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Box 37, Folder 8, Latin America - Jewish-Christian relations,  
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**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

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October 16, 1970

**To:** Dr. Simon Segal  
**From:** Jacobo Kovadloff  
**Re:** Report on Jewish-Catholic and Jewish-Protestant Relations

First of all I want to ask you please to excuse me for the delay in replying to your memo of September 16th about this matter, but you will no doubt understand that what with my trips to the neighbouring countries and the other problems at the office here, I was unable to write you sooner as was my desire.

ARGENTINA:

The most active role in the promotion of Jewish-Christian relations and in all activities connected with the adequate implementation of the 1965 Council Declaration has been fundamentally played by the Jews. The Catholic hierarchy as well as the Catholic publications and lay institutions (such as Acción Católica Argentina and other minor groups) have continued to be under the predominant influence of the more reactionary, pre-conciliar group. The few positive steps that were taken were in the way of formal commitments which evidently lacked a substratum of sincerity. The greatest degree of acceptance of the Declaration was shown by the Jesuits. It should be noted that the Church was not prepared for the dialogue either from a psychological or a structural point of view, since their members lacked the necessary flexibility to accept something different. Similarly, they were unprepared from a social point of view, in view of the fact that the clergy lacked adequate roots among the masses.

The most intensive activity in this field was carried out by our friend organization, the Confraternidad Judeo-Cristiana, a pioneer since many years in this work, and closely connected with the Instituto Judío Argentino. The authorities of the Confraternidad over the past couple of years showed a more constructive attitude, promoting publications and encounters which, although they did not have great massive repercussion, reached sectors that were im-

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portant because of their intellectual level or their militant activity in their pertinent denominations. This activity witnessed a substantial increment specifically over the two past years, and you as well as Rabbi Tenenbaum received in each case the reports from our office as well as from Rabbi Klenicki -who played, precisely, the most important role in this work as representative of the Jewish group. As a result of this, the program of the Confraternidad, which was looked upon with suspicion in the beginning and was even subject to malicious criticism on the part of groups and leaders in the community, has now become a matter of interest to all sectors. The DAIA, for instance, has created a special committee headed by their Vice-president to deal with this subject. The most positive result of this committee was that they succeeded in getting together for the first time the various groups that were acting separately in the field of Jewish-Christian relations. Thus, they obtained the participation of some Orthodox rabbis (who are centralized at the Kehilah's Rabbinate under the leadership of the Chief Rabbi Dr. David Kahane), the representative of the institution known as "Casa Argentina en Israel, Tierra Santa", Mr. Baruj Tenenbaum, (who has very good connections with the highest Catholic hierarchy and who brought into that institution Father Segura), the representative in Argentina of the National Israeli Office of Tourism (who established contacts with various Catholic groups -of course this was done to promote visits to Israel-, the president of the Instituto Judic Argentino, Dr. Kurchan, himself a member of the Confraternidad, and the director of our office. All of this was done in an atmosphere of respect and consideration for the experience previously accumulated by Rabbi Klenicki and by the Confraternidad.

In time, this action has shown a marked tendency to capitalize Jewish-Christian relations in supporting Israel's interests. Let me say in passing that during the 6-Day war in 1967 and for several months thereafter Catholic lay opinion was openly favourable to the cause of Israel. Later the attitude was not so unanimous, because of the very complex political factors that enter into this situation. An element to be particularly noted in this action is the cold and indifferent attitude shown by the Protestants who generally follow the policy of the World Council of Churches and whose missionary position prevents them from cooperating fully with the Confraternidad and the Jewish-Christian dialogue. There were, of course, some remarkable exceptions in both cases. It should likewise be understood that as far as the Israel-Arab conflict is concerned, the Catholic church had to take a cautious position in order not to jeopardize their relations with the Orthodox churches.

Another factor that has hindered the development of Jewish-Christian activities is the division brought about within the Catholic church by social problems in Latin America, and the fact that the most "progressive" priests, and particularly those of the Third World, have no interest in the matter.

