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Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue: A Jewish Perspective**by Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum****11/18/85**

It is the sign of hospitality of St. Paul/Minneapolis that it is the only city of the world where they serve you skim bourbon for water.

Over the course of the past, I guess six, seven weeks, I have traveled more intensively, than I can recall at almost anytime during the course of the past twenty years. At the close of September and beginning of October I went to Caracas, to take part in a twentieth anniversary observance of the adoption of Nostra Aetate. In Caracas Venezuela, the Cardinal Archbishop of Venezuela took part along with the Papal Nuncio and members of the government. From there I turned around and came back to New York to say "Hello" to my wife, and the next day took off for a ten day mission to South Africa. This was a grueling experience that I want to say a few words about during the course of my presentation. And I came back from South Africa to change laundry, that's always the sign that the trip is over. Then I went off to Rome, where I had an audience with Pope John Paul II, and then engaged in three days of intensive discussion with Cardinal Wilibrand and the Vatican Secretariat for non Christian Religions. We spent four to five days in Rome, engaging in very intensive discussion on what Pope John Paul II exchanged with us during our audience, deliberations and then our examination

of the State of Catholic/Jewish relations in many parts of the world. From Rome, I turned around and went to Brazil for the first Pan American Conference on Catholic Jewish Relations, sponsored by the National Conference of Brazilian Catholic Bishops, the Confederation of Brazilian Jewish Communities and the American Jewish Committee. You know I think Catholic-Jewish relations is doing pretty well, but I really have a complaint with God, why all at one time and why now? The sense of timing is becoming overwhelming! What I really wanted to tell you and take a moment to say, and get to what I'm here for, is that traveling in many parts of the world one is exposed to all kinds of exigency and all kinds of vulnerabilities. This afternoon, as I was coming in to St. Paul/Minneapolis or maybe I should say Minneapolis/St. Paul, the fog began to loom up, and the airplane began circling and it circled for more than an hour. I suddenly recalled the wonderful story about another situation like that, where someone sitting there deeply anxious as to whether the plane was going to land in time to be here for the observance this evening. And in this account, a Jewish man was sitting there getting very nervous, very anxious, he looks across the aisle in the airplane and sees a Roman Catholic nun in her habit and she too becomes very anxious and she takes out her rosary beads and she begins going through a series of Hail Marys' and deeply concerned about the well-being of everybody on that plane. Finally, the Jewish man

supposedly in this case a Rabbi, like myself turns to her and says, Sister, when your finished with those rosary beads would you please let me have them, I'm not going to risk eternity on a technicality tonight!

It really is a genuine privilege to be here this evening. First, to come and pay tribute to a man for whom I have the greatest esteem, who's courage, honesty and candor has meant a great deal to many of us in the Jewish community who remember him as a long time deep friend of the Jewish people, his excellency Archbishop John Roach. And I was delighted to be able to renew our friendship here this evening. Monsignor Terrence Murphy, President of the College of St. Thomas, has really shown magnificent leadership by allowing this Twentieth Anniversary observance of Nostra Aetate, to be celebrated and in fact for it to lead to the establishment of a solid structure the Center for Jewish-Christian Learning. The Center will give live and meaning, concreteness, to the movement forward in developing and understanding, friendship, mutual respect, love and caring between Catholics and Jews in this city and in many other parts of the nation. And for those who have made this possible Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Cohen, and others we are very much in their debt, and beyond that Rabbi Max A. Shapiro, who has always been a tower of strength, one of the shining lights in the

American Rabbinate. I can not think of a happier marriage than that of his serving as director of the Center, especially at this time.

On October 28, 1965, after three years of what was frequently tumultuous, turbulent, pressures and counter pressures, Nostra Aetate "in our time," the Vatican Council II declaration on non-Christian religions, with Section four that dealt with Catholic/Jewish relations was adopted. When the late Augustin Cardinal Bea introduced that declaration before the twenty-two hundred and some council fathers, of Vactican Council II in his Relatio, in his introduction as he introduced it he made the point that no other declaration, no other single declaration considered by the council had attracted such world wide attention. No other declaration had struck the question of the identity of the Catholic Church, her nature, her source, her origins, her destiny, as Nostra Aetate.

