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## ISRAEL AND THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

There can be no question but that the Israel-Arab crisis during June resulted in a severe strain in Jewish-Christian relations. But the exact nature of that strain and the implications of this problem for the future of relations between Jews and Christians - and for Israel - have been far from adequately understood in the Jewish community.

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

Shortly after the June hostilities and, thank God, Israel's brilliant victory, a number of Jewish personalities made large black headlines in the nation's press by blanket condemnations of "the Christians (who) by and large were silent". Several Jewish leaders, among them colleagues in the rabbinate, publicly declared that this was proof-positive that "the Christians are morally and spiritually bankrupt" and that the Jewish-Christian dialogue is a farce. Further, these same leaders demanded that Jewish groups engaged in these dialogues with Christians withdraw since these "obviously" have proven to be "inadequate" in influencing Christian attitudes toward

Israel and the Jewish people.

Given the state of heightened anxiety and concern that all of us experienced during the last days of May and early June when the Jews of Israel were being threatened with extermination by the Arabs, it is altogether natural that a number of our spokesmen said things in a highly emotional way. But the emotional state that was an appropriate feeling response to those charged circumstances are hardly appropriate to the changed situation now. Nor is such emotion an adequate basis for coming to grips with the present needs of Jewish statesmanship, which require a rational, dispassionate grasp of the factual realities on which we must base our hard choices of policy and program - including Jewish-Christian relations - that will best serve the interests of the Jewish people, of Israel, and of world peace.

What are some of these realities?

First, it is inaccurate and misleading to generalize that "the Christians" failed the Jews of Israel by their silence and by implication lack of support. Generalizations of that sort are not substantiated by the evidence. On July 10, the Louis Harris public opinion firm published the results of a survey which indicated that "key Israeli concerns meet with this kind of overwhelming approval" by Americans:

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To a White House administration that appears to be responsive to "consensus politics" - at least on some major issues - a persistent rumor that "the Christians" of America did not support Israel could become an exceedingly precarious political threat to

Israel, for whose security and international position the strong backing of the American government is of such obvious critical importance. I cannot repress the homiletic point made in Pirke Aboth (the Ethical Sayings of the Synagogue Fathers), "Wise men, be guarded in your words!"

Second, the generalization about "the Christians (who) by and large were silent," must be qualified by the documented evidence that a significant number of some of the most prominent and influential Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christian leaders did speak out in support of Israel's right to exist, to be free of the threat of Arab belligerency, and to have free access to international waterways. There is not enough space in this limited article to quote the full documentation. Those who are interested in knowing the facts with some precision are invited to read a just-published study issued by the American Jewish Committee, entitled, Christian Reactions to the Middle East Crisis: New Agenda for Interreligious Dialogue (available at AJC, 165 East 56 Street, New York, N. Y. 10022, 25¢ per copy). The July 1967 issue of Christian News From Israel, published by the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, contains similar documentation.

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



of combined Arab aggression."

Thus, for example, "a joint statement, published all over the country on May 29, called upon 'our fellow Americans of all persuasions and groupings and on the Administration to support the independence, integrity and freedom of Israel.'" The statement was signed by such prominent Christian leaders as the Rev. John C. Bennett, president of the interdenominational Union Theological Seminary; Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the foremost Protestant theologians; the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King; the Rev. Robert MacAfee Brown, professor of religion at Stanford University; the Rev. Dr. Franklin Littell, president of Iowa Wesleyan (Methodist) College; the Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, dean of St. Vladimir's Russian Orthodox Seminary; and Father John Sheerin, editor of the Catholic World and Vatican representative at numerous ecumenical conferences.

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

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

Another impressive example of broad clergy support of Israel was demonstrated during July in Los Angeles where 150 clergymen from all denominations joined in signing a public declaration that received very prominent attention in the press and other media. Father Charles Casassa, the Jesuit president of Loyola University in Los Angeles, sent a copy of the declaration to President Johnson, U Thant, and the State Department, and received a sympathetic response from the Administration.

(In the preamble to their document the Los Angeles clergy indicated that their action grew directly out of their involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogues. "In recent years," they stated, "great strides have been made in the area of interreligious dialogues and we are now confronted with the need to express ourselves together in terms of the religious and moral implications of the moral crisis.")

