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JEWS AND JUDAISM IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

On October 28, 1965, the 2,500 Fathers of Vatican II adopted almost unanimously the Declaration on Non-Chistian Religions, generally known as Nostra Aetate ("In Our Time"). Thus, twenty years have passed since that historic action was taken by Roman Catholic leaders from throughout the world to set relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people on a new and productive course. In January, 1975, the Vatican issued comprehensive Guidelines on Catholic Jewish Relations which provided concrete guidance for implementing the affirmative policies of the Vatican Declaration in the vital areas of religious education, liturgy, preaching, teacher training, and social action.

These important Catholic actions have been preceded by the adoption in 1961 by the World Council of Churches of a far-reaching declaration on Christian Jewish relations that contained a number of themes later taken up and developed by the Vatican. Similar declarations on Jewish-Christian relations—all of which condemned Antisemitism and called for mutual respect between Christians and Jews—had also been adopted in the 1960's and 1970's by a number of American, European, and Latin American Protestant and Catholic church bodies.

What have been the effects of these widely heralded declarations? Have they been just more pious declarations, or have they resulted in actual changes in Christian teachings and images about Jews and Judaism—and in Jewish images and teachings about Christians and Christianity? How extensive and meaningful have the revisions of the formerly negative or hostile images been? What still remains to be improved? What educational tools and theological resources are available for bringing about future progress?

This special issue of the Journal of Ecumenical Studies contains six major essays by leading specialists in Jewish-Christian relations that provide informed answers to these critical questions. Their papers, plus the appended guidelines of the International Conference of Christians and Jews, are probably the most up-to-date summary of what has been taking place in interreligious education during the past two decades.

Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, executive secretary of the Secretariat on Catholic Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has furnished an incisive summary of the major changes that have taken place in American Catholic textbooks and teaching materials regarding the images of Jews and Judaism.

Ms. Judith Herschopf Banks, associate director of interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Committee (my colleague for nearly twenty-five years), has
written a thorough survey of content analyses in Protestant and Catholic textbooks since the inception of various studies beginning in the 1930’s.

Dr. Ruth Kastning Olmedahl, based on her teaching experiences in West Germany, has probed suggestively the linkage between “the history of anti Judaism in the primitive church and the psychology of antisemitic prejudice.”

Dr. Peter Fiedler, also of West Germany, integrates the new insights of contemporary biblical and historical scholarship into fresh teaching approaches toward the relationship of Christianity to Judaism.

Dr. Paul van Buren of Temple University has composed a challenging essay calling for a radical rethinking of Christian identity in the presence of a living Judaism and the State of Israel.

Dr. John Carmody summarizes the findings of a research project that suggest methods for catalyzing the process of revising anachronistic methods for teaching about Jews and Judaism in Christian education.

The I C C J Guidelines crystallize the state of the interreligious condition and point to what productive work is yet to be done.

The first three articles and the I C C J guidelines emerged from an international consultation held by the International Conference of Christians and Jews at the Martin Buber House in Heppenheim, West Germany, April 7-10, 1983, on “The Image of Jews and Judaism in Teaching Materials: Evaluation of Past Research and Determination of Future Tasks.” Dr. Fiedler’s criteria were published in German, with a special English translation prepared for the Heppenheim consultation. Dr. van Buren’s essay was originally delivered to Christian and Jewish seminarians at a conference at Holy Trinity Seminary, Irving, Texas, in January, 1983, cosponsored by the American Jewish Committee and the Council of Southwest Theological Schools. Dr. Carmody’s project was commissioned by JES and the American Jewish Committee.

The publication of this vital collection of essays has been made possible by generous grants from the Nathan Appleman Institute for the Advancement of Christian Jewish Understanding and the Ruth U. Samuel Institute for International Programs in Interreligious Relations, both of which are affiliated with the American Jewish Committee. I am privileged to serve as director of both institutes.

This document would not have been possible without the commitment and encouragement of my long time friend and colleague, Professor Leonard Swidler, editor of JES.

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