



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE  
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

*Preserving American Jewish History*

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 4, Folder 33, "A Jewish Viewpoint on Nostra Aetate", 1985.



1985  
856

A JEWISH VIEWPOINT  
ON NOSTRA AETATE

by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum

It is appropriate, I think, to ask why it is that "the Jewish declaration," introduced at the second session of Vatican II, November, 1963, and promulgated October 28, 1965, had elicited such widespread universal attention.

As Cardinal Bea said in his relatio September 25, at the time of his introduction of the "Jewish declaration,"

I can only begin with the fact that this Declaration certainly must be counted among the matters in which public opinion has shown the greatest concern. Scarcely any other schema has been written up so much and so widely in periodicals....Many will judge the Council good or bad by its approval or disapproval of the Declaration.

This decree had engaged the concern and the attention of 2,300 Council Fathers in Rome over a period of three years. It involved the attention of the Protestant and Eastern Orthodox observers. Why is the issue of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism and the

practical relations between Christians and Jews on a daily level of such central significance? Why did it attract such widespread attention?

It is my thesis that the issue of relations between Christians and Jews had reached the point of ripeness, of maturation, in a way that can be seen analogously in terms of the ripeness and the fullness which relations between the black and white societies have reached. The moment of crisis, or the moment of truth, in relations between black and white <sup>people</sup> are tested and resolved to the degree to which we overcome the contradictions between our professions of love, charity and justice and our practices which have often stood in flagrant opposition to our pious verbalizations. In the process of being confronted by blacks with a challenge to our moral claims, and our negative attitudes and behavior toward them, we have begun to find it necessary to face truthfully the fact that we have been dealing with blacks in the main as abstractions, as mythic perceptions, but not as real people, not as persons who have a human dignity that demands a certain response from us <sup>as</sup> brothers and sisters. One of the facts that has become very clear to us is that we have evaded our moral duties to blacks by substituting a series of myths for genuine confrontation. These myths have buffered us from encountering the reality of black people.

Now in many ways the mythology, the unreality, the capacity to abstract human relationships and to empty them of solid human meaning and feeling ~~find~~ <sup>can</sup> find ~~an~~ analogy in the relations between Christians and Jews. What we have begun to confront in the relationships between Christianity and Judaism and between Christ<sup>e</sup>dom and Jewry is the fact that there is a fundamental ambivalence historically and theologically within Christian teaching and within Christian social practice that has never been confronted before in any serious and systematic way in the past nineteen hundred years of the Christian-Jewish encounter. Just as the social revolution of the blacks has caused us to confront the race issue in a way that we cannot escape, so certain revolutionary facts of the twentieth century have made the Christian-Jewish confrontation inescapable.

I believe that the Nazi holocaust and all that has meant for the Christian conscience, as well as the tremendous needs of a new world of the twentieth century in which Christians and Jews together find themselves increasingly a minority in relation to a non-white, non-Judeo-Christian world, are compelling us to confront the deep realities of the relationship between Christians and Jews. Fundamentally, Christianity had <sup>where</sup> never made up its mind as to ~~whether~~ it stands in terms of its common patrimony with Judaism and its daily attitudes and relationships and behavior toward Jews. We find as we look into the history of the Christian-Jewish encounter for the greater part of the past two millennia that there have been teachings

and episodes betokening the greatest of mutual respect and esteem between Christians and Jews.) ~~Fundamentally, Christianity has never made up its mind as to where it stands in terms of its common patrimony with Judaism and its daily attitudes and relationships and behavior toward Jews. We find as we look into the history of the Christian-Jewish encounter for the greater part of the past two millennia that there have been teachings and episodes betokening the greatest of mutual respect and esteem between Christians and Jews.~~

Thus, we find St. Athanasius, one of the early Church Fathers at the beginning of the fourth century, who said that "the Jews are the great school of the knowledge of God and the spiritual life of all mankind." St. Jerome, who lived in the fifth century and who spent forty years in Palestine where in Caesarea with Jewish scholars and biblical authorities he studied the Holy Scriptures and the Masoretic traditions--and from whom he obtained insights on which he based his translation of the Scriptures into the Vulgate--declared that "the Jews were divinely preserved for a purpose worthy of God."

This side of the affirmative attitude of the Church toward the Jews reflected the tradition of St. Paul in Romans 9 to 11, which speaks of Christians being engrafted onto the olive tree of Israel (11:17) planted by God. This tradition also found expression in positive behavior of popes even in the Middle Ages. Thus Callixtus II issued a bull in 1120 beginning with the words "Sicut Judaeis" in which he strongly condemned the forced baptism of Jews, acts of

violence against their lives and property, and the desecration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Gregory IX issued the bull "Etsi Judeorum" in 1233 in which he demanded that the Jews in Christian countries should be treated with the same humanity as with which Christians desire to be treated in heathen lands.

Side by side with that tradition there existed a tradition of hostility and contempt which the late French historian, Professor Jules Isaac, has written about in his various studies. This tradition was perhaps most explicitly embodied in the eight sermons of St. John Chrysostom, who in the year 387 spoke from the pulpits of the city of Antioch to the first congregations of early Gentiles who became Christians, saying:

I know that a great number of the faithful have for the Jews a certain respect and hold their ceremonies in reverence. This provokes me to eradicate completely such a disastrous opinion. I have already brought forward that the synagogue is worth no more than the theatre...it is a place of prostitution. It is a den of thieves and a hiding place of wild animals...not simply of animals but of impure beasts...God has abandoned them. What hope of salvation have they left?

1. Jesus and Israel; His Anti-Semitism Roots in Christianity?; and The Teaching of Contempt are all by Prof Jules Isaac, translated by Mme. Claire Huchet Bishop.

