

**CONFERENCE PROCEEDING***Courtesy, Confrontation, Cooperation:  
Jewish-Christian/Catholic Relations in the United States*

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**Introduction**

One of my early experiences in Jewish-Christian relations was an exciting venture in Arizona in the 1970s when I served as executive director of a cluster of five Protestant churches, one Catholic church and two synagogues (one Conservative and one Reform), known as the North Phoenix Corporate Ministry. My task was coordinating the interfaith activities of twenty-five priests, ministers and rabbis, and involved lay people from the seven congregations. We developed programs in education, social justice, liturgy and communications and became a model for ecumenical/interfaith groups in the West. We grew in remarkable relationships—many of which continue to this day. I preached my first sermon in a synagogue in 1970—and was known as either “the Temple nun” or “the synagogue Sister” depending on whether I was in the Reform or the Conservative Jewish congregation.

Weekly, with very few exceptions, we had wonderful wild clergy luncheons! They consisted of prayer, kosher food, business, theological discussion and a lot of laughter. On one occasion, Rabbi Albert Plotkin announced to the group: “If Jesus came to Phoenix, Arizona, he would not go to any of your churches! He would come to my synagogue! He was a good Reform rabbi!” After a hearty laugh, we all agreed with him. Prior to Vatican II most Christians would have been taken aback by such a statement.

What is the American experience of Jewish-Catholic relations? It is only a slice of the larger picture of Jewish-Christian relations in the United States. Therefore, some consideration of Protestant-Jewish relations is required for context. In this essay I will (1) briefly sketch a tapestry background of Jewish-Christian relations in the United States to Vatican II; (2) discuss the Second Vatican Council and the significant relationship of Catholics and Jews as it has evolved in the United States to 1995; and (3) reflect on how Jewish-Catholic relations in three areas—academia, religious institutional structures, and “grass roots” experiences—have allowed the United States to make unique contributions to the dialogue.

**A Sketch of Jewish-Christian Relations in the United States to Vatican II**

The Early Immigration: 1654-1820. Jewish-Christian relations in the United States are unique in the world. The United States evolved from a Protestant vision of Pilgrims in 1620 and the

Puritans in 1630 who believed they were destined to be “God’s New Israel.” Catholics arrived in the English colonies as a group when their founders reached the shores of Maryland in 1634. Jews disembarked in New Amsterdam (later New York City) in 1654 and were *not* welcomed by the Dutch. From the outset it was clear that Catholics and Jews were distinct minorities in a Protestant culture.

At the time of the American Revolution there were only about 3,000 Jews and approximately 30,000 Catholics in a population of 3,000,000 Protestants.<sup>1</sup> Although meager in numbers, both Catholics and Jews fought in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 and also held some positions of moderate importance in the U.S. government.

German and Irish Immigration: 1820-1880. The predominantly Irish and German immigrants who arrived in the United States in the period 1820-1880 consisted largely of those who were seeking opportunities in the New World which were closed off to them in the old. Jews who had received citizenship and other rights as a result of emancipation in 1791 during the French Revolution found themselves suffering reaction when kings and queens and the pope were restored to their thrones in 1815 and efforts were made to return to the old order. For example, to control the number of Jews in Bavarian towns, a law was passed to limit the number of Jews who could contract legal marriages. This inspired a mass emigration to America in 1836. In the years 1846-1851, over a million people left Ireland due largely to the potato famine, the majority coming to the United States.<sup>2</sup> According to James O’Toole, almost 800,000 Irish and more than 400,000 Germans, including a substantial number of German Jews, moved to the United States in the 1840s.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas the earliest Jewish immigrants in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had been both Sephardic (Spanish speaking) and Askenazic (German speaking), many of them in the merchant class, the mid-nineteenth century arrivals from German lands were often artisans, peddlers or operators of dry goods stores. Most Jews settled in communities rather than on farms, many of them in the growing cities of the eastern seaboard although some ventured to the Midwest. They were often accepted as German-Americans who practiced Judaism, and were welcomed into German-American clubs. Congregation Mickve Israel of Savannah, Georgia was erected on land given to the congregation as a gift by the city and at the dedication on July 21, 1820, the mayor and the aldermen marched in the procession and played an important part.<sup>4</sup> Isaac Leeser, a prominent leader in early American Judaism attended the dedication of many synagogues and was aware of the presence of non-Jews on these occasions.<sup>5</sup>

States varied in their acceptance of Jews. For example, Maryland’s first state constitution in 1776 required that any office holder profess “belief in the Christian religion,” disallowing Jews and some Deists. Prior to 1778, those who denied the Trinity could be executed for their disbelief; after that date they would only have their tongues bored through. Among other

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<sup>1</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 128 cites 4,000 Catholics at the time of the American Revolution. Jewish sources vary. Rufus Lears, *The Jews in America: A History* (New York: KTAV, 1972), p. 29 approximates between 2,400-2,700 Jews.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>3</sup> James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 97-98.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph L. Blau and Salo W. Baron, *The Jews in the United States 1790-1840: A Documentary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), III: 686-687.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Radar Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews, 1775-1865* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), II, 67.

restrictions, Jews were not allowed to serve as jurors or as officers in the militia, and had to pay taxes to support Christian institutions. Efforts were made as early as 1797 to petition the General Assembly for Jewish equality, but “the Jew Bill,” as it was known—allowing for equality for Jews in Maryland—was not passed until January 5, 1826. Jacob Rader Marcus wrote, “The Catholic Bishop of Charleston, John England, who never forgot that he had suffered discrimination in his native Ireland, gloried in the emancipation of Maryland’s Jews.”<sup>6</sup> When Jews were persecuted in Damascus in 1840, a general meeting of citizens was held in Charleston, South Carolina on August 28 to protest the brutality and one of the speakers was Bishop John England.<sup>7</sup> However, North Carolina did not allow Jews to hold high office until 1868, and New Hampshire until 1876.<sup>8</sup>

Efforts to proselytize Jews were common, but did not go without challenge. Frequently, crusades for the conversion of Jews were organized by Jews newly converted to Christianity.<sup>9</sup> Isaac Leeser complained, “Among the many missionaries whom I have met, the converted Jews were rascals without exception. To my regret, many of these returned later to the Jewish fold. The Christian missionaries I found occasionally companionable and well-meaning.”<sup>10</sup>

In the pre-Civil War period anti-Catholic nativism was at its height. Jewish-Christian relations were relatively calm. Protestant-Catholic interactions became volatile beginning with the burning of the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts in 1834, incited by the revival preaching of the Reverend Lyman Beecher. A convent of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Philadelphia was burned by anti-Catholic nativists May 6, 1844.<sup>11</sup> Fuel was added to the fire by nativist propaganda stories of a so-called nun, Maria Monk, published in a monumental volume *The Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal* (1836) which created a storm of controversy. Three hundred thousand copies were sold before the Civil War.<sup>12</sup>

A respected Jewish woman in Philadelphia, Rebecca Gratz, perhaps summed it up best in a letter to her brother Benjamin in Lexington, Kentucky, July 12, 1844:

The present outlook is an attack on the Catholic Church, and there is so much violent animosity between that sect and the Protestants that unless the strong arm of power is raised to sustain the provisions of the Constitution of the U.S. securing to every citizen the privilege of worshipping God according to his own conscience, America will be no longer the happy asylum of the oppressed and the secure dwelling place of religion.

She offered very specific directives to the Christian clergy of whom she was clearly critical! She suggested that if they would stay in their pulpits and practice what they preached, the goals of religion would be better accomplished:

Intolerance has been too prevalent as of late, and many of the clergy of different denominations are chargeable with its growth. The whole spirit and office of religion is to make men merciful and humble and just. If such teaching was preached by the pastors to

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<sup>6</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry 1776-1985* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), I: 500-504, 564.

<sup>7</sup> Blau and Baron, III: 942.

<sup>8</sup> Blau and Baron, I: 17. See also Lears, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Blau and Baron, III: 701-773.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry 1776-1985*, II: 108.

