸ The reception of the documents by the Christian community was by and large positive. The Christian community recognized the monumental nature of Jews taking a public stand on Christianity and many Christian bodies responded with public statements of appreciation. The United States Conference of Catholic and Bishops issued a letter of appreciation noting it as an act of reconciliation offered in the spirit “repentance and humility.”⁴⁸⁹ The text, opening with a reference to the 1947 Seelisberg Conference and its Ten Points and Vatican II’s 1965 *Nostra Aetate*, viewed *Dabru Emet* as a formal response crafted by the four drafters and acknowledged the great scholarship and religious openness the writing required.

Similar positive responses expressing gratitude for the authors’ work and encouraging their respective communities to engage in dialogue around the document were crafted by The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, the European

⁴⁸⁸ Christopher Leighton 2024, 104.

⁴⁸⁹ “The Power of Words: A Catholic Response to *Dabru Emet*,” The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), October 11, 2000, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://www.ccr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/bceia-2000oct18>.

Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the American Baptist Church.⁴⁹⁰ In response to *Dabru Emet*, the Synod of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Germany) crafted its own original substantive document of confession and commitment to study and dialogue to ensure continued positive Jewish-Christian relations.⁴⁹¹ The Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations likewise responded by developing their own ten statements⁴⁹² written to Christians to consider as grounding for their relationship with Jews. They viewed their work as a counterpart to *Dabru Emet*.

Ironically, just five days before *Dabru Emet* was published, the Vatican issued a declaration titled “*Dominus Iesus*: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” asserting that the Catholic Church provided the unique path toward Salvation. With that text, the Catholic pendulum once again swung towards Christian supremacy. *Dominus Iesus*’ twenty-three points included assertions that dialogue does not replace the Church’s mission to the nations; pluralism endangers the

⁴⁹⁰ Interfaith Relations Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, “An Ecumenical Response to ‘Dabru Emet,’” February, 24, 2001, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/ecumenical-christian/nccc01feb24>. European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People, “A Response to Dabru Emet,” May 31, 2003, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://www.jcrelations.net/article/a-response-to-dabru-emet.pdf>. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), “Lutheran-Jewish Panel Welcomes ‘Dabru Emet,’” November 16, 2000, *ELCA*, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://www.elca.org/news-and-events/4046>. Committee on Christian Unity of the American Baptist Churches, “An American Baptist Response to ‘Dabru Emet,’” June 1, 2002, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://www.baptistholocauststudies.org/dabru-emet>.

⁴⁹¹ Synod of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, “Christians and Jews,” September 22, 2001, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/eur/neelc01sep22>.

⁴⁹² The Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, “A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People,” September 1, 2002, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/ecumenical-christian/csg-02sep1>.

missionary role of the church; Christ is the only path to salvation; and followers of other religions can receive divine grace but “objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.”⁴⁹³

The reception of *Dabru Emet* by the Jewish world was largely positive as well — though the signatories broke down along denominational lines. It was endorsed by the leadership of the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements.⁴⁹⁴ Soloveitchik’s sway opposing interreligious dialogue was still strong and only a handful of Orthodox leaders signed on.

There were a minority of Jews who publicly and passionately objected to the text. In the author’s eyes, Levenson and Berger were the most notable among them. Lander understood that the rift among modern Jewish scholars was based on their understanding of the ways Judaism had historically been shaped by encounters with Christians. The opposition to *Dabru Emet* was “rooted in the biblical myth of Jewish impermeability, which asserts the view of an essentialist core to Judaism that has consistently repelled and resisted outside influences.”⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ “Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church,” *The Holy See*, accessed November 30, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

⁴⁹⁴ David Sandmel, Interview by Judy Schindler, August 5, 2024.

⁴⁹⁵ Shira Lander, “From the ‘National Jewish Scholars Group’ to Dabru Emet: Encountering Intrareligious Rifts,” *American Religion*, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://www.american-religion.org/dabruemet/lander>.

English Israeli Orthodox Rabbi and prominent interfaith leader, David Rosen,⁴⁹⁶ signed the document. In a 2001 address to the Dutch Council of Christians and Jews, Rosen stated that he did not consider the document to be far-reaching. He cited the International Council of Christians and Jews' 1993 statement titled "Jews and Christians in Search of a Common Religious Basis for Contributing Towards a Better World" as having greater depth.⁴⁹⁷ Yet still, Rosen saw *Dabru Emet's* value in the public nature of the statement and in the Christian community's sincere appreciation for this Jewish declaration of reciprocity that prominent Catholic and Protestant leaders claimed as opening a new era in Jewish-Christian relations. The statement acknowledged that Christians and Christianity today are not the same as what they were in the past and that Christianity is no longer a threat but an ally. *Dabru Emet* reflected a Jewish commitment not to forget the past but "to look forward to a unique fraternal theological interaction in the future."⁴⁹⁸

Commentary magazine, in its April 2002 issue, published an array of responses to Levenson's lengthy critique. In addition to *Dabru Emet's* four authors, sixteen additional

⁴⁹⁶ Rabbi David Shlomo Rosen (1951-) is an English-Israeli rabbi. He was ordained as an Orthodox rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel. He was Chief Rabbi of Ireland (1979-1985) moving to Israel in 1985. He served as AJC's International Director of Interreligious Affairs for twenty-three years. From 2005 until 2009 he headed the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultations (IJCIC). He currently serves as Special Interfaith Advisor to the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi.

⁴⁹⁷ International Council of Christians and Jews, "Jews and Christians in Search of a Common Religious Basis for Contributing Towards a Better World," March 1, 1993, accessed December 15, 2024, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ICCJ_1993.htm.

⁴⁹⁸ David Rosen, "*Dabru Emet*: Its Significance for the Jewish-Christian Dialogue," (Address, 20th anniversary celebration of the Dutch Council of Christians and Jews at Tilburg, The Netherlands, November 6, 2001), https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/rosen.htm.

writers, most of whom were scholars in the field of interfaith relations weighed in. The majority viewed Levenson's criticism as unfair and overly dismissive. A handful supported Levenson's premise — Wyschogrod and Berger among them. Jacob Neusner,⁴⁹⁹ called Levenson's article a "splendid critique" and added that *Dabru Emet* is a politically expedient document erroneously melding differences between Judaism and Christianity to bolster Reform and Conservative clergy whose congregations are filled with intermarried couples.⁵⁰⁰

Dabru Emet did not have the reach to the laity of the Jewish community that the authors had hoped. In Leighton's estimation, "...the Jewish community was in kind of a self-protective posture."⁵⁰¹ He believed the synagogues were functioning as places of refuge where they could bolster a sense of distinct Jewish identity. Leighton understood Jews to be saying, "Our time out away from the synagogue is in the rough and tumble world where we're bumping up against Christians or people with no religious tradition whatsoever. And so, our Jewish identity is best served by going back to the sanctuary where we don't have to get bombarded with... *avodah zarah*, these strange notions."⁵⁰²

In celebrating the *Dabru Emet*'s 20th anniversary, the ICJS invited thirty-two scholars from across the globe to contribute essays weighing in on the document, offering

⁴⁹⁹ Jacob Neusner (1932-2016) was a prolific American scholar of Judaism, authoring more than 900 books. Neusner received his BA from Harvard University, was ordained by and received his master's degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary and received his PhD from Columbia University.

⁵⁰⁰ "Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *Commentary*, April 2002.

⁵⁰¹ Christopher Leighton, Interview by Judy Schindler, September 10, 2024.

⁵⁰² In his book *A Sacred Argument*, Leighton translates *avodah zarah* as "strange worship." Christopher Leighton 2024, 105. Christopher Leighton, Interview by Judy Schinder, September 10, 2024.

critique, historical reflection, and reframing.⁵⁰³ Many of the issues raised in the original debates surrounding the writing of the documents emerged. Not surprisingly Christian critiques surrounding the statement on Israel remain. For 20 years, Dr. Ed Kessler,⁵⁰⁴ founder and director of the Woolf Institute that is dedicated to Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations, has included *Dabru Emet* as a key text in his curriculum for Christian students studying theology at the Cambridge Theological Federation. As Kessler trains more than 300 students annually from varied Christian denominations across the UK, he notes: “The paragraph that generated most difficulty and criticism concerned Israel, especially the omission of the term ‘Palestinian.’ A common response to ‘Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel’ was, ‘What about the Palestinians, and why haven’t they been mentioned?’ Unsurprisingly, this criticism has increased in intensity in recent years.”⁵⁰⁵

In response to the question about whether, in retrospect, there was anything about *Dabru Emet* Novak would have changed, he replied, “No. Things could have been worded a little differently. I have no regrets about it. I think that it did its job. The fact

⁵⁰³ “Dabru Emet: 20 Years Later,” *Institute for Islamic, Christian, Jewish Studies*, accessed December 13, 2024, <https://icjs.org/dabru-emet-20-years-later/>.

⁵⁰⁴ Edward Kessler (1963-), received his First Degree from the University of Leeds, his MTS degree from Harvard Divinity School, his MBA from the University of Stirling and his PhD from the University of Cambridge. Kessler founded the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations (CJCR) in 1998 which was changed to the Woolf Institute in 2010 and its focus was expanded to focus on relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

⁵⁰⁵ Ed Kessler, “Responses to *Dabru Emet* from the United Kingdom: Teaching the Next Generation of Christian Leaders,” *American Religion*, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://www.american-religion.org/dabruemet/kessler>.

that people in the Orthodox community... they're coming out from under [Soloveitchik's prohibition against Jewish-Christian dialogue], that I think is a result of *Dabru Emet*.”⁵⁰⁶

Lander noted that *Dabru Emet* would have benefited by expanding the group of core authors to include those outside North America: “I know a lot of Israeli academics who would've been really good participants and honest brokers in a nonpolitical way ... I think it would've been a better reflection of the audience that it intended to address had we extended or included Israeli theologians.”

