



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

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

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 11, Folder 4, "AJC and Vatican II: A Chronology of the Agency's Involvement", 1984.

The AJC and Vatican Council II: A Chronology of the Agency's Involvement

Declaration

*Under the direction of Dr. John Naisbitt, AIC
Executive Vice-President,*

The AJC was the leader among Jewish organizations in working for the approval of the Statement on the Jews. The initiatives undertaken by the agency helped both to shape the content of the Statement and to secure its eventual adoption and promulgation. What follows is an annotated chronology of the AJC's involvement with the Council as well as some pioneering activities in Jewish-Christian relations which set the stage.

1947

*Known as the
"Seelisburg Ten Points"*

- Zachariah Shuster, European director of the AJC, helps to organize the Seelisburg (Switzerland) conference on the persistence of anti-Semitism in Europe. This conference sounded the themes of a new agenda for Jewish-Christian relations. It called for a repudiation of anti-Semitism, a theological recognition of the enduring worth and validity of Judaism, an end to the pernicious accusation of deicide and a cleansing of anti-Jewish bias from Christian teaching materials.

1950's

Catholic

- Throughout the decade, building upon initiatives undertaken as early as 1932, the AJC initiates Protestant and Catholic "self-study" investigations of prejudice in teaching materials. The Catholic study funded by AJC and a private foundation and executed by a team of social scientists at St. Louis University, documented the problem of anti-Jewish bias in Catholic religion textbooks. The religion textbook study, undertaken by Sr. Rose Thering, O.P., was edited and condensed by Judith Hershkopf Banki at the AJC, and circulated to Catholic educators throughout the country. This critical self-examination by Catholics was to play a major role in the eventual formulation of the conciliar Statement.

July 1961

- Augustin Cardinal Bea, appointed to head the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, which was charged with preparing the Jewish statement, meets with AJC representatives in Rome; he requests that the Committee submit a memorandum on anti-Jewish elements in Catholic textbooks as well as another on anti-Jewish passages in Catholic liturgy.

Autumn 1961

- AJC, International Affairs Department*
- Judith Hershkopf Banki drafts a memorandum based on the St. Louis study findings, which is submitted to Bea's Secretariat. The other memorandum, prepared by Dr. Eric Werner of Hebrew Union College, on liturgy, is also filed. Cardinal Bea requests information regarding Catholic teaching materials outside the U.S. AJC staff in Europe and South America provide documentation of negative and hostile teachings in many countries and languages, demonstrating the problem is ~~not local~~.

universal

- November 1961 - Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Zachariah Shuster meet with Cardinal Bea at the Vatican to discuss the inclusion of positive elements in the Statement that would affirm the enduring validity of Judaism. Heschel made an enormous impression on Bea, who invited him to prepare a memorandum.
- 1962 - Throughout the year, the issues of anti-Semitism, Catholic-Jewish relations, and the upcoming Council are discussed in the international press. AJC's French language publication, Evidences, devotes several issues to a symposium in which Christian scholars set forth their views on Christian teaching about Judaism. It was the first discussion of its kind in any European periodical. Other AJC continuing activities included ongoing communication with Cardinal Bea. In January, AJC representatives were invited to the Vatican to participate in a major interreligious convocation, where AJC was the only Jewish organization to address the gathering. ~~In February, three of Rabbi Heschel's books were sent to Bea, which he acknowledged as a testimony of the "strong, common, spiritual bond" between us.~~ The first session of the Council began in September 1962.
- May 1962 - Rabbi Heschel and AJC's Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum draft and submit a third memorandum to Cardinal Bea's Secretariat entitled, On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations. More a passionate and eloquent theological statement than a memorandum, it urged that the Council recognize the "integrity and permanent preciousness" of Jews as Jews - not as potential converts to Christianity. It calls on Catholics to affirm that those of other faiths ought to be respected as equals.
- Winter 1963 - AJC sent several delegations to Rome to consult with Cardinal Bea. When the Cardinal came to the U.S. in March, he met with Rabbi Heschel and Rabbi Tanenbaum, director of the Interreligious Affairs Department, privately in Boston.
- March 31, 1963 - Cardinal Bea attends an unprecedented off-the-record meeting at the AJC, coordinated by the Interreligious Affairs Department. Bea meets with a broad spectrum of Jewish religious and civic leaders to share ideas on the proposed Statement. The meeting was of historic importance. Bea had written answers to pre-submitted questions, which were subsequently elaborated in the give and take. His answers were to form the essential content of the future Statement. *Declaration*
- September 1963 - As the second session of the Council opened, conservative and Arab opposition to the Statement, which would be discussed at this session, grew. AJC contacted Church authorities on three continents to underscore the importance of a strong Statement. The draft Statement ~~faced stiff opposition~~ in the Council for political and theological reasons. *Scheme*

November 1963 - In consultation with Rabbi Tanenbaum, Rabbi Heschel wrote to Cardinal Bea of his concern that the Statement would be weakened or distorted. Heschel then traveled to Rome to communicate his views to the Vatican.