<sup>11</sup> Ann M. Harrington, *Creating Community: Mary Frances Clarke and Her Companions* (Dubuque, Iowa: Sisters of Charity, BVM, 2004), 53.

<sup>12</sup> Roy Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860* (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1964), 98-108.

their own congregations and the charge of others left to their own clergy, God would be better served and human society governed more in accordance to *His* holy commandments.<sup>13</sup>



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*Rebecca Gratz, prominent Jewish woman of Philadelphia, who commented perceptively on the Nativist riots of the 1840s. Photo courtesy of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.*

Although there were occasional episodes of anti-Jewish discrimination in this era, the problems were largely hostility and sometimes violence between Protestants and Catholics.

<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Gratz to her brother Benjamin Gratz July 12, 1844, *American Jewish Archives*, Vol. 2 (June 1953), 351. I am grateful to Kevin Proffit of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati for sending me a copy of this letter.

The growth of Reform Judaism in the United States is almost synonymous with Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise who arrived from Bohemia in 1846. Staunchly in the Reform tradition, his goal was to “Americanize” Judaism. In 1854 he began publication of a weekly newspaper in English, *The American Israelite*. By 1873 he founded the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and in 1875 he opened Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio for the education of future rabbis.<sup>14</sup> Reform Jews affirmed a statement in 1885 known as the “Pittsburgh Platform” which stated: “We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine nor sacrificial worship under the laws of Aaron...”<sup>15</sup> By 1894 the *Union Prayer Book*, drastically edited with Hebrew almost completely eliminated, was being used by people in the pews. That this took place while thousands of Eastern European Orthodox Jews were arriving on the east coast of the United States was a recipe for conflict.

Immigrants from Eastern Europe: 1880-1924. The East European immigration during this time was largely Catholic, Jewish and Eastern Orthodox. New arrivals came from Poland, Russia, Greece and Italy. Languages, costumes, customs, and religious practices hitherto unknown in the United States suddenly flooded the major ports of disembarkation on the east coast. During this era of the “Gilded Age,” and the “Social Gospel,” Protestant Americans continued to believe they were the chosen people in a promised land. Fear that an invasion of foreigners would “pollute” the environment of a “Christian America” contributed to waves of xenophobia culminating in the restriction of immigration in 1924.

The word “anti-Semitism,” coined by a German journalist named Wilhelm Marr in Germany in the 1870s, is a misnomer in that “Semitic” is a designation for a family of languages, not a racial category. It became accepted, however, to describe hatred for Jews for racial reasons. Antisemitism, as opposed to anti-Judaism (discrimination against Jews for religious reasons), was in the ascendancy in the nineteenth century—an outgrowth of Darwinian thought. There was an emphasis on “racial purity” and the superiority of the Nordic and Anglo groups. As a result liberal Jews who no longer believed or practiced their Judaism were not exempt from restrictions. Although signs such as “No Irish Need Apply” and similar types of discrimination were felt by other ethnic groups as well, the Jews seemed to be in a special category. On one occasion, my father, a teenage immigrant from Greece in the early 1900s, wandered into an Irish neighborhood in Chicago and was attacked by a gang because they thought he was a Jew. When he assured them that he was Greek and not Jewish, they let him go! Despite the incident, he married my beautiful Irish mother some years later!

Even educated and wealthy Jews were not considered for positions for which they were qualified, were not allowed to belong to exclusive clubs, and were not permitted to buy homes in “restricted areas.” Allusions to Jewish connections to international monetary conspiracies, socialism, communism and Zionism were common. Stereotypes of the Jew in novels and other popular writings were accentuated during this period.<sup>16</sup> Those from the first wave of immigration often tried to distance themselves from newcomers. The “uptown German Jews” similar to “the lace curtain Irish” found themselves embarrassed by the newly arrived members of their own religious-ethnic groups at the turn of the century. With the pogroms of the early 1900s in Russia, and the added influx of refugees, the Jewish community accepted the necessity of supporting “their own.” The American Jewish Committee was founded in 1906 for that purpose.

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<sup>14</sup> James G. Heller, *Isaac Mayer Wise: His Life, Work and Thought* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1965), 144.

<sup>15</sup> Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 41.

<sup>16</sup> John Higham, “Social Discrimination Against Jews in America, 1830-1930,” in *Jewish Experience in America V*, ed. Abraham Karp (New York: KTAV, 1969), 351.

John Higham in *Strangers in the Land* reflects on American nativism in the period 1860-1925 with the following helpful distinction:

Generically, nativism was a defensive type of nationalism, but the defense varied as the nativist lashed out sometimes against a *religious* peril, sometimes against a *revolutionary* peril, and sometimes against a *racial* peril.<sup>17</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Jews probably exceeded other groups by falling into all three of these categories. Jews were targets of the “100 percent Americanists” because of their “race,” because of their religion, and because they were frequently identified with liberal revolutionary movements such as socialism and communism.

World War I and After-Opportunities for Cooperation. The idealism surrounding the entrance of the United States into World War I to “make the world safe for democracy” provided a rare instance of Protestant-Catholic-Jewish cooperation. The united effort of the Federal Council of Churches (later the National Council of Churches of Christ, NCCC), the National Catholic War Council (later the National Catholic Welfare Conference, NCWC), and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), representing the various Jewish groups, was an example to all of the beneficial effects of cooperation. Collaborative efforts were made to supply chaplains to the armed forces and find support for refugees.

In the post-war period, collaboration continued regarding social justice and labor issues. The Social Action Department of the NCWC and its counterparts in the Federal Council of Churches and the Central Conference of American Rabbis made some progress in the need for reform in labor.<sup>18</sup> A new era in American ecumenical and interfaith life appeared to have begun.

As the 1920s progressed, however, tensions increased. The activities of the Ku Klux Klan, a largely Protestant organization aimed at Blacks, Catholics and Jews, created fear and mistrust. Anti-Catholic bigotry erupted during the campaign of 1928 when Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York became the first Catholic candidate of a major political party to run for president of the United States. It became evident that nativistic tendencies were still alive and well.

The formation of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) in 1928<sup>19</sup> was a direct response to the interracial and interreligious strife in the 1920s. Charles Evans Hughes helped to bring the group into existence, but the leadership troika consisted of Protestant Newton D. Baker, formerly in Woodrow Wilson’s Cabinet, Catholic Carlton J. H. Hayes, former ambassador and professor of history at Columbia University, and Jewish member and industrialist Roger Straus. Dr. Everett Clinchy became the first executive director.

The goals of the NCCJ were communication and education. The institution of the Religious News Service (RNS) by the NCCJ aimed to close the communication gap by countering sensationalistic journalistic accounts of religious issues with objective reports. “Brotherhood Week” became an annual event. Panels of a priest, minister and rabbi traveled to various communities to discuss current religious problems and suggest possibilities for interfaith

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<sup>17</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), Preface to the Second Edition, n.p. [2].

<sup>18</sup> Glazer, 139. In 1923 they issued a joint statement attacking the seven day week and the twelve-hour day in the steel industry.

<sup>19</sup> See “Interfaith at Fifty,” (Special Issue), *Judaism* (Summer 1978), vol. 27, no. 3.

cooperation. During World War II such teams visited military camps, encouraging dialogue among service members. The story of “The Immortal Chaplains”—two Protestant ministers, a Catholic priest and a rabbi—who gave their life jackets to servicemen on the U.S. troopship *Dorchester* as it was sinking off the coast of Greenland February 3, 1943, and then remained on deck praying arm-in-arm as the ship went down became the image of what interfaith might be in the post-war period.<sup>20</sup>

The NCCJ in the first thirty years, however, was mostly a Protestant-Jewish organization. The papal encyclical *Mortalium Animos* (1928) was a specific response by the Catholic Church articulating its unwillingness to participate in the Life and Work Conference in Stockholm (1925) or the Faith and Order Conference in Lausanne (1927). Believing that it had all the truth, the Catholic Church found no need to dialogue. If unity was to be attained, it would be because others would see the light and come to Rome.