Sandmel reflected on that fact that the document is “predicated on a certain concept of Jews as a religious group ... I take great pains these days in my teaching and so forth to problematize that idea. This document doesn't do that. I'm not sure if it could have or should have.”⁵⁰⁷

Sandmel is referencing the notion that Jewish identity may not include religion. According to a 2021 Pew study on Jewish identity and belief, “Religion is not central to the lives of most U.S. Jews. Even Jews by religion are much less likely than Christian adults to consider religion to be very important in their lives (28% vs. 57%).”⁵⁰⁸ At the same time, three-quarters of American Jews saw “being Jewish” is either very important or somewhat important to their lives. Jewish identity today is a combination of religion,

⁵⁰⁶ Novak was referring to the later documents on Jewish-Christian relations that would be issued by Orthodox organizations. David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

⁵⁰⁷ David Sandmel, Interview by Judy Schindler, August 5, 2024.

⁵⁰⁸ “Jewish Identity and Belief,” *Pew Research Center*, May 11, 2021, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-identity-and-belief/>.

ancestry, and culture and varies widely from person to person. Only one-in-ten view Jewish identity as only a matter of religion.⁵⁰⁹

Just as Sandmel seeks to problematize notions of what it means to be Jewish in his teaching, incorporating broader notions of what it means to Jewish into interreligious declarations would problematize these theological documents. Yet, since these documents are dialogical and educational tools, incorporating concepts of Jewish identity based on peoplehood would have great value.

While *Dabru Emet* became a “first” Jewish document of dialogue because of its broader interdenominational backing, it was not the last. In December 2015, the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation issued the document “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians.”⁵¹⁰ It was a statement signed by 80 Orthodox rabbis from the Americas, Israel and Europe. It acknowledged the sincere transformation of Catholic doctrine and teachings that began in 1965 with *Nostra Aetate* and continued with subsequent Church documents that rejected antisemitism and the deicide charge against Jews and affirmed the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people. It cites and affirms the precedents of medieval Jewish scholars Maimonides and Judah Halevi⁵¹¹ who recognized that “the emergence of Christianity in human history is neither an accident nor an error, but the willed divine

⁵⁰⁹ “Jewish Identity and Belief,” *Pew Research Center* 2021.

⁵¹⁰ Jehoschua Ahrens, Irving Greenberg, and Eugene Korn, editors, *From Confrontation to Covenantal Partnership: Jews and Christians Reflect on the Orthodox Rabbinic Statement “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven.”* (Urim Publications, 2021), 11-16.

⁵¹¹ Judah Halevi (c. 1075 – 1141) was a Sephardic Jewish poet, physician and philosopher. He was born in Spain and in 1140 fled to Egypt.

outcome and gift to the nations.” It asserts that both faith communities share a covenantal mission to perfect the world under God’s sovereignty.

To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven recognizes a transformed relationship between the two faith communities:

“In the past, relations between Christians and Jews were often seen through the adversarial relationship of Esau and Jacob, yet Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berliner (Netziv) already understood at the end of the 19th century that Jews and Christians are destined by God to be loving partners: ‘In the future when the children of Esau are moved by pure spirit to recognize the people of Israel and their virtues, then we will also be moved to recognize that Esau is our brother.’”⁵¹²

In August 2017, a declaration entitled “Between Jerusalem and Rome: Reflections on 50 Years of *Nostra Aetate*,” would be issued by three major Orthodox Jewish organizations: The Conference of European Rabbis, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and the Rabbinical Council of America. It acknowledged the profound theological differences between Judaism and Christianity and traced and applauded the significant milestones marking the transformed attitude of the Church toward the Jewish people. It ultimately declared, “Despite the irreconcilable theological differences, we Jews view Catholics as our partners, close allies, friends and brothers in our mutual quest for a better world blessed with peace, social justice and security.”⁵¹³

After five decades since *Nostra Aetate* was first proclaimed, the faith of the Orthodox rabbinate in the true *teshuvah*, the true theological turning of Christians, was in large part affirmed and statements were issued in return acknowledging a new stage in

⁵¹² Jehoschua Ahrens et al. 2021, 13.

⁵¹³ “Between Jerusalem and Rome: Reflections on 50 Years of *Nostra Aetate*,” Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/jewish/cer-cri-rca-2017>.

Jewish understanding of Christians and Christianity. David Novak would attribute this Orthodox turnaround, in part, to *Dabru Emet*. “*Dabru Emet* broke the ice,” he said.⁵¹⁴

The Authors at the Table

With each pioneering document of dialogue, the authors engaged with the work do so not merely out of academic curiosity, but because their life experiences propel them forward. *Dabru Emet* was crafted by a third generation of interfaith scholars.⁵¹⁵ Several of the authors were raised by parents and taught by professors who nurtured an interfaith appreciation.

Dr. David Novak described himself as growing up in a home that was marked by strong interfaith relations. “One of the things that I’m grateful to my parents for is they were not afraid of the *goyim*, of Christians, unlike certain very traditional people who have Christophobia...”⁵¹⁶ His parents’ friends were “devout Episcopalians” as he described them. They came to David’s defense when he, as a youth, came to embrace traditional rituals such as wearing tefillin – a practice that his parents, whom he described as “nominal Reform Jews,” found discomfoting.

As an undergrad at the University of Chicago, Novak studied with Dr. Marcus Barth, the eldest son of the famous Karl Barth. Novak wrote his bachelor’s thesis on the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew which he said, “reads like a page in the Talmud.” The ability from the youngest of ages to know where he stood and appreciate the sacred

⁵¹⁴ David Novak. Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

⁵¹⁵ On the generations of Jewish scholars on Christianity, see footnote 416.

⁵¹⁶ David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

literature of the other, set the stage for Novak's lifetime career as both a Jewish scholar and as an interfaith scholar.

As mentioned, Novak was a student of Heschel during Heschel's year of engagement with Vatican II. Novak reflected, "What Professor Heschel showed is that from a deeply authentically Jewish perspective, we could engage Christians because the world has changed dramatically since the time of the medieval disputations."⁵¹⁷

Polish philosopher at the University of Warsaw, Stanislaw Krajewski, notes that "almost all the ideas" expressed in Abraham Joshua Heschel's groundbreaking 1965 lecture "No Man Is an Island" are included in the "unprecedented Jewish declaration on Christianity 'Dabru emet' [sic]."⁵¹⁸ Since Heschel was Novak's teacher during his formative years of developing as a theologian and since *Dabru Emet* is built upon the Novak's systematic theology, it should be no surprise that Heschel's thinking echoes so strongly in the text of *Dabru Emet*.

David Sandmel, the facilitator at the table and an editor of the two companion volumes was the son of Samuel Sandmel,⁵¹⁹ a rabbi and professor who was a pioneer in post-World War II, Jewish-Christian dialogue. The elder Sandmel was an internationally recognized authority on early Christianity and his home life, as remembered by his son David, reflected this generous welcoming of the religious other: "Shabbat dinners,

⁵¹⁷ David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

⁵¹⁸ Stanislaw Krajewski, "Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Declaration 'Dabru Emet,'" *Shofar* 26, no. 1 (2007): 154.

⁵¹⁹ Samuel Sandmel (1911-1979) was ordained by the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in 1937 and received his doctorate from Yale university in 1949. He was professor of Jewish Literature and Thought at Vanderbilt University from 1949 to 1952 and professor of Bible and Hellenistic Literature at HUC from 1952 to 1978. Kenneth Briggs, "Samuel Sandmel," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/11/07/archives/samuel-sandmel-scholar-helped-better-jewishchristian-relations.html>.

Passover Seders, there were always Christian clergy and religious scholars at our table. So that was just a part of what I did growing up. I sort of feel like I went into the family business.”⁵²⁰

Lastly, having a woman at the table mattered. Novak noted, “We were very conscious that there should be a woman. Tikvah was a Biblical theologian, impressive... we wanted a female participant who was there not as a token woman but as a woman who happened to be somebody whose scholarship and opinions could be respected irrespective of gender.”⁵²¹

It was striking that the authors of *Dabru Emet* are not listed in alphabetical order on the statement itself. It can be deduced that David Novak, as the primary theologian at the table upon whose work the document was based, was listed first, though it is confounding why Frymer-Kensky, as the only woman, is listed last. When the authors who were interviewed were asked, no reason was given.

Why did it take five and a half decades for a Jewish document to be drafted by an interdenominational group of scholars and given authority by Jewish interdenominational leaders? Afterall, Jews played a part in the drafting of Jewish–Christian documents from almost immediately after the war. The answer cannot be misunderstanding, mistrust, and prejudicial attitudes — because historically that went both ways in the Jewish–Christian relationship, and yet the Protestants and Catholics managed to produce earlier documents of dialogue.

⁵²⁰ David Sandmel, Interview by Judy Schindler, August 5, 2024.

⁵²¹ David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024.

On a surface level, one might say it was a question of authority. Judaism does not have the authoritative, hierarchical structure of leadership that exists in many Christian denominations. The four tenured faculty at non-Jewish institutions, each of whom addressed Christianity as part of their scholarship, wielded their academic authority to influence the interfaith conversation. They all addressed Christianity through their scholarship; this gave them the historical and textual expertise on which to build a statement that reflected a new understanding of Jewish-Christian relations. As academics, they had the freedom and independence from political pressures that was unobtainable to leaders of congregations and Jewish organizations. Novak commented, that had the authors “been working for official Jewish organizations, it would have never seen the light of day...We didn’t have to check in with central headquarters to get a *heter* [permission] for doing these things.”⁵²²

Yet on a deeper level, it is far more likely that the unfathomable barbarity of the Holocaust left Jewish leaders and scholars viewing atonement as a one-way obligation. It is likely they believed that it was only Christians who needed to apologize and reach out to reconcile. There could be no comparison between the historic harm caused by anti-Christian teachings in Judaism and the sheer magnitude of violence that Christian anti-Jewish teachings had historically caused. With the establishment of the State of Israel and with the growing confidence of world Jewry in the last half of the 20th century, Jewish scholars and leaders would come to see the value of an internal reckoning of their

⁵²² David Novak, Interview by Judy Schindler, July 2, 2024

theological teachings on Christianity. A Jewish statement on Christians and Christianity could serve to deepen and strengthen the relationship between Jews and Christians.