At the height of the debate in the United Nations over the question of Israel's reunification of the old city of Jerusalem, seventeen of the leading Protestant theologians, professors, and seminary presidents published an advertisement in The New York Times on July 12 in which they asserted, "For Christians, to acknowledge the necessity of Judaism is to acknowledge that Judaism presupposes inextricable ties with the land of Israel and the city of David, without which Judaism cannot be truly itself. Theologically, it is this dimension to the religion of Judaism which leads us to support the reunification of the city of Jerusalem." The majority of the scholars who signed



this remarkable document - including the leading New Testament scholars Prof. Kristar Stendahl of Harvard and Prof. W.P. Davies of Duke University - have been active participants in theological dialogues with Jewish scholars, the latest of which was the International Colloquium on Judaism and Christianity held at Harvard Divinity School in 1966. The value of their declaration was underscored by the fact that during the ensuing UN debate, Israel's Foreign Minister Abba Eban quoted the text of this statement before the General Assembly as a significant theological reinforcement of Israel's position.

Weighing in the balance all the available information regarding the response of individual Christian leaders of both national and local community prominence, it seems perfectly clear to me that while the response may not have been overwhelming, it certainly was considerably more substantial and more significant than was communicated in the judgment that "the Christians by and large were silent." When compared to the support given to Israel by the individual leaders of the political left and liberal movements, the response of Christian leaders stands out as even more impressive. (See the article, "The American Left and Israel," by Martin Peretz, November 1967 issue of Commentary.)

One can make too much of declarations by individuals, just as one can make too little of them. In the internal Jewish debate thus far, it is puzzling to find that the tendency among Jewish spokesmen and commentators has been to minimize the value of these individual commitments by Christians. But why? In 1953, Elmo Roper conducted a national survey, in

which he asked Americans, "Which one of these groups do you feel is doing the most good for the country at the present time?"

Forty percent (40%) of the American people picked religious leaders as the group "doing the most good" and most to be trusted. "No other group - whether government, Congressional, business or labor - came anywhere near matching the prestige and pulling power of the men who are ministers of God," Roper stated. The picture of the clergyman that Americans have may not be without its ambiguous aspects, but there can be little doubt that the clergy as individuals rank high in the American scale of prestige and public influence. The leadership that clergymen have given in recent years in the Vietnam peace effort, the war against poverty, in community organization in the slums, in support of aid to underdeveloped countries have further solidified their moral influence among large segments of the nation's populace. The support of Israel by such prominent individual Christian clergymen ought therefore to be valued in the perspective of that standing in American society.

When Christian individuals have aligned themselves one-sidedly with the extremist Arab cause - as in the case of the Rev. Dr. Henry P. Van Dusen, a former Protestant seminary president, who wrote a letter to the N. Y. Times in which he equated the Israeli victory with the Nazi blitzkrieg - a great deal was made of how distressing was his point of view and the harm done by his negative influence. Logic and common sense

ought to have compelled us to give at least as much weight to the positive value of the declarations of those Christian leaders who unequivocally backed Israel's cause and helped shape affirmatively the public opinion of America.

When the AJC publicized a survey early in June emphasizing the "widespread support" of Christian leaders and masses (as reflected in the public opinion polls), a representative of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations berated in the public press that conclusion of the survey terming it "exaggerated oversimplification". That commentary had little effect other than to tell some of the most distinguished American Christians - including two of the four U. S. Catholic Cardinals, one archbishop, and hundreds of Protestant scholars and church leaders, and editors of major Christian journals whose pro-Israel stands were cited in that report - that their support was not regarded by Jews as terribly important after all. Here, too, imagine if the situation had been reversed: what a pained outcry would have arisen throughout Jewry had this same group of Christian individual leaders come out in support of Nasser and the Arab League. One of the lessons to be learned from this experience, it seems to me, is that we need to overcome the Puritannical reflex of naively and self-righteously rubbing into the dirt the faces of those Christians who did come to our aid in frustrated retribution against those who did not.



Third, the most valid and serious criticism that deserved to be made by Jewish leaders was that directed at the "establishment" institutions of the Catholic and Protestant churches. As the AJC study puts it, "The reluctance of the two 'umbrella' organizations -- the National Council of Churches and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops -- to commit themselves unequivocally on the basic question of Israel's survival, especially in the face of Arab threats to annihilate the whole population, came as a surprise to many Jewish leaders. Neither of these two groups issued any clear-cut statement to this effect during the saber-rattling days in May."