The leadership of the NCWC, although representing the U.S. bishops, was caught in ambivalence. They did not feel free to sign interfaith statements of the NCCJ—even one in the 1930s supporting the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*—for fear of challenging the authority of local bishops.<sup>21</sup> The organization became paralyzed in terms of efforts to speak in a united voice. The non-participation of Catholics in the World Council of Churches (WCC) was made explicit on a local level when Cardinal Samuel Stritch of Chicago prohibited Catholics from attending the WCC meeting in Evanston, Illinois in 1954. Few could have anticipated that eleven years later the bishops at Vatican II would approve *Nostra Aetate* and open up a new era in interreligious relations.

The Jewish Search for Jesus. Ironically, in the nineteenth century some Jewish scholars began to explore the Jewishness of Jesus and see possibilities for dialogue with Christians. With the Enlightenment Jewish scholars in Germany began what Samuel Sandmel has called “a Jewish reclamation of Jesus.”<sup>22</sup> Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), a primary advocate for Reform Judaism in Germany, delivered a series of lectures in Frankfurt in 1863-1864 in which he described Jesus as part of a distinguished Jewish history—“a Pharisee who walked in the way of Hillel.”<sup>23</sup> Susannah Heschel credits Geiger as “the first Jew to subject Christian texts to detailed historical analysis from an explicitly Jewish perspective.”<sup>24</sup>

Influenced by Geiger, Joseph Klausner published the first modern full-length history of Jesus in Hebrew *Yeshu Ha-Nostri* in 1922. Jesus is presented as an observant Jew. The English translation, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times and Teachings* appeared in 1925 and received criticism and commendation from both Jews and Christians. Klausner stated:

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<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.immortalchaplains.org/Story/story.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Maria Mazzenga, “Condemning the Nazis’ *Krystallnacht*: Father Maurice Sheehy, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and the Dissent of Father Charles Coughlin,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 26(4) (Fall 2008): 75-77.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Matthew Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Susannah Heschel, “The Image of Judaism in Nineteenth Century Christian New Testament Scholarship in Germany,” *Jewish Encounters Over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue*, eds. Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer (New York, Peter Lang, 1994), 227.

<sup>24</sup> Hoffman, 37.

In his [Jesus'] ethical code there is a sublimity, distinctiveness and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code; neither is there any parallel to the remarkable art of his parables.<sup>25</sup>

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, a prominent Reform rabbi in the United States, enthusiastically endorsed Klausner's work in a lecture at Carnegie Hall in New York in 1925. He stated emphatically that it marked a first chapter in a new literature—Jews writing about Jesus. He concluded: "Thank God the time has come when men are allowed to be frank, sincere and truthful in their beliefs."<sup>26</sup> Liberal Christians and liberal Jews began a conversation. Just as Jesus had seemed to be de-Christologized by some Christians, some liberal Jews were convinced that the Torah had to be de-legalized. A de-Christologized Jesus became a proto-Reform Jew—in fact—a good Reform rabbi! There was great optimism that a new universal age was about to appear in America. Little did Jews in America or around the world realize how their lives would change in the decades ahead.

Between the World Wars. Protestants, Catholics and Jews moved into the 1930s searching for a deeper understanding of their own religious heritages, coupled with a desire to retain their own religious identity in a nation that professed religious pluralism. Many Protestants, emerging from the battles between liberals and fundamentalists as depicted in the Scopes Trial, discovered Neo-Orthodoxy, and were called back to their roots in the sixteenth century, epitomized in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr. Catholics, still feeling the scars of the "Americanism" and "Modernism" crises, welcomed the Neo-Thomistic revival which idealized the thirteenth century. Social activist and theoretician Msgr. John A. Ryan, "the Right Reverend New Dealer," played a leading role for Catholics in this era. Jews, many of whom believed the Reform movement had become too liberal—especially when shrimp was served at a banquet at Hebrew Union College!—but were uncomfortable with Orthodox Jews who seemed unwilling to adapt to the new world, sought out a middle ground in the Conservative movement and its offspring—Reconstructionism, led by Mordecai Kaplan. If it had not been for the crash of 1929, resulting in economic depression, the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe, and the advent of war, I believe that it is possible that the American experience of the "triple melting pot" popularized by Will Herberg might have evolved in the 1930s instead of after World War II.<sup>27</sup>

A period of economic depression, however, is always a time to search for scapegoats. The bankers, whom most people assumed to be Jewish, became prime candidates. Fear of a Communist takeover was also heightened, and again the Jews were a target. In that volatile atmosphere Father Charles E. Coughlin, the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith, Reverend Gerald Winrod and other religio-political figures—the so-called "demagogues of the depression"—sowed the seeds of hate, suspicion, fear and distrust regarding Jews.<sup>28</sup>

"The Radio Priest": Father Charles E. Coughlin. Perhaps no one poisoned the atmosphere regarding Jewish-Christian relations in this era as much as Father Charles E. Coughlin whose radio addresses reached as many as forty million people from Detroit, Michigan on Sunday

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<sup>25</sup> Cited in Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 224.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 78.

<sup>27</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant – Catholic – Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, revised ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 32 ff. Herberg popularized Ruby Jo Kennedy's thesis of the "triple melting pot" which she had published in the *Journal of Sociology* (January 1944).

<sup>28</sup> See David H. Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party, 1932-1936* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969).

afternoons in the 1930s and early 1940s. Coughlin was clearly a “star” on the American scene and many Catholics were thrilled to have a young attractive Irish-American priest as their spokesman. Three times he was on the cover of *Newsweek*, and was treated as a celebrity in other magazines and newspapers. Coughlin is credited with popularizing the papal social encyclicals (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891, and *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931) supporting the rights of working people. Unfortunately, it was later discovered that Coughlin’s own financial dealings contradicted some of what he was saying.

Coughlin was passionate in his devotion to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the presidential campaign of 1932 coining the expressions “Roosevelt or Ruin” and “The New Deal is Christ’s Deal.” After Roosevelt was elected, however, the president did not look to Coughlin for advice. Rejected, Coughlin joined the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith and Dr. Francis Townsend to form the Union Party to run Congressman William Lemke of North Dakota against Roosevelt in 1936. This gave Coughlin a political platform to blame the Jews as both the capitalists and Communists who were leading the world astray. After Roosevelt’s re-election, Coughlin’s antipathy toward the Jews increased.

The impact of Coughlin’s antisemitic and anti-Judaic sermons and radio addresses, particularly after 1938, is too lengthy to detail here.<sup>29</sup> Important, however, is that in 1938 he discovered the writings of an Irish theologian, Holy Ghost Father Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., who provided him with a “theological rationale” for his own distorted ideas. Most disturbing was Coughlin’s fascination in his later years—moving beyond what Fahey posited—regarding “the mystical body of Satan.” In Coughlin’s letters to Fahey, that reference became connected explicitly to the Jews. In a letter to Fahey, Coughlin suggested: “Perhaps you could find room for a chapter or two relative to the mystical body of Satan.” The “radio priest” continued: “To my mind, all those who are not with Christ are against Him—even the lukewarm; all those who are rejectors of Christ are the chief factors in the mystical body of Satan.”<sup>30</sup>

It was the rejection of Christ which precluded the possibility of the Jew reaching God. Coughlin theologized:

In my concept of theology it is impossible for individuals or nations to adhere to God under the conditions of fallen nature except through the acceptance of Christ...Without Christ, we can do nothing. Judaism, which rejects Christ entirely as Mediator and the Messiah, will devolve according to the teaching above expressed, into practical atheism.<sup>31</sup>

Some twelve years later Coughlin wrote to the Irish priest thanking him for an autographed copy of his book *The Kingship of Christ and the Conversion of the Jewish Nation*, describing it as a “wonderful work.” Coughlin, who by this time had been “silenced” for more than ten years, once again offered Fahey a suggestion: “It is my opinion that we need a book on the Mystical Body of Satan.” On the question of the membership in the Mystical Body of Christ and the mystical body of Satan, Coughlin’s conclusion is explicated in one of the most telling paragraphs of his missive to Fahey:

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<sup>29</sup> See Mary Christine Athans, BVM, *The Coughlin-Fahey Connection: Father Charles E. Coughlin, Father Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., and Religious Anti-Semitism in the United States 1938-1954* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Athans, 188. Charles E. Coughlin to Denis Fahey, March 5, 1941. Emphasis mine.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Athans, 188-189. Coughlin to Fahey, March 5, 1941.