I want to begin by sharing with you an autobiographical account of what was for me a personal spiritual odyssey. In some ways as you will see, what was for me a very profound act of conversion. In making a decision to respond to a invitation by the late Cardinal Bea, prepared for by the late Cardinal Lawrence Sheen of Baltimore, a wonderful human being, a great man, who was the first chairman of the American Catholic Bishops commission on ecumenism and inter-religious affairs. He had proposed my name to Cardinal Bea, and Cardinal Bea, had invited me as a official guest observor.

My journey in relation to Nostra Aetate began when I was about four years old, and I have to unburden myself of this account, for you to understand where I came from, and what antecedence I had to cope with in relation with Vatican Council Two. This is a true story uninbellished, if anything understated. I was born the one of three children, the children of Russian, Polish, Jewish emigrants who came to the United States in the early 1900's from the Ukraine. They left the Ukraine, because they could no longer tolerate the poverty, and the progomes. My parents were very Orthodox Jews, very traditional Jews, and on the Sabbath after we would walk some twenty blocks to the Synagogue and walk back twenty blocks we would come home and have a Sabbath luncheon and then sit around the living room. And as I suppose all ethnic parents did at one time or another, they would begin recalling nostalgically, what the old country was about, they wanted to share their experiences with the old country, the old home. On a Saturday afternoon at the beginning of the Jewish passover observance, on the Eve of Easter, Holy Week, climaxed by Good Friday, my father who was a small, merchant, he had a grocery store, or a general store suddenly sat back and said, "You know when we were children in Damidifca this small village in the Ukraine, this is what happened on the Passover right before Easter, Good Friday. His father was known as a staretstour that is to say that he was the de facto mayor of

a predominantly Jewish village. There were 200 to 300 Jews living in that small village of Damidifca. And as the staretsour it was his job to raise taxes, collect taxes for the Czar's government and to gather in young Jews for military service, they had quotas for service. And he said that on the Friday, of Good Friday in that village of Damidifca, down the road was a Russian Orthodox church at the end of a long dusty path. And apparently after the celebration of the liturgy of the passion of Christ when the crucifixion account was apparently told, the Orthodox priest became so energized over the role of the Jews in the crucifixion, the Jews as Christ killers that he incited the congregation to become a howling mob, it tore out of that church in that village area, came up the road with people grabbing rocks and sticks and stones, they descended on my Grandfathers' house and they demanded that everyone in the house come outside. And then as my father told it, we saw the Orthodox priest with his pectoral cross, glinting in the sun, he held the staff, and said to my father, my Grandfather, bring out your whole family, the whole family came out, and then he pointed the staff at an uncle of mine whose name was Aaron. Aaron had been a poet in the city of Odessa who came to Damidifca to visit his family, to celebrate the Passover season. And as my father told this account, the Orthodox priest then forced the entire family to come to the edge of a river around which the village was constructed, and then the congregation of

Russian Orthodox Christians, called the entire Jewish village, forced the entire Jewish village to come to the edge of the river, and the priest held up the staff and began screaming in Russian, "arista morga", "God forsaken Jews," Jews have killed our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as ransom for his murder we offer up this Jew and then my Uncle Aaron was compelled to walk into the water in the presence of that Jewish village, until the water covered his head, and that was the end of Uncle Aaron.

