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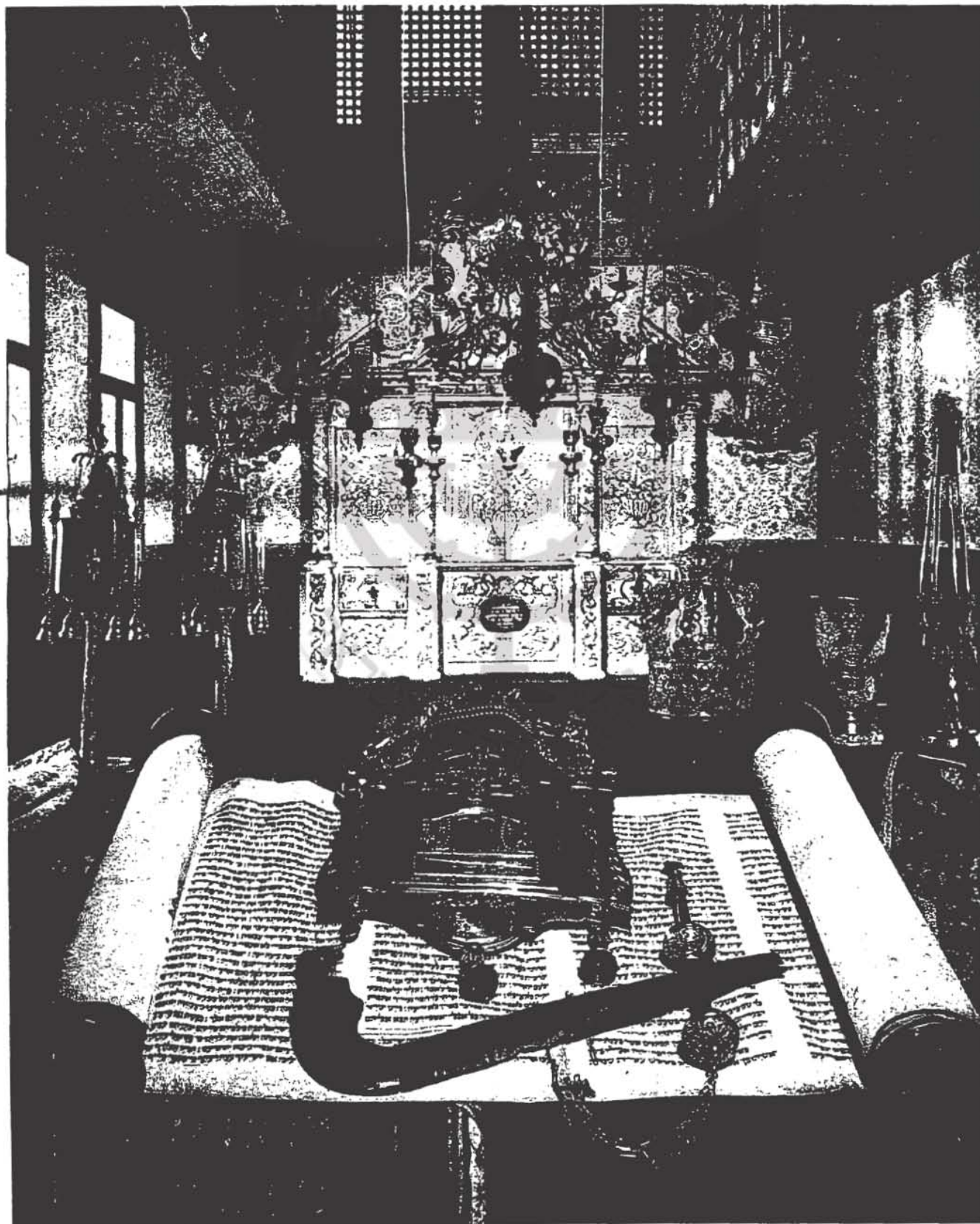
Is Jewish-Christian Dialogue Worthwhile?
Marc H. Tanenbaum, Emanuel Rackman
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HADASSAH

JANUARY 1968

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magazine



Italian Jewry: Splendor and Tragedy — Cecil Roth

Arnold Newman's photo of ancient Italian synagogue now in the Israel Museum.