It is also notable that the three prior pioneering documents (the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, the Ten Points of Seelisberg and *Nostra Aetate*) were European-centric. The majority of the players who penned these documents were European and they were responding to the Holocaust, a European disaster. In contrast, *Dabru Emet* was a product of America. In the words of American Jewish historian, Gary P. Zola, by the 1960's, American Jewry was confidently rooted "as the largest, richest, most philanthropic, and politically powerful Jewry in the world."⁵²³ The 1960s in America was a time of universalism when the Civil Rights Movement and the second wave of feminism were growing in American consciousness. Zola added, "Only in a land where there was separation of Church and State – where (theoretically) all religions (and those with no religion) stand on equal footing," would a document such *Dabru Emet* be authored. As secure Americans, the scholars who crafted *Dabru Emet* valued interfaith collaboration. They worked with authority, humility, and with a commitment to mutuality, recognizing that reconciliation was a two-way street. That notion of equality compelled them to reckon with their own spiritual shortcomings, just as their Christian counterparts had consistently done over the prior five and half decades.

⁵²³ Gary P. Zola (1952-) Gary Phillip Zola is Executive Director Emeritus of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and Edwin M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor Emeritus of the American Jewish Experience and Reform Jewish History. Personal Communication with Judy Schindler, March 3, 2025.

Documents of dialogue are in conversation with one another. *Dabru Emet* was both a response to the pioneering Christian documents that came before it and asked questions that the authors of future documents of interfaith dialogue would answer. As *Dabru Emet*'s authors crafted the document finding their own voice, they learned from the voices of those before them. In studying the Vatican's 1998 document "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah," the Jewish authors gained a deep appreciation for the challenges in crafting such documents and the critical role of language to harmonize divergent stances.⁵²⁴ *Dabru Emet* was a response to Christian *teshuvah*, the Christian theological transformation that preceded it. For Jews could only have dialogue with those who believed that God's covenant with the Jewish people is enduring and that direct proselytization is not religiously required.

The four scholars who authored *Dabru Emet*, like the pioneering authors before them, understood that a statement in and of itself was not sufficient to change the hearts, minds, and practices of the Jewish community. *Dabru Emet* necessitated associated education and dialogue. Hence, the National Jewish Scholars Project crafted two companion books.

The name Israel means "one who wrestles with God." It is the name given in Genesis to Jacob by an angel with whom Jacob wrestled all night on the eve of his reconciliation with his brother Esau. The angel said, "Your name shall no longer be

⁵²⁴ Michael Signer 2003, 194.

called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with humans and have prevailed.” (Genesis 32:29)

In the eyes of the first to seventh century CE Rabbis who shaped the Talmud and the Midrash, Esau was identified with the Roman Empire (inclusive of both its early paganism and later Christianity) and Jacob represented Israel. In the eyes of some sages, Esau and Jacob (Christianity and Judaism) wrestle and later reconcile; they learn to live together and appreciate the accomplishments and innovations of the other. Yet in the eyes of other commentators, Esau and Jacob will always remain enemies.⁵²⁵

An antagonism and alienation of the Jewish and Christian communities from one another was created when the boundaries between the two ancient communities became set. In *The Jews of Germany: A Story of Sixteen Centuries*, American author and historian Marvin Lowenthal, describes this boundary: “The fence around the Torah became, in the hands of the Gentiles, a ghetto wall. The barrier which the Jews had built for their own preservation and for the salvation of humanity served to exclude them, generations on end, from the enjoyment of the most elementary human rights and decencies – to mark them off as a public enemy and a common object of prey. And the hue and cry to track them down was raised in the name of the very Messiah they had themselves devised as a blessing for mankind.”⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ Burton L. Visotzky, “Two Nations in Your Belly,” *Jewish Theological Seminary*, accessed September 26, 2024, <https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/two-nations-in-your-belly/#:~:text=In%20the%20world%20of%20the,been%20for%20their%20own%20needs>.

⁵²⁶ Marvin Lowenthal 1936, 10.

After the Holocaust, there was an intentional process of reconciliation made stage by stage where difference would not require hegemony nor homogeny. Like in all prior pioneering documents, the Shoah's memory loomed large. Sandmel reflected that just as *Nostra Aetate* has come to represent "Christianity's post-Shoah reconsideration of its relationship to the Jews; since its publication, *Dabru Emet* has come to represent the Jewish reconsideration of post-Shoah Christianity."⁵²⁷

The scholars who labored to craft *Dabru Emet* were God wrestlers who offered a Jewish theological framework for reconciling with their Christian counterparts. In the eyes of those who engage in dialogue, Esau and Jacob can be seen not only as brothers but as twin brothers whose relationship is rooted in family history. They were brothers who shared a womb, wrestled, parted ways and then reconciled at their father's grave.

Frymer-Kensky sets the context in the feminine, "Sometimes dialogue with a close sister can shed a transformative light on our own tradition."⁵²⁸ That is the goal of Jewish-Christian dialogue -- to recognize a common history, a common humanity, and a common family tree from which two unique branches of faith grow bearing diverse fruits that uplift their respective communities and nourish the world. Dialogue calls these communities to see that just as their past is interconnected so is their future.

⁵²⁷ David Fox Sandmel, "Is Dabru Emet the Jewish *Nostra Aetate*? Sic et non," *American Religion*, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.american-religion.org/dabruemet/sandmel>.

⁵²⁸ Tikvah Frymer-Kensky et al. 2000, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, 371.

Conclusion

“Repentance is not about repairing the past but about building a different future.”⁵²⁹

German theologian Katharina Von Kellenbach

Each of the four pioneering documents of dialogue examined through this research represents an act of return — to the essence of each community’s faith teachings and to the sources of each faith’s constructive messages surrounding its relationship with the religious other. These four documents are categorized as documents of dialogue because they reach out in a constructive way to the religious other to build a better and safer future. Each document emerged in a post-Holocaust world with an aim of *tikkun*, healing, of *teshuvah*, reconciliation, and of *tikvah*, hope.

Closely examining the pioneering Protestant, Jewish-Christian, Catholic and Jewish documents individually and then comparatively is instructive for interreligious activist scholars today. In a world that is broken and polarized, often at war, these documents unearth common historical roots and articulate a theology that calls a given faith community to hear and understand its religion in new ways (dialogue of the mind), to see the humanity of its religious counterpart (dialogue of the heart), and to act in partnership to heal our world (dialogue of the hands).

⁵²⁹ Katharina von Kellenbach 2020, 15.

Over the course of the fifty-five years, faith leaders felt compelled to come together in confession. Shaken from their complacency, they reckoned theologically with the world in which they lived. In October 1945, as the eleven German Protestant clergy who were all surviving members of the Confessing Church gathered in Stuttgart, they realized great repentance was required. While they had each, to varying degrees, protested Nazi infiltration of their churches, they nonetheless knew confession of wrongdoing was required. These leaders did not yet know the full extent of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, but they knew well enough that had a good portion of the sixty million Christians, among them forty million Protestants and twenty million Catholics, acted upon their faith and protested, the Nazis could not have succeeded in barbarically acting upon their antisemitic supremacist ideology. The Holocaust would not have happened. Their bold confession of communal responsibility – the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt -- would slowly seep into the consciousness and stir the conscience of their flock. While at first it was criticized as a document of betrayal, along the lines of the Versailles Treaty, the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt would ultimately become a source of great pride. The Stuttgart Declaration exemplified a contrition that was required by the leadership of the Provisional Committee of World Council of Churches (who were visiting the German leaders in Stuttgart) in order to move forward in actualizing their plans to formalize the international World Council of Churches as an organization and include their German Protestant community as partners.

On the heels of the Stuttgart Declaration came the Ten Points of Seelisberg. In late July and early August 1947, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders gathered in a

small Swiss village for an emergency conference on antisemitism. Based on the scholarship of Jules Isaac, whose wife and daughter were murdered in Auschwitz and whose son-in-law perished in Bergen-Belsen, the Christian leaders issued the Ten Points of Seelisberg. The document aimed to identify Christianity's strong rootedness in Judaism, purge Christianity of its teachings of contempt, and break the historic cycle of Christian animosity aimed at Jews. The declaration acknowledged that had all Christians been true to their faith, the persecution and extermination of millions of Jews would have been impossible.

From 1962 to 1965, Catholic prelates from across the globe would gather at the Vatican to fulfill Pope John XXIII's vision of metaphorically opening the windows of the church and letting fresh air in. A new path forward was needed not only to nurture an ecumenical spirit of unity across Christian denominations but to advance a theological transformation whereby the Church would nurture a positive relationship with their non-Catholic neighbors.

In 1960, Jules Isaac's seized the moment and secured an audience with Pope John XIII, thus becoming the metaphoric thread connecting Seelisberg's Ten Points to Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*. The updating of the Church for which John XXIII called and which, after his death, Pope Paul VI would shepherd in, would entail a reckoning with those aspects of Catholic doctrine, liturgy and teachings that had caused historic harm to Jews and to those of other faiths. Global Catholic and interfaith voices would passionately weigh in on an evolving Vatican II draft declaration on Catholic relations with Jews — both in favor and in opposition. But perseverance and partnerships of those who

understood its import and urgency would enable *Nostra Aetate*, both a Jewish and broader interreligious statement, to see the light of day. The watershed Roman Catholic declaration acknowledged Christianity's rootedness in Judaism and disavowed any demeaning and devaluing images, attitudes, or teachings about Jews. The Catholic Church would extend its circle of inclusion to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucianists.

From 1998 to 2000, four Jewish academics who were experts in Jewish-Christian relations felt called to collaborate on a statement to clarify and speak truth, offering a contemporary Jewish understanding of Christianity. The time had come to confront anti-Christian teachings and reframe traditional texts on Jewish relations with Christians in a positive light. The four authors found a unified voice with which to speak and with which more than 220 rabbis and Jewish intellectuals would agree and add their names in affirmation.