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

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

The record must show that Catholic and Protestant leaders who hold positions of authority in their respective establishments--notably Msgr. George Higgins, director of social action for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Rev. Edward Flannery, executive secretary of the U.S. Bishops Subcommittee on Catholic-Jewish

Relations, and the Rev. Dr. David Hunter, associate general secretary of the National Council of Churches--did take strong public positions on Israel's survival. They did so, however, in their private capacities. Their courageous and independent stands, taken at some personal risk and in the face of some institutional pressures, were a reflection of their understanding of the interior mind of Jews that was the inevitable consequence of their many years of close association and friendship with Jewish leaders.

When the National Conference of Catholic Bishops did issue a statement on June 8, it asked for "a crusade of prayer for peace" and expressed the "fervent hope" that the UN would be successful in halting the conflict. Essentially, that was the nature of the position taken by German Christian leaders in the face of the Nazis' rise to power. Already agonizing over how to respond in effective ways to prevent what appeared realistically to most of us as the imminent prospect of another Auschwitz for the corporate Jewish body in Israel, this rhetoric and its recall of the earlier flight into pietism contributed to a pervading sense of gloom in American Jewry.

The statements of the National Council of Churches, while more politically formulated, were not a source of great moral reinforcement for Jews nor for Israel. In their June 6 telegram to President Johnson in which they pressed for a cease fire through the UN, they appeared to equate Israel's right to exist with the need to resolve the Arab refugee problem. In their July 7 resolution, the National Council of Churches contributed to the moral confusion of cause and effect by labeling Israel's retaliation to Arab provocations as "aggression" and "expansionism".



Despite the chagrin and distress that these positions have evoked in the Jewish community, there is some encouragement to be found in the fact that significant modifications in position have begun to emerge which are potentially of considerable political importance to Israel and to eventual peace in the Middle East. Some of these changes are demonstrably attributable to the marathon dialogues that a number of us have been engaged in with the Catholic and Protestant establishment people since last June.

The most striking change has been that of the Vatican in relation to Jerusalem. Pope Paul VI, on several occasions, called for the internationalization of the city of Jerusalem, a policy which most members of the Catholic hierarchy in the United States have therefore felt obliged to follow. On July 11, a "dialogue" took place in Jerusalem between Israel's Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and the Vatican's representative, Msgr. Angelo Felici, following which they issued a joint communique stating that they had explored formulae for the holy places "in an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual understanding." There are authoritative reports that the Vatican has changed its position, now aligning itself with the views of the World Council of Churches which from the beginning of the crisis asked of Israel only the assurances for free access to Christian holy places.

The July 7 resolution of the National Council of Churches, referred to above, also represents an advance away from a one-sided leaning toward the Arab cause and toward a more balanced view seeking even-handed justice in the Middle-East. "Indispensable to peace in the Middle East," the resolution asserts, "is acceptance by the entire international community of the State of Israel...Early talks between



the belligerents with or without the good offices, conciliation, or mediation of a third party are encouraged."

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

The counsels of men like Dr. Eliezer Berkovitz who have been advising Jews that Christianity is "a sinking ship," that we live in "a post-Christian" world, that dialogue with Christians only "white-washes their criminal past" is the most dangerous kind of nonsense. Jewish leadership must repudiate this diatribe at all costs because it gives our people a false sense of security, and sets into motion a mood of anti-Christian emotion which can paralyze any creative relationship with the majority society. This resort to slogans of "post-Christian world" obscures a very complex subject that I have dealt with at greater length in another essay; suffice it for these purposes to point out that this cliché leaves the conviction with many Jews that they can arbitrarily turn their backs on the Christian society and establish themselves elsewhere. How misleading! There is no future for Jews anywhere in the Arab-Muslim nations. The illusions of a Jewish future in the proletarian utopia of the Soviet Union have been completely dashed. The elementary facts are that the overwhelming majority of the Jews in the diaspora live in the midst of pre-

dominantly Christian communities in the United States, Western Europe and Latin America. The security of the State of Israel and the Jewish community there rests heavily on the continued support of the United States government and its people. The realistic problem for us is not how to escape these facts of our existence, but how to relate to them in the most serious way - which includes a recognition of the fundamental importance of strengthening ties of cooperation and authentic solidarity with Christians and their institutions who constitute primary structures in our environment.