On October 28, 1965, I stood there a Rabbi invited by a German Cardinal, as a guest observer to listen to him on that day introduce the Vatican Declaration on Non-Christian Religions. "As this sacred synod searches into the mystery of the church, it affirms the common spiritual patrimony that binds the church to the Jewish people and to the Jewish faith. This church repudiates the charge of deicide the christ killer charge against the Jewish people as being incompatible with the spirit of Christ and the gospels. This sacred synod repudiates anti-semitism by anyone at anytime and at any place." And then it went on to say, that this council calls on the Catholic faithful to join in Biblical studies and fraternal dialogue with the Jewish people so that it might lead to mutual respect, and fraternal relations between Catholics and Jews. That's my odyssey, as I stood there and I have to tell you as God is my witness, only one set of images came flooding through my head as I listened to Cardinal Bea introduce that

relatio and introduce that declaration and then Pope Paul VI stood up and proclaimed that declaration as the magisterium of the Church and then the vote was taken and it was adopted almost unanimously 99 percent vote in favor of that declaration as the mind of the church. And I kept saying, there is some how historic justice because had something like this happened 500 years ago, 400, 200, years ago, my Uncle Aaron would still be alive. More than likely the greater part of six million Jewish men, women and children would have been alive in Nazi dominated Germany and Europe. There are four issues I want to talk about, briefly, because our time is limited and perhaps we'll have a chance to get at them in greater detail during the discussion.

Why this issue, Christ Killer charge, why was that a sign of a turning point in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people? The truth of the matter is that most Christians today hardly recognized that as a issue in their lives. Especially over the last twenty years. As I indicated earlier, one of the most searing visits that I've had in years, was my experience in South Africa, I don't want to make this to great of diversion but it became relevant for me and made sense out of Nostra Aetate twenty years later in a way that few other experiences have done for me.

I went with a delegation of four leaders of the American Jewish committee to South Africa, at the request of the American Government unofficially. Our African

desk who said it was important for us to get a first hand experience of what was going on in South Africa, not simply newspaper accounts, or not watching the eleven o'clock news alone and also at the request of the Jewish community in South Africa. We met with everybody we had to meet with, Botha and the government all the political parties, Christian leaders, Bishop Tutu, coloreds, indians, Jewish leadership, business leaders, media, etc. The most tragic experience, what really transformed my sense of what was going on in South Africa and the imminent tragedy unless a miracle happens, the imminent tragedy in South Africa was to go into Soweto with Helen Souseman, a member of the parliament, a Jewish lady it turns out, the first member of parliament who twenty-seven years ago, began the first campaign in the South Africa parliament against the apartheid, she's now been joined by hundreds of others in the progressive federal party, she took us into Soweto to see the conditions of blacks, and it is beyond imagining a whole society of 23 million people segregated from a white society and to go through that city and to watch truck loads, hippos they call them, armed carriers filled with young Afrikaners, eighteen, nineteen years old, sitting with canons on top of the tanks and as soon as they see someone rest, the first response is naaaaaaaaa. Machine guns!!! The first response to any unrest is to kill, blacks. We turned to some of the people in the government afterwards, we said, hasn't this government ever heard of riot control.

We have riots in New York, we have riots in America, and Germany and elsewhere.

The last thing you do is kill people! The first thing you do is use water canons, or whatever tear gas to stop, and someone took us aside and said, "Sir, you have to

understand this is a apartheid society, these young soldiers and policemen, most of them come from the farms, they were raised in a strict Christian Reform, Dutch Reform,

Africana tradition, that believes in apartheid as a religious belief. They believe that the scripture teaches the curse of Ham, the black people are cursed by God. As an

inferior people, and one is justified in maintaining the separation between the races.

The white cities, the ten black homelands, and the blacks are regarded as in such a state of inferior outcast condition, that they, every single black who seeks to walk

across the street in South Africa must carry a passport, a reference pad and you can not go from a city or to a homeland, to a town, to a village without having a passport

in your own homeland. Influx control laws, group area laws, all of the imagination of man to justify, what is taken to be a religious lie. The curse of Ham, is a religious lie.