What propelled the theological transformation manifest in this new and evolving genre of literature? First and foremost, the immediate memory of the Holocaust. The undeniable danger that antisemitism posed loomed large in each of the pioneering documents of dialogue. The Nuremberg trials and subsequent tribunals presented incontrovertibly brutal evidence of exterminations, deportations, and genocide, and placed them squarely in the public eye. While for centuries Jews were victims of violent antisemitic massacres in lands with Christian majorities, the scale of the Holocaust's state-sponsored systematic genocide metastasized and wreaked global havoc. The far-reaching extent of the Nazification of the German Church implicated nearly every

Christian person with authority — especially the Protestant and Catholic Church leadership. Confronting the horrors of the Holocaust would require Christian denominational soul-searching, theological introspection and, ultimately, public accountability.

In essence, every one of the pioneering documents, *Dabru Emet* included, embodied a post-Holocaust theology -- discourses on Judaism and Christianity that would address the role of evil, of God's intervention and non-intervention, covenant, Christology, eschatology, and the role that historic and contemporary Christian antisemitism played or did not play in the genocide of European Jews. The Library of Congress has catalogued upwards of two thousand books and other printed resources on "Holocaust theology."⁵³⁰ This study seeks to contribute to the efflorescence of this literature.

Second, many of the religious leaders who authored these public proclamations of culpability and boldly pressed their church movements to issue them, were either personally affected by the Holocaust or witnesses to the tragedy as it was unfolding. The creators of these pioneering documents had lived experience of harm: either as Jews, as Jews who had converted to Christianity, as Christians having immediate family members who were Jews, or as individuals who had positions of authority in countries where Jewish persecution leading to genocide had been perpetrated.

⁵³⁰ Didier Pollefeyt, "Five Must-Reads on Holocaust Ethics and Theology Selected by Didier Pollefeyt," *Theology Research News*, October 31, 2022, accessed December 23, 2024, <https://theo.kuleuven.be/apps/press/theologyresearchnews/2022/10/31/five-must-reads-on-holocaust-ethics-and-theology-selected-by-didier-pollefeyt/>.

Jules Isaac's untiring and thorough research of the New Testament, born and fueled by his grief, led him to coin the terms "teaching of contempt" and "supersessionism"⁵³¹ and to steadfastly advocate for the Church to teach its true history and the unbroken bond it shared with the Jewish people. Two decades before calling for a Catholic reinterpretation of teachings surrounding its relations with Jews, Pope John XXIII (then acting as Archbishop Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli) had worked to save Jews from persecution and deportation in Bulgaria and throughout Eastern Europe.⁵³² Gregory Baum and John Oesterreicher, two of the core Catholic authors responsible for drafting iterations of the Vatican II's Jewish declaration, were victims of Nazi tyranny. Baum, born to a Jewish mother and Protestant father and raised as a Protestant, escaped Nazi persecution as a youth on the *Kindertransport*, the British rescue effort.⁵³³ Oesterreicher, raised as a Jew in Moravia, was able to flee West and later converted to Christianity. Oesterreicher's father died in Theresienstadt and his mother was murdered in Auschwitz.⁵³⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, a key dialogical partner who helped usher the Vatican Jewish declaration along its path to fruition, described himself as "a brand plucked from the fire, in which my people was burned to death."⁵³⁵ Were it not for the invitation to teach at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati just two months prior to the German invasion of Poland, Heschel's distinctive voice, vision, writing and prophetic

⁵³¹ On teaching of contempt and supersessionism, see page 86.

⁵³² For more on Roncalli's efforts to rescue Jews during the Holocaust, see page 127.

⁵³³ The *Kindertransport* was Great Britain's successful rescue effort that saved approximately 10,000 children between 1938 and 1940. "Obituary – Gregory Baum, Catholic theologian who promoted more progressive sexual ethics," *The Herald*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.heraldsotland.com/opinion/15638084.obituary---gregory-baum-catholic-theologian-promoted-progressive-sexual-ethics/>.

⁵³⁴ On Oesterreicher, see pages 132-135.

⁵³⁵ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," 117.

urgency that influenced Cardinal Bea, in the latter's role as President of Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU), would have been absent.

The next generation of authors who penned these pioneering documents were influenced by their predecessors. They grew up in homes and were educated by scholars who lived a life of Christian-Jewish dialogue rooted in authentic relationship. They sat at tables where pluralism was practiced, and moral courage was embodied. The most critical component that drove the creation of the pioneering documents was the authors themselves, whose lived experiences broadened their worldview and helped them see the urgent need for religious inclusion.

Documents of dialogue are not written in a vacuum. They must always be contextualized by the political and demographic realities of their day. The devastation of Germany in the aftermath of World War II in the mid to late-1940s and the changing demographics of the Christian community in the 1960s, where the number of Catholics was diminishing while the number of Protestants was increasing, propelled these documents into being.

Documents of dialogue are grounded in authentic interreligious relationships. Dr. Michael Signer, the primary mover of *Dabru Emet* taught: "Dialogue does not occur between religions but between people who are profoundly committed to a life within their own community."⁵³⁶ Cardinal Bea and Rabbi Heschel, from their first moment of meeting

⁵³⁶ James Heft et al., *Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, v.

in November 1961, formed an immediate friendship and spiritual bond. They were both scholars and theologians who lived lives of piety.⁵³⁷

Father John T. Pawlikowski attributed *Nostra Aetate's* success to the collaborative work done between Christian and Jews in prior decades. The unified and formidable support of the American bishops in direct advocacy with Pope Paul VI rested upon the earlier interreligious positive relationships that the Catholic Church in the United States had developed with Jews (and with Protestants) as they collaboratively worked to combat societal ills.⁵³⁸

The Jewish scholars who composed *Dabru Emet* did so under the auspices of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore (ICJS) where the Christian Scholars Group (CSG) on Judaism was also being sponsored. The leaders of both ICJS and CSG were friends and colleagues with a long history of working together. The personal and professional risks that each author took in reaching out to the religious other were taken because of the trust they had built and the deep interfaith relationships and friendships they had developed.

Documents of dialogue are not built on syncretism (a mixing of elements of religions), and they are not built on triumphalism (the ideology that truth belongs to one faith alone). They are built on the premise of pluralism (that there can be more than one truth). Documents of dialogue acknowledge that while deep religious differences exist, a clash between religious communities is not inevitable. As *Dabru Emet* affirms in its sixth claim, there are “humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians...”

⁵³⁷ On Bea and Heschel's friendship, see pages 153.

⁵³⁸ On the Christian-Jewish partnership of the 30's and 40's, see page 190.

Those differences “will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other; nor by exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians’ faithfulness to their revelation just as we [Jews] expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.”⁵³⁹

Documents of dialogue are constrained by both religious and political realities. The irreconcilable differences between faiths require that words are judiciously and precisely chosen so they can speak to the widest audience possible. Additionally, documents of dialogue can jeopardize the safety of its members of faith who live in countries that are intolerant of religious diversity. For example, the Vatican is cautious about its statements on Israel lest Catholics living in Muslim-majority countries be vulnerable to discrimination and harm.

These pioneering documents highlight that in models of social and religious change and advancing justice, proximity to the community that has experienced harm is essential. Dismantling systemic, longstanding and destructive supremacist structures requires allyship – a process by which those with power and privilege use their role to support a marginalized group and advocate for their equality and safety. The reversal of a nearly 1900-year-old Christian supersessionist ideology and teachings of contempt transmitted through liturgical and catechetical texts would require genuine partnership.

The authors who composed pioneering documents of dialogue could all be characterized as activist scholars. While Dietrich Bonhoeffer was tragically murdered just

⁵³⁹ “*Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*,” Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies.

six months before the Stuttgart Declaration was authored, his letters influenced the document's writing. It is important to note that Bonhoeffer is an exemplar of a scholar activist. In July 1939, Bonhoeffer wrote to his former professor Reinhold Niebuhr⁵⁴⁰ regarding his decision to leave the academic post he had just taken in America and return to Germany:

“I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people... Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.”⁵⁴¹

Bonhoeffer understood that grace cannot be found, and forgiveness cannot be attained without a price. That price of faith, as Bonhoeffer observed in his 1937 classic work *The Cost of Discipleship*,⁵⁴² requires a believer to always live their faith in all places and to live a life of sacrifice and selflessness. While Bonhoeffer framed his message in deeply Christological terms, his message can also be applied universally.

Interreligious scholar activists are serious scholars who are deeply rooted in their respective faith traditions. They are committed to using their academic expertise and authority, which is grounded historically and textually, to advance justice, equality, safety, and the development of a positive and pluralistic community. They seek to move their respective denominational and faith communities to reckon with texts that could

⁵⁴⁰ Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr (1892 – 1971) was an American theologian, ethicist, and professor at Union Theological Seminary for more than 30 years and a leading American public intellectual. Bonhoeffer had studied with Niebuhr at Union Seminary in 1930-1931.

⁵⁴¹ Eberhard, Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, (Fortress Press, 2000), 655.

⁵⁴² See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (Touchstone, 1995).

cause insult at best or at worst be weaponized to cause violence. They live with one foot in the ivory tower of academia and with the other in the communities that are the focus of their research.

Activist scholars model a willingness to be vulnerable and to grow. They engage in what Judaism calls a *machloket l'shem shamayim*, translated literally as “an argument for the sake of heaven” but what Christopher Leighton (founder and leader of the ICJS for three decades) refers to as “a sacred argument.”⁵⁴³ The pioneering activist scholars examined in this study have mastered the movement from historic polemics and disputation to healthy dialogues of depth that have the goal of crafting a greater good for all. They understand that the global religious field is not a zero-sum game with victor and vanquished.