They say that they too worship God but this is not so. None of the Jews, not one of them is a worshiper of God....Since they have disowned the Father, crucified the Son and rejected the Spirit's help, who would dare to assert that the synagogue is not a home of demons! God is not worshiped there. It is simply a house of idolatry....The Jews live for their bellies, they crave for the goods of this world. In shamelessness and greed they surpass even pigs and goats....The Jews are possessed by demons, they are handed over to impure spirits...Instead of greeting them and addressing them as much as a word, you should turn away from them as from a pest and a plague of the human race.

Now, if one enters into the historic background and the context within which St. John Chrysostom made these remarks, perhaps one can understand a little better--one can explain but certainly not excuse--what led St. John Chrysostom to make ~~these~~ <sup>these</sup> anti-Jewish ~~remarks~~ <sup>Polemics</sup>. It may be useful to take a moment to observe that the Church in the first four centuries of this era was struggling for its existence as an autonomous, independent faith community. In the minds of the Roman Empire the early Christians represented another Jewish sect. Judaism was the religio licita (a favored religion), and for early Christians to achieve any status, including the right to conduct Christian ceremonials, they had to come as Jews to achieve recognition by the

2. Martin Luther appropriated these anti-Jewish polemics and incorporated both the images and rhetoric in his "The Jews and Their Lies." See Luther and the Jews, essays by Prof. Eric W. Gritsch and Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, published by the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., 360 Park Ave. South, New York, NY. 10010

Romans.<sup>3</sup> And so the early Church fathers found it necessary to separate Christians from the Jews. The early Christians felt very close to Jews; observed their Sabbath on the Jewish Sabbath, their Easter on the Jewish Passover. At the time of the Council of Elvira (ca. 300) many Christians in Spain thought the Jews had a special charism as the People of God and therefore invited them to bless their fields so that they would be fruitful. To separate Christians from their associations with Judaism, to create a sense of autonomy and independence for Christianity, apparently in the wisdom of the early Church Fathers it became necessary to embark on a drastic effort to break the bonds between church and synagogue and to give Christians a consciousness of difference from the Jews. In the process of this disidentification, however, the pattern of anti-Jewish attitudes and of anti-Jewish behavior became so entrenched, that by the time the Church became the established religion of the Roman empire, these attitudes were reflected increasingly in ecclesiastical legislation. These laws subsequently led to the establishment of ghettos, the forcing of Jews to wear yellow hats and badges, and in general, this legislation reduced Jews to the status of pariahs throughout the Roman empire. As the Church became the major institution integrating the whole of medieval society, the perception of the Jew within medieval Christendom became the perception of the Jew within Western culture and civilization.

<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> See James Parkes, The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue (London: Soncino Press, 1934).

Lest one think that these attitudes are mainly of academic or historic interest, one needs to confront the following facts. A prominent Catholic educator has traveled around this country to various Christian seminaries and universities, to speak of the new understanding between Christians and Jews. As she sought to elaborate her thesis of the historical and theological factors which helped shape the conception of the Jew in the Western world, she received many questions from students at the end of her lectures. These are some of the questions that were asked of her by students in Catholic and Protestant seminaries and universities, and also on some secular campuses:

If the Jewish people did not kill Christ, who did?

You said that the high priest and the elders and not the Jewish people had a share of the responsibility in Jesus' condemnation. That is not true. The gospel says that the people clamored for his death.

I am a Catholic and I know what I have been taught when I went to catechism; and that is that the Jews killed Christ. That is what my Church teaches. I don't like it. I have several friends who are Jewish, but what can I do? I have to believe my Church.

Don't you think that in this country we are antagonistic to Jews because they are too successful in business?

Why are all Jews rich?

Why are the Jews better than anyone else in business?

I have heard it said that Hitler had to do what he did because Jews held all the money in Germany.

The St. Louis University study, in its examination of Catholic parochial school textbooks, found that there are echoes and resonances of this tradition of contempt in materials used even to this day. Thus, for example, to cite some of the teachings which have an unerring echo from the teachings of St. John Chrysostom, it is written in some of the religious textbooks studied by Sister Rose Albert:

The Jews wanted to disgrace Christ by having him die on the cross.

Show us that the Jews did not want Pilate to try Christ but to give permission for his death.

When did the Jews decide to kill Christ.

4. Catechetics and Prejudice by the Rev. John Pawlikowski (Paulist Press) summarizes the findings of the St. Louis textbooks studies. Faith without Prejudice by Dr. Eugene Fisher (Paulist Press) is also based in part on these studies. 9

The Jews as a nation refused to accept Christ and since that time they have been wandering on the earth without a temple or a sacrifice and without the Messiah.

The findings of the Yale University Divinity School study, published in book form as Faith and Prejudice by Dr. Bernhard E. Olson, have revealed analogous results in some of the denominational textbooks used in Protestantism. There have been significant revisions, as well as improved portrayals of Jews and Judaism, in Catholic and Protestant teaching materials since the publication of the St. Louis and Yale studies. Nevertheless, there is still a heavy residuum from the polemical histories of the past in far too many textbooks, and above all, in sermons, religious radio broadcasts, Seminary Manuals, Bible commentaries, liturgical missals, catechisms, passion plays, and in fact in the daily attitudes of many professing Christians.

These studies, which are of interest, I think, to people who have professional religious and educational responsibilities, do not begin, however, to make us aware of the consequence of these generations of teachings in terms of the impact they have had on the attitudes toward Jews in Western society and culture. These views which began in a

theological and religious matrix have penetrated into the marrow of Western civilization and continue to influence the Western world's attitudes toward the Jews to this very moment.

When you go home to your studies, if you will open any unabridged dictionary and look up the definition of a Jew, you will find the following:

**Webster's Universal Dictionary:<sup>2</sup>**

"Jew--to cheat in trade; as to Jew one out of a horse. To practice cheating in trade; as, he is said to Jew. To Jew down."

**Funk and Wagnalls:**

"Jew--(slang) to get the better of in a bargain; overreach: referring to the proverbial keenness of Jewish traders."