Taking the foregoing into account -- the generally supportive response of the Christians in American society, the positive reaction of numerous Christian leaders, and the development and changes that appear to be taking place even in the Christian establishments--one could validly come to a conclusion that is radically opposite to that widely held in the Jewish community: namely, "the Christians by and large" did well by Israel. That conclusion is further strengthened when the Christian support of Israel is analyzed in relation to other issues which are critical in the life of the churches - Vietnam, the race problem, admission of Red China to the United Nations, draft-card burning, conscientious objection, birth control, celibacy, and church-state issues. On each of these major problems the Catholic and Protestant communities are severely divided and find it exceedingly difficult to obtain a Christian consensus that would include the hawks and the doves, the militant liberals and the white backlash, the conservatives and the liberals. While I believe that the establishment bodies, the National Council of Churches and a number of its affiliated Protestant denominations, and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, have a long way to travel in their pronouncements



on the Middle East before they remove the tarnish from their moral reputations in the Jewish community, for my part, I must say in all honesty, that I am prepared to settle for the present state of Christian public opinion in its support of Israel. If the Christian masses and the Christian leaders who have spoken out remain stable and steadfast in their present views, it should be a major source of moral stamina to Israel and her people during the long and protracted negotiations that lie ahead.

That assertion nevertheless raises the critical question: just how profound and deeply rooted are the commitments of those who have indicated their support of Israel? It has been speculated that the overwhelming popular support of Israel among Americans is a peculiar American phenomenon of identifying with "the underdog". The support for Israel crystallized during the time when the Israelis were being threatened with extermination. For most Americans nurtured on the B-film and radio soap opera culture of "cowboys and Indians," "good guys and bad guys", it was natural to back the little David surrounded by the murderous Goliath. But the roles have now shifted. Are we to anticipate that this large popular support will shift to the side of the Arabs who are the new "underdogs"? Certainly the Russian and Arab propaganda campaigns which have been trying diabolically to portray Israelis as the "new Nazis" pursuing the Arabs as "the new Jews" are striving to bring about such a shift in identification on the part of world public opinion.

The Harris and Gallup opinion polls were conducted respectively in July and October, and would therefore argue that Israel's victory was not met by a significant shift in public sentiment away from Israel. However, conversations that numerous Jewish leaders and



that I myself have had with large numbers of Christians, clergy and lay, since the end of the June war lead to the inescapable impression that the majority of Christians who supported Israel did so on the basis of strong humanitarian feelings, rather than on the basis of any real understanding of why Jews felt so strongly about Israel and Jerusalem. Such feelings and expressions of conscience, while they are to be honored for what they are, are inadequate to sustain convictions for the long pull ahead in the Middle East, and it seems to me that it is imperative that Jews must help their Christian neighbors enlarge their intellectual grasp of the issues, including the meaning of Israel and Jerusalem to the Jewish people and Judaism.

And that brings me to the matter of the role of the Jewish-Christian dialogue as an instrument for furthering Christian understanding of Jewish peoplehood and its relation to Israel. Those who have down-graded the dialogue or condemned it as bankrupt are no more accurate in their understanding of precisely what the dialogue has achieved than they were in their highly emotional and imprecise descriptions of "the Christian response" to Israel. From first-hand experience, I know that those who have spoken out in such dogmatic terms have either not participated in any of the more serious Jewish-Christian dialogues that have been taking place, or have taken part at most in two or three seminars and institutes and generalize about a whole movement on the basis of their extremely limited experience.

If that process of judging success or failure were applied, for example, to the usefulness of adult Jewish education programs in our Synagogues in helping transform the lives of congregants in terms of their pattern of religious observances and in-depth knowledge of the Talmud and classic Jewish sources, then I fear that many Rabbis would be compelled to close down their Synagogues and conclude that Judaism has failed. But that conclusion would be as erroneous as that which is being made by some Jewish leaders, especially a few nationally-prominent Rabbis, about the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The dialogue may not have proven to be all that its enthusiastic supporters have claimed for it, but it is certainly far more than the caricature its opponents have made of it.

A judgement of the values of the Jewish-Christian dialogue requires fair-minded people to confront the bald evidence. It is incontrovertible to those who have actively participated in dialogues - especially with academicians, theologians, religious school teachers, seminarians, and clergy - that these interactions have helped bring about changes of a profound and positive character in the attitudes and behaviour of many Christians towards the Jewish people, Judaism, and the Synagogue. Here, too, the evidence is so clear-cut and palpable that I find great difficulty in understanding the assertions to the contrary. It would take a large volume to document the changes that have already taken place in Christian thought, teaching and practice simultaneously on levels of

high-brow, middle-brow, and low-brow Christian culture (the rates of change are uneven, of course, in such a mammoth process of change).