In addition to what we say above, it is important to underscore that the

Latin American branch of the World Jewish Congress has already announced the creation of a special department to deal with this matter in the area.

The persons consulted on the subject agree in pointing out that anti-Semitic attitudes and statements on the part of teachers and professors of Catholic militancy have decreased substantially as far as the expression of anti-Semitic feelings in their respective chairs is concerned.

While Acción Católica Argentina has not had any relevant participation in the Jewish-Christian action, a new organization, the Movimiento Familiar Cristiano, has shown great sensitivity and permeability in all contacts with Jewish leaders and organizations.

It is also worth mentioning the increase of trips to Israel made by groups of Catholic congregations and schools, and the positive statements made by them upon their return.

There have also been remarkable expressions of solidarity and encouragement on the part of militant Catholic politicians, although Christian Democracy is a small group in Argentina. Publications such as the well-known magazine "Criterio" followed the same line; "Esquiú", in turn, showed a more reticent attitude.

The basic thing that remains, is that some fundamental changes were obtained in Catholic text books, and especially in catechisms (although this was not in a very large measure, it still should not be underestimated).

In the interior of the country the activity of the Confraternidad has been very limited and almost inexistent.

I want to underscore once again that the relations with the Catholic hierarchy are carried out basically on a personal -and not on an institutional- level, while on the other hand it was easier to establish constructive contacts with parochial priests and lay militants.

It is also important to note that by the end of this year the Congregation of the Sisters of Sion under the leadership of Sister Alda will establish a representation in Buenos Aires. This is an encouraging fact, considering the positive work that the congregation has developed in other countries. Specifically it is expected that the Sisters may become an important mediator in helping break the formality of the relation now existing with the high hierarchy.

As respects dialogue specifically considered at a scholarly level, there is a complete void.

From the reports you have received from this end you have also certainly been

able to appreciate the favourable effects of Dr. Rijk's visit early in April of this year.

In addition to the conferences and round table discussions about which you received full reports as they took place, the Confraternidad organized several encounters, most of which were held at Catholic premises (convents, etc.). I reiterate that these activities have not had a mass repercussion.

In summary: great progress has been made since 1965, but there is still much that can and should be done. The coordination of these activities is an essential need, but it is also essential to guard the spirit that moves them and to be alert to the details that have at times deformed them because of political interests involved (such was the case of the DAIA's declaration on the occasion of the mass at the Buenos Aires Cathedral for the Arabs killed in the war and the legal case against Father Mervielle). For the DAIA, for instance, the program in this field is centered around two basic points: 1st) to make clear that the Jewish question does not exhaust itself in the religious aspect, and consequently, 2nd) it is not possible to speak of Jewish-Christian relations without admitting the relation between the Jewish people and Israel. The Orthodox Jewish groups believe that no progress will be of any relevant consequences, since there exists a reciprocal lack of confidence and it will never be possible to overcome the premise that "the Jews killed Christ". For sectors such as the Instituto, the Confraternidad and particularly Rabbi Klenicki, the program is meant at creating a brotherly link completely independent from theological controversies, and conduct it in this way and given enough time, to a natural vegetative growth.

It has not been possible to institute Judaica courses at the official universities, and even less at the Catholic universities, but it is important to note that many Jewish young men and women attend classes at Catholic universities.

#### CHILE AND URUGUAY:

During my recent visits to both countries the information I gathered both from Jewish and Gentile leaders was that the work of the brotherhoods is completely stagnant. They did indicate as a factor in this stagnation the non-existence of important anti-Semitic manifestations.

In Chile, a small group at the Catholic University of Valparaiso is working in this field on a high level, as I had occasion to inform you after my first visit to Rabbi Günter Friedländer.

#### BRAZIL

You have no doubt received in due time the reports submitted by Rabbi Klenicki after his visit to Brazil on his return from New York, as well as the overall report prepared by Maximo Yagupsky.

Best wishes.