**Merriam Webster:**

"Jew--adjective, Jewish, usually taken to be offensive.

"Jew--verb, to cheat by sharp business practice, usually taken to be offensive.

"Jew--noun, a person believed to drive a hard bargain."

---

<sup>2</sup> See Jacob Chinitz, "Jews and Judaism in the Dictionary," Reconstructionist Magazine (June, 1963).

Contrast this with the dictionary's definition of "Christian":

**Webster's Universal Dictionary:**

"Christian--colloquial, a decent, civilized, or presentable person, characteristic of Christian people, kindly."

If one looks at the general social reality in terms of the way the Jew is perceived by and large (with significant changes in recent years growing out of our greater contact with each other), one finds, for example, a striking double standard in the evaluation of the behavior of the Christian and the Jew in the world of commerce. When a Jewish business man is successful in a given business or industry, in the parlor rooms and in the bars where the "man-to-man talk" is made (and all of us have heard this enough to know that it is true and not a figment of one's imagination), one hears the "explanation": "Well, he's a Jew." There's something sharp, there's something cunning about his practices. It is the Jewishness of the man which leads to his success. But if a Christian or a Gentile is engaged in the same industry, using virtually the same business practices, achieves the same kind of success, then in the American mythos this is the result of "Yankee ingenuity." This is living out the Horatio Alger myth of rags to riches in American life. It is a consequence of living out the "Puritan ethic."

One must confront ultimately how as recently as the past twenty-five years in a country--which, when it vaunted its great values and its great moral traditions, spoke of itself as a country of ancient Christian culture, which was in fact the seat of the Holy Roman Empire for almost a millennium beginning with Charlemagne--it was possible for millions of Christians to sit by as spectators while millions of human beings, who ~~were~~<sup>were</sup> their brothers and sisters, the sons of Abraham according to the flesh, were carted out to their death in the most brutal, inhuman, uncivilized ways. And one must confront as one of the terrible facts of the history of this period the conversation that took place between Adolf Hitler and two bishops in April, 1933, when they began raising questions about the German policy toward the Jews and Hitler said to them, as reported in the book, Hitler's Table-Talk, that he was simply completing what Christian teaching and preaching had been saying about the Jews for the better part of 1,900 years. "You should turn away from them as a pest and a plague of the human race," said St. John Chrysostom, and 1,500 years later thousands of his disciples implemented his teachings, literally.

One must compel oneself to face these hard facts in our own time because there is a tendency to want to evade the reality of this problem, since in America both for Christians and Jews anti-Semitism is not much more than a social nuisance. It is not a serious problem of human deprivation, of human discomfort, or a clear and present danger. But it was not too long ago that in the city of Buenos Aires,

Theological Issues of Vatican II  
Session VIII

for example, where 400,000 Jews live, Jewish merchants were packing guns into their business places, synagogues were being stored with armaments because the Neo-Fascist, ultra-nationalist movement called the TACUARA, consisting entirely of young well-to-do Catholic students, tramped through the streets of Buenos Aires spraying machine gun fire at synagogues and throwing bombs at Jewish businesses. The TACUARA apprehended a Jewish girl, Graciela Sirota, as she came home from the university in the evening, kidnapped her and carved a swastika in her breast. The chaplain of this TACUARA movement was a Father Julio de Meinvielle, who has written a book called The Mystery of the Jew in History. Father Meinvielle has claimed that he bases his "ministry" to these students in the TACUARA movement on the fact that the tradition of St. John Chrysostom's views toward the Jews and Judaism and those who have repeated that tradition represent the authentic view of the Church toward the Jewish people and to Judaism.

Within the past twenty years since the close of Vatican Council II, all of us have lived through what in fact may be the most revolutionary period in the history of the Christian-Jewish encounter over the past two millennia. As in race relations, the churches have begun to seek to reconcile the ambivalences and the contradictions between theology and history. The Catholic Church, through Vatican Council II's approval of a declaration dealing with Catholic-Jewish relations, the World Council of Churches, in its very forthright resolution at New Delhi in December, 1961, and American, West Euro-

pean, and Latin American Catholic and Protestant bodies have all contributed dramatically to the powerful assault against anti-Semitism. Their wide-ranging programs of textbook and curriculum revision, teacher training, seminar, education, retreats and adult education have been confronting increasingly the issues of responsible portrayal of Jews and Judaism.

If nothing else came out of Vatican Council II other than what took place in Rome on September 28 and 29, 1964, the Council more than justified its existence in terms of Jewish interests. On Friday, September 25, 1964, Cardinal Bea arose in the aula of St. Peter's Basilica to read his relatio to the "Jewish Declaration." After indicating the importance of this decree to the life of the Church, the importance of the Church's understanding of her true relationship to Israel, to the Bible, to the Jewish people, ancient and present (an understanding upon which is founded the whole future and prospect of the biblical, liturgical and theological renewals of the Church), Cardinal Bea declared before 2,300 Council Fathers, "There are many historical instances from various nations which cannot be denied." In these instances this belief concerning the culpability of the Jewish people as such has led Christians to consider and to call the Jews with whom they live the deicide people, reprobated and cursed by God and therefore to look down upon them and indeed to persecute them." Then he described what he thought was authentic Church teaching about the role of the Jews in the passion and the mystery of the relation-

ship between Christians and Jews. The moment of truth, as those of us who were privileged to be in Rome were able to observe, occurred on those two days when thirty-five cardinals and bishops from twenty-two countries arose on the floor of St. Peter's, and one after another, in terms more powerful and more committed than had even been heard before, called upon the Catholic Church to condemn anti-Semitism as a sin against the conscience of the church. Thirty-one of the cardinals and bishops from every major continent of the world took positions regarding Catholic attitudes in relation to the Jewish people, Judaism, the role of Israel in salvation history, the synagogue and its continued relevance, conversion, anti-Semitism--positions that have never been heard before in 1,900 years of Catholic-Jewish history, positions articulated with such friendship, indeed, fraternal love, as to make clear that a profound turning point had taken place in our lifetime.