IS JEWISH-CHRISTIAN

"...The dialogue process holds out 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..."

By MARC H. TANENBAUM

THERE can be no question that the Israel-Arab crisis of May and June resulted in a severe strain in Jewish-Christian relations. But the exact nature of that strain and its implications for the future of relations between Jews and Christians—and for Israel—are 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 eye-catching black headlines in the nation's press by blanket condemnations of "the Christians [who] by and large were silent." Several Jewish

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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 leaders demanded that Jewish groups engaged in these dialogues with Christians withdraw since they "obviously" had 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 made highly emotional declarations. But the emotional state that was an appropriate feeling in response to those charged circumstances is 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 mislead-

ing 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:

Eighty-two per cent believe that Israel's existence as a sovereign state should be formally accepted by the Arab nations;

Eighty-eight per cent believe Israel should be guaranteed passage through the Gulf of Aqaba;

Eighty-six per cent feel that Israel also should have freedom of passage through the Suez Canal;

Seventy-nine per cent oppose any UN condemnation of Israel as the aggressor in the war;

Sixty-two per cent of U. S. opinion reject Israel withdrawal from occupied territory as a precondition to negotiations.

In the same poll, seventy per cent of the respondents felt "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 fifty-six per cent of the American people to favor Israel's retaining control over a reunified Jerusalem.

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.

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.

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 McAfee 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.

Cardinal Cushing and a number of other Catholic and Protestant religious leaders in the Boston area issued a "Declaration of Moral Principle" 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

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RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM (third from left) frankly discusses with school teachers, both lay and clergy, the meaning of Israel and Jewish peoplehood, as well as Christian responsibility for combating anti-Semitism in religious education.

DIALOGUE WORTHWHILE?

"... It is Israel's crisis, more than anything else that has happened in the past five years, that pinpoints the bankruptcy of any program designed to get Christendom to revise its attitudes about Jews ..."

By EMANUEL RACKMAN

ISRAEL's crisis galvanized the American Jewish community precisely at a time when the religious organizations were girding for a bitter controversy. The debate pertained to dialogues between Christians and Jews. Liberal and conservative rabbis had favored them while orthodox rabbis had asked that the dialogues be limited to social issues with no confrontation whatever on matters of dogma or doctrine.

Last May, the Synagogue Council of America, which comprises delegates from all three Jewish groups, and Christians jointly sponsored a conference to be held in Boston. It was to deal with conscience in our time. The two orthodox constituent organizations of the Synagogue Council of America—the Rabbinical Council of America and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America—had raised no objection and had even agreed to participate. Shortly before the conference opened, however, they withdrew because of the pressure of leaders of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis.

Notwithstanding, several orthodox rabbis attended. Before their defiance and the generally embarrassing behavior of the orthodox groups could become the subject of sad incriminations and recriminations in the community, Israel was confronted by the armed might of the Arabs and all the energies of Jews were focused on unity and help for our beleaguered brethren. Now, perhaps, as Jews are united, one may with less passion and more reason give the entire issue a new look.

What is meant by "dialogue?" What form is it expected to assume? What do its proponents hope to accomplish? What do its opponents fear? And last, but not least, did we learn anything from Christendom's response to Israel's plight and victory that we may the more realistically appraise what Jews can expect from Christians in any crisis? Is that which we can expect worth another conflict among Jews?

It is inevitable that in American society there will be communication between Christians and Jews. And who will undertake to supervise and control what individual Christians and Jews discuss with each other? This is dialogue in its original meaning—talk on a "one-to-one" basis. Certainly the controversy cannot pertain to this kind of interpersonal relationship.

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What is meant must, therefore, not be dialogue at all, but organized confrontations between leaders of both groups. If the themes for discussion are not theological, there is no objection whatever to the confrontation. If the themes, however, are theological, then one must ask several practical questions. Will only Jewish theologians participate? If so, can we who are three per cent of the population provide enough theologians to enlighten the ninety-seven per cent who are Christians with that which they seek to know about Judaism? Of necessity, most Christians will have to learn about Judaism from books and not from face-to-face encounters. Perhaps Jews will not use professional theologians but laymen—presidents of synagogues and B'nai B'rith chapters. Visualize their Jewish knowledge pitted against the erudition and forensic skill of a Jesuit!