Leighton recalls learning the meaning of dialogue through his relationship with Rabbi Joel Zaiman, a father of a student at the high school where Leighton worked as chaplain prior to building the ICJS. Zaiman once explained to Leighton that he had no interest in dialogue, because in his view, “Dialogue, the way in which it is normally played out is a quest for consensus, agreement... Dialogue was a tepid exercise in narcissism. You look into the mirror and imagine that you’re actually talking to somebody else. Joel’s conviction was, ‘If you’re going to get to know somebody, you have to be willing to engage in a sacred argument’ ...a sacred argument is an argument

⁵⁴³ Christopher Leighton 2024, 71.

where you learn to see the world through the eyes of the other, where the person with whom you disagree ends up being one of your best teachers.”⁵⁴⁴

The interfaith activists who authored and advanced declarations of dialogue were not threatened by the religious other. In Novak’s terms, the Jews at the table were free of Christophobia. Jules Isaac was remarkable in that in the face of hate, he did not hate. Isaac, though victim to the harm caused by the weaponization of Christianity, was able to approach his research with an academic eye utilizing the techniques of historical and literary criticism. His approach to Christian leaders who had the power to transform Christian teachings was not one of animosity but of appreciation of Jesus, the New Testament and Christianity. He came to the Seelisberg Conference and to his meeting with Pope John XXIII in the spirit of reconciliation. He approached his dialogical mission not with malice but with the authentic stance of collaborative concern and reconciliation.

When it comes to authoring these documents of dialogue, gender inclusion mattered. Women have critical contributions to offer and essential voices that need to be heard. Not only does the impact of these documents reach the half of the world who identify as women, but women broaden and deepen the theological conversation. Tikvah Fymer-Kensky’s place at the table crafting *Dabru Emet* and her willingness to theologically spar with Novak produced a document that would speak to more than the

⁵⁴⁴ Christopher M. Leighton, “A Sacred Argument: Dispatches from the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounter,” A conversation with Christopher Leighton and Heather Miller Rubens, *Institute for Islamic, Christian, & Jewish Studies*, (13:30), accessed December 21, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV8mfeQs76s>. Rabbi Joel H. Zaiman (1938-2019) served as the spiritual leader of Chizuk Amuno Congregation in Pikesville, Maryland from 1980-2003, when he became “Rabbi Emeritus.” See <https://jmoreliving.com/2019/08/01/rabbi-emeritus-rabbi-joel-zaiman-dies-at-81/>

traditional Jewish audience that was likely comfortable with the patriarchy embedded in ancient texts. Frymer-Kensky, through her academic experiences as a female theologian and through her lived experience as a woman, was cognizant of and sensitive to issues of hierarchies that can reinforce notions of supremacy.

The theological turning illustrated in the pioneering documents represents repentance. In Maimonides' code, *Mishneh Torah* (which remains an influential source of Jewish Law today), he outlines the steps to contrition on the journey toward atonement. First, atonement requires an acknowledgment and confession of wrongdoing. Second, it requires restitution and restorative measures. And lastly, repentance requires that the sin not be repeated.⁵⁴⁵

The authors who crafted these documents understood the value of moving beyond blame to crafting productive partnerships. These pioneering documents reflect an evolution on this front. The early statements open with an acknowledgement of guilt and the acceptance of responsibility, while the later documents commit to education and dialogue as key components of preventing a recurrence of antipathy toward the religious

⁵⁴⁵ "If a person transgresses any of the mitzvot of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command - whether willingly or inadvertently - when he repents, and returns from his sin, he must confess before God, blessed be He, as [Numbers 5:6-7] states: 'If a man or a woman commit any of the sins of man... they must confess the sin that they committed.' This refers to a verbal confession." Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance*, 1:1, Trans. by Eliyahu Touger, Moznaim Publishing. "[Who has reached] complete Teshuvah? A person who confronts the same situation in which he sinned when he has the potential to commit [the sin again], and, nevertheless, abstains and does not commit it because of his Teshuvah alone and not because of fear or a lack of strength." Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Law of Repentance*, 2:1, "...someone who injures a colleague, curses a colleague, steals from him, or the like will never be forgiven until he gives his colleague what he owes him and appeases him. [It must be emphasized that] even if a person restores the money that he owes [the person he wronged], he must appease him and ask him to forgive him," Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Law of Repentance*, 2:1, accessed December 24, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Repentance.1.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

other. It was amid Vatican II's intensive work addressing its stance on interreligious relations that the word "dialogue" would appear for the first time ever in a magisterial document of the Catholic Church.⁵⁴⁶ The Church realized that there was no better tool for the restoration of unity between Jews and Christians than conversations rooted in fellowship. In August 1964, Pope Paul VI would issue a lengthy encyclical devoted to dialogue, *Ecclesiam Suam* (Latin for "His Church"), in which the Pope noted how important it is for the Church and the world to "meet together and get to know and love one another."⁵⁴⁷

In terms of Christian-Jewish relations, reconciliation needed to be initiated from both partners. Both Christians and Jews have historic teachings that devalue the religious other. The Jacob/Esau relationship of rivalry had in the past served as a metaphor for Jews and Christians with both faiths identifying with Jacob whom they saw in a positive light and casting the other as Esau who was seen in a negative, threatening, and even sinister light.

German theologian and Professor Emerita of Religion at St. Mary's College of Maryland, Katharina von Kellenbach, in her essay on "Guilt and the Transformation of Christian-Jewish Relations," speaks to the steps that are needed beyond the documents themselves to bring about repair. She notes that restorative actions (which she calls penitential restitution) help to rid a community of their historical guilt. As an example,

⁵⁴⁶ See Appendix D, "On the Attitude of Catholics Toward Non-Christians and Especially Toward Jews" (November 8, 1963).

⁵⁴⁷ *Ecclesiam Suam* Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Church August 6, 1964, *The Holy See*, accessed November 23, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html.

she cites the Christian community of Dresden which after reunification of East and West Germany raised 230 million euros to reconstruct their Cathedral that had been left in rubble at the end of the war. While the Jewish community needed only 20 million euros to reconstruct their synagogue, that was out of reach for the 220 remaining Jews of Dresden.⁵⁴⁸ The Protestant pastor Siegfried Reimann, who stepped up to help lead a fundraising effort for the synagogue, linked the historic ruins of the Dresden church to the obliteration of its neighboring synagogue. Reimann remarked in a speech:

“We should not forget that it is not the fault of the Jews that they no longer have a synagogue. The destruction of the synagogue, as well as the persecution and the murder of the Jews, is a past that we must all bear together, although we were not personally involved. We must give a response to this history. This is a chance to approach this subject on a personal level and to remember this past atrocity. This is true for each individual, as well as organizations, banks, and businesses.”⁵⁴⁹

Kellenbach noted that this act of commemoration and restitution would “turn guilt into the ground of new beginnings.”⁵⁵⁰ Documents of dialogue are a significant step on the journey to healing historic wounds, but they are not the only step.

One could justifiably ask, do these documents of dialogue matter? To whom do these documents composed by religious and academic elites speak? Because wars and violence continue and bleed into the world of religion, the need remains today for religious leaders to speak in ways that reach beyond their pews to inspire national and international actors. The need for prophetic voices of *tikkun*, of repair, remains pressing.

⁵⁴⁸ Katharina von Kellenbach 2020, 16-18.

⁵⁴⁹ Katharina von Kellenbach 2020, 18. Pastor Siegfried Reimann (1930-2022) was the chairman of the interfaith synagogue construction association in Dresden, Germany. See <https://michaelzwise.com/the-rebirth-of-dresden/>

⁵⁵⁰ Katharina von Kellenbach 2020, 19.

World leaders change, popes change, the world changes. And there can be a pendulum effect where religious or governmental policies swing to an extreme, harming especially those who stand in the margins. Interreligious activist voices are needed to counter extremists⁵⁵¹ who abuse faith to further their goals. Pioneering documents of dialogue provide a model which is why the milestone conferences celebrating their creation and assessing their relevance continue to be necessary. As Thomas Banchoff, expert on ethical and religious issues in world politics, recently wrote, “... international interfaith meetings and declarations do matter in the long run by providing a normative framework and point of reference for such efforts.”⁵⁵²

Declarations of dialogue are in dialogue with one another. They serve as responses to one another in an active conversation. While the 1934 Barmen Declaration which birthed the Confessing Church is not categorized as a document of interfaith dialogue (because it spoke only to Christians, failed to deem Nazi ideology and Christian dogma as incompatible, and failed to seek protections for those outside the Church),⁵⁵³ there is a direct line from the Barmen Declaration to the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt. It was surviving leaders of the Confessing Church who would author the confession. Franklin Hamlin Littell noted the remarkable nature of their claim, “In the presence of God and delegates from the sister churches, leaders of the Christian resistance identified themselves with the sin of the German people, expressed repentance, and begged forgiveness... more than any other single thing [their actions in Stuttgart] opened the way

⁵⁵¹ This included the rising number of white Christian nationalists in the US today.

⁵⁵² Thomas Banchoff 2024.

⁵⁵³ For further analysis of the Barmen Declaration, see pages 35-37.

for the spirit of reconciliation which has been at work in Germany and the rest of Europe since the war.”⁵⁵⁴

The Jewish and Christian leaders who gathered for the Emergency Conference on Anti-Semitism in Seelisberg heard the expressions of penitence spoken in Stuttgart and advanced and deepened the details of Christian accountability. In turn, as Catholic scholar John Borelli noted, if each of the Ten Points of Seelisberg were posed as questions, *Nostra Aetate* answered 9 ½ of them, affirming on behalf of the Catholic Church its role in and responsibility for transforming Christian teaching. The only question that would be qualified was the Church’s avoidance of acknowledging that in the Hebrew Bible the Divine promise of the land of Israel to Jews is a sign of the covenant.

Vatican II essentially asked, “How do we live in a pluralistic world?” And thirty-five years later, the four academics who comprised the National Jewish Scholars Project labored to compose *Dabru Emet* in response to their Christian academic and activist colleagues who had continuously gone out on a limb to publish positive statements on Judaism. This action would pave the way to two subsequent Orthodox Jewish multi-organizational statements: “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians” and “Between Jerusalem and Rome: Reflections on 50 years of *Nostra Aetate*.”⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴ Franklin Hamlin Littell 1961, 49-51.

⁵⁵⁵ For more on “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven” and “Between Jerusalem and Rome,” see pages 234-235.

With each generation, questions continue to be asked for future serious practitioners of dialogue to answer. We, today, are called into that dialogue. One statement of a denomination, faith community, or interfaith community is not the end of the conversation, it calls for continued correspondence, conversation, and conferences.

