



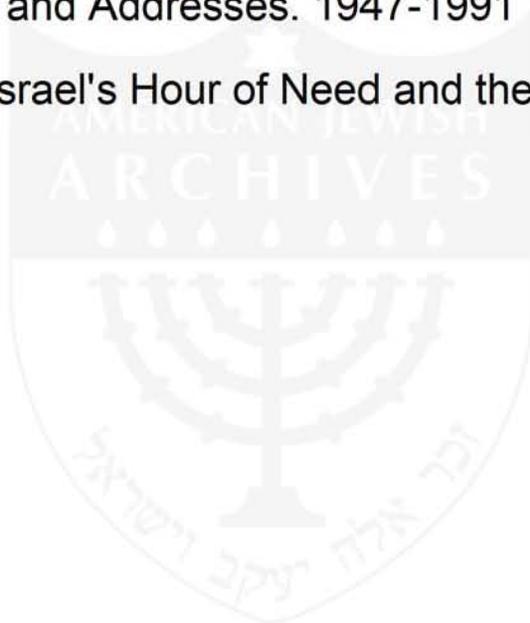
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A Reprint From  
*Conservative Judaism*  
Volume XXII, Number 2  
Winter, 1968

**ISRAEL'S HOUR OF NEED  
AND THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE**

**Marc H. Tanenbaum**

**T**HERE CAN BE NO question but that the Israel-Arab crisis of June 1967 put a severe strain on Jewish-Christian relations. But the exact nature of that strain and its implications for future relations between Jews and Christians—and for Israel—are far from adequately understood in the Jewish community.

In recent extensive travels around this country, I have been dismayed to find so much misinformation within the Jewish community about "the Christian response" to Israel in her hour of desperate need. Worse still were the conclusions for Jewish policy that derived from this distorted understanding. It is bad enough to come to wrong conclusions; to come to wrong conclusions on the basis of wrong information is reckless, irresponsible—and dangerous for Jewish well-being and security.

Shortly after the June hostilities, a number of Jewish personalities made big bold headlines in the nation's press with blanket condemnation of "the Christians [who] by and large were silent." Several Jewish leaders, including some of my colleagues in the rabbinate, publicly declared that this silence was proof positive that "the Christians are morally and spiritually bankrupt" and that Jewish-Christian dialogue is a farce. The same leaders demanded that Jewish groups withdraw from dialogues with Christians because they have proven to be "obviously inadequate" in influencing Christian attitudes toward Israel and the Jewish people.

Given the state of anxiety and tension among all Jews during those days in late May and early June when the Arabs were threatening to exterminate the Jews of Israel, it is altogether natural that a number of our spokesmen expressed themselves in highly emotional terms. But

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the emotional response that was appropriate in those charged circumstances is hardly appropriate today; and it is certainly inadequate for coming to grips with the present problems of Jewish statesmanship. Our hard choices of policy and program—including Jewish-Christian relations—that best serve the interests of the Jewish people, of Israel, and of world peace, will have to be based on a rational and dispassionate grasp of realities.

*public opinion*

WHAT ARE SOME OF THESE REALITIES?

First, the generalization that "the Christians" failed the Jews of Israel by their silence, and implied lack of support, is inaccurate, misleading, and not substantiated by the evidence. On July 10th Louis Harris published the results of a survey which indicated that "key Israeli concerns meet with this kind of overwhelming approval" by Americans:

*82% believe that Israel's existence as a sovereign state should be formally accepted by the Arab nations.*

*88% believe Israel should be guaranteed passage through the Gulf of Aqaba.*

*86% feel that Israel should also have freedom of passage through the Suez Canal.*

*79.7% oppose any UN condemnation of Israel as the aggressor in the war.*

*62% of U.S. public opinion rejects Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory as a precondition to negotiations.*

In the same poll, 70% of the respondents felt that "Jerusalem should become an international city open to all." However, a subsequent Gallup poll released in October disclosed that a dramatic shift had taken place: 56% of the American people favored Israel's retaining control over a reunified Jerusalem.

Who are the Americans who feel this way about Israel? There are about 200 million people in the United States. According to the 1957 U.S. Bureau of the Census "Current Population Survey," about 79 million persons identify themselves as Protestants, representing 66.2% of the population; and 30.7 million as Roman Catholics, representing 25.7% of the population. Since 1957, the number of affiliated Christians has grown, but their proportions in relation to the general population remain about the same.