It is a perversion of scripture. I can show you essays by Biblical scholars on how their is no basis in fact for that tradition of the curse of Ham. And everybody is talking

in South Africa about dismantling apartheid, apartheid is about 300 hundred years old, look at what it's taking to try to bring about the simplest reforms in that society,

they've now finally past the law of mixed marriages, which in itself is fraudulent, because you can marry somebody outside of your race, but if you are found living in the township over night, they can put you in prison. You can marry during the day, but over night you can not stay in the township. It's going to be hard for you to take this, but this is how I experienced -Jews- have lived in a culture which has been predominately a deicide culture for the greater part of the past nineteen hundred years. And what the church had the courage to face up to, finally in the year of 1965, is that this is a misappropriation of Sacred Scripture much of the curse of Ham, was a perversion of Sacred Scripture. Because out of that notion of Jews as Christ Killers, Jews are collectively guilty for the death of Christ, came the notion that the Jews are rejected by God, then the wandering Jew image when the Judas Iscariot image which then became translated from a theological image into a secular image, Judas became shylock, a pound of flesh. And those images in their demonic character penetrated the whole of Western Christian Civilization. If you look at what Adolf Hitler did when he came to power, you know the first essay he translated into all of the language of Western Europe, Martin Luthers' essay on the Jews and their Lives. Which was a repetition of the sermons of Saint John Chrisisdom were all of these themes, the Synagogue of Satan, the Christ Killers, Jews as wandering Jews but, the human damage, the dehumanization

which resulted from that, has scared us down to the case of my Uncle Aaron. And so to stand, in 1965 at Vatican Council Two and to see the entire Church raise up and declare by an overwhelming vote, we will not accept this as inherited tradition and ever since that time over the past twenty years when you consider, when you consider, the way in which those themes, those demonologies of the Jews, have penetrated Western christian civilization, what has happened in the past twenty years since Nostra Aetate, literally has been a miracle.

Compare South Africa's three hundred years and how almost nothing, nothing can move in that rigid system, that apartheid culture, what has happened in the past twenty years is phenomenal, I'll just give you one illustration. My own group, the American Jewish Committee has been involved literally since the 1950's, in the study of textbooks, we have studied Jewish textbooks in terms of what it is the Jews teach about christians and christianity, because we refuse to tell lies about christians in our text books. We refuse to defame christians, we study what we are teaching about Islam, what we're teaching about blacks, racial ethnic groups, to make sure that we raise a generation of jewish children faithful to their values and ideals, who can approach their neighbors without defamation without distortion. It was first the Dropsy Studies, we have now just completed a study which I commissioned three years ago, of an examination of what

it is we teach our Jewish seminarians. The next generations of Rabbis' and Jewish teachers and all of our major seminaries, Orthodox, conservatives, reform, reconstructionist. That's a matter of our own ethical integrity. Not a matter of you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours! Although, it does not hurt to know that somebody else on the other side is paying attention.

What has begun to happen in the past 20 years is that there is today, and I can tell you this out of chapter and verse, not out of vague impressions, the six major Catholic Publishing houses in the United States that produce the vast majority of text books used in Catholic, parochial schools, elementary, secondary schools, increasingly now also in colleges, universities, and seminaries, have come to my office where we have a person who does nothing other than read teaching materials, at the request of the publishing houses and they have come to us since these publishers have said, "We want to make sure that we do not teach anything that is contrary to the spirit of Nostra Aetate, either intentionally or unintentionally. And as a result of that Judith Banke has read literally hundreds of manuscripts, all of them faithful to Catholic doctrine, but assuring that there is no extra theological ethnic slurs, or any other kinds of slurs that might enter into it. Today, and most Jewish people don't know this, probably most Catholics don't know this either, today there is not a single catholic textbook used