Cardinal Cushing, the first of the American hierarchy to speak out on the declaration on the Jews, called for a denial by the Council of the culpability of the Jews as a people for the death of Jesus. "Rejection of Jesus by the Jewish people is a mystery and is to serve to instruct us not to inflate us," Cardinal Cushing said.<sup>35</sup> He

<sup>3</sup> These paraphrases of the interventions of the Council Fathers are based on the press reports issued by the Press Service of the National Catholic Welfare Conference and also on the summaries printed in the Herder Correspondence. The publication of the full texts of the interventions would be a valuable contribution, in my judgment, to a fuller understanding of the historic implications of the Council's actions for the future of Catholic-Jewish relations.

declared that the Catholic Church cannot judge the ancient judges of the Jews, as that is for God to do. At the same time, the Cardinal said Christians must be aware of the universal guilt of all men who by sinning crucified and are crucifying Christ.

The late Cardinal Meyer of Chicago stated that "it is not enough for the Church to deplore any injustices against the Jewish people. It must also point out the close relationship of the Church with the Jews." Cardinal Meyer pointed out that St. Thomas Aquinas taught that the Jews were not guilty of deicide.

Cardinal Ritter of St. Louis said that the declaration would repair injustices of past centuries. He said that it is often assumed that God abandoned the Jews, and the Jews were rightly to be accused of condemnation by Jesus. Now he said an opportunity had been offered to remedy these errors and to remove these injustices. Referring to the passage that spoke of the "reunion" of the Jews with the Church, Cardinal Ritter said it sounds as if the Church envisions conversion of the Jewish people. He pointed out that the text did not speak of the Moslems, Hindus and Protestants in the same respect. Therefore he suggested that the final text find less offensive wording and include a paragraph expressing the biblical hope of the union of all men at the end of days.

Cardinal Leger of Canada called the declaration a necessary act of the Church's renewal.

Cardinal Lercaro of Bologna suggested that the declaration emphasize biblical discussions with the Jews. He said the Jewish people should not be regarded as having value only in the past. But the heritage of Israel, the institution of the eucharist within the Jewish paschal cycle, the relation between the Passover meal and the Mass, the common fatherhood of Abraham--all these should be emphasized in the declaration, Cardinal Lercaro said, in order to give witness in a pastoral way and to foster piety. He added that the Jews of today should not be called an accursed or deicide people, but rather that we should recognize that all of us "have strayed like sheep."

Archbishop Pocock of Canada said that the Church must acquit the Jewish people of all false accusations made in the past through the abuse of truth and charity.

Bishop Stephen A. Leven of Texas, in rejecting the ancient deicide charge against the Jews, declared:

Fathers of the Council, we are not dealing here with some philosophical entity but with a word of infamy and execration which was invented by Christians and used to blame and persecute the Jews. For so many centuries, and even in our

own, Christians have hurled this word against Jews, and because of it they have justified every kind of horrible excess and even their slaughter and destruction. It is not up to us to make a declaration about something philosophical but to reprobate and damn a word which has furnished so many occasions of persecution through the centuries. We must tear this word out of the Christian vocabulary so that it may never again be used against the Jews.

During those two days of debate in Rome and in the final text that was promulgated by Paul VI on October 28, 1965, the Catholic Church took a great and historic leap forward in reconciling this ambivalence, affirming on the highest levels of its teaching authority the indebtedness of Christianity and the Christians to Judaism and the Jewish people, the rejection of anti-Semitism and an unprecedented call for fraternal dialogue between Christians and Jews. Later in this paper I should like to discuss the Declaration that was promulgated and both the Jewish and Catholic reactions to it.

There is a larger dimension to what took place in Rome at Vatican Council II that should be of as great significance to the Jewish people as the Jewish Declaration itself. The clue to that larger significance is suggested by the letter that Pope Paul VI sent to Cardinal Tisserant, dean of the Council presidency, on November 9, 1965. In that letter, Paul VI announced that Vatican Council II would

end on December 8, "on the same date on which in 1869, there was solemnly inaugurated the first Vatican Ecumenical Council." The ~~People~~<sup>Pope</sup> then said that "our Council can well be considered under many aspects a worthy counterpart" of Vatican Council I. I need not belabor the point of how great an advance, indeed a revolution, Vatican Council II represents in contrast to Vatican Council I. As you well know, most objective, impartial historians have described Vatican Council I as that which marked the decisive victory of ultramontanism. The foundation stones of Vatican Council I were based on the encyclical Quanta Cura and the accompanying Syllabus of Errors issued by Pius IX in 1864.<sup>4</sup> J.B. Bury, regius professor of modern history at Cambridge, in his study The History of the Papacy in the 19th Century summarizes the contents of the encyclical and the Syllabus in this way:

<sup>4</sup> Whether the Syllabus possessed dogmatic character is a subject of controversy which Prof. Bury discusses at some length. He cites critics, such as M. Dupanloup and others, who sought to minimize its binding import, but concludes from evidence contained in letters of Cardinal Antonelli "that the Syllabus was intended to have dogmatic value...on the subject of modern errors." Similarly, there is a deep divergence of views regarding ultramontanism itself. Paul Droulers, S.J., for example, writing in the Journal of World History, characterizes the "ultramontanist" movement as one "impelled by the desire for greater purity and fervor" and constituted a "voluntary renunciation of local ecclesiastical particularism. It held up the pope, the head and center of the Church, as the visible source of Catholic vitality, while steadily consolidating his practical authority." Looking at the same set of "facts," the Lutheran church historian, Rudolph Sohm, in his book, Kirchengeschichte in Grundriss characterized ultramontanism as "the intolerant doctrinal Catholicism which with its lust of power demands once more the complete subjection of the individual, of the world itself, to the supreme authority of the Church."