According to Will Herberg's study, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (p. 62), it may be safely estimated that about 70 to 75 per cent of the American people regard themselves as members of churches; another 20 to 25 per cent locate themselves in one or another religious community without actually being church members; these constitute a "fringe of sympathetic bystanders," so to speak. Only about five per cent of the American people consider themselves outside the religious fold altogether.

Obviously, "religious preference" is a mixed bag; it can include anybody and everybody from a devout Christian monk to a religious agnostic. That 91.9% of the American people chose voluntarily to associate themselves with the Christian community in their replies to census takers is relevant to our concerns, and we need not be side-tracked by philosophical questions about the meaning or depth of their commitment. At the very least, this data indicates that associating oneself with the Christian denominations did not have a negative correlation with support of Israel.

In the face of this evidence, which Louis Harris characterizes as "sweeping majorities (of) the American people who support the principal arguments by Israel for a permanent peace in the Middle East," on what basis and by what justification have Jewish spokesmen made loose charges to the effect that "the Christians" did not support Israel?

To a White House administration that appears to be responsive to consensus politics—at least on some major issues—a persistent rumor that "the Christians" of America did *not* support Israel could become a dangerous political threat to Israel, for whose security and international position the strong backing of the American government is of such obvious critical importance. I cannot repress the homiletic point made in *Pirke Aboth*, "Wise men, be guarded in your words!"

*those who spoke up*

SECOND, the generalization that "the Christians by and large were silent" must be qualified by the documented evidence that a significant number of prominent and influential Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christian leaders *did* speak out in support of Israel's right to exist, to freedom from the threat of Arab belligerency, and to free access to international waterways. There is not enough space here to quote the full documentation. Those who are interested in precise facts are invited to read a recently published study issued by the American Jewish Committee, *Christian Reactions to the Middle East Crisis: New Agenda for Interreligious Dialogue*. The July 1967 issue of *Christian News From Israel*,

published by the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, contains similar documentation.

According to the AJC study—which seeks to provide an objective and balanced analysis of the reactions of Christian leaders, institutions, and journals to the Middle East crisis during the 10-week period from mid-May to the end of July—it is evident that eminent Christian leaders and leading Christian journals of opinion “took clear positions in support of Israel’s national integrity and her navigation rights” during “the tense weeks before the outbreak of hostilities, when it appeared that Israel might become the victim of combined Arab aggression.”

Thus, for example, a joint statement published all over the country on May 29, called upon

*our fellow Americans of all persuasions and groupings and on the Administration to support the independence, integrity and freedom of Israel.*

The statement was signed by such prominent Christian leaders as the Rev. John C. Bennett, President of the interdenominational Union Theological Seminary; Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the foremost Protestant theologians; the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King; the Rev. Robert MacAfee Brown, Professor of Religion at Stanford University; the Rev. Dr. Franklin Littell, President of Iowa Wesleyan (Methodist) College; the Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, Dean of St. Vladimir’s Russian Orthodox Seminary; and Father John Sheerin, editor of the *Catholic World* and Vatican representative at numerous ecumenical conferences.

In addition, Catholic and Protestant leaders in major communities in the United States issued joint statements of conscience supporting Israel’s position both at the height of the war and since the close of hostilities when the struggle had moved from the battlefield to the United Nations. A good example was the “Declaration of Moral Principle” issued on June 7 by Cardinal Cushing and a number of other Catholic and Protestant religious leaders in the Boston area:

*None of us can be indifferent or uninvolved in confronting the moral issues inherent in the current conflict in the Middle East. We cannot stand by idly at the possibility of Israel’s destruction, of decimating the two and a half million Jewish people. . . . The end of hostilities must be followed by a firm and permanent peace; one which will recognize Israel as a viable nation in the community of nations. . . .*

Another impressive example came in July from Los Angeles where

150 clergymen of all denominations signed a public declaration of support that was well publicized in the press and other media. Father Charles Casassa, the Jesuit President of Loyola University in Los Angeles, sent a copy of the declaration to President Johnson, U Thant, and the State Department, and received a sympathetic response from the Administration.