I suppose that by the use of dogmatic logic, we could conclude that all who reject Christ must end up by being cut off from the Father. Definitely, those who have rejected Christ beyond all doubt are those advocating the heresy of Judaism, which rejects Him in person; and the second heresy, which rejects Him in word. Possibly, the Hindus, Mohammedans [here the word "Protestantism" is hand-written in the margin of this typed letter, with an arrow pointing to this section], etc., have not formally rejected Him, either in person or in word, to the extent the others just mentioned above have done.<sup>32</sup>

From the progression of the letter, it is clear that the Jews fall into a special category vis-à-vis the mystical body of Satan because they have directly rejected Jesus as the Christ. Coughlin's less severe interpretation regarding Hindus and Muslims was, apparently in an afterthought, extended to the Protestants. The latter had not directly rejected Christ so they are "rescued" from membership in the diabolical corporation.



Fr. Charles E. Coughlin, whose antisemitic rhetoric poisoned Jewish-Catholic relations in the 1930s and 1940s. Library of Congress photo #208456762-1110273.

The "Silencing" and Impact of Coughlin. Coughlin's sympathy for Hitler and his description of Nazism as "a defense mechanism against Communism" even after the U.S. entered World War II resulted in Coughlin's weekly newspaper, *Social Justice*, having its mailing privileges revoked by the U.S. Postal Service. President Roosevelt sent word to Archbishop Edward Mooney of Detroit that, if Coughlin was not curtailed, he would be indicted under the Espionage Act of 1917. Although Coughlin accepted the directive of his archbishop he confided to Fahey that his problems with the hierarchy were related to "the almost universal ecclesiastical subservience to Franklin D. Roosevelt who is surrounded by high Masons and dominated by crafty Jews."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Athans, 192-193. Coughlin to Fahey, May 27, 1953.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Coughlin to Fahey, March 5, 1941.

The “radio priest” was silent on political issues after 1942 but continued as pastor of the Shrine of the Little Flower until his retirement in 1966. Although he wrote a few small volumes denouncing Communism and questioning Vatican II, often with apocalyptic emphases, he lived mostly in seclusion. He died October 27, 1979 in Birmingham, Michigan.

Coughlin was a priest and a politician. At times he seemed to be more the latter than the former. Although some members of the Catholic hierarchy such as George Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago spoke out against his tirades, according to Canon Law only a diocesan priest’s own bishop could silence him. In an era when church-state relations were often a source of controversy, Catholics were often portrayed as subservient to the Vatican without real “freedom of speech.” This may account for the hesitancy of some bishops to criticize Coughlin.

Had Coughlin’s antipathy to the Jews been primarily political and economic—because they were Bolsheviks or bankers—it might not have infiltrated into the era’s spiritual mentality. However, in this period already boiling with hatred and suspicion, to present it as a theological question and suggest diabolical conspiracies was to resurrect the concept of “the demonic Jew” from the Middle Ages.<sup>34</sup> This had huge implications especially for Catholics who revered “the thirteenth—the greatest of centuries.” In the writings and speeches of Coughlin, theological anti-Judaism and “racial” antisemitism came together, I believe, not dissimilar to the propaganda of Hitler’s Germany.

Catholics and Jews had come to the United States in the same waves of immigration, and had endured the difficult years of arrival together. Both had a strong sense of tradition and worship, family, *joie de vivre*, dietary laws and rejection of interfaith marriage. There was competition and some hostility, but there was give-and-take in the political sphere and a common fear of the nativist enemy. Cooperation in World War I and in the 1920s seemed to have opened up new possibilities. In the Coughlin era the real polarization of Catholics and Jews emerged in twentieth century America. The result was that the Gospel message, which was meant to be Good News, became a source of suffering for Jews in America and around the world. It also proved destructive for some Christians whose understanding of both Judaism and Christianity became distorted. Coughlin’s silence was welcomed by many in the summer of 1942.

Scholars such as Msgr. John A. Ryan and George Schuster confronted Coughlin in the pages of *Commonweal*.<sup>35</sup> An NBC-CBS radio broadcast organized by Father Maurice Sheehy of the Catholic University of America on November 16, 1938 offered dramatic responses on the part of Archbishop John J. Mitty of San Francisco, Catholic layman and former presidential candidate Alfred E. Smith, and others to Coughlin’s vitriolic *Krystallnacht* speech. The transcript was printed in full in the *New York Times* as a Catholic response to Jewish persecution in Germany.<sup>36</sup> Dorothy Day spoke out against antisemitism, and columns in *The Catholic Worker* supported that view. In May 1939, Day and some friends formed the “Committee of Catholics to Fight Anti-Semitism” which included prominent Catholics such as the Baroness Catherine de Hueck and Chicago Catholic activist John Cogley. Their paper titled *The Voice* was published in direct

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<sup>34</sup> See Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943).

<sup>35</sup> John A. Ryan, “Anti-Semitism in the Air,” *Commonweal* 29 (December 30, 1938): 260-262; George N. Schuster, “The Jew and the Two Revolutions,” *Commonweal* 29 (December 30, 1938): 262-264.

<sup>36</sup> See Mazzenga, 71-87.

opposition to *Social Justice*, condemning the antisemitic activities which were rampant at that time. With the coming of the war, however, some of the antisemitism subsided.<sup>37</sup>

World War II and the Holocaust. Exactly when world leaders knew about the extermination camps is sometimes disputed but certainly by 1942 it was evident in diplomatic circles. Many Americans found it difficult to believe. Recent scholarship, however, provides concrete evidence in newspaper articles, news releases, and diplomatic material indicating that people were being informed.<sup>38</sup> Many people—who were either desensitized, or assumed that the press was exaggerating—only yawned. When General Eisenhower visited the camps liberated by the Allies at the end of World War II, the pictures and films of emaciated figures amidst piles of dead skeletal bodies gave evidence of the grim reality. It could no longer be denied. The key question for some became: “If Christians had really been *Christian* over the centuries, would the Holocaust have occurred?”

The Nuremberg Trials in Germany (1945-1949) received extensive coverage in the press. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of December 10, 1948 proclaimed “the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” and stated that this principle was “...the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, Catholic indifference and even hostility to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 was painful for many Jews. Some editorials and articles in *America*, *Commonweal* and *The Catholic World* describe the Holy Land as the birthplace of Catholic Church that should not be given to the Jews.<sup>40</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, the semi-official newspaper of the Vatican, the very day of the founding of the state of Israel, May 14, 1948, stated: “Modern Zionism is not the true heir of Biblical Israel, but a secular state...therefore the Holy Land and its sacred sites belong to Christianity, the true Israel.”<sup>41</sup>

Although scholars and activists such as John LaFarge, S.J., John A. Ryan and John Courtney Murray, S.J. made efforts to encourage Jewish-Christian dialogue in the 1940s and 1950s, the stance of the Catholic Church was one of separation from other faith groups. Even the establishment of the Institute for Judeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University in New Jersey in 1953 by Msgr. John Oesterreicher, a convert from Judaism, had a conversionist tone in its earlier years.<sup>42</sup> Prior to Vatican II, however, the Institute and its yearbook *The Bridge*, later titled *Brothers in Hope*, proved to be a valuable resource for discussing theological concepts which laid the groundwork for Vatican II.

After the initial shock of the extermination camps, Americans in the 1940s and 1950s—whatever their religion—seemed to fade into denial.<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that Will Herberg's classic *Protestant – Catholic – Jew* first published in 1955 never mentioned either the Holocaust or the

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<sup>37</sup> William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 319-320. I am grateful to Anne Klejment for directing me to this information on Dorothy Day.

<sup>38</sup> See Robert W. Ross, *So It Was True: The American Protestant Press and the Nazi Persecution of the Jews* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Haim Genizi, *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983); Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 246-247.