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

"In our time Christian theology has gained a new religious understanding of the people of Israel through the realization that God continues to be with his people and that the revelation of the Old Testament is now complete as far as the Jewish people are concerned, even though they have not recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. The Messiah came

to fulfill the Old Covenant, but there is no suggestion anywhere in the New Testament that the Old Covenant was thereby abolished. Nor is it ever stated that God rejected his own people and that Christianity came to take the place of Judaism."

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

There are, of course, many Orthodox Christians who, ironically, share with some Orthodox Jews, that deep suspicion of change and who are anxious about the liberalization that is taking place in the Catholic community. These are mostly the same Orthodox Christians (also called "conservatives") who, in alliance with the prelates from the Arab countries, resisted the progressive churchmen's efforts to condemn anti-Semitism and to declare a clear policy of friendship and respect for Jews and Judaism. Do Jews, wittingly or unwittingly, want to play

into the hands of that camp of Christians whose spiritual ancestors have been the source of so much agony and bloodshed for our people, and so much contumely for our religion? It is these same Orthodox Christians who have found it theologically intolerable that the Jews have returned to the holy land, and that the holy places are now residing under Jewish jurisdiction. These same conservatives can be counted upon to do everything humanly possible to prevent the recognition of the State of Israel by the Vatican. How paradoxical it appears that Jews who have demonstrated such devotion and passion to help preserve the State of Israel continue to press their opposition to the dialogue process which holds out such promise for bringing about the necessary changes in understanding that can lead more Christians to the support and recognition of Israel's right to exist.

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



television, and other mass media.

The notion that these changes would have taken place simply as a result of Christians studying Jewish books, without a living encounter with Jews in dialogue, is an illusion and a fantasy. Vast libraries of Judaica, in all languages, have been available to Christian scholars, clergymen, and teachers for almost 2,000 years. How many significant changes in the Christian attitudes toward Jews and Judaism can be attributed to that process? The contrary evidence is plentiful, namely, that Christian savants, nurtured on anti-Jewish theological stereotypes, and living in isolation from Jews as persons, read into or read out of Jewish sources proof-texts to confirm their preconceived biases. Those Jews who advocate this technique as a substitute for dialogue must explain how they deal with such noble fruits of that technique, such as Johann Eisenmenger's "Judaism Unmasked," "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," and the most recent anthology of vicious anti-Semitism published and distributed by Arab sources at Vatican Council II, "The Plot Against the Church". All these marvelous works were the result of such library studies . . .

The fact is that this policy of withdrawal from Jewish-Christian dialogue and emphasis on theoretical understanding flies in the face of everything that we know about attitude change from social psychology. Kurt Lewin, the father of this social science, has demonstrated clinically that change in attitudes and behavior come about not just as a result of having cognitive information or abstract ideas, but primarily

through living human interaction, which transmutes ideas into personal values. The changes that have taken place thus far in Christian attitudes toward deicide, anti-Semitism, proselytization, and the living relevance of Rabbinic Judaism are case histories demonstrating the validity of this approach to effecting change.

The more recent substitute for religious dialogue that has been vigorously advocated is that of interfaith social action. I know of no proposal more in contradiction with traditional, halachic Judaism than that of those Orthodox Jews who are in effect advocating a separation between religion and life. The late Chief Rabbi Kook of Israel, one of the great sages of traditional Judaism, declared that "man's physical concerns and spiritual aspirations were inseparable. The sacred cannot exist without the profane. The sacred and the profane together influence the human spirit and man is enriched by absorbing from each whatever is suitable. Indeed, the sacred can exist only so long as it rests upon a 'foundation of the profane' since spiritual sanctity must rest upon the solid base of normal life." Holiness that is set up in opposition to nature was described by Chief Rabbi Kook as "the holiness of the exile," a reflection of the long dispersion in which Jews were cut off from normal existence in society.

Not only is such a religious social action an absurdity from the point of view of Judaism, it is impractical as well. To avoid examining the basic religious premises on which social

action work is grounded and to cooperate with Christians on that basis can lead to the incredible situation of Christians and Jews collaborating to "redeem" the civic society while Christians look upon their Jewish partners as "unredeemed". How strong an alliance in social action do Jews believe they can sustain, while Christians continue to think Jews are "fallen and faithless Israel"?