In the preamble to their document the Los Angeles clergy indicated that their action grew directly out of their involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogues:

*In recent years, great strides have been made in the area of interreligious dialogues and we are now confronted with the need to express ourselves together in terms of the religious and moral implications of the moral crisis.*

On July 12, at the height of the United Nations debate about Israel's reunification of the city of Jerusalem, seventeen leading Protestant theologians, professors and seminary presidents published this advertisement in *The New York Times*:

*For Christians, to acknowledge the necessity of Judaism is to acknowledge that Judaism presupposes inextricable ties with the land of Israel and the city of David, without which Judaism cannot be truly itself. Theologically, it is this dimension to the religion of Judaism which leads us to support the reunification of the city of Jerusalem.*

The majority of the scholars who signed this remarkable document—including the leading New Testament scholars Prof. Kristar Stendahl of Harvard and Prof. W. P. Davies of Duke University—have been active participants in theological dialogues with Jewish scholars, the latest of which was the International Colloquium on Judaism and Christianity held at Harvard Divinity School in 1966. The value of their declaration was underscored when Israel's Foreign Minister Abba Eban quoted the text of their statement before the General Assembly as an authoritative theological reinforcement of Israel's position.

When all the available statements and actions by individual Christian leaders of both national and local prominence are weighed in the balance, it becomes perfectly clear that while the response may not have been overwhelming, it certainly was considerably more substantial, and significant, than is conveyed by the judgment that "the Christians by and large were silent." When compared with the support given to Israel

by individual leaders of the political left and liberal movements, the response of Christian leaders stands out as even more impressive.<sup>1</sup>

### *the jewish response*

ONE CAN MAKE too much of declarations by individuals, just as one can make too little of them. In the internal Jewish debate thus far, it is puzzling to find that many Jewish spokesmen and commentators have tended to minimize the value of individual commitments by Christian leaders. But why? In 1953, Elmo Roper conducted a national survey in which he asked Americans, "Which one of these groups do you feel is doing the most good for the country at the present time?"

Forty per cent of the American people picked religious leaders as the group "doing the most good" and most to be trusted. "No other group—whether government, Congressional, business or labor—came anywhere near matching the prestige and pulling power of the men who are ministers of God," Roper stated. The image of the clergyman among Americans may not be without its ambiguities, but there can be little doubt that clergymen as individuals rank high in the American scale of prestige and public influence. In recent years their leadership in the Vietnam peace effort, in the war against poverty, in community organization in the slums, and in support of aid to underdeveloped countries, has further solidified their moral influence among large segments of the population. Considering this standing in American society, the support of Israel by prominent individual Christian clergymen ought to be valued very highly indeed.

When Christian individuals aligned themselves one-sidedly with the extremist Arab cause—as in the case of the Rev. Dr. Henry P. Van Dusen, a former Protestant seminary president, who wrote a letter to the *New York Times* equating the Israeli victory with the Nazi blitzkrieg—there was quick response. Other Christian leaders, and most notably Dr. Roy Eckardt, voiced their distress both at his point of view, and at the harm done by his negative influence. Logic and common sense alone should have compelled us to give at least as much weight to the positive influence of declarations by those Christian leaders who unequivocally backed Israel's cause and helped shape affirmative public opinion in America.

When early in June the AJC publicized a survey emphasizing the

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<sup>1</sup> See "The American Left and Israel," by Martin Peretz, in *Commentary*, November 1967.

“widespread support” of Christian leaders and masses (as reflected in the public opinion polls), a representative of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations berated that evaluation in the public press, terming it “exaggerated oversimplification.” His comment had little effect other than to tell some of the most distinguished American Christians—including two of the four U.S. Catholic Cardinals, one archbishop, hundreds of Protestant scholars and church leaders, as well as the editors of major Christian journals whose pro-Israel stands were cited in the survey—that their support was not regarded by Jews as terribly important after all. Imagine the situation in reverse! What a pained outcry would have arisen from Jewry had the same group of Christian leaders come out in support of Nasser and the Arab League! One of the lessons to be learned from this experience, it seems to me, is that we need to overcome the self-righteous reflex of rubbing into the dirt the faces of Christians who come to our aid—in frustrated retribution against those who do not.