<sup>40</sup> See Egal Feldman, *Catholics and Jews in Twentieth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 95-102.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Pinchas Lapide, *The Last Three Popes and the Jews* (London: Souvenir Press, 1967), 282.

<sup>42</sup> See Feldman, 70-80, 169.

<sup>43</sup> A recent study by Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust 1945-1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) challenges that thesis.

State of Israel.<sup>44</sup> Gradually, a word emerged which described the destructive acts of the Final Solution. In the late 1950s, the word “Holocaust” (Jews prefer the Hebrew word *Shoah* which means “destruction”), became “synonymous with Hitler’s eradication of the Jews.”<sup>45</sup> The 1959 film *The Diary of Anne Frank* presented a poignant and powerful presentation of Nazi devastation to the American public.

The 1960s. The Eichman Trial in Jerusalem in 1961, at which the chief administrator of the Final Solution who had fled to Argentina was finally put on trial in Israel, created a new awareness of the atrocities and once again the inhumanity of Hitler’s Germany raised the question: “Who is responsible?” The 1963 drama *The Deputy* by Rolf Hochhuth accusing Pope Pius XII of moral cowardice and, even worse—indifference to the suffering and death of Jews in Nazi Germany—ignited a fire in the Jewish and Catholic communities. Scholars, both Jewish and Christian, questioned the historical authenticity of the play, but the emotional response of audiences was vehement. This was occurring while Vatican II was discussing a statement to be made on the relationship of the Catholic Church to the Jewish people.

Also concurrent with the council in Rome were events important for both the civil and religious communities in the U.S. Several of these boiled over in the 1960s: Civil Rights, the Vietnam War, the cause of the farmworkers. For many, especially the clergy, the challenge became: “What is the role of the religious leader in time of moral crisis?” Priests, nuns, ministers and rabbis marched together to protest the denial of basic human rights. To see Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Archbishop Iakovos, and Bishop-Elect James Shannon with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the front line in a Civil Rights rally indicated a new era in interreligious and interracial life. Was this one of the consequences of the supposed indifference of Pius XII toward the Jews in World War II? The pledge appeared to be that never again would religious leaders be silent.

#### Vatican II and the Jews

The election of Angelo Roncalli as Pope John XXIII to succeed Pius XII in 1958 opened a new window on the world. Pope John had a history of sensitivity to the Jewish people. As papal nuncio in Istanbul he had offered baptismal certificates to Jews to aid them in avoiding deportation to the death camps. As pontiff in 1960 he met with the French historian Jules Isaac, author of the influential volume *Jesus and Israel*. Isaac shared his research on “the teaching of contempt” and emphasized how Church teachings had contributed to the antisemitism of the centuries.<sup>46</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Vatican set up a commission to study the Church’s relationship with the Jews. Pope John requested that a document on the Jews be part of the work of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>47</sup>

The text on Jews was originally included in Chapter IV of the *Decree on Ecumenism*. Cardinal Augustine Bea, S.J. presented the schema to the Council on November 19, 1963 and revealed that Pope John himself had ordered the preparation of the text and had approved the basic lines of the document before he died.<sup>48</sup> Some of the bishops asked that the statement on the Jews be included in a separate document because they thought it did not properly fall into the category of

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<sup>44</sup> See above n. xxiii.

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence Baron, “The First Wave of American ‘Holocaust’ Films, 1945-1959,” *American Historical Review* 115(1): 90.

<sup>46</sup> Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971). Orig. ed. Paris: Albin Michel, 1948. See also *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).

<sup>47</sup> Augustine Bea, S.J., *The Church and the Jewish People* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 22.

<sup>48</sup> Bea, 23.

ecumenism (which they defined as uniting all in Christ). Most of the bishops from Arab countries did not want any document at all. Between the second and third sessions, the Secretariat, headed by Cardinal Bea, prepared a new draft—the contents of which were widely published in newspapers of various countries.<sup>49</sup>

At the Council's third session, the text presented to the fathers was not the one publicized but another in which the rejection of the charge of deicide had disappeared. Special concern was evidenced for the Muslims and the section on non-Christians was expanded. A great controversy followed in which several influential members of the U.S. hierarchy including Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, Albert Cardinal Meyer of Chicago, Joseph Cardinal Ritter of St. Louis and Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle of Washington, D.C. insisted that the statement on the Jews not be diluted. In contrast, the Patriarchs of the East requested that the entire declaration be dropped.

The politics of the Middle East were a considerable factor in the revisions, but the declaration was by no means rejected. In the final text Article 4 of the *Declaration of the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)*, strongly emphasized the relationship of the Church with the people of the Hebrew Scriptures. The request for forgiveness from those who had been wronged by Christian persecution was omitted and there was no reference to the rejection of the charge of deicide. The document did decry the attitudes and episodes of antisemitism which had been common over the centuries:

The Church repudiates all persecutions against any man. Moreover, mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews, and motivated by the Gospels' spiritual love and by no practical considerations, she deplors the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed at the Jews at any time and from any source.<sup>50</sup>

The document was finally promulgated on October 28, 1965.

One need only read *Nostra Aetate* to become aware of the complete turnabout in the attitude of the Church toward the Jews. The basis for a new relationship in the document is clearly scriptural with a strong emphasis on Paul's Letter to the Romans. There are no references to the Church Fathers, (e.g., John Chrysostom and his *Adversos Judaeos* sermons), or decrees of earlier Church councils (e.g., decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, mandating that Jews mark their clothes with a badge). A new era was beginning in the Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

American bishops at the Council fought for religious pluralism, ecumenism, and interfaith dialogue. The unique character of the Catholic Church in the United States was expressed particularly in *Nostra Aetate*, especially Article 4 on the relationship to the Jews, as well as in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, and the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*. These three documents bore an American stamp and allowed Catholics in the United States to breathe a sigh of relief that they could now be recognized as both Catholic and American in a religiously pluralistic nation.

#### Post Vatican II: Four Challenges to the Doctrinal Turnaround

Canadian theologian Gregory Baum stated in a lecture to the Catholic Theological Society of America in Chicago in 1986: "It can be argued, I think, that the Church's recognition of the

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<sup>49</sup> Robert A. Graham, "Introduction to the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), 656-657.

<sup>50</sup> Abbott, 666-667.

spiritual status of the Jewish religion is the most dramatic example of doctrinal turnaround in the age-old *magisterium ordinarium*.<sup>51</sup> Four elements which inhibited that turnaround had to be confronted: (1) the impact of Modernism; (2) supersessionism; (3) “the criterion of dissimilarity”; and (4) the concept of “the Aryan Christ.” Although people in the pews would not relate to these categories as named, I believe they had a deep impact on the often unconscious presuppositions of many Catholics regarding the relationship of Judaism and Christianity.

The Impact of Modernism on Scripture, Ecclesiology and Liturgy. In the post-Vatican II period, a question for many Catholics newly discovering the Bible was: “Will the *real* Jesus please stand up?” Why had Catholics been so unaware of their roots in Judaism and of the Jewishness of Jesus? Many did not realize that as a result of the Modernism crisis in the Catholic Church, and the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), the writings of Catholic theologians and scripture scholars had been severely curtailed. Scripture scholars were prohibited from using historical critical methods and theologians from using modern philosophical thought to explain Catholic theology. With the condemnations of the French scripture scholar Alfred Loisy and theologian George Tyrrell in 1908, Catholic scholars “went underground” except in the area of social justice and, to some degree, liturgy. It was not until Pius XII promulgated the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943 that Catholic scripture scholars were allowed officially to resume research using modern methodologies. This influenced all of the theological disciplines.

The emphasis in ecclesiology from the nineteenth century was on the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ. Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, also promulgated in 1943, confirmed that approach. However, a new perspective was developing. The French theologian Yves Congar, O.P. claims that while it is impossible to pinpoint the origin of the idea, it was between the years 1937-1942 that the idea of the Church as “the People of God” was established in Catholic theology. Theologians rediscovered the Church’s continuity with Israel. Emphasis on the Church’s historical dimension, and the salvific institution of revelation, culminated also in the rediscovery of eschatology.<sup>52</sup> Rediscovering the concept of “the People of God” offered a more inclusive vision and a new perspective on the Church which became evident in Vatican II.