The leading ideas which are associated closely with modern progress are described as monstrous opinionum portenta, and those who propagate them are designated as slaves of corruption to design to demolish society, civilis societatis fundamenta convellere....

He [Pius IX] begins his comments on this doctrine (of toleration) by quoting with approval a passage from Mirari Vos of his predecessor, where liberty of conscience and the right of each man to practise his own religion are described as deliramentum. Such liberty, says Pius, citing St. Augustine, is libertas perditionis.

Professor Bury concludes (p. 6) that "the general drift of the argument [of the encyclical] is: liberty, toleration, secularism, and democracy are closely bound together, and what they mean is materialism."

Wrapped up in religious phraseology, Bury adds, the encyclical "is really a political document, setting forth an ideal of civilization and declaring principles of political import."

The positive principles which it asserts by means of condemning their negations may be summed up thus: The State must recognize a particular religion as regnant, and submit to its influence and this religion must be Catholic; the power of the State must be at its disposal, and all who do not confirm to its requirements must be compelled or punished. The duty of governments is to protect the Church, and freedom of conscience and cult is madness. Not the popular will, but religion, that is the papal authority, is the basis of civil society, otherwise it will sink into materialism. The Church is superior to the State, and therefore the State has no right to dictate to her, and has no power over religious orders. The family and the education of children belong to the Church, not to the state. The Pope can decree and prescribe what he chooses, without the State's permission, and his authority is not limited to doctrines and morals. (p.8).

The Episcopal scholar, the Rev. Dr. Frederick Grant, in his introduction to Professor Bury's study, described the mentality of Vatican Council I and of Pius IX as that which held that "the best safeguard of the Christian faith" against liberalism and modernism was to convert the Catholic Church into "a Maginot line of impenetrable defense." In the face of a series of shocks beginning with the

Reformation in the sixteenth century and climaxed by the French Revolution in the eighteenth century, the Church became preoccupied with her own self-preservation and was relatively indifferent to the fate of those who were non-Catholic. This virtual obsession with the preservation of herself and her institutions made it possible for the Church to enter into concordats with the blackest forces of reaction, a tradition which led to tragic consequences in the twentieth century. § 6

As one reads the texts of the sixteen declarations promulgated by Vatican II and compares these with both the spirit as well as the rhetoric of the documents of Vatican Council I, there is no conclusion possible other than that the Catholic Church has undergone a revolution in terms of not only her self-perception but in her attitudes toward non-Catholics and her own responsibility for the welfare of other people. Nowhere is the new attitude of concern for others, involvement in their fate and destiny more clearly reflected than in

6 Paul Droulers, S.J., writing on Roman Catholicism in the 19th Century World states, "The diplomacy of the Court of Rome...was adapted to meet the varying circumstances of the individual countries, striving to obtain the fullest possible measure of civil liberty for the celebration of worship and the exercise of spiritual government....The Bull Sollicitudo Ecclesiarum of August 7, 1831, contains an explicit reminder that in the cause of religion the Holy See will negotiate with any duly constituted government, though this does not imply recognition of its legitimacy before the law (293).

the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, the Decree on Ecumenism, and the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.

No person of good will can fail to be moved by these words contained in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men (art. 1).

In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception, and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign laborer unjustly looked down upon, a child born of an unlawful union and wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit, or a hungry person (art. 27).

Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters (art. 28).

This emergence from behind something of a Maginot line and the joining of a dialogue with the world was dramatically ratified as much for non-Catholics as for Catholics in the brilliant address of Pope Paul VI before the United Nations at the end of 1965. The Pope renounced for the Catholic Church any pretense to temporal power and then declared, "We make our own <sup>the</sup> voice of the poor, the disinherited, the suffering, to those who hunger and thirst for justice, for the dignity of life, for freedom, for well being and progress." Pope Paul VI gave Catholic support to "the pluralism of states" and to "co-existence" between peoples. He said to the United Nations: "Your vocation is to make brothers not only of some but of all peoples." He then ratified "the formula of equality" saying: "Let no one inasmuch as he is a member of your union be superior to the others; never one above the other." The Pope then decried that "pride" which "disrupts brotherhood." Noting that the United Nations proclaims "the fundamental rights and duties of man, his dignity, his freedom--and above all, his religious freedom," the Pope declared that "the life of man is sacred; no one may dare offend it." Pope John Paul II has given vivid affirmation to those humanistic trends throughout his Papacy.

I believe that I speak the mind of most informed Jewish observers when I say that if this mentality had been normative for the popes, the Vatican and the Catholic and Protestant masses over the past one hundred years, the incredible phenomenon of hundreds of thousands of

so-called devout Christians becoming accomplices or passive spectators to the cruel slaughter of millions of men, women and children who happened to be born Jews--or Gypsies--would not have been possible. The pragmatic significance of this newly articulated humanitarian mentality has given birth, I have no doubt, to the magnificent involvement of priests, nuns and Catholic laymen who, together with ministers and rabbis, marched together through the streets of Selma, Alabama, or in the March on Washington as a powerful renunciation of that mentality which echoed in traumatic silence less than twenty-five years ago in the cities of ancient Christian culture of Germany and Poland and elsewhere in Europe. Austria, The Pope cried out "No more war, war never again!" and moved the world when he pleaded. Vatican Council II has proclaimed to the whole of the human family. "No more indifference, indifference and silence no more"! as long as the dignity of a single human being is offended or is exploited.