PERHAPS on a limited scale, in great citadels of learning, there could be dialogue between the intellectual giants of both religious traditions. And for what? Do such giants resolve any issues in their conferences—no matter how learned—without the subsequent publication of their papers, critical rejoinders by those who differ with them and on-going debate in periodicals and books? If this is what is meant by dialogue, then it always was and always will be, so long as freedom of the

press endures. The face-to-face encounter is usually only frustrating in such situations. One needs the precise formulation of a paper to begin with, and time within which to formulate an equally precise reply.

Indeed one such conference was held at Harvard University last October. It was most impressive, yet at the one seminar devoted to theology it became apparent that there could be no dialogue. The distinguished chairman—a world-renowned Christian theologian—in virtual exasperation asked at the conclusion of the seminar, "Is there naught upon which Christians and Jews can agree?" Fascinating it was that the orthodox, conservative and liberal rabbis present were all agreed on that which united them—a common history that determined even their theology—while it was precisely history that Christians wanted either to ignore or to transcend. They had no answer to the chairman's query. And if Jewish theologians at such a conference felt frustrated, what form shall the dialogue assume, as visualized by its proponents?

In the final analysis, it is not the face-to-face encounter of intellectual giants that is being proposed but rather public sessions where less knowledgeable Christians and Jews will talk it out. But again let us be practical. Do Jews have the qualified manpower for such enterprise? Do Jews have the manpower in the midwest, the west,

the south and the southwest? And it is precisely in those communities where Jews are so anxious to find favor in Christian eyes. It is there, too, that the threat of Jewish assimilation is greatest. Are we wise to accelerate that process by having more Jews enter churches to hear sermons by priests and ministers, and then to organize social activities which are the inevitable prelude to, and aftermath, of any kind of program to which the public generally is invited?

Many American rabbis who were chaplains during World War II will recall how active they were both in military installations and in the so-called "good-will" programs under the auspices of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. They appeared together with priests and ministers on programs promotive of brotherhood. Their collective experience was that those who attended the meetings were those who needed no convincing. And no one could tell who, among even these, would have had the courage to take a stand on behalf of a Negro when a lynching impended or on behalf of a Jew if the star of another Hitler began to rise.

The chaplains were convinced that nothing short of legislation could help protect the rights of minorities. Today, we wonder whether even legislation is enough and whether anything less than drastic social, political and economic

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ACTIVE SUPPORT of burning moral issue of civil rights is type of social action around which different faiths can rally jointly, in the view of Rabbi Emanuel Rackman. But dialogue? No.



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Dialogue Is Worthwhile

(Continued from Page 4)

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. In the preamble to their document, the Los Angeles clergy indicated that their action grew directly out of their involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogues.

At the height of the debate in the United Nations over the question of Israel's reunification of the city of Jerusalem, 17 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 Profs. Kristar Stendahl of Harvard and W. D. Davies of Duke University — have been active participants in theological dialogues with Jewish scholars. 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.

One can make too much of declarations by individuals, just as one can make too little of them. But 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.

When Christian individuals 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 *New York Times* in which he equated the Israeli victory with the Nazi blitzkrieg — there was a great feeling of distress regarding their point of view and the harm done by their negative influence. Logic and common sense ought to have compelled us to give at least as much weight to the positive declarations.

WHEN the American Jewish Committee published 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 publicly berated the conclusion of the survey, terming it "exaggerated oversimplification." That commentary had little effect other than to tell some of the most distin-

guished American Christians — including two of the four American Cardinals, one archbishop, and a great many 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.

The most valid and serious criticism made by Jewish leaders was directed at the "establishment" institutions of the Catholic and Protestant churches. As the American Jewish Committee study on Christian reaction 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.

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 United States 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.

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. In the face of what appeared 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.

In their June 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 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.



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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, Magr. Angelo Felici, following which they issued a joint communiqué 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 to 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 Judaism. There are Christian leaders of good-will within the establishments who are allies or potential allies 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 elementary facts are that the overwhelming majority of the Jews in the diaspora live in the midst of predominantly 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.