The renewal of the liturgy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had been largely a retrieval of the patristic sources. It was the Jewish scholar Kaufmann Kohler, later president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, who in 1893 published an article titled “*Ueber die Ursprunge und Grundformen der synagogalen Liturgie*” (“About the Origins and Basic Forms of Synagogal Liturgy”),<sup>53</sup> and called attention to Christian interpolations added to Jewish prayers in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (Books VII and VIII).<sup>54</sup> These dealt with liturgical material derived from Jewish blessings. The new Offertory prayers in the post-Vatican II Eucharist reflect this “rediscovery” of the *berakah* over the bread and the wine.

Pius XII’s encyclical *Mediator Dei* in 1947 opened up the reform of the liturgy. The ceremonies of Holy Week were renewed. Fasting regulations were modified. The pope allowed change to begin. Gregory Dix, author of the monumental volume *The Shape of the Liturgy* (1945),<sup>55</sup> stated in 1949: “Our understanding of our forms of worship underwent a radical transformation some

<sup>51</sup> Gregory Baum, “The Social Context of American Catholic Theology,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41(1986): 87.

<sup>52</sup> Yves Congar, O.P., “The Church: The People of God,” *Consilium*, 1 (New York: Paulist Press, 1964), 14.

<sup>53</sup> Kaufmann Kohler, “Ueber die Ursprunge und Grundformen der synagogalen Liturgie,” *MGWJ* (1893), 441-451, 489-497.

<sup>54</sup> John Barry Ryan, *The Eucharistic Prayer: A Study in Contemporary Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 10.

<sup>55</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945). Emphasis mine.

forty years ago when it finally occurred to someone that *Jesus was a Jew*.<sup>56</sup> In the study of scripture, ecclesiology and liturgy, scholars had been curtailed by Modernism. By the 1940s, with new horizons opening, the Jewish roots of Christianity were beginning to emerge.<sup>57</sup>

Supersessionism. Sometimes called “replacement theology,” supersessionism is the belief that the “new covenant” which God made in Jesus had taken the place of the “old covenant” with the Hebrews and therefore the original covenant was obsolete. The Church, therefore, had taken the place of the Jews as God’s chosen people. This conviction was never defined by the early church, but it became the centerpiece of the relationship between Christians and Jews for centuries, and was alive and well among both Protestants and Catholics in the United States.<sup>58</sup> Even in more liberal Catholic magazines and journals such as *The Catholic World* in the mid-nineteenth century, and *America* and *Commonweal* in the twentieth, Jews were presented as having been replaced as God’s chosen people.<sup>59</sup>

Theodore Herzl, the founder of political Zionism in the later nineteenth century, wrote in his diary shortly before his death in 1904 that in his interview with Pope Pius X, he asked the pontiff for support regarding the hope of the Jews to return to their homeland. The pope’s response was: “The Jewish religion was the foundation of our own; but it was superseded by the teachings of Christ, and we cannot concede it any further validity.”<sup>60</sup> Until 1959 the Latin prayers of Good Friday liturgy in the Roman rite of the Catholic Church included a prayer for “the perfidious Jews” and an intercession: “May the Lord our God remove the veil from their hearts so that they, too, may acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>61</sup>

The Criterion of Dissimilarity. More common in the Protestant tradition, but influencing Catholics as well is what became known as “the criterion of dissimilarity.” It was one of the major presuppositions which Rudolph Bultmann presented in his *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, later popularized by Norman Perrin.<sup>62</sup> Those who accepted this approach believed that what Jesus shared with any form of first-century Judaism would not disclose his uniqueness. Therefore, anything in which Jesus and any of the Judaisms of his time agreed was automatically ruled out as something that would give insight about him. Perrin, in his book *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, stated: “By definition (the criterion) will exclude *all* teaching in which Jesus may have been at one with Judaism or the early church at one with him.”<sup>63</sup> Because this method dominated for many years, Jesus has not only *not* been depicted as a Jew, but sometimes as the great anti-Jewish figure of first-century Judaism.

Why did this approach fall into disfavor? The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the caves at Qumran in 1947 stunned the religious world. It became the catalyst in the fertile field of biblical studies. The scrolls provided extraordinary information about Jewish life and thought at the time

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Thomas J. Talley, “From Berakah to Eucharistia: A Reopening Question,” *Worship* 50 (March 1976): 115.

<sup>57</sup> See Mary Christine Athans, BVM, “Judaism and Catholic Prayer: A New Horizon for the Liturgy,” *New Theology Review* 21(4): 48-58.

<sup>58</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism,” *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 413-414.

<sup>59</sup> Feldman, 13-14.

<sup>60</sup> Feldman, 37.

<sup>61</sup> John M. Oesterreicher, “Introduction,” *Brothers in Hope (The Bridge: Judaeo-Christian Studies)* V (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 25.

<sup>62</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 5-6.

<sup>63</sup> Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 43.

Christianity was born. Jewish, Catholic and Protestant scholars began working together. They came to appreciate the complex Judaism of the first century.

A new appreciation of a sense of historical consciousness grew. Sociologists and psychologists affirm that no person is unrelated to the world in which he or she lives. We are shaped in large part by family and culture. To understand Jesus, therefore, we must set him in his environment of first-century Judaism. N.T. Wright states: "Texts matter, but contexts matter even more."<sup>64</sup> The criterion of dissimilarity has been dismissed today by most scholars.

The Aryan Christ. German influence in scripture study and the ascendancy of German culture in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were evident in more than literary analysis. Artistic portraits of Jesus available to people in churches and homes were often those of a blond blue-eyed Aryan figure. The influence of Darwin and the European focus on the superiority of the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon people influenced artists and painters. Alan T. Davies describes the nineteenth century effort of some writers who claimed that Jesus was not a Jew. This so-called "aryanization of Jesus" by Fichte, Renan, H.S. Chamberlain and others invaded churches. Jesus and Mary were portrayed as more German than Jew.<sup>65</sup> Some of us still have recollections of crowning the statue of a blond blue-eyed Mary each May singing with our Catholic schoolmates "O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today..." Jaroslav Pelikan offers a fascinating reflection in his volume *Jesus Through the Centuries*. He asks the following questions:

Would there have been such anti-Semitism, would there have been so many pogroms, would there have been an Auschwitz, if every Christian church and every Christian home had focused its devotion on icons of Mary not only as Mother of God and Queen of Heaven but as the Jewish maiden and the new Miriam, and on icons of Christ not only as Pantocrator but as Rabbi Jeshua bar-Joseph, Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, in the context of the history of a suffering Israel and a suffering humanity.<sup>66</sup>

#### Jewish-Catholic Relations in the U.S.: 1965-1995

There was excitement—almost an element of romance—in ecumenical and interfaith relationships after Vatican II. Three areas where this blossomed were (1) academia, (2) religious institutional structures, and (3) local "grass roots" developments. All three are necessary for holistic interfaith growth and development in Jewish-Christian relations.

Academia. Jewish-Christian relations is an intra-disciplinary and interdisciplinary field. Within the general area of theology, a knowledge of Scripture, church history, systematics, ethics, liturgy, spirituality and pastoral theology are required if one is to become involved in the dialogue. Relevant studies in philosophy, sociology, psychology and political science also have a substantial impact on the theological issues under consideration. The challenge is one of both breadth and depth.

Foundational to the composition of *Nostra Aetate*, as mentioned above, was the new research in Scripture studies. Themes such as the Jewishness of Jesus (and more recently of Mary), Jewish

<sup>64</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 489.

<sup>65</sup> See Alan T. Davies, "The Aryan Christ: A Motif in Christian Anti-Semitism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12(4) (Fall 1975): 569-579.

<sup>66</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in History and in Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 20.

understandings of “Messiah,” a new appreciation of the beliefs and role of the Pharisees, differing approaches to covenant, and new interpretations of Paul were explored in terms of the new biblical hermeneutics.