*the establishments*

THIRD, Jewish leaders directed their most valid, serious and justifiable criticism at the “establishment” institutions of the Catholic and Protestant churches. As the AJC study puts it:

*The reluctance of the two ‘umbrella’ organizations—the National Council of Churches and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops—to commit themselves unequivocally on the basic question of Israel’s survival, especially in the face of Arab threats to annihilate the whole population, came as a surprise to many Jewish leaders. Neither of these two groups issued any clear-cut statement to this effect during the saber-rattling days in May.*

Jews, including those who have been engaged in dialogue with these bodies for a number of years, did not expect Christian institutions to accept the Jewish understanding of the religious and cultural significance of Israel and Jerusalem to Judaism. Nor were Jewish leaders looking to Christian institutions for a commitment on political or legal issues relating to Israel’s sovereignty—Israel’s right to exist was not up for negotiation in any case. It was the moral and human issue of the potential massacre of 2,500,000 Jews that demanded a spontaneous outcry from those authorized to speak for the Christian conscience in this nation.

Those were “the Christians who by and large were silent” on the life-and-death issue of Jewish survival.

The record must show that Catholic and Protestant leaders who hold positions of authority in their respective establishments—notably Msgr. George Higgins, Director of Social Action for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Father Edward Flannery, Executive Secretary of the U.S. Bishops Subcommittee on Catholic-Jewish Relations, and the Rev. Dr. David Hunter, Associate General Secretary of the National Council of Churches—did take strong public positions on Israel's survival. They did so, however, in their private capacities. Their courageous and independent stands, taken at some personal risk and in the face of some institutional pressures, were a reflection of an understanding of the interior mind of Jews—the consequence of many years of close association and friendship with Jewish leaders.

When the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops did issue a statement on June 8, it asked for “a crusade of prayer for peace” and expressed the “fervent hope” that the UN would be successful in halting the conflict. In the face of what appeared to most Jews as the imminent prospect of another Auschwitz for the corporate Jewish body in Israel, this rhetoric, with its echo of the earlier flight into pietism by Christian leaders in Nazi Germany, contributed to a pervading sense of gloom in American Jewry.

Nor were the statements of the National Council of Churches, although formulated in more political terms, a source of great moral reinforcement for Jews or for Israel. In their June 6 telegram to President Johnson, in which they pressed for a cease fire through the UN, they appeared to equate Israel's right to exist with the need to resolve the Arab refugee problem. In their July 7 resolution, the National Council of Churches contributed to the moral confusion of cause and effect by labeling Israel's retaliation to Arab provocations “aggression” and “expansionism.”

*positions have changed*

DESPITE THE CHAGRIN and distress these positions have aroused in the Jewish community, there is some encouragement in the fact that modifications in stance have begun to emerge, and these are potentially of considerable political importance to Israel and to eventual peace in the Middle East. Some of these changes are demonstrably attributable to the marathon dialogues that a number of us have been engaged in with Catholic and Protestant institutional representatives since last June.

The most striking change has been that of the Vatican in relation to Jerusalem. Pope Paul VI, on several occasions, called for the interna-

tionalization of the city of Jerusalem, a policy which most members of the Catholic hierarchy in the United States have felt obliged to follow. On July 11, a "dialogue" took place in Jerusalem between Israel's Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and the Vatican's representative, Msgr. Angelo Felici, following which they issued a joint communique stating that they had explored formulae for the holy places "in an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual understanding." Since then the Vatican has changed its position, now aligning itself with the views of the World Council of Churches, which from the beginning of the crisis asked of Israel only assurance of free access to Christian holy places.

The July 7 resolution of the National Council of Churches also represents a shift from a one-sided attitude leaning toward the Arab cause, in the direction of a more balanced advocacy of even-handed justice in the Middle-East:

*Indispensable to peace in the Middle East is acceptance by the entire international community of the State of Israel. . . . Early talks between the belligerents with or without the good offices, conciliation, or mediation of a third party are encouraged.*

However profound and justified our frustrations with, and criticism of the Christian institutions, hard-headed realism requires that Jewish policy-makers do not yield to the temptation to break off diplomatic relations with the spokesmen of Christendom, and retreat to a fortress Judaica. There are Christian leaders of good-will within the establishments who are allies or potential allies of the Jewish community, and only by keeping communication with them open and ongoing can we hope to deepen their understanding of our positions, and to win their institutional support.