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 the conclusion radically opposite to that widely held in the Jewish community; namely, "the Christians by and large" did well by 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.

Conversations that n rous

Jewish leaders 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. 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.

Those who have downgraded 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.

A JUDGMENT 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 behavior of many Christians toward the Jewish people, Judaism, and the Synagogue.

How far the dialogue process has helped Christian leadership in overcoming the ancient mythologies about the decide—"Christ-killer"—charge, proselytizing, and the continuing worth and value of Judaism is reflected in the guidelines set down by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in March regarding Christian-Jewish relations.

Among the points the guidelines stress are the frank treatment of historic Christian anti-Semitism in Catholic history books and courses; presentation

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of the Crucifixion story so as not to implicate all Jews; elaboration of the use of the term "the Jews" in negative references in the Gospels; rejection of the idea that Judaism and Pharasaism during Jesus' time were simply decadent formalism and hypocrisy; acknowledgement of the living relevance of Judaism during the Christian era and the permanent election of Israel; the careful avoidance of proselytizing 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 scholars, the net effect of which

is to call upon Christians to give up their designs to convert the Jews. It receives 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.

There are, of course, many Orthodox Christians who, ironically, share with some Orthodox Jews a 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. 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 now exist under Jewish jurisdiction.

These same conservatives can be counted on to do everything possible to prevent the recognition of the State of Israel by the

Vatican. How paradoxical it is that Jews who have demonstrated such devotion and passion to help preserve the State of Israel continue to oppose 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 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 the Orthodox Jews who advocate a separation between religion and life.

Not only is such 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 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?"

THERE is one very sound criticism regarding the dialogue made by traditional Jews which must be taken seriously: the fear that the dialogue will become an arena for trading ignorances. It is for this reason that anti-dialoguists have been especially opposed to lay dialogues. My response is two-fold: first, 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 Reform movements and in the academic world.

Secondly, in organizing lay dialogues, we generally insist that our lay people enroll in intensive adult Jewish education courses, 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 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 Yisrael*, "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 fulfillment

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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? When did you last speak to your congregation about this?" Invariably the answer was, "Not very recently" or "We take our relationship to Israel for granted."

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 task 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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Dialogue - No

(Continued from Page 5)
action will accomplish the desired result. But public rallies for good-will, for toleration, for brotherhood are deemed an utter waste of time and energy. Even the National Conference of Christians and Jews has abandoned the approach.

Is this, then, what the dialogues shall now become? Will it make a difference that today the dialogues will deal with theology while a generation ago they dealt only with the dignity of man and the right to be different? On the other hand, who knows better than theologians how little influence a man's doctrines have over his deeds and how little professions of the mouth reflect one's behavior in time of crisis?

By all means, in social action, Jews and Christians, whites and Negroes must not only have dialogue but joint planning and implementation as a team. To this kind of enterprise there is no objection whatever. The Boston conference was conceived with this in mind. But because it was made to appear unwittingly and erroneously that the conference was an indirect response to the call for ecumenism between Christians and Jews—and some might have deemed the participation of orthodox rabbis as a blanket endorsement of the total program including confrontations on theological levels—a number of orthodox rabbis panicked and forced their more rea-

(Continued on next page)

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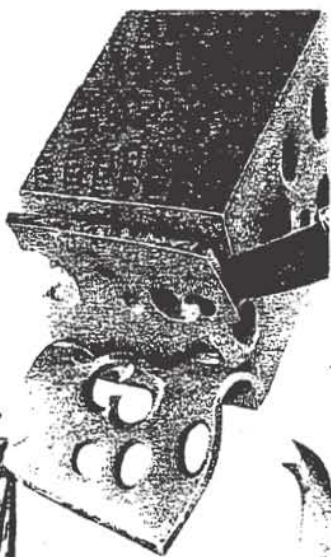
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(Cont'd from preceding page)
sonable colleagues to withdraw. From every point of view what happened was embarrassing to all Jews, especially orthodox Jews. However, this is the time for conservative and liberal rabbis to ask whether the broader dialogue makes sense.

Do Christian theologians need the dialogue to learn about Judaism? Isn't there enough available in books and periodicals for their edification? Do we need to face them to learn about Christianity? And if the dialogues are for our lay Jews—young and old alike—have we done enough to make them knowledgeable vis-a-vis their own faith that we must now expend our limited resources on teaching them comparative religion?