Catholic biblical scholarship blossomed with Vatican II in the writings of Raymond Brown, S.S., Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland Murphy, O.Carm., and others. Theologians—Protestant and Catholic—such as Karl Rahner, S.J., Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jurgen Moltmann and Walter Kasper explored the christological dimensions of the new research. It became clear to Christian scholars that knowledge of the Talmud and other Jewish documents was essential to understanding Jesus and the early Christian community.

These scholarly advances had repercussions in historical and systematic theology (especially Christology), ethics and liturgy. A revised version of Gregory Baum’s volume *The Jews and the Gospel* was published in 1965 with the controversial title *Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?* That same year Father Edward Flannery published *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Anti-Semitism*. He reflected sadly: “It is little exaggeration to state that those pages of history Jews have committed to memory are the very ones that have been torn from Christian (and secular) history books.”<sup>67</sup> These two volumes were responsible for raising consciousness regarding the history of antisemitic behavior of Christians over the centuries.

Three subsequent studies of particular significance by American Catholic authors were *Faith and Fratricide* by Rosemary Radford Ruether (1974), *Christology After Auschwitz* by Michael McGarry, C.S.P. (1977), and *Christ in the Light of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue* by John Pawlikowski, O.S.M. (1982). These scholars addressed key issues in an effort to understand anew how the Christological claims of Catholics need not negate the on-going validity of the Jewish covenant.

As a new consciousness of the Holocaust emerged in the mid-1960s, Jewish and Catholic theologians also probed the questions of theodicy. The attempt at Jewish genocide became paradigmatic of evil for moral theologians searching for a new comprehension of the depths to which human beings could descend in human behavior gone radically astray. Sociologists, psychologists and literary figures researched and reflected on the *Shoah* and raised questions about ultimate meaning and its impact on the human person. The Glock-Stark studies on antisemitism in America provided hard data identifying the attitudes of church-going Christians regarding Jews. Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*, and *Night* by Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, influenced the growing number of Catholics and Jews in high schools, colleges and adult religious education programs in churches and synagogues.

The Sisters of Zion began the journal *SIDIC (Service International de Documentation Judéo-Chrétienne)* in 1967 and founded centers for Jewish-Christian dialogue around the world. The Graymoor Ecumenical Institute, founded by the Augustinians, was re-named to include interreligious affairs broadening its vision. These religious orders had long worked for Jewish-Christian understanding but with a more conversionist goal. In keeping with the spirit of Vatican II, they rewrote their objectives to be more accepting of their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Catholic universities established chairs and began programs in Jewish studies, e.g., Rabbi Hayim Perlmeuter was appointed to the faculty at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago in 1968 to teach courses in Judaism; the Jay Phillips Chair in Jewish Studies was founded at St.

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<sup>67</sup> Edward Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Anti-Semitism*, revised ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 1.

John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota in 1969 to promote Jewish understanding on a Catholic university campus.

Centers for dialogue were established, e.g., the Jewish-Catholic Institute at St. Joseph University in Philadelphia in 1967, the Center for Judaic Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley in 1968, and the Center for Jewish-Christian Learning at the College (now University) of St. Thomas in Minnesota in 1985.

Although post-1995, it is noteworthy that as the number of centers multiplied a Council of Centers for Jewish-Christian Relations (CCJR) was established in 2002. It was founded "for the exchange of information, cooperation and mutual enrichment among centers and institutes for Christian-Jewish studies and relations in the United States." There are thirty-two member centers in the USA and Canada; twenty-two are associated with Catholic universities or religious orders. Affiliate members, such as the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the USCCB, the National Council of Synagogues, and about thirty individual members—usually scholars in the field—participate. This network keeps scholars both individually and collectively connected, allowing them to share information on the internet, on the website, through their electronic journal *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* and at an annual meeting. The CCJR is a member of the International Council of Christians and Jews, giving it a global dimension.<sup>68</sup>

Institutions. The bishops returned from Vatican II with a mandate to implement the documents which had been promulgated, including *Nostra Aetate*. In 1966 Pope Paul VI approved the establishment of the Office for Jewish-Christian Relations within the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. The location was controversial because some Jews feared proselytizing by Catholics. Church leaders, however, believed it was reasonable because Jews and Christians shared common roots and had a closer albeit sometimes painful relationship far different than that of Catholics with Hindus or Buddhists. By 1974 a Commission on the Religious Relationship with the Jews was formed within the Secretariat.

In 1970 an International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) was created. During December 20-23, 1970 six members of the IJCIC joined with members of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity and agreed upon a memorandum resulting in the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee. One of the participants stated: "For the first time in history representatives of the Catholic Church and of the Jewish community met for discussions at a high official level."<sup>69</sup>

Succeeding documents from Rome evoked differing reactions. "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4)" (January 1975), was positively received. "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" (March 1982), was more controversial. While the IJCIC acknowledged many positive features in the document, it expressed disappointment that it was published without prior consultation with the Jewish community which felt that in some areas it was regressive.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (today's United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) established a Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations in 1967. In that same year,

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<sup>68</sup> I am grateful to Philip A. Cunningham for this information as well as his article "Jewish-Christian relations, centres for the study of" in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, 231.

<sup>69</sup> Pier Francesco Fumagalli, "The International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee: Historical Note," *Fifteen Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue* (Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1988), xvii.

under the leadership of the first Executive Secretary Father Edward Flannery, the bishops published "Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations" in the United States. In 1985, a revision of that document was issued, prepared by Flannery's successor, Dr. Eugene Fisher, in consultation with the Advisory Committee. Article 6 of the General Principles states:

Proselytism, which does not respect human freedom, is carefully to be avoided. While the Christian, through the faith life of word and deed, will always witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, the dialogue is concerned with the permanent vocation of the Jews as God's people, the enduring values that Judaism shares with Christianity and that, together, the Church and the Jewish people are called upon to witness to the world.<sup>70</sup>

Diocesan ecumenical commissions, which included Jewish-Christian relations, were established through the country. Activity varied according to the size and energy of the Jewish population in a geographical location. The commission in Los Angeles developed an outstanding priest-rabbi dialogue under the leadership of Msgr. Royale Vadakin and Rabbi Arthur Wolf which became a model for other dioceses. Commentaries for Catholic clergy on sensitivity to the Jews when preaching during Holy Week were published and available. Eventually ecumenical commissions were retitled "Diocesan Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs" to reflect the inclusive nature of the dialogue with the Jews, and more recently with Muslims and other religious groups. In the 1980s under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Chicago Board of Rabbis, and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, a Catholic-Jewish Scholars Dialogue Group was formed which continues to be active.

Jewish organizations on national and local levels expended new energy in cooperation. The Interreligious Committee of the American Jewish Committee, under the leadership of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum and Judith Banki, and the Jewish-Christian Relations Department of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, led by Rabbi Leon Klenicki, were among those which worked effectively to promote Catholic-Jewish relations. From 1973-1999 the National Workshop in Christian-Jewish Relations was an opportunity for Catholics, Protestants and Jews to gather in different cities around the U.S.—sometimes annually, sometimes biennially—for lectures, discussion, and celebration to form or renew relationships.

Dialogue and Cooperation at the "Grass Roots." Commissions and statements can be helpful but will not have genuine influence on the life of the church and the synagogue unless people on the local level are involved. The "Living Room Dialogues"<sup>71</sup> of the 1960s helped Catholics, Protestants, and some Eastern Orthodox Christians become acquainted and learn about each other. Jewish participation followed. This often resulted in collaborative social action and interfaith education.

In the early 1970s, some churches and synagogues began to affiliate into clusters to work together for enrichment and the good of the community. One example of such a "grass roots" enterprise was the North Phoenix Corporate Ministry (NPCM) in Phoenix, Arizona. It began in 1966 as a Protestant-Catholic group, but by 1970 included two synagogues (one Conservative

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<sup>70</sup> "Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1985), Publication No. 966.