The institutions that were created because of the pioneering documents continue to play a vital role today in supporting interreligious relations: the International Council of Christians and Jews, the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, and the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. They all continue to dialogue with one another, whether in person or through statements, and most recently and most passionately in response to the Gaza-Hamas War that began with the October 7th Massacre. The mission of these organizations is to combat antisemitism, Islamophobia and prevent religious-based hatred from increasing.

The pace of religious change is slow. Matthew Taylor, currently the Senior Protestant Scholar at the ICJS, writes that the interreligious understanding between any two faith communities “proceeds not linearly but episodically, fragmentarily, and at a glacial pace by the breakneck standards of modernity. Religious traditions with their constitutive communities are massive, hulking bodies of knowledge and disputation, and they don't exactly turn on a dime.”⁵⁵⁶ In extending Taylor's words to apply to all the

⁵⁵⁶ Matthew Taylor, “Dabru Emet's Imagined Future: Doing Eschatology with an Interreligious Sensitivity,” *American Religion*, accessed December 23, 2024, <https://www.american-religion.org/dabruemet/taylor>.

pioneering documents, each statement can be seen as “a waypoint, a mile marker along the meandering path of Jewish–Christian understanding.”

There is much more research to be done on this history and significance of interfaith declarations. *Dabru Emet*, the Jewish declaration, was not the final pioneering religious document. The Muslim community began to launch such initiatives in 2004 with “The Amman Message” that paved the way for a more far-reaching interfaith effort titled “A Common Word Between Us and You” in 2007. In response to Islamic terrorism that not only attacked its coreligionists (and those of other faiths) but also distorted and devalued Islam as a religion in the eyes of the world, King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein II of Jordan⁵⁵⁷ and his first cousin Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal⁵⁵⁸ crafted a theological and educational platform for change. The Amman Message sought to define normative Islam, declaring what Islam is, what it is not, and what actions represent the faith. King Abdullah recognized that to comprehensively defeat terrorism there was a need to “neutralize the appeal of their extremist ideology and combat the ignorance and hopelessness on which they thrive. This is not just a military battle, but an intellectual one.”⁵⁵⁹ The Amman Message earned accolades as “one of the most significant dialogue initiatives of our times” because of the blueprint it created for the many noteworthy

⁵⁵⁷ Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein (1962 -), King of Jordan, ascended to the throne in 1999. He is a member of the Hashemite dynasty, who have been the reigning royal family of Jordan since 1921, and is considered a 41st-generation direct descendant of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

⁵⁵⁸ Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal (1966 -) is a Jordanian prince. He is a professor of Islamic philosophy with PhDs from Al-Azhar University and the University of Cambridge. He has held many official and nongovernmental positions in Jordan, including chief advisor for religious and cultural affairs.

⁵⁵⁹ King Abdullah II, *Our Last Chance: In Pursuit of Peace in a Time of Peril*, (Viking, 2011), 256.

interreligious statements and programs that would follow its path and build upon its work.⁵⁶⁰

A next step for research is to examine the Muslim early efforts and include their work in this comparative study and analysis. The Muslim global leadership in interfaith relations is expansive, impressive and instructive.

Religious statements addressing Israel also warrant further research, especially the dozens of religious denominational and organizational statements in response to the October 7th Massacre and the consequent Israel-Hamas War. Philip Cunningham, in his capacity as editor of *Dialogika*, which is an online library that chronicles statements and documents capturing the conversation between Christian and Jewish communities notes that “a bewildering myriad of texts about the war have been published.” As the war unfolded, he collected 142 religious statements, editorials, and opinion pieces.⁵⁶¹

Despite best efforts, religion-based hate and violence remain a reality today.⁵⁶² Teachings of contempt that degrade Judaism need to be eradicated from pulpits and classrooms. Transformative interfaith education remains a priority for adherents of all faiths. From the training of religious leadership to the laity to youth education and

⁵⁶⁰ Mike Hardy, Fiyaz Mughal, and Sarah Markiewicz, eds., *Muslim Identity in a Turbulent Age: Islamic Extremism and Western Islamophobia*, (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 3.

⁵⁶¹ “Selected Texts on the Israel-Hamas War: Oct 2023 to the present,” *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed December 24, 2024, <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/israel-hamas>.

⁵⁶² For more on religion-based hate and violence today, see Georgette Bennett and Jerry White, *Religicide: Confronting the Roots of Anti-Religious Violence* (Post Hill Press, 2022).

university courses, to the use of publishing and all forms of multimedia, every possible tool is needed to advance messages of pluralism.

In 2002, Orthodox leader and teacher, Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Lord Jonathan Sacks wrote a book in response to 9/11, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. The title of his book and his theological premise is that Samuel Huntington's theory (that in the post-Cold War era wars would be fought based on religious battles) is not inevitable. The monotheistic religions at their core celebrate difference as foundational. The "real miracle of monotheism," according to Rabbi Sacks, is "not that there is one God and therefore one truth, one faith, one way, but that unity above creates diversity here on earth."⁵⁶³ The enlightened understandings of the religious other revealed through these documents of dialogue are the scaffolding that supports constructive interfaith engagement today.

As global conditions change, the need to craft new documents of dialogue remains. The premise that words have transformative power grounds the sacred scriptures of all religions. Modern declarations of dialogue crafted by theologians and religious leaders similarly seek to use words to dismantle antisemitism, Islamophobia, and religiously based extremist radicalization and violence. They also seek to use words to promote the power of interfaith relations to heal and strengthen our world. The clash of civilizations predicted by Huntington can indeed be countered by an interreligious

⁵⁶³ Jonathan Sacks, "The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations," Foreign Policy Research Institute, June 27, 2013, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2013/06/the-dignity-of-difference-avoiding-the-clash-of-civilizations/>.

collaboration and coalition for good. That was the work of activist scholars in the past and this remains the task of activist scholars to the present day.

Appendix A

Twenty-One Propositions that serve as organizing framework
for Jules Isaacs' *Jesus and Israel*⁵⁶⁴

INTRODUCTION

Preliminary Observations on the Old Testament

PROPOSITION 1. The Christian religion is the daughter of the Jewish religion. The New Testament of the Christians is built upon the foundation of the Old Testament of the Jews. If only for this reason, Judaism is deserving of respect.

PART I

Jesus, the Christ, a Jew "According to the Flesh"

PROPOSITION 2. Jesus, the Jesus of the Gospels, only Son and Incarnation of God for the Christians, in his human lifetime was a Jew, a humble Jewish artisan. This is a fact of which no Christian has a right to be unaware.

PROPOSITION 3. Insofar as we can know of them through the Gospels, Jesus' family was Jewish: Mary, his mother, was Jewish, and so were all their friends and relatives. To be at once an antiSemite and a Christian is to try to marry reverence with abuse.

PROPOSITION 4. On each New Year's Day the Church commemorates the circumcision of the Infant Jesus. It was not without hesitation and controversy that early Christianity abandoned this rite sanctioned by the Old Testament.

PROPOSITION 5. The name Jesus Christ is basically Semitic, even though its form is Greek: Jesus is a Hellenization to a Jewish name; Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Jewish word Messiah.

PROPOSITION 6. The New Testament was written in Greek. In the course of the centuries, the Catholic Church has quoted it in Latin, a Latin which is the result of translation. But Jesus, like all the Palestinian Jews he was addressing, spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew.

PART II

The Gospel in the Synagogue

PROPOSITION 7. It is commonly maintained that at the time of the coming of Christ, the Jewish religion had degenerated into mere legalism without a soul. History does not

⁵⁶⁴ Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, v-viii.

support this verdict. In spite of Jewish legalism and its excesses, everything at this period attests to the depth and intensity of the religious life of Israel.

PROPOSITION 8. The teaching of Jesus took place in the traditional Jewish setting. According to a very liberal Jewish custom, “the carpenter’s son” was permitted to speak and teach in the synagogues, and even in the Temple at Jerusalem.

PROPOSITION 9. Jesus was born and lived “under the [Jewish] law.” Did he intend or announce its abrogation? Many writers hold that he did, but their statements exaggerate, distort, or contradict the most important passages in the Gospels.

PROPOSITION 10. Nothing would be more futile than to try to separate from Judaism the Gospel that Jesus preached in the synagogues and in the Temple. The truth is that the Gospel and its entire tradition are deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and in the attempts at renovation and purification which had been manifested for almost two centuries in Palestine.

PART III Jesus and His People

PROPOSITION 11. Christian writers deliberately omit the fact that at the time of Christ the Dispersion of the Jews had been a *fait accompli* for several centuries. The majority of the Jewish people no longer lived in Palestine.

PROPOSITION 12. Therefore, no one has any right to say that the Jewish people “as a whole” rejected Jesus. It is entirely probable that the Jewish people “as a whole” were not even aware of his existence.

PROPOSITION 13. But with rare exceptions, wherever Jesus went the Jewish people took him to their hearts, as the Gospels testify. Did they, at a given moment, suddenly turn against him? This is a notion which has yet to be proved.

PROPOSITION 14. In any case, no one has the right to declare that the Jewish people rejected Christ or the Messiah, that they rejected the Son of God, until it is proved that Jesus revealed himself as such to the Jewish people “as a whole” and was rejected by them as such. But the Gospels give us good reason to doubt that this ever happened.

PROPOSITION 15. Christ is said to have pronounced a sentence of condemnation and alienation on the Jewish people. But why, in contradiction of his own Gospel of love and forgiveness, should he have condemned his own people, the only people to whom he chose to speak—his own people, among whom he found not only bitter enemies but fervent disciples and adoring followers? We have every reason to believe that the real object of his condemnation is the real subject of guilt, a certain pharisaism to be found in all times and in all peoples, in every religion and in every church.

PART IV

The Crime of Deicide

PROPOSITION 16. For eighteen hundred years it has been generally taught throughout the Christian world that the Jewish people, in full responsibility for the Crucifixion, committed the inextinguishable crime of deicide. No accusation could be more pernicious—and in fact none has caused more innocent blood to be shed.

PROPOSITION 17. Now, in the Gospels, Jesus was careful to name in advance the parties responsible for the Passion: elders, chief priests, scribes—a common species no more limited to the Jews than to any other people.