in any Catholic parochial school, elementary or secondary school in this country, that has a single anti-semitic reference in it. The Deicide chart has been removed, it is now taught with great historical accuracy about the role of the Romans at Roman law and the roman power of crucifixion and the documents breathe a whole new spirit of friendship and respect and in fact the first two nuns who invited me to serve as a consultant at the Pope Pius 12th Religious Education Center in Detroit, Michigan some years ago at the very beginning of the effort, were so determined to try to teach authentically about the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, being sensitive to its authentic Jewish sources that they had drawings made in a textbook on the life of Jesus, (the book is called Come Lord Jesus produced by Allen and Bacon) in which Jesus was shown in I suppose, in a appropriate use of creative imagination, as he must have been, a first century Jewish palestinian child. And he is shown standing in a Synagogue wearing a skullcap behind him is a manora and undereath there is a Hebrew caption, and I turned to the sisters and I said it is a beautiful, moving drawing, but you ought to be a little careful, there is a suggestion of a hook nose and you push that to far and the anti-defamation league will get after you for creating a stereo type. But the intention was magnificent it was in fact a translation into reality of all of the

explosion of biblical, theological, historical knowledge that has taken place since Nostra Aetate.

There are three things one of them I'm sure Professor Paul Van Buren may want to deal with because he has written magnificently on the theme of what has been at the source much of the problem of relationship theologically, between Christianity and Judaism namely the displacement theory. The theme that with the coming of Christianity, Judaism, ceased to have some role as a living viable faith in the life of the Jewish people. I suppose it goes back to the days of Eusebius, the Church father in the fourth century who wrote a massive tome _____ evangelical. Judaism existed simply as a preparation for the coming of Christianity and then disappeared. Well, in our audience with Pope John Paul II on the Twentieth Anniversary of the adoption of Nostra Aetate, a Pope who has been evolving his own theological understanding of Judaism and the Jewish people, probably gave it its most crystal clear formulation when he said to us, at an audience on apostolic palace in these words. He said, "the spiritual links between Catholics and Jews are sacred, that there is a real parentage which we have with Judaism alone." And then he went on to say, that contrary to some ambiguous language the recently published Vatican notes, which were published on June 24, 1985, he affirmed the permanent validity of Judaism asserting quote, "God does not reject his people".

Instead, he proposed that the Vatican notes will greatly help toward freeing our catechetical religious teaching of a negative or an accurate presentation of Jews and Judaism and will help to promote respect, appreciation and indeed love for one and the other. The Pope then went on to say that he urged that anti-semitism and its ugly sometimes violent manifestations should be completely eradicated, better still a positive view of each of our religions with due respect of the identity of each will surely emerge as is already the case in so many places.

Now, I would be less than candid than to say that these developments, this emerging theology on the part of the Holy Father himself, not to speak of that of Cardinal Willibrands, a number of prominent Catholic theologians among them Father McGarry who has written a magnificent book on Christology after Auschwitz. (In fact I took it with me to Rome because I thought I would need to quote from it somewhere along the way.) But we're now going through a difficult period, because in the publication of the Vatican notes while there was all this movement forward, all of this new spirit, the rejecting of the negatives and of that which were distortions of history, those which were reading into the Biblical texts, themes that came out of the culture that were not in the text themselves, and affirming a whole new positive relationship between the Church and the Jewish people, between Christianity and Judaism that had begun

to become solidified in very powerful ways. Suddenly in these Vatican notes there contradictory themes were introduced, which has raised concern for a great many of us, on the one hand it affirmed all the things that Pope John Paul II has said, about the permanent validity of Judaism, that God's covenant with Israel is everlasting, and suddenly phrases were introduced which came out of Vatican Council One's, understanding of Jews and Judaism. "Judaism and Christainty are not parallel ways to salvation." Judaism prepared the way for the coming of Christainty, those are regressive themes, and as we talk to some of the people who prepare the first text of the Vatican notes, among them a prominent Archbishop, President of a Potifical University, deeply disturbed by what happened to the document they worked on, he said that document went upstairs to the same place, that has been tampering with the notes on women, that has been tampering with the notes on liberation theology, that has been tampering on the notes on seminary education, that has been tampering with the notes on the autonomy of National Episcopal Conferences and the centralization of power and authority in one office in Rome. So I said to him, well at least we are in very good company, and it's very big company. But it is an issue that has to be dealt with because if it is allowed, to sustain itself it can in fact become a regressive force, it can begin to unmake much of the great progress that has taken place since Vatican Council II.