<sup>71</sup> William B. Greenspun, C.S.P. and William A. Norgren, eds., *Living Room Dialogues: A Guide for Lay Discussion Catholic-Orthodox-Protestant* (New York: National Council of Churches of Christ and Paulist Press, 1965).

and one Reform).<sup>72</sup> It was large enough to have influence in the city (6,800 families in the seven congregations), but small enough to develop warm and solid relationships. We did not want to be an experience of “tea and crumpets ecumenism.” Our goal was to build relationships of candor and trust beginning with those wild weekly clergy luncheons. Programming began in 1967. I was involved in both the lay council and the clergy council, and in 1970 I was hired full time as executive director. That year each congregation began making a financial contribution monthly to the NPCM. A governing board and committee structure was established and we incorporated in the state of Arizona.

The NPCM offered a wide array of programs in which hundreds, even thousands, of the congregants were involved: an education program in the fall—usually ten courses taught by the clergy and others from the congregations at one of the Protestant churches; a spring panel forum at one of the synagogues for 1,500 or more people on topics such as “Religion and Politics” with Sandra Day O’Connor as a participant, or medical-moral-legal issues with prominent doctors, lawyers and clergy discussing life issues such as genetic engineering, euthanasia, and “Health care—Who Can Afford It?”

The NPCM sponsored and coordinated the Community Clothing Bank in an African-American area of South Phoenix, and a pre-school in the Santa Rita Center—both of which included volunteers from all of the congregations. We had an active legislative task force, produced a weekly television program titled *The Next Frontier*, had a creative arts festival, youth programs, clergy-lay baseball games to raise money for the St. Mary’s Food Bank, retreats, dialogue study sessions, pulpit exchanges, and published an annual magazine.

We had interfaith liturgies twice a year—on Thanksgiving in St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, and a “Spring Celebration” on the Sunday night before Passover and Easter at Beth El Synagogue. A worship service in which Jews, Catholics and Protestants can feel comfortable—with no group’s tradition unrepresented—is not easy to create!<sup>73</sup> Each celebration was the result of hard work, including meditation and discussion. Rabbis, priests, ministers, nuns, and lay people—especially the choir directors and youth participants—all shared what was deepest in his or her relationship with God, so that we might celebrate that relationship to God and to one another.

Perhaps in some way that was the “secret” of the Corporate Ministry. The heart of our relationship was a religious commitment. In 1976 I wrote, “Unless we sometimes come together and pray, and celebrate our relationship to God and to one another, our commitment will lack the depth that our hopes require of it.”<sup>74</sup> I still recall a Jewish gentleman—a survivor of the Holocaust—coming out of a Thanksgiving Service at St. Francis Xavier Church and saying to me, “I could hardly believe I was in this huge cathedral-like church with a large crucifix above me and my Rabbi was on the altar leading us in the prayers of Yom Kippur in Hebrew, *Al cheyt shechetanu l’fanecha...*” (For the sins we have committed before You...) He had tears in his eyes and so did I.

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<sup>72</sup> Beth El Congregation, Church of the Beatitudes (UCC), Cross Roads United Methodist Church, Orangewood Presbyterian Church, Our Savior’s Lutheran Church (LCA), St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Shadow Rock Congregational Church (UCC), and Temple Beth Israel.

<sup>73</sup> See Mary Christine Athans, BVM, “Build Trust...Then Ring the Bell!” *Pastoral Music* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, June-July 1991), 22-25 for a description of the NPCM Thanksgiving Service in November 1976.

<sup>74</sup> Mary Christine Athans, BVM, “Ecumenism in the Valley of the Sun.” *Next Frontier* (Phoenix, Arizona: North Phoenix Corporate Ministry, 1976), 13-15.



*Rabbi Moshe Tutnauer guiding Sister M. Christine Athans, BVM through the Hebrew scriptures, Beth El Congregation, Phoenix, Arizona, December 1970. Courtesy of The Arizona Republic.*

The NPCM was not just a clergy organization. It had evolved from a strong lay council and a strong clergy group with creative determined personalities on every side. It was an exciting venture of clergy and lay, adults and teenagers who built trust, shared, worked together, laughed, cried, disagreed, and grew in a genuine sense that we were all somehow “related.” Members of Orangewood Presbyterian would refer to St. Francis Xavier as “our Catholic Church,” and congregants at Cross Roads Methodist would speak of Beth Israel as “one of our synagogues.” We never lost our own identities but we were part of a larger family known as the North Phoenix Corporate Ministry.

The culminating event each spring was an end-of-the-year party at the convent. Some 200 or more of the clergy and involved laity and their spouses would gather to celebrate! We had choices: “Methodist punch” or “Episcopal punch” for the social hour; kosher chicken or regular chicken for dinner! We always ended up doing Israeli dancing—and sometimes the Irish jig—in the convent garden! It was a magical time.

That collaboration faded by the 1990s. Some of its activities folded into other groups due in part to increased demands on families with two spouses working, the decreasing number of clergy—particularly among Catholics, and financial demands in a stressed economy. The changing life styles of Americans limited the number of volunteers at many churches and synagogues. In addition, what was new and exciting in the post-Vatican II period has become more commonplace. The relationships, however, have never died, and some have carried on to the next generation.

## Jews and Christians: A Blessing to One Another

Pope John XXIII had initiated the Jewish-Catholic dialogue but Pope John Paul II deepened the relationship. This was due in part to his experience as young adult in Poland during World War II and his pain at losing Jewish friends in the *Shoah*. Early on in his pontificate, on March 12, 1979, he spoke with representatives of Jewish organizations and he stated:

In effect, the council made very clear that...while searching into the mystery of the Church, it recalled “the spiritual bond linking the people of the new covenant with Abraham’s stock” (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). Thus it understood that *our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of our respective religious identities.*<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps not since the first centuries had some Christians reflected so profoundly on their closeness to Judaism and what that relationship could mean for both of them. This statement articulated the basis for a new connection hitherto unrecognized. Both Jews and Christians were called to ponder the question: “What does it mean to be ‘*connected and closely related at the very level of our respective religious identities*’?”



*Pope John Paul II and Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff greeting each other at the Rome synagogue, April 1986. Courtesy of Google Images.*

John Paul met with the Jewish communities in almost every country he visited. His homily at Auschwitz in June 1979, and his historic visit to the Great Synagogue in Rome in April 1986 were particularly memorable events for Jews and Christians around the world. Although there

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<sup>75</sup> Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds., *Spiritual Pilgrimage – Pope John Paul II: Texts on Jews and Judasim 1979-1995* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 4. Emphasis mine.

were challenging moments in those early years—the situation of the Carmelite Convent in Auschwitz, meetings with Yassar Arafat and Kurt Waldheim, the canonization of Edith Stein—Pope John Paul still spoke freely of the covenant never revoked. He was convinced that Jews and Christians must be a blessing to one another and to the world:

Jews and Christians, as children of Abraham, are called to be a blessing for the world [cf. Gen, 12:2 ff], by committing themselves together for peace and justice among all men and peoples, with the fullness and depth that God himself intended us to have, and with the readiness for sacrifices that this goal may demand. The more this meeting is imprinted with this sacred duty, the more it becomes a blessing also for ourselves.<sup>76</sup>

Although beyond the scope of this essay, John Paul's statements and actions post-1995—the document *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (1998), his "Confession of Sins Against the People of Israel" on the First Sunday of Lent 2000 as the Church was beginning the millennial year, and his trip to the Holy Land—have all underscored his genuine concern and affection for the Jewish people, and his desire to make amends for the anti-Judaism of the ages.

In his pastoral visit to the United States in 1987, the pope acknowledged the paths which Jewish and Catholic immigrants had taken in coming to America. He stated, "...Jews and Catholics have contributed to the success of the American experiment in religious freedom, and, in this unique context, have given to the world a vigorous form of interreligious dialogue between our two ancient traditions. For those engaged in this dialogue, so important to the Church and to the Jewish people, I pray: May God bless you and make you strong in his service."<sup>77</sup> In the United States—despite challenges of the past and the present—Jewish-Catholic relations continue to mature after more than 350 years.

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<sup>76</sup> Fisher and Klenicki, eds., 16.

<sup>77</sup> Fisher and Klenicki, eds., 106.