The promulgation of the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christians on October 28, 1965, received a mixed reaction in the Jewish community. As a commonplace pun has it, "Where there are <sup>two</sup> Jews, there are three opinions" -- which is a Jewish self-critical way of describing the deep-seated democracy and pluralism that exists in Jewish life. The Jewish reaction ranged across a broad spectrum. There were those who opposed the Declaration and, in fact, who resented it. There were those who were indifferent to it. There were those, including myself, who welcomed the Declaration as an

important contribution to improve the future relations between Catholics and Jews. In my study of the Jewish responses, I became aware of how decisive a role mass media played in influencing relations between groups. A substantial segment of the Jewish community reacted not to the content of the Declaration, as much to the headlines which reported about the Declaration. The day following the promulgation, newspaper headlines throughout this country and, in fact, throughout the world, carried such statements as "Vatican Council Exonerates Jews for Death of Christ"; "Catholic Church Absolves Jews of Crucifixion." The so-called Jewish man-in-the-street naturally responded to such presumptive formulations with resentment, if not worse. No Jew in my acquaintance has ever felt guilty for the death of Jesus. Therefore, no Jew ever felt in need of absolution. But ~~it~~ was <sup>the problem created by</sup> the newspapers and the radio and television commentator<sup>s</sup> who used those words. The text of the Declaration itself does not use "absolve" or "exonerate" even once. This is not to impute bad motives or incompetence to the mass media. The problem of reducing to headlines a complex historical and theological problem is one that I am glad I did not have to face. But again, the fact that such headlines and such radio and television reports were dinned around the world for days both prior to and following the promulgation, led almost inevitably to a negative reaction of so many Jewish people.

A more substantive consideration is the fact that the Vatican Council, for whatever reasons, "backed and filled" over this declaration for some four years. And to many Jews it was as though the Jewish people were being subjected to a trial over this period of time. When you add to that a number of unfortunate episodes took place during those four years (including the insulting articles and speeches by Bishop Carli of Segni, who said, in fact, the Jews and Judaism today are collectively responsible for the crucifixion and stand under God's reprobation because of it), then one has another insight into how the Jewish patience wore thin. Overriding all, however, was the absence in the Declaration of any note of contrition or repentance for the incredible sufferings and persecutions Jews have undergone in the Christian West. The Church's various declarations asked forgiveness from the Protestants, the Eastern Orthodox, from the Moslems, but not from the Jews. Many Jews, especially those who lived through the Nazi holocaust, asked with great passion, "How many more millions of our brothers and sisters will need to be slaughtered before any word of contrition or repentance is heard in the seats of ancient Christian glory?"

The Jews who were indifferent to the Vatican Council's action believed that it was too little and too late. Within this group there is was strong feeling that the Catholic bishops in Germany and ~~Pope~~ <sup>Pope</sup> Pius XII himself could have spoken out decisively, unambiguously at a time when it would have meant something of profound importance of the

Jewish people. That did not happen in terms adequate to the need and, therefore, the loss of confidence in the present usefulness of the Vatican statement is <sup>d/</sup>widespread among this group. In the perspective of history this group has also been aware that up until the time of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the Church contributed to the disenfranchisement of the Jewish people of the Western world and much worse. This group looked to the secular powers of the world for its political and civic salvation. In the view of this group history has outdistanced the Christian community, and such statements are only pleasant rhetoric and are really of no significant effect in terms of the security or fate of the Jewish people in the Twentieth Century. The reluctance of the Holy See to establish de jure diplomatic relations with the State of Israel has provided confirmation for this skepticism.

In the view of the third group, the text of the final version of the Declaration that was adopted represented a compromise document compared to the text that was introduced at the close of the third session and which received an overwhelming majority vote of the Council Fathers. The earlier version was warmer, more generous, and less severe: it dealt explicitly with the "deicide" concept which became something of a symbolic test of good will. In that perspective, the failure of the Council to enact the majority will of the

Fathers of 1964 was a disappointment. But in the view of this group, seen in the perspective of 1900 years of Christian-Jewish history, this Declaration represents an incredible achievement.

As important as the Declaration itself is, the commitment of the teachings of Nostra Aetate and 1975 Vatican Guidelines on Catholic-Jewish Relations Catholic Church authorities and institutions to translate the ~~guidelines in this document~~ into reality in the lives of some 800 million Catholics throughout the world was of even greater importance. That commitment was given decisive expression when the American Catholic hierarchy designated a special subcommission on Catholic-Jewish relations charged with the responsibility of implementing the objectives of the Declaration throughout every level of Catholic culture and society. The determined action of the Vatican shortly after the Declaration was promulgated which put an end to the veneration of Simon of Trent--that ritual blood libel episode which since the fifteenth century has been celebrated by annual procession through the streets of Trent, repeating an insult to the whole of the Jewish people -- was another impressive demonstration of the commitment of the Catholic Church to express in deeds its new attitude of respect and esteem for the Jewish people. The instruction given by Cardinal Dopfner of Munich to the organizers of the Oberammergau Passion Play to revise the text so that all anti-Jewish references are removed is another earnest of the Catholic Church's commitment to the uprooting

of the sources of anti-Semitism. (Tragically, the Oberammergau Passion play remains "structurally anti-Semitic," our AJC studies revealed.)

In the face of the agonizing history that many of the people of the cross had wrought in the transformation of the Jews into a cross among the peoples, there should not be too great bafflement or wonder over some of the skepticism of a number of the Jewish people in this country and abroad as to the real meaning of the Vatican Council Declaration to them and their children. As long as hostile references to the Jewish people, Judaism and the synagogue continue to appear in Catholic textbooks, missals, liturgical commentaries, theological dictionaries, sermons, and passion plays, a great many Jews will continue to view the Vatican Council Declaration as a vain and even hypocritical show. Having worked closely with members of the Catholic community both here and abroad, especially in the fields of religious history and religious education, I am deeply persuaded that a vast and irreversible tide of self-purification and self-correction with regard to the portrayal of Jews and Judaism in the teaching process of the Catholic Church--nor should the Protestants be slighted--is under way and that the fruits of this process are already in evidence. That is not to overlook the hard reality that a great deal more needs to be done before the last weeds of anti-Jewish teaching and anti-Jewish poison are removed. But in my judgment, no Jew has a right to belittle the great advances that have been made already. I am

persuaded that we are now going through a period of transition which will find both Jews and Catholics fumbling and stumbling as they seek to find appropriate new modes of relating to each other in a growing climate of mutual tolerance and esteem.