To pursue this line of invoking an embargo on the discussion of religious issues with Christians and to promote relations solely on the basis of social action means that Orthodox Jews (and others who support this approach) are conspiring to present Judaism to the Christian world as a secular humanist institution. As Arthur Hertzberg has frequently noted, Jews and Judaism have greater dignity and status in the Bible than they have in any other intellectual construction in the Western world, and traditional Jews who take this "social action only" appear to be hell-bent on undermining that extraordinary reality.

Rabbis, priests, nuns, and ministers do not come together to do social action because they are experts in non-proliferation of nuclear bomb treaties, or the administration of economic development programs in Lesotho, or as city planners. What universally brings them together is a recognition that they share in a moral conscience that in turn derives from a certain attitude toward Sacred Scriptures and their sacred histories, and a certain expectation for man and society that is shaped by messianic visions of a kingdom to come in which justice and righteousness are consummated. Certainly they will be more effective in carrying out their task of redemptive work if



they have technical competence, but that is not their primary vocation, and if religious principles is not what binds them together, then their labors would be carried out in a more honest and unambiguous atmosphere were they to meet under the auspices of the Foreign Policy Association or the American Civil Liberties Union.

There is one very sound criticism regarding the dialogue made by traditional Jews which must be taken seriously. That concern is over the dialogue becoming an arena for trading ignorances. It is for this reason that anti-dialoguists have been especially opposed to lay dialogues. These are serious and legitimate concerns. My response is two-fold; firstly, neither my agency nor I personally have organized any theological or religious dialogues without involving the most competent Jewish scholars we could find in the Orthodox, Conservative, and in the academic world; secondly, in organizing lay dialogues, we generally insist that our lay people enroll in an intensive adult Jewish education course, entitled "Prelude to Dialogue" which are implemented in cooperation with local bureaus of Jewish education or institutions of higher Jewish learning. With rare exceptions, our experience has been that our representatives who take part in theological dialogues more than hold their own, and generally make a deep impression on Christians as to the vitality and richness of contemporary Jewish scholarship and cultural life. The lay dialogue has taught us that we have tended to over-estimate the knowledge that Christians have of their faith and doctrines, and have underestimated the capacity of our intelligent, carefully-selected lay people to acquit themselves favorably. One other lesson we have

learned: the Jewish-Christian lay dialogues have become increasingly a strong incentive for our lay people to know themselves as Jews, and, as a result, the dialogue has been characterized as "the secret weapon of adult Jewish education".

In summary, the evidence is overwhelming that we have made remarkable, indeed, unprecedented progress in relation to each of the issues to which we have addressed our attention in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. Can the dialogue work in a similar effective way to help overcome Christian ignorance or misunderstanding with regard to the mystique of Jewish peoplehood (K'lal Yisroel, "the sacred congregation of Israel") and the symbolic meaning of Israel and Jerusalem to Judaism and the Jewish people?

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

When in recent weeks some of my colleagues in the rabbinate expressed bitter disappointment over "the Christian silence" about Israel, I responded by asking them, "When did you last speak to a Christian minister about the religious significance of Israel to Judaism?" Invariably the answer was "never" or "not very recently". Further, I would ask, "When did you last speak to your congregation



about this?" Again, "not very recently," or "we take our relationship to Israel for granted; everyone knows the ark faces toward Jerusalem, the glass that is broken at each wedding commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, our three Pilgrim festivals keep alive the memory of the national sanctuary on Mt. Zion, and so forth."

In the main, Rabbis and Jewish teachers have not clarified these fundamental issues in relation to Israel for themselves nor for their Jewish audiences. How much less so have we clarified these questions for our Christian neighbors? Given this enormous lack in theoretical understanding, it is virtually a miracle that the Jewish people have behaved as well as they have. It is equally astounding that the Christian leaders and masses responded as affirmatively as they did.

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

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Rabbi Tanenbaum is National Director of the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee. An authority on Jewish-Christian relations, he was the only rabbi at Vatican Council II during the deliberations that led to the passage of the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, which condemned anti-Semitism and called for "mutual knowledge and respect between



Christians and Jews." Rabbi Tanenbaum is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained and holds a master's degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He has published numerous articles and studies and has lectured at major universities here and abroad on Jewish-Christian relations. He is president of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, an interfaith group devoted to aiding the poor and deprived in the inner cities achieve mastery over their destinies.