The counsel of those who have been advising Jews that Christianity is "a sinking ship," that we live in "a post-Christian" world, or that dialogue with Christians only "white-washes their criminal past," is the most dangerous kind of nonsense. Jewish leadership must repudiate this diatribe at all costs, because it gives our people a false sense of security, and sets into motion an anti-Christian mood which can paralyze any creative relationship with the majority society. This resort to slogans about a "post-Christian world" obscures a very complex problem that I have dealt with at greater length in another essay; suffice it for present purposes to point out that this cliché encourages many Jews to believe that they can arbitrarily turn their backs on Christian society and estab-

lish themselves elsewhere. How misleading! There is no future for Jews anywhere in the Arab-Muslim nations. The illusion of a Jewish future in the proletarian utopia of the Soviet Union has been completely dashed. The elementary fact is that the overwhelming majority of the Jews in the diaspora live in the midst of predominantly Christian communities, in the United States, Western Europe and Latin America. The security of the State of Israel and of its Jewish community rests heavily on the continued support of the United States Government and its people. The realistic problem for us is not how to escape these facts of our existence, but how to relate to them seriously—which means to recognize the fundamental importance of strengthening cooperation and authentic solidarity with Christians and their institutions. It is they who constitute primary structures in our environment.

Taking the foregoing into account—the generally supportive response of the Christians in American society, the positive reaction of numerous Christian leaders, and the changes that appear to be taking place even in the Christian establishments—one could come to a valid conclusion radically opposite to the one widely expressed in the Jewish community; to the conclusion that “the Christians by and large” did well by Israel. That judgment can be further strengthened when Christian support of Israel is analyzed in relation to other critical issues in the life of the churches—Vietnam, the race problem, admission of Red China to the United Nations, draft-card burning, conscientious objection, birth control, celibacy, and church-state issues. On each of these major problems the Catholic and Protestant communities are severely divided, and find it exceedingly difficult to obtain a Christian consensus that would include the hawks and the doves, the militant liberals and the white backlash, the conservatives and the progressives. If the Christian masses and the Christian leaders who have spoken out in support of Israel remain stable and steadfast in their present views, it should be a major source of moral stamina to Israel and her people during the long and protracted negotiations that lie ahead.

#### *sympathy for the underdog?*

THE FOREGOING assertion nevertheless raises a critical question: just how deeply rooted are the commitments of Americans who have indicated their support of Israel? It has been speculated that this overwhelming popular support of Israel derives from the peculiar American tendency to identify with the underdog. It crystallized during the time when the Israelis were threatened with extermination. For most Americans nur-

tured on the B-film and soap-opera culture of "cowboys and Indians," "good guys and bad guys," it was natural to back little David surrounded by murderous Goliaths. But the roles have now shifted. Are we to anticipate that this large popular support will shift to the side of the Arabs, who are the new "underdogs"? Certainly the Russian and Arab propaganda campaigns—which have been trying diabolically to portray Israelis as the "new Nazis" pursuing the Arabs cast in the role of "the new Jews"—are striving to bring about such a shift in world public opinion.

The Harris and Gallup opinion polls were conducted respectively in July and October of 1967, and would therefore argue that Israel's victory was not met by a significant shift in public sentiment away from Israel. However, conversations between numerous Jewish leaders and many Christians—clergy and laymen—since the end of the June war lead to the inescapable impression that the majority of Christians who supported Israel did so on the basis of strong humanitarian feelings. Such feelings and expressions of conscience, while they are to be honored for what they are, are inadequate to sustain conviction for the long pull ahead in the Middle East. It therefore seems imperative that Jews help their Christian neighbors enlarge their intellectual grasp of the issues, including the meaning of Israel and Jerusalem to the Jewish people and to Judaism.

*instrument of understanding*

AND THAT BRINGS US to the role of the Jewish-Christian dialogue as an instrument for furthering Christian understanding of Jewish peoplehood and its relation to Israel. Those who have down-graded the dialogue or condemned it as bankrupt are no more accurate in their understanding of its achievement than they were in their emotional and imprecise evaluation of "the Christian response" to Israel. From first-hand experience, I know that those who have spoken in such dogmatic terms have either not participated at all in the more serious Jewish-Christian dialogues, or at most have taken part in two or three seminars and institutes. On the basis of this minimal experience, they generalize about a whole movement.