Perhaps it is Israel's crisis, more than anything else that has happened in the last five years, that ought to pinpoint the bankruptcy of any program designed to get Christendom to revise its attitude toward Jews, Judaism and the survival of both our people and our heritage. What help Jews received in our present crisis was not due to Christendom but rather to political realities—to the desperate need of the United States to keep the Soviet Union at bay in the Middle East, to a very satisfactory trade treaty to Israel with Rumania and to political leaders in Europe whose Christian loyalty is superficial. (The weakness of Christianity in Scandinavian countries is too well known to require documentation.)

Did the Pope react to the threats of the Arab world against Israel with even the concern he made manifest for the Vietnamese people? Can he and organized Christendom anywhere pretend that they knew nothing of the desecration of cemeteries and the demolition of synagogues in Jordanian Jerusalem with their representatives living alongside these sites of sacrilege? Did only Moslems use the driveway to the hotel through the Jewish cemetery? Were the Lutheran sponsors of schools in old Jerusalem and the Christian tourists in the hotels there or even the patrons of the Helen Keller institutes—were all of these blind Christians who had naught to say when Jewish holy places were violated but became concerned like "His Holiness" only when Jews took charge? Isn't this precisely how Christendom behaved in Hitler's day? One finds it difficult to forget that German S.P.C.A.'s took care of the pets of Jews while the owners were taken away to death camps.

True, there were a few Christian theologians who signed pleas for Israel even as there were a few heroic Christians during World War II who saved Jews. Who will gainsay that there are righteous people among the Gentiles now as there were then! One of them did regret his compassion once it became apparent that Jews were no longer the underdogs. And this is the heart of the matter.

THE continuing existence of our people is a fact which the Church cannot reconcile with its historic theology. The restoration of Israel—the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Prophets for us and not for a Christian Israel—is more unacceptable to Christianity than unequivocal proof that we never

committed deicide. And public debates will not change the Church's position.

A few liberal Protestants do not so hold. With them Jews already work well in many areas of social action. With the others, too, we should seek to work in the same areas. Let all of us do this in the name of God each of us serves. But we do not have to define that God for each other in order to toil for the amelioration of the lot of all His creatures. On the other hand, let us respect each other's right of privacy—in this case, the privacy of one's religious commitment and covenant and in that way help society achieve even knowledge of the tension between collective action and individual belief. Moreover, what we must know about each other's theology will always be available in books.

In the final analysis, it is only thus that we will fulfill the meaning of dialogue in its loftiest sense. Dialogue is more than communication. Years ago when I would sit down with members of the Communist Party to discuss ideologies, I had the peculiar feeling that it was not dialogue in which we were engaged. There was always a desire on the part of my adversary to manipulate me. For there is a difference between communicating with another in order to sell and communicating with another because you really crave to understand each other, to fathom each other's motivations and yearnings so that your love of each other may grow because of a deeper understanding of each other's souls.

This is dialogue. When East and West sit down at the table it isn't dialogue. We know that they sit down with mutual suspicion. There is a desire in each to destroy the other's power system.

AND between Christians and Jews there cannot be dialogue in the correct sense of the term until there is a basic recognition that all the participants are equals and what each group seeks is to maintain its own spiritual heritage, not absorption or assimilation of the other. Until it is recognized that I am an absolute equal whose Jewishness the other party to the dialogue is as anxious to see continued as I am, it is not dialogue.

To be sure, there can be union with each other on levels where there is agreement, but this cannot possibly involve theology if the Church is to be true to its own commitment. I cannot have dialogue with one who feels that he is bound by his own religious commitment to change my convictions and the pattern of my commitment. Thus the dialogue between Catholics and Jews can never be on the theological level, and if it can't be on the theological level then we ought to be frank and say, "When you Catholics are engaged in theology—it's not our business."

You have to do what is right for your theology. You have to do what is safe for your covenant. We cannot be involved any more than we can invite you into our covenant. On the social action level, however, there can be dialogue.

American Jewry is presently more united than ever. Let us not rock the boat for a mess of pottage.