PROPOSITION 18. Joan of Arc was also sentenced by a tribunal of chief priests and scribes—who were not Jewish—but only after a long trial, of which we have the complete and authentic text. This is not true of the trial of Jesus, which was hurried through, whether in three hours or in three days, and is known only by hearsay. No official transcript, no contemporary testimony on the event has come down to us.

PROPOSITION 19. To establish the responsibility of the Jewish people in the Roman trial—the Roman death sentence—the Roman penalty, we must ascribe to certain passages in the Gospels a historical validity which is particularly dubious; we must overlook their discrepancies, their improbabilities, and give them an interpretation which is no less biased and arbitrary for being traditional.

PROPOSITION 20. To crown its injustices, a certain so-called Christian devotion, only too happy to fall in with a centuries-old prejudice which is complicated by ignorance or misunderstanding of the Gospel, has never wearied of using the grievous theme of the Crucifixion against the Jewish people as a whole.

CONCLUSION

PROPOSITION 21 and Last. Whatever the sins of the people of Israel may be, they are innocent, totally innocent of the crimes of which Christian tradition accuses them: they did not reject Jesus, they did not crucify him. And Jesus did not reject Israel, did not curse it: just as “the gifts ... of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29), the evangelical Law of love allows no exception. May Christians come to realize this at last—may they realize and redress their crying injustices. At this moment, when a curse seems to weigh upon the whole human race, it is the urgent duty to which they are called by the memory of Auschwitz.

Appendix B

THE RECTIFICATION NECESSARY IN CHRISTIAN TEACHING: EIGHTEEN POINTS⁵⁶⁵

For purposes of greater clarity, may I be allowed to submit for the examination of Christians of good will—who are agreed in principle on the need for rectification—the following Eighteen Points, meant to serve at least as a basis for discussion.

Christian teaching worthy of the name should

1. give all Christians at least an elementary knowledge of the Old Testament; stress the fact that the Old Testament, essentially Semitic – in form and substance – was the Holy Scripture of Jews before becoming the Holy Scripture of Christians;
2. recall that a large part of Christian liturgy is borrowed from it, and that the Old Testament, the work of Jewish genius (enlightened by God), has been to our own day a perennial source of inspiration to Christian thought, literature and art;
3. take care not to pass over the singularly important fact that it was to the Jewish people, chosen by Him, that God first revealed Himself in His omnipotence; that it was the Jewish people who safeguarded the fundamental belief in God, then transmitted it to the Christian world;
4. acknowledge and state openly, taking inspiration from the most reliable historical research, that Christianity was born of a living, not a degenerate Judaism, as is proved by the richness of Jewish literature, Judaism's indomitable resistance to paganism, the spiritualization of worship in the synagogues, the spread of proselytism, the multiplicity of religious sects and trends, the broadening of beliefs; take care not to draw a simple caricature of historic Phariseeism;
5. take into account the fact that history flatly contradicts the theological myth of the Dispersion as providential punishment for the Crucifixion, since the dispersion of the Jewish people was an accomplished fact in Jesus' time and since in that era, according to all the evidence, the majority of the Jewish people were no longer living in Palestine; even after the two great Judean wars (first and second centuries), there was no dispersion of the Jews of Palestine;
6. warn the faithful against certain stylistic tendencies in the Gospels, notably the frequent use in the fourth Gospel of the collective term "the Jews" in a restricted and pejorative sense – to mean Jesus' enemies: chief priests, scribes and Pharisees – a procedure that results not only in distorting historic perspectives but in inspiring horror

⁵⁶⁵ Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, 401-404.

and contempt of the Jewish people as a whole, whereas in reality this people is in no way involved;

7. state very explicitly, so that no Christian is ignorant of it, that Jesus was Jewish, of an old Jewish family, that he was circumcised (according to Jewish Law) eight days after his birth; that the name Jesus is a Jewish name, Yeshua, Hellenized, and Christ the Greek equivalent of the Jewish term Messiah; that Jesus spoke a Semitic language, Aramaic, like all the Jews of Palestine; and that unless one reads the Gospels in their earliest text, which is in the Greek language, one knows the Word only through a translation of a translation;

8. acknowledge – with Scripture – that Jesus, “born under the [Jewish] law” (Gal. 4:4), lived “under the law”: that he did not stop practicing Judaism’s basic rites to the last day; that he did not stop preaching his Gospel in the synagogues and the Temple to the last day;

9. not fail to observe that during his human life, Jesus was uniquely “a servant to the circumcised” (Rom. 15:8); it was in Israel alone that he reunited his disciples; all the Apostles were Jews like their master;

10. show clearly from the Gospel texts that to the last day, except on rare occasions, Jesus did not stop obtaining the enthusiastic sympathies of the Jewish masses, in Jerusalem as well as in Galilee;

11. take care not to assert that Jesus was personally rejected by the Jewish people, that they refused to recognize him as Messiah and God, for the two reasons that the majority of the Jewish people did not even know him and that Jesus never presented himself as such explicitly and publicly to the segment of the people who did know him; acknowledge that in all likelihood the messianic character of the entry into Jerusalem on the eve of the Passion could have been perceived by only a small number;

12. to take care not to assert that Jesus was at the very least rejected by the qualified leaders and representatives of the Jewish people; those who had him arrested and sentenced, the chief priests, were representatives of a narrow oligarchic caste, subjugated to Rome and detested by the people; as for the doctors and Pharisees, it emerges from the evangelical texts themselves that they were not unanimously against Jesus; nothing proves that the spiritual elite of Jerusalem was involved in the plot;

13. take care not to strain the texts to find in them a universal reprobation of Israel or a curse which is nowhere explicitly expressed in the Gospels; take into account the fact that Jesus always showed feelings of compassion and love for the masses;

14. take care above all not to make the current and traditional assertion that the Jewish people committed the inextinguishable crime of deicide, and that they took total responsibility

on themselves as a whole; take care to avoid such an assertion not only because it is poisonous, generating hatred and crime, but also because it is radically false;

15. highlight the fact, emphasized in the four Gospels, that the chief priests and their accomplices acted against Jesus unbeknownst to the people and even in fear of the people;

16. concerning the Jewish trial of Jesus, acknowledge that the Jewish people were in no way involved in it, played no role in it, probably knew nothing about it; that the insults and brutalities attributed to them were the acts of the police or of some members of the oligarchy; that there is no mention of a Jewish trial, of a meeting of the Sanhedrin in the fourth Gospel;

17. concerning the Roman trial, acknowledge that the procurator Pontius Pilate had entire command over Jesus' life and death; that Jesus was condemned for messianic pretensions, which was a crime in the eyes of the Romans, not the Jews; that hanging on the cross was a specifically Roman punishment; take care not to impute to the Jewish people the crowning with thorns, which in the Gospel accounts was a cruel jest of the Roman soldiery; take care not to identify the mob whipped up by the chief priests with the whole of the Jewish people or even the Jewish people of Palestine, whose anti-Roman sentiments are beyond doubt; note that the fourth Gospel implicates exclusively the chief priests and their men;

18. last, not forget that the monstrous cry, "His blood be upon us and on our children!" (Mt. 27:25), could not prevail over the Word, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

Preface to Appendices C through F: The following four appendices are draft statements of the Jewish declaration that were crafted during Vatican II. They reflect an evolution of thought, debate, and negotiations that would culminate in the issuing of *Nostra Aetate* (Appendix G) that would be voted on and issued in October 1965. Appendix C, written by the SPCU, was shelved during Vatican II's first session in 1962 without debate. Appendix D, written by the SPCU, was distributed during the second session in 1963 but was not debated nor voted on. Appendix E was written by the Coordinating Commission and the focus of intense debate in the lead up to and during the third session in 1964. Appendix F was rewritten by the SPCU during the third session and voted on in November 1964.

Appendix C

Decretum de Iudaeis, (November, 1961)⁵⁶⁶

Under Cardinal Bea's direction, this draft document on the Church's relationship with the Jewish people was completed in November 1961 but never submitted to the Council.

The Church, the Bride of Christ, acknowledges with a heart full of gratitude that, according to God's mysterious saving design, the beginnings of her faith and election go as far back as to the Israel of the Patriarchs and Prophets. Thus she acknowledges that all Christian believers, Abraham's children by faith (see Gal. 3:7), are included in his call. Similarly, her salvation is prefigured in the deliverance of the chosen people out of Egypt, as in a sacramental sign (Liturgy of the Easter Vigil). And the Church, a new creation in Christ (see Eph. 2:15), can never forget that she is the spiritual continuation of the people with whom, in His mercy and gracious condescension, God made the Old Covenant.

The Church, in fact, believes that Christ, who "is our peace," embraces Jews and Gentiles with one and the same love and that He made the two one (see Eph. 2:14). She rejoices that the union of these two "in one body" (Eph. 2:16) proclaims the whole world's reconciliation in Christ. Even though the greater part of the Jewish people has remained separated from Christ, it would be an injustice to call this people accursed, since they are greatly beloved for the sake of the Fathers and the promises made to them (see Rom. 11:28). The Church loves this people. From them sprang Christ the Lord, who reigns in glory in heaven; from them sprang the Virgin Mary, mother of all Christians; from them came the Apostles, the pillars and the bulwark of the Church (1 Tim. 3:15).

Furthermore, the Church believes in the union of the Jewish people with herself as an integral part of Christian hope. With unshaken faith and deep longing the Church awaits union with this people. At the time of Christ's coming, "a remnant chosen by grace" (Rom. 11:5), the very first fruits of the Church, accepted the Eternal Word. The Church believes, however, with the Apostle that at the appointed time, the fullness of the children

⁵⁶⁶ This document translated as "Decree on the Jews" was written by the Secretariat for Christian Unity. Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert Hoffman and Joseph Sievers, eds. 2007, 191-192.

of Abraham according to the flesh will embrace Him who is salvation (see Rom. 11:12, 26). Their acceptance will be life from the dead (see Rom. 11:15).