April 30, 1964 - Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, the dean of the American cardinals, addresses the AJC Annual Meeting. His speech was a landmark statement on Catholic-Jewish relations which was widely disseminated and discussed in the U.S., Europe and South America. Following consultation with Rabbi Tanenbaum, Cardinal Spellman made a direct intervention with the Pope urging a strong Declaration.

May 30, 1964 - AJC leaders have an audience with Pope Paul VI. The Pope goes on record for the first time in denouncing anti-Semitism, rejecting the charge of deicide and acknowledging an intimate link between Christianity and Judaism. His statement was published by the official Vatican organ and was widely reported in the international press, giving some support to the proponents of the Statement. The Pope said that he read Cardinal Spellman's speech and that the Cardinal had expressed his own sentiments. Declaration

Nonetheless, persistent reports that the conservative opposition was eviscerating the Statement led to increased AJC activity during the months prior to the opening of the third session. Rabbi Tanenbaum addressed more than 400 members of the American Catholic Press Association in May. Editorials appeared in every major diocesan paper in the country calling for the approval of the Statement. Declaration

September 1964 - On the eve of the third session, the latest draft of the Statement appeared in the press. The Statement implied that the Church anticipated the eventual conversion of the Jews to Christianity. Anger spread throughout the Jewish world. Differences of opinion in the American Jewish community over the legitimacy of Jewish interest in and advocacy of the Statement sharpened. Believing that public Jewish dissension would weaken the hand of the liberal bishops who were about to fight for the Statement in the third session, the AJC created a consensus among 14 Jewish groups affirming Jewish interest in Jewish-Catholic relations. The joint Jewish statement was warmly received by Cardinal Bea. Declaration

Nonetheless, concern remained over the conversionary implications of the Statement. The day before the opening of the third session, Rabbi Heschel met with Pope Paul VI at an audience arranged by the AJC. Heschel strongly criticized the inclusion of the controversial text in a document intended to improve Catholic-Jewish relations. The third session was to see the tentative approval of a strong Statement, closely resembling Bea's original effort. Declaration

1965

*Declaration
In Vatican City,
of Catholic bishops ~~and~~*

- In the months leading up to the final session of the Council, there was great uncertainty about the future of the Statement. Persistent rumors of a conservative effort to permanently table the Statement moved AJC leaders to hold numerous meetings with prominent American prelates to voice their concern. *Schlesinger and Tanenbaum mobilize the support from throughout the world.*

October 14, 1965 -

At the fourth and final session, the entire Schema of which the Statement on the Jews is a part was approved. The AJC calls it an "act of justice long overdue" and anticipates "new opportunities for improved interreligious understanding and cooperation throughout the world." The AJC also voiced regret however concerning the weakened passages in the document which could give rise to misunderstanding.

October 28, 1965 -

The final text is approved by the Council 2.221 to 88. Pope Paul VI promulgates the declaration as official church teaching, binding on all Catholics.

[Sources: The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Jews, a Background Report, AJC Internal Memorandum, November 1965, "Heschel and Vatican II - Jewish-Christian Relations," Marc H. Tanenbaum, unpublished manuscript, 1983]

MO69-IAD
84-700-72
AM:ls
11/13/84

January 1975 - The Vatican Secretariat on Religious Relations with Judaism issues a set of "Guidelines on Catholic-Jewish Relations" calling for implementation of Notre Actio in the revision of textbooks, liturgy, preaching, Bible study, and work as for joint social action. AJC participates actively in a joint liaison committee with the Vatican Secretariat charged with improving Catholic-Jewish relations throughout the world.

The AJC after Vatican Council II: a chronology of selected AJC initiatives in Jewish-Catholic relations

The AJC correctly perceived that Vatican II had opened a window of unprecedented opportunity for Jewish-Catholic relations. The future of such relations however, was by no means insured by the mere promulgation of Nostra Aetate. Like any declaration, its promise lay in its implementation, not in its text. Unlike other high-minded documents however, Nostra Aetate has been taken quite seriously. The U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference, formed in 1966 as a direct result of the Council's empowerment of national hierarchies, set up, as early as 1967, a Subcommittee on Catholic/Jewish Relations. This subcommittee issued its own guidelines for the implementation and interpretation of Nostra Aetate in the same year. In 1968, the bishops established a full-time Secretariat for Catholic/Jewish Relations. Originally based at Seton Hall University, the Secretariat is now in Washington, D.C. Continuing its tradition of leadership in promoting Jewish-Catholic relations, the AJC began numerous joint programs with American Catholic groups in order to assist in the realization of the Council's intentions. What follows is a selection from the many activities which the AJC has conducted with Catholics in the U.S. and abroad in the post-conciliar period.