If the same standard of success or failure were applied, for example, to the usefulness in our synagogues of adult Jewish education programs in transforming the congregants' patterns of religious observance and in-depth knowledge of the Talmud and classic Jewish sources, then I

fear that many rabbis would be compelled to close down their synagogues and conclude that Judaism has failed. But that conclusion would be as erroneous as the one which some Jewish leaders, especially a few nationally prominent rabbis, are making about the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The dialogue may not have proven to be all that its supporters have claimed, but it is certainly far more than the caricature its opponents have made of it.

A value judgment of the Jewish-Christian dialogue requires a fair-minded confrontation of the bald evidence. It is incontrovertible fact for those who have actively participated in dialogues—especially with academicians, theologians, religious school teachers, seminarians, and clergy—that these interactions have helped bring about profound and positive changes in the attitudes and behavior of many Christians toward the Jewish people, Judaism, and the Synagogue. The evidence is so clear-cut and palpable that it is difficult to understand assertions to the contrary. Documentation of the changes that have already taken place in Christian thought, teaching and practice, on all levels of Christian culture could fill a large volume. (The rates of change are uneven, of course, in this mammoth process.)

How far the dialogue process has helped Christian leadership to overcome the ancient myths and stereotypes about deicide (the “Christ-killer” charge) proselytizing, and the permanent worth and value of Judaism is reflected in the official statement of the American Catholic Church issued in March 1967 as “The Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.”

These guidelines charge “Catholic educators and scholars” with responsibility to carry out the following program of implementation on all levels of Christian society:

*In keeping with the [Vatican Council II] statement's strong repudiation of anti-Semitism, a frank and honest treatment of the history of Christian anti-Semitism [should be incorporated] in our history books, courses and curricula. . . .*

*The presentation of the Crucifixion story in such a way as not to implicate all Jews of Jesus' time or of today in a collective guilt for the crime. . . .*

*A full and precise explanation of the use of the expression 'the Jews' by St. John and other New Testament references which appear to place all Jews in a negative light.. (These expressions and references should be fully and precisely clarified in accordance with the intent of the [Vatican Council] statement that Jews are 'not to be presented as rejected or accursed by God as if this followed from Holy Scripture'.)*

*An explicit rejection of the historically inaccurate notion that Judaism of that time, especially that of Pharasaism, was a decadent formalism and hypocrisy, well exemplified by Jesus' enemies. . . .*

*An acknowledgement by Catholic scholars of the living and complex reality of Judaism after Christ and the permanent election of Israel alluded to by St. Paul (Romans 9:29), and incorporation of the results into Catholic teaching. . . .*

*It is understood that proselytizing is to be carefully avoided in the dialogue.*

***the theological vanguard***

UNQUESTIONABLY the most significant consequence of the Jewish-Christian dialogue has been the emergence of "a new theology of Israel" among a group of influential Catholic and Protestant theologians, the net effect of which is to call upon Christians to give up their designs to convert Jews. This "new theology" is hinted at in the last statement of the Bishops' guidelines quoted above; it appears in more explicit theological form in the following paragraph from an essay by Father Cornelius Rijk, recently appointed advisor on Jewish affairs to Cardinal Bea at the Vatican:

*In our time Christian theology has gained a new religious understanding of the people of Israel through the realization that God continues to be with his people and that the revelation of the Old Testament is now complete as far as the Jewish people are concerned, even though they have not recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. The Messiah came to fulfill the Old Covenant, but there is no suggestion anywhere in the New Testament that the Old Covenant was thereby abolished. Nor is it ever stated that God rejected his own people and that Christianity came to take the place of Judaism.*

Anyone who knows anything about the past 1,900 years of Jewish-Christian relations is fully aware that these theological affirmations by the highest authorities of the Roman Catholic Church constitute little short of a revolutionary change in position. This change is matched by parallel developments among leaders in the Protestant communities. No Jew needs to turn somersaults in the street because the Christian world is finally beginning to correct its errors and misperceptions about us. But what moral, intellectual, or practical purpose is served by acting as though no change at all is taking place, or by seeking to discredit this healthful development?

