

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING*Interfaith Dialogue and the Golden Age
of Christian-Jewish Relations*

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The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed unprecedented transformations in the relationship between the Western Christian and Jewish communities. At the center of the developments stood a movement of interfaith dialogue and reconciliation, serving as a catalyst that helped to bring about many of the changes. Beginning hesitatingly at the turn of the twentieth century, the dialogue between Jews and non-Jews gained more ground in English speaking nations in the decades between the two World Wars. The movement of interfaith reconciliation advanced considerably in the years after World War II, and reached a "golden age" in the late 1960s and 1970s, when an unprecedented momentum for reconciliation and dialogue between the faiths flourished in Europe, America, Israel, and other countries. Despite occasional setbacks, this movement of reconciliation helped to improve the relationship between Christians and Jews in an unprecedented manner, and on a worldwide scale.

Dialogue and Reconciliation: the Beginnings of a Movement

The early attempts at interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews began in America in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, mostly on the initiative of liberal Protestants. In addition to cooperating over civic issues, a number of Jewish and Christian clergymen invited each other to give talks in their congregations. Such interactions often took place on a sporadic basis and usually entailed personal friendships between Jewish and Christian religious leaders. More significant for future developments were the interfaith conferences, which liberal Protestants organized and in which liberal as well as more traditionalist rabbis took part.¹

One of the more special occasions in the early history of interfaith dialogue and reconciliation was the World Parliament of Religions (WPR), which convened in Chicago, in 1893, in conjunction with the World Columbian Exposition. It brought together Protestants, Catholics, and Greek Orthodox Christians, as well as Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Baha'i, Muslims, Native Americans, and representatives of other faiths as well.² It offered Jewish religious leaders, such as Alexander Kohut, Isaac M. Wise, Kaufmann Kohler, Emil G. Hirsch, and Marcus Jastrow, an opportunity to present their views to a non-Jewish audience and make a case for Judaism. While Emil G. Hirsch, a Reform rabbi from Chicago, spoke about the need to overcome parochial differences and create one world religion, other Jewish representatives used the occasion to defend

¹ For examples of such encounters, see Lawrence G. Charap, "Accept the Truth from Whomsoever Gives It: Jewish-Protestant Dialogue, Interfaith Alliance and Pluralism, 1880-1910," *American Jewish History*, Volume 89, Number 3 (September 2001) 261-178.

² On the World Parliament of Religion, see Marcus Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

Judaism against what they considered to be erroneous and degrading Christian views. In the wake of the WPR, some liberal Jewish and Protestant religious leaders further engaged in dialogue. Rabbi Hirsch and his Protestant colleague, Jenkins Lloyd Jones, a Unitarian minister and an architect of the WPR, were particularly committed to interfaith dialogue, for the most part demonstrating respect towards each other's faiths.³

While the WPR gave Judaism a voice, and put its representatives on the podium with other leaders of world religions and in spite of some attempts at pursuing the dialogue, its long-range effects were more limited. In theory, the unprecedented conference reflected a sense of respect for and recognition of all religions. However, at this stage, even the Protestant liberal activists who presided over the WPR did not really view non-Protestant religions as equal to their faiths.⁴ Influenced by theories of religious evolution, which prevailed in the late nineteenth century, liberal Protestants had put their faith at the top of the religious evolutionary ladder.⁵ In spite of their relative openness to dialogue and their more critical reading of their own sacred scriptures, liberal Christians before World War I held to a triumphalist vision of Christianity, which they saw as a faith destined to eventually become the world's all-encompassing religion.

Additionally, the Protestants who participated in the WPR were among the most liberal Christians at that time, in some ways ahead of their time. The liberals who led the event drew fire from more conservative Protestants, who strongly objected to theological dialogues with non-Protestants on seemingly equal terms.⁶ In the conservative Protestant view, only those persons who had accepted Jesus as their Savior would be "saved" and could expect eternal life. The conservative Protestants, who were organizing at that time as a "fundamentalist" camp, in opposition to the liberals, insisted that Protestants should look at members of other religious traditions exclusively through missionary lenses and concentrate on spreading the Christian Gospel among non-Christians instead of wasting precious time and resources on dubious dialogues.⁷ Influenced by a more literal reading of the Bible, conservative Protestants saw special merit in evangelizing the Jews. They were not alone—numerous Western Christian groups in Europe and America were busy propagating Christianity among the Jews all over the globe.⁸ Christian missionary activity caused much resentment among Jewish leaders, who viewed the missions as a demonstration of Christian contempt towards Judaism and Jews. A number of Jewish religious leaders in Germany, Britain and America of the late nineteenth century were busy defending Judaism against what they considered to be unjustified defamation resulting from the unwillingness of Christians to relate to Judaism as a legitimate faith.⁹ However, Reform Jewish participants in

³ Charap, "Accept the Truth," *The Jewish Encounter with Protestant America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 130-132.

⁴ Cf. Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Vol. 1, The Irony of it All, 1893-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1886), 17-24.

⁵ On the prevalence of such theories, see, for example, Eric J Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (Chicago: Open Court, 1986) 47-71; J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 1977.

⁶ Cf. Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 1, 22. Arno C. Gaebilein, *Christianity or Religion?* (New York: Our Hope, 1912).

⁷ For example, Arno Gaebilein, *Christianity or Religion?*

⁸ Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 9-78.

⁹ For example, Yaakov Ariel, "Christianity Through Reform Eyes: Kaufmann Kohler's Scholarship on Christianity," *American Jewish History*, Volume 89, Number 2 (June 2001) 181-192.

the dialogue, on their part, also promoted a triumphalist Jewish vision of the future according to which Judaism stood at the top of the religious evolutionary ladder and would gradually become the one universal world religion.

Already at this early stage, certain characteristics of the dialogue were laid out. Many of the issues discussed were not spiritual or theological, yet the dialogue between Jews and non-Jews was entrusted to clergymen. Representing Judaism and the Jewish community in dialogue with representatives of other faiths would become an important component of rabbis' work in Europe and America and would add to the prestige of the rabbinate. Rabbis