I want finally to say that the other two issues that I hope that we may have some time to talk about, one, will deal with the question of the treatment of the Nazi Holocaust which was given also very short shrift in the Vatican Notes and I simply want to say that Pope John Paul II recognized that something was amiss there and during our very warm sympathetic audience with him, he went out of his way as if to correct the record of the Vatican notes, to say that, did not represent his mind, he declared, that the Pope called on Catholics and I quote from him "Catholics to fathom the depths of the extermination of many million Jews during the Second World War, and the wounds thereby inflicted on the consciousness of the Jewish people." And he added that, "Christians need the theological reflection on the meaning of the Holocaust for christianity," and there I hope we can have sometime to discuss, what is the meaning of the Nazi Holocaust not only for Jews, indeed for Jews it was unique experience, but I'am persuaded unless and until the human family faces the issue, of the vast evil, the vast dehumanization that took place in Nazi Germany, and Nazi Germany was not _____ and was not _____, Nazi Germany took place in a country of ancient christian culture and civilization. It took place in a country where the seed of the Holy Roman empire was established. Where popes from the time Charlemagne came to Germany to invest emperors in their imperial power, as a will of God. A country

where the Protestant Reformation took place, a country where to this day, there is such sense of lively devout Christian belief, probably the only place in the world, I can recall, where if you go into Southern Bavaria, if you go into Garmisch, go to Oberammergau, you are not greeted as you are in San Palo Brazil, Buenas Dias, Good Day, secular greeting, you are still greeted _____, were on the walls of the houses, tableau of the Old Testament, Hebrew scriptures, and New Testament, are still painted, so faithful are the people, these Christians have to ask, themselves, what went on that, enables, such devout faithful people in places like Oberammergau, Garmisch. To be so paralyzed, that they could not stand up against the evil of Nazism when it began to raise its head. I regard that as a question not for Jews and Christians, but the darkest legacy of the Nazi Holocaust is the dehumanization, that has been set in motion, a world which somehow has developed psychic numbing, to stand by while two to three million people have been destroyed in _____, _____, Cambodia, and not to lift a finger. To stand by while a half million black christians were destroyed in Uganda, and to act as if this had nothing to do with us. And in Afghanistan where there is two to three million refugees and who even knows if they exist. But a world which has become used to the Nazi Holocaust as ordinary and usual business, can become used to the fact that human beings become destroyed everyday of the week, in every part of

the world, and it is none of my business. As they ask the question, is this the fast I seek of thee? Solemn assemblies, or is it to care for the poor of the orphan, the widow, the homeless, the naked, the destitute.

Tomorrow, I want to talk more about the challenge of being a Jew and Christian in a world in which we live. Tonight, I simply want to say, in summary, that I thank God that in his mysterious wisdom, after all of the torment, after so much loss of lives, after so much defamation, dehumanization as well as glory, the majesty and the glory and the tragedy, that all of us were privileged to live though a time, where a very unlikely little Italian man who had seen in Istanbul, who saw in Hungary what could happen when anti-semitism went rampant, when thousands of Jewish children were being rounded-up to be sent to Auschwitz, and he didn't ask technical legal questions, when Pope John the Twentythird turned to a Jewish man, Ira Hirschman and said, "How many Catholic baptismal certificates do you need to save those children." There are three to four thousand Jewish children living today, because this Holy man sent by God made come alive what Jews and Christians at their best really stand for, what Nostra Aetate is all about. Namely that, we are all created in the sacred image of God, each of our lives, the lives of all God's children are infinitely precise in his eyes. And he wants us not in words, not in pieties, but in our daily deeds in the way in which we talk

to one another, relate to one another, help one another, to honor his sacred image,

the spark of his presence in each of our souls. Thank you