There are, of course, many conservative Christians who, ironically, share with some Orthodox Jews a deep suspicion of change, and who are anxious about the present liberalization process in the Catholic community. These are mostly the same Orthodox Christians (also called "conservatives") who, in alliance with the prelates from the Arab countries, resisted the efforts of progressive churchmen to condemn anti-Semitism and declare a clear policy of friendship and respect for Jews and Judaism. Do Jews, wittingly or unwittingly, want to play into the hands of the camp of Christians whose spiritual ancestors were the source of so much agony and bloodshed for our people, and so much contumely for our religion? These are the Orthodox Christians who have found it theologically intolerable that the Jews have returned to the Holy Land, and that the holy places are now under Jewish jurisdiction. These same conservatives can be counted upon to do everything humanly possible to prevent the recognition of the State of Israel by the Vatican. [Liberal churchmen who have not been confronted in the dialogue with their liberal bias against Israel make strange bedfellows with ultra-conservatives and are not exempt from the same criticism.] Is it not paradoxical that Jews who demonstrate such devotion and passion to preserve the State of Israel should continue to press their opposition to the dialogue process which holds out such promise of an understanding that can lead more Christians to the support and recognition of Israel's right to exist?

The Italian historian Benedetto Croce pointed out that an intellectual élite in every society establishes and maintains the new ideas which become the keystone of all social and cultural change. What this élite thinks today, Croce stated, often becomes the thought of the masses in decades to come. Already new élite Christian ideas about Jews and Judaism have begun to percolate down to the Christian masses through new textbooks used in parochial schools and Sunday schools, teacher training institutes for nuns and Protestant teachers, seminars for Christian seminarians, chairs of Jewish studies in colleges and universities, adult education institutes for Christian parents, and the growing use of Christian programs on radio, television, and other mass media.

*only face to face*

THE NOTION that these changes would have taken place if Christians had simply studied Jewish books, without a living encounter with Jews in dialogue, is an illusion and a fantasy. Vast libraries of Judaica, in all languages, have been available to Christian scholars, clergymen, and teachers for almost 2,000 years. How many significant changes in the

Christian attitudes toward Jews and Judaism can be attributed to the study of this literature? Indeed, there is plenty of evidence that Christian savants, nurtured on anti-Jewish theological stereotypes, and living in isolation from Jews as persons, read into or read out of Jewish sources texts that confirmed their preconceived bias. Those Jews who advocate just letting Christian scholars study the Judaic literature as a substitute for dialogue must explain how they would deal with such noble fruits of that process as Johann Eisenmenger's *Judaism Unmasked*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and the most recent anthology of vicious anti-Semitism reputedly published and distributed by Arab sources at Vatican Council II, *The Plot Against the Church*. All these marvelous works were the result of such library studies.

The fact is that the policy of withdrawal from Jewish-Christian dialogue and reliance on theoretical understanding flies in the face of everything we know from social psychology about attitude change. Kurt Lewin, the father of this social science, has demonstrated clinically that changes in attitudes and behavior do not result from cognitive information or abstract ideas alone, but primarily from living human interaction, which transmutes ideas into personal values. The changes that have taken place thus far in Christian attitudes toward deicide, anti-Semitism, proselytization, and the living relevance of Rabbinic Judaism are case histories demonstrating the validity of this approach.

*social action as surrogate*

THE MORE RECENT substitute for religious dialogue that has been vigorously advocated by some Jews, strange to say, is interfaith social action. I know of no proposal more contradictory to traditional, halachic Judaism, for in effect, it advocates a separation between religion and life. The late Chief Rabbi Kook of Israel, one of the great sages of traditional Judaism, declared that

*man's physical concerns and spiritual aspirations are inseparable. The sacred cannot exist without the profane. The sacred and the profane together influence the human spirit, and man is enriched by absorbing from each whatever is suitable. Indeed, the sacred can exist only so long as it rests upon a 'foundation of the profane' since spiritual sanctity must rest upon the solid base of normal life.*

Holiness set up in opposition to nature was described by Chief Rabbi Kook as "the holiness of the exile", a reflection of the long dispersion in which Jews were cut off from normal existence in society.

Not only is this religious social action absurd from the point of view of Judaism, it is impractical as well. To avoid examining the basic religious grounds for social action work, to cooperate with Christians without such an examination, can lead to an incredible situation in which Christians and Jews would collaborate to "redeem" the civic society while Christians look upon their Jewish partners as "unredeemed". How strong an alliance in social action do Jews believe they could sustain, while Christians continued to think of Jews as "fallen and faithless Israel"?