During the course of the deliberations of Vatican Council II in connection with "Nostra Aetate" the contradictory and at times confused views expressed with regard to the inclusion or elimination of a passage in the third version of the text relating the question of the conversion of the Jews brought into sharp focus the fact that the Catholic Church has done very little serious thinking about the place of Jews and Judaism in the divine economy. That episode alone underscored the need for Catholic theologians and scholars to develop a theology of Israel and the synagogue in salvation history that has some correspondence with the historic realities of the present-day living Jewish people. At the same time, the bewildering and bewildered response of many Jews to Vatican Council II, whose attitudes toward present-day Christians are based on old-world memories of Christians as persecutors, threw into sharp relief the critical need for Jews to develop a theology of Christians and Christianity that is consonant with the realities of an emerging "new Christian" society that is struggling in unparalleled fashion to uproot anti-Semitism and to restore her traditions to biblical modes of thought and practice.

At the heart of Christianity's problem of what to make of the Jew is the Christian's immense ignorance, if not illiteracy, regarding Judaism. If the Jews were supposed to have committed deicide against Jesus, then a great many Christians in fact have committed homicide against him. They have killed Jesus as a Jew and as a man. The weapon was ignorance of Jesus' Jewishness. But Jesus' life, his preaching, his teaching, his vision of the kingdom of God, the very ground of his messianism cannot be accurately or profoundly understood apart from his background in the synagogue, his life of worship and observance as a Jew, and his education with the Pharisaic rabbis of the first century. Indeed, the New Testament itself cannot be fully comprehended as other than a Jewish book, written almost entirely by Jews for Jews, and in the Jewish mode of exegesis, known as Haggadah. Long passages of the New Testament are, indeed, actually nothing less than new and different exegesis of the Jewish Bible, the difference being determined by the belief in the divinity of Jesus, which stands in opposition to the uncompromising monotheism of Judaism.

The significance of this Christian amnesia regarding the Jewishness of the origins of Christianity is that the Christians who live in this ignorance are expressing the Marcionite heresy. Further, God bestowed promises upon the Jews and chastised them with curses, in order that they might repent. But a certain tradition of Christian teaching appropriated the promises for "the new Israel" and imposed upon the "old Israel" the left-over curses. In this way, many

Christians found it possible to cease to identify religiously with Judaism and, worse, perceived the Torah and Judaism as "stagnant" and "dessicated." From this conviction it was but a short step to the belief that the Church "superseded" Israel--despite St. Paul's admonition in Romans that God's call and promises to the Jews are irrevocable.

When one adds to this ignorance of first-century Judaism the even greater lack of knowledge about post-biblical Judaism, the ground of misunderstanding becomes an abyss. To most Christians, Judaism came to an abrupt end with the close of the canon of the Hebrew Scripture. But Judaism did not come to an end with the Old Testament. Just as a non-Catholic does an injustice to Catholicism by failing to take into account the significance of tradition, Church teaching and canon law, in addition to Sacred Scripture, so do non-Jews distort Judaism by failing to recognize that modern Judaism is the product of a long and rich development of postbiblical thought, devotion and piety that the great rabbis and sages of the Jewish people developed over the past, 1,500 years. In the absence of that knowledge, the Christian pedagogues' continued use of the stereotypes of "Pharisees" for hypocritical post-biblical Jews, the false antimony of Judaism as a religion of law and justice versus Christianity as a religion of love, mercy and compassion will only serve to perpetuate bias and know-nothingism in religion.

I  
In this perspective, it has now become very clear that there are at least three major and decisive areas of scholarship that must be vigorously pursued by Catholic and other Christian scholars if the call of Vatican Council II for "biblical and theological studies" is to be translated into "mutual understanding and respect." These are, first, critical commentaries and interpretations of the New Testament that will remove any possibility for bigots to exploit certain expressions in the gospels for anti-Semitic purposes. An excellent example of such studies is to be found in the essay "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel," by Dominic M. Crossan, which appeared in Theological Studies. In that essay Crossan wrote that "the often-repeated statement that the Jews rejected Jesus and had him crucified is historically untenable and must, therefore, be removed completely from our thinking and our writing, our teaching, preaching and liturgy."

II  
The second area is that of historical studies. If one reads Church histories and Jewish histories in the same events, it is as though Christians and Jews are being educated in different universes of discourse. A Christian historian, for example, Philip Hughes, writes of the Crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as "holy war to free Jerusalem." "Never before had Europe known such a vast and successful propaganda as the preaching of the First Crusade, and its success is a most eloquent proof of the reality of the new reform papacy's hold on the average man and of its popularity with him," wrote Hughes in his A Popular History of the Catholic Church. To

Jewish historians the Crusades "becomes a gory story of pillaging Jewish settlements, killing Jewish people, looting Jewish wealth. Such serious restrictive legislation as the humiliating garb, ritual-murder charges, Host desecration libels, and confinement of the ghetto were not the heritage of the Dark Ages but the heritage of the Crusades."<sup>6</sup>

As The Rev. Edward Flannery, author of The Anguish of the Jews has written, "most Christians have torn out of their history books the pages that Jews have memorized." The time has come, perhaps, for a proposal to be made for Christian and Jewish historians to join together in writing a common history of the Jewish-Christian encounter which will fill in the blank pages.

The third area of much-needed scholarship is that of theological studies in Jewish-Christian relations. Unless and until Christian scholars and people develop theological conceptions regarding Judaism and the synagogue that reflect in some way the vital reality of the existence of present-day Judaism, very little else of significance in Jewish-Christian relations will be possible. Gregory Baum has begun to point the way:

7 <sup>8</sup> Max Dimont, Jews, God and History (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962).