As the Church, like a mother, condemns most severely injustices committed against innocent people everywhere, so she raises her voice in loud protest against all wrongs done to Jews, whether in the past or in our time. Whoever despises or persecutes this people does injury to the Catholic Church.

Appendix D

On the Attitude of Catholics Toward Non-Christians and Especially Toward Jews (November 8, 1963)⁵⁶⁷

Cardinal Bea recrafted the 1961 decree as Chapter IV of a schema on ecumenical relations, which was being deliberated at the second session. A summary of this new version was distributed November 8, 1963, but debate was postponed for the third session.

Having dealt with the basic principle of Catholic Ecumenism, we do not wish to pass over in silence the fact that these principles are also to be applied, with due regard to the given situation, to dialogues and acts of cooperation with people who are not Christians, but adore God or, at least, animated by God's will, try to keep the moral law implanted in human nature following their consciences. This is particularly true of the Jews who, after all, are linked to the Church to an extraordinary degree.

The Church of Christ acknowledges with a heart full of gratitude that, according to God's mysterious saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election can already be found among the Patriarchs and Prophets. For all Christian believers, Abraham's children by faith (cf. Gal. 3:7), are included in the same Patriarch's call and the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed in the deliverance of the chosen people out of the land of bondage. The Church, a new creation in Christ (cf. Eph. 2:15), can never forget that she is the spiritual continuation of the people with whom, in His mercy and gracious condescension, God made the Old Covenant.

In addition the Church believes that Christ, our Peace, embraced both Jews and Gentiles with one and the same love and that He made the two one (cf. Eph. 2:14) and by the union of these two in one body (cf. Eph. 2:16) proclaims the whole world's reconciliation in Christ. Even though a greater part of the chosen people are still far from Christ, it would be an injustice to call this people accursed, since they are greatly beloved by God for the sake of the Fathers and the gifts given to them (cf. Rom. 11:28), or a deicidal

⁵⁶⁷ This document was written by the Secretariat for Christian Unity. Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert Hoffman and Joseph Sievers, eds. 2007, 192-193.

people, since the Lord, by his passion and death, washes away the sins of all men, which were the cause of the passion and death of Jesus Christ (cf. Lk. 23:34; Acts 3:17; 1 Cor. 2:8).

Yet the death of Christ is not to be attributed to an entire people then alive, and far less to a people today. Therefore, let priests be careful not to say anything, in catechetical instruction or in preaching, that might give rise to hatred or contempt of the Jews in the hearts of their hearers. Nor does the Church forget that Christ Jesus was born of this people according to the flesh, that the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ, was thus born, that thus were born the Apostles, the pillars and the bulwark of the Church.

Since the patrimony common both to the Church and the Synagogue is thus of such a magnitude, this Sacred Synod wants to foster and recommend in every way mutual understanding and respect which is, above all, the fruit of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues; moreover, in her rejection of injustices of any kind and wherever inflicted upon people, with a maternal heart deplores and condemns hatred and persecution of the Jews, whether it arose in the past or in our own times.

Appendix E

Second Declaration on the Jews and Non-Christians (September 28–29, 1964)⁵⁶⁸

On the inheritance common to Christians and Jews

The Church of Christ gladly acknowledges that, according to God's mysterious saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election can already be found among the Patriarchs and Prophets. For all Christian believers, Abraham's children by faith (cf. Gal. 3:7), are included in the same Patriarch's call and the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the deliverance of the chosen people out of the land of bondage. The Church, a new creation in Christ (cf. Eph. 2:15) and people of the New Covenant, can never forget that she is the continuation of that people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy was once pleased to enter into the Old Covenant and to whom He chose to entrust the revelation contained in the Books of the Old Testament.

Moreover, the Church does not forget that Christ was born of this Jewish people according to the flesh, that the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ, was thus born, that thus were born the Apostles, the bulwark and the pillars of the Church.

Further, the Church is always mindful and will never overlook the words of the Apostle Paul relating to the Jews, "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises" (Rom. 9:4).

⁵⁶⁸ This document was written by the Second Vatican Council Coordinating Commission. Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert Hoffman and Joseph Sievers, eds. 2007, 194-195.

It is also worth remembering that the union of the Jewish people with the Church is a part of the Christian hope. Therefore, following the teaching of the Apostle Paul (cf. Rom. 11:25), the Church waits with unshaken faith and deep longing for the entry of that people into the fullness of the people of God established by Christ.

Since the patrimony common both to Christians and Jews is thus of such a magnitude, this Sacred Synod wants to foster and recommend in every way mutual understanding and respect, which is, above all, the fruit of theological studies, as well as of fraternal dialogues, and, beyond that, in her rejection of injustices of any kind and wherever inflicted upon people, deplores and condemns hatred and persecution against the Jews, whether it arose in the past or in our own times.

Therefore, everyone should be careful not to present the Jewish people as a rejected nation, whether in catechetical instruction, in the preaching of God's Word, or in everyday conversation. Neither should anything be said or done that could alienate human minds from the Jews. Equally, all should be on their guard not to impute to the Jews of our time that which was perpetrated in the Passion of Christ.

Appendix F

Declaration on the Church's Relationship to Non-Christian Religions (November 18, 1964)⁵⁶⁹

4. [About the Jews]

As this Sacred Synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus, with a heart full of gratitude, the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's mysterious saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election can already be found among the Patriarchs, Moses, and the Prophets. She professes that all Christian believers, Abraham's children by faith, are included in the same Patriarch's call and the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed in the deliverance of the chosen people out of the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, can never forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament from the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy was once pleased to enter into the Old Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 11:17–24). Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, our Peace, reconciled the Jews and Gentiles, thus making the two one.

⁵⁶⁹ This document was written by the Secretariat for Christian Unity. Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert Hoffman and Joseph Sievers, eds. 2007, 196-197.

The Church always keeps in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: “theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:4–5), the son of Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the bulwark and pillars of the Church, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ’s Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

Even though a greater part of the Jews did not accept the Gospel, nevertheless, as the Apostle testifies, they are still greatly beloved by God, whose gifts and call are irrevocable, for the sake of the Fathers. In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and “serve Him shoulder to shoulder” (Zeph. 3:9).

Since the spiritual patrimony common both to Christians and Jews is thus of such a magnitude, this Sacred Synod wants to foster and recommend mutual understanding and respect which is, above all, the fruit of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues. Moreover, this Synod, in her rejection of injustices of any kind and wherever inflicted upon people, and recalling that common patrimony, deplors and condemns hatred and persecution of Jews, whether it arose in the past or in our own times.

All should then ensure that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the Word of God they do not teach anything that could give rise to hatred or contempt of Jews in the hearts of Christians. May they never present the Jewish people as one rejected, accursed, or guilty of deicide. All that happened to Christ in His passion can in no way be attributed to the whole people then alive, much less to the people of today.

Besides, the Church has always held, and still holds, that Christ freely faced His passion and death, because of the sins of all people and out of infinite love. Therefore, Christian preaching is to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

Appendix G

DECLARATION ON
THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS
NOSTRA AETATE
PROCLAIMED BY HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI
ON OCTOBER 28, 1965⁵⁷⁰

1. In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth.(1) One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men,(2) until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.(3)

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

2. From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They

⁵⁷⁰ Pope Paul VI, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*," *The Holy See*, October 28, 1965, accessed May 12, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.(4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

3. The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ – Abraham's sons according to faith (6) – are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the

revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.(7) Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.(8)

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).(12)

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men,⁽¹⁴⁾ so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.⁽¹⁵⁾⁵⁷¹

Appendix H

STATEMENT ADOPTED BY THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF AMERICA AT THE MID WINTER CONFERENCE, FEBRUARY 3-5, 1964⁵⁷²

We are pleased to note that in recent years there has evolved in our country as well as throughout the world a desire to seek better understanding and a mutual respect among the world's major faiths. The current threat of secularism and materialism and the modern atheistic negation of religion and religious values makes even more imperative a harmonious relationship among the faiths. This relationship, however, can only be of value if it will not be in conflict with the uniqueness of each religious community, since each religious community is an individual entity which cannot be merged or equated with a community which is committed to a different faith. Each religious community is endowed with intrinsic dignity and metaphysical worth. Its historical experience, its present dynamics, its hopes and aspirations for the future can only be interpreted in terms of full spiritual independence of and freedom from any relatedness to another faith community. Any suggestion that the historical and meta-historical worth of a faith

⁵⁷¹ Reference notes within *Nostra Aetate* ("Cf" is Latin for either confer or conferatur, both meaning "compare": 1. Cf. Acts 17:26, 2. Cf. Wis. 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:4, 3. Cf. Apoc. 21:23f. 4. 2 Cor. 5:18-19, 5. Cf St. Gregory VII, *letter XXI to Anzir (Nacir), King of Mauritania* (Pl. 148, col. 450f.), 6. Cf. Gal. 3:7, 7. Cf. Rom. 11:17-24, 8. Cf. Eph. 2:14-16, 9. Cf. Lk. 19:44, 10. Cf. Rom. 11:28, 11. Cf. Rom. 11:28-29; cf. dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of nations) AAS, 57 (1965) pag. 20, 12. Cf. Is. 66:23; Ps. 65:4; Rom. 11:11-32, 13. Cf. John. 19:6, 14. Cf. Rom. 12:18, 15. Cf. Matt. 5:45

⁵⁷² The statement was published as an appendix to Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," 28-29.

community be viewed against the backdrop of another faith, and the mere hint that a revision of basic historic attitudes is anticipated, are incongruous with the fundamentals of religious liberty and freedom of conscience and can only breed discord and suspicion. Such an approach is unacceptable to any self-respecting faith community that is proud of its past, vibrant and active in the present and determined to live on in the future and to continue serving God in its own individual way. Only full appreciation on the part of all of the singular role, inherent worth and basic prerogatives of each religious community will help promote the spirit of cooperation among faiths.

It is the prayerful hope of the Rabbinical Council of America that all inter-religious discussion and activity will be confined to these dimensions and will be guided by the prophet, Micah (4: 5) "Let all the people walk, each one in the name of his god, and we shall walk in the name of our Lord, our God, forever and ever."

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