To call for an embargo on the discussion of religious issues with Christians and to promote relations solely on the basis of social action would mean that we were presenting Judaism to the Christian world as a secular humanist institution. As Arthur Hertzberg has frequently noted, Jews and Judaism have greater dignity and status in the Bible than they have in any other intellectual construction in the Western world, and traditional Jews who take this "social action only" line appear to be bent on undermining that extraordinary reality.

Rabbis, priests, nuns and ministers do not come together for social action because they are experts in nuclear non-proliferation treaties, or in the administration of economic development programs in Lesotho, or in city planning. What brings them together is a recognition that they share a moral conscience which in turn derives from a certain attitude toward Sacred Scriptures and their sacred histories, that they all have a certain expectation for man and society that is shaped by messianic visions of a kingdom to come in which justice and righteousness are consummated. Certainly they will carry out their redemptive work more effectively if they have technical competence, but that is not their primary vocation. If it is not religious principle that binds them together, then their work can be done more honestly and unambiguously under the auspices of the Foreign Policy Association or the American Civil Liberties Union.

#### *a valid objection*

TRADITIONAL JEWS make one very sound criticism of the dialogue which must be taken seriously. That concern is that the dialogue may become an arena for trading ignorances. It is for this reason that anti-dialoguists have been especially opposed to lay dialogues. To these serious and legitimate concerns, my response is two-fold: first, neither my agency nor I personally have organized any theological or religious dialogues without involving the most competent Jewish scholars we could find in the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform groups, and in the academic

world. Second, in organizing lay dialogues, we generally seek to enroll our people in an intensive adult Jewish education course, entitled "Prelude to Dialogue," and conducted in cooperation with local bureaus of Jewish education or institutions of higher Jewish learning. With rare exceptions, our representatives in theological dialogues more than hold their own, and generally convey a deep impression of the vitality and richness of contemporary Jewish scholarship and cultural life. The lay dialogue has taught us that we have tended to overestimate the knowledge among Christians of their own faith and doctrines, and have underestimated the capacity of our intelligent, carefully selected Jewish laymen. We have also learned that Jewish-Christian lay dialogues have become an increasingly strong incentive for our people to know themselves as Jews. As a result, the dialogue has been characterized as "the secret weapon of adult Jewish education."

*a challenge to be met*

IN SUMMARY, the evidence is overwhelming that we have made remarkable, indeed unprecedented progress on the issues we have stressed in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. Can the dialogue be similarly effective in helping overcome Christian ignorance or misunderstanding of Jewish peoplehood (*k'lal yisroel*, the sacred congregation of Israel) and the symbolic meaning of Israel and Jerusalem to Judaism and the Jewish people?

The answer is yes, but with provisions. The first provision is that Jews themselves clarify their own understanding of these complex questions. We are far from anything like a consensus on the meaning of Israel to the Jewish people. Is Israel simply a secular nation-state? Does it represent the fulfilment of messianic expectations that date back to the prophets of Israel? Is it an eschatological reality, pointing to the day of judgment which the prophets foretold would usher in *malkhut shamayim*, the kingdom of heaven?

When in recent weeks some of my colleagues in the rabbinate have expressed bitter disappointment over "the Christian silence" about Israel, I asked them, "When did you last speak to a Christian minister about the religious significance of Israel to Judaism?" Invariably the answer was "never" or "not very recently." Further, I would ask, "When did you last speak to your congregation about this?" Again, "not very recently," or "we take our relationship to Israel for granted; everyone knows that the ark faces toward Jerusalem, that the glass is broken at each wedding to commemorate the destruction of the Temple in Jerusa-

lem, that our three pilgrim festivals keep alive the memory of the national sanctuary on Mt. Zion," and so forth.

In the main, rabbis and Jewish teachers have not clarified these fundamental issues relating to Israel, neither for themselves nor for their Jewish audiences. How much less have we clarified these questions for our Christian neighbors? Given this enormous lack in theoretical understanding, it is virtually a miracle that Jewish people have behaved as well as they have. It is equally astounding that the Christian leaders and masses responded to Israel's predicament as affirmatively as they did.

Before us, therefore, is a great task of intellectual clarification, and of communication. The Israel-Arab crisis resulted in a crisis in Jewish-Christian relations. But it is a crisis that is also a great opportunity.



## CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

is a quarterly review

devoted to Jewish thought, life and letters

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

3080 Broadway

New York, N.Y. 10027

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