The apostle tells us, that the Jews of the Synagogue remain dear to God for the sake of the fathers (cf. Rom 11:28). Their election stands. Why? Because God is faithful, his gifts and call are irrevocable (Rom 11:29). His election cannot ultimately be undone by human decision against it. This scriptural theme is invoked in the conciliar text.

What does this mean for the understanding of the Jews of our day? Giving this Pauline theme its weakest possible meaning, it asserts that God continues to be present and to address Jewish believers in their synagogue services. The testimonies of God's mercy in the past as celebrated in the synagogue worship remain a way of divine action, for "his gifts and call are irrevocable." We have here the answer to a question crucial to the Jewish-Christian dialogue. What is the present synagogue worship before God? Is the Christian forced to regard present Jewish worship as an empty form, as words and gestures without meaning? Or is he able to acknowledge in Jewish worship the presence of the living God? The conciliar text answers this question by its adoption and use of the Pauline theme. God remains present in his gifts to Israel. <sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Gregory Baum in Ecumenist (May-June, 1965).

That new appreciation of Judaism and the Jewish people has come full term in the latest declaration of His Holiness Pope John Paul II. In an audience with American Jewish Committee leaders held on February 15, 1985, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate, the Holy Father made this important statement:

"I wish to confirm, with utmost conviction, that the teaching of the Church proclaimed during the Second Vatican Council in the Declaration Nostra Aetate...remains always for us, for the Catholic Church, for the Episcopate...and for the Pope, a teaching which must be followed--a teaching which it is necessary to accept not merely as something fitting, but much more as an expression of the faith, as an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as a word of the Divine Wisdom.

"I willingly repeat those words to you who are commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration. They express the commitment of the Holy See, and of the whole Catholic Church, to the content of this Declaration, underlying, so to speak, its importance.

"After twenty years, the terms of the Declaration have not grown old. It is even more clear than before how sound the Declaration's theological foundation is and what a solid basis it provides for a really fruitful Jewish/Christian dialogue. On the one hand, it places the motivation of such a dialogue in the very mystery of the Church herself, and on the other hand it clearly maintains the identity of each religion, closely linking one to the other.

"During these twenty years, an enormous amount of work has been done. You are well aware of it, since your organization is deeply committed to Jewish/Christian relations, on the basis of the Declaration, on both the national and the international levels, and particularly in connection with the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism.

"I am convinced, and I am happy to state it on this occasion, that the relationships between Jews and Christians have radically improved in these years. Where there was distrust and perhaps fear, there is now confidence. Where there was ignorance and therefore prejudice and stereotypes, there is now growing mutual knowledge, appreciation and respect. There is above all, love between us, that kind of love, I mean, which is for both of us a fundamental in-

"After twenty years, the terms of the Declaration have not grown old. It is even more clear than before how sound the Declaration's theological foundation is and what a solid basis it provides for a really fruitful Jewish/Christian dialogue. On the one hand, it places the motivation of such a dialogue in the very mystery of the Church herself, and on the other hand it clearly maintains the identity of each religion, closely linking one to the other.

"During these twenty years, an enormous amount of work has been done. You are well aware of it, since your organization is deeply committed to Jewish/Christian relations, on the basis of the Declaration, on both the national and the international levels, and particularly in connection with the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism.

"I am convinced, and I am happy to state it on this occasion, that the relationships between Jews and Christians have radically improved in these years. Where there was distrust and perhaps fear, there is now confidence. Where there was ignorance and therefore prejudice and stereotypes, there is now growing mutual knowledge, appreciation and respect. There is above all, love between us, that kind of love, I mean, which is for both of us a fundamental in-

junction of our religious traditions and which the New Testament has received from the Old (cf. Mk 12:28-34; Lev 19:18)."

"There is no doubt that much remains to be done. Theological reflection is still needed, notwithstanding the amount of work already done and the results achieved thus far. Our Biblical scholars and theologians are constantly challenged by the word of God that we hold in common.

"Education should more accurately take into account the new insights and directives opened up by the Council and spelt out in the subsequent "Guidelines and Suggestions for the Implementation of Nostra Aetate n. 4", which remain in force. Education for dialogue, love and respect for others, and openness towards all people are urgent needs in our pluralistic societies, where everybody is a neighbor to everybody else.

"Antisemitism, which is unfortunately still a problem in certain places, has been repeatedly condemned by the Catholic tradition as incompatible with Christ's teaching and with the respect due to the dignity of men and women created in the image and likeness of God. I once again express the Catholic Church's repudiation of all oppression

and persecution, and of all discrimination against people--from whatever side it may come--"in law or in fact, on account of their race, origin, color, culture, sex or religion." (Octogesima Adveniens, 23).

"In close <sup>connection</sup> ~~cooperation~~ with the preceding, there is the large field of cooperation open to us as Christians and Jews, in favor of all humanity where the image of God shines through in every man, woman and child, especially in the destitute and those in need.

"I am well aware of how closely the American Jewish Committee has collaborated with some of our Catholic agencies in alleviating hunger in Ethiopia and in the Sahel, in trying to call the attention of the proper authorities to this terrible plight, still sadly not solved, and which is therefore a constant challenge to all those who believe in the one true God, who is the Lord of history and the loving Father of all.

"I know also your concern for the peace and security of the Holy Land. May the Lord give to the land, and to all the peoples and nations in that part of the world, the blessings contained in the word "shalom," so that, in the expression of the Psalmist, justice and peace may kiss (cf. PS 85:11).

" The Second Vatican Council and subsequent documents truly have this aim: that the sons and daughters of Abraham--Jews, Christians and Muslims (cf. Nostra Aetate, 3)--may live together and prosper in peace. And may all of us love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength (cf. Dt 6:5). Shalom!"

I048-Tanenbaum Essay

March 7, 1985/e1