Interreligious Affairs Department

1966 - AJC organizes an Institute on Jewish-Catholic faculty and seminarians at Woodstock College, a Jesuit institution, near Baltimore. To orient laypersons to interreligious encounters AJC publishes a Guide to Interreligious Dialogue. For the first time in American religious history, a Jewish organization (the AJC) gives an award to the American cardinals in "heartfelt appreciation" of their work at the Council. *The American hierarchy appreciates with an air of appreciation to the AJC for its role in*

1967 - AJC convenes six conferences around the country directed towards the training of Catholic religious educators. AJC follows up on its earlier Catholic textbook self-studies by participating in a conference in Rome on Catholic teaching materials in Europe and South America. *improving Catholic teaching materials*

1968 - Intensive work continues in the area of teacher training, as an eight week seminar for Catholic educators on Judaism is held in Chicago. A major conference of Jewish and Catholic theologians is held in the midwest.

1969 - AJC co-sponsors eight lectures at the Pius XII Religious Education Center in Detroit aimed at Catholic teachers. Reaching out to lay persons, the AJC co-sponsors a meeting with The Grail, a national Catholic women's organization on the meaning of Israel for American Jews.

1970 - A major study of the anti-Jewish bias of the famous Oberammergau Passion Play is published by AJC. Catholic support for a reworking of the drama is enlisted as the study is distributed to ecclesiastical authorities in West Germany.

- 1971 - During the '70's, the AJC uses its high-level contacts at the Vatican repeatedly to build sympathy and understanding for Israel. In this year, the AJC submits a memorandum to the American cardinals on Jerusalem and the holy places to help offset Arab pressure on the Vatican. AJC convenes a major Jewish-Catholic conference in Philadelphia.

- 1972 - The National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, headed by a Catholic nun, Sister Ann Gillen, is set up with AJC co-sponsorship in Chicago. The Task Force will raise awareness in the Christian communities about oppressed religious minorities in the Soviet Union and promote interreligious activism on their behalf. AJC representatives participate in an international conference with Vatican representatives on human rights and religious freedom.

- 1973 - Publication of Catechetics and Prejudice by Father John Pawlikowsky. This volume summarizes the Catholic textbook self-studies conducted at St. Louis University. AJC's South American office conducts an extensive study of 134 Catholic textbooks used on the continent which receives a wide distribution among the Latin American bishops and education departments. A pilot project in Jewish studies is initiated by the office at a Jesuit university in Buenos Aires.

- 1974 - The Pro Deo and Louvain University (respectively, Italian, Spanish and French) text book self-studies are summarized in English under the title, How Catholics Look at Jews by Claire Huchet Bishop and published by the AJC and Paulist Press.

- 1975 - Several commemorations marking the ten year anniversary of the promulgation of Nostra Aetate take place in American cities under AJC sponsorship.

- 1976 - AJC representatives meet with Vatican officials in Jerusalem (1976). The Vatican, as a result, condemns international attempts to defame and isolate Israel. Archbishop Donnellan of Atlanta addresses the NEC (1977), calling interreligious cooperation "one of the most significant developments of the twentieth century." Also in 1977, AJC and Paulist Press copublish Faith Without Prejudice by Dr. Eugene Fisher, a work devoted to rebuilding Christian attitudes towards Judaism. AJC and National Interreligious Task Force representatives go to the Belgrade conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (1978) to press for religious freedom and human rights for Jews and others in the Soviet Union. AJC leaders meet with Pope John Paul II (1979), who reaffirms his commitment to Nostra Aetate and the Vatican Guidelines for its implementation. During the 1980's, AJC launches a series of seminarians' conferences which bring together future Jewish, Catholic and Protestant clergy. In 1983, in cooperation with the National Catholic Educational Association, AJC copublishes Eugene Fisher's, Seminary Education and Christian-Jewish Relations. AJC establishes the National Institute for Catholic-Jewish Education, directed by Sister Anna Marie Erst, in 1982. The Institute seeks to enhance Catholics' understanding of the Judaic heritage of Christianity by providing educational materials and resources for religious schools. In 1984, Archbishop John O'Connor of New York and Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago speak, respectively, at the AJC's Annual Meeting and at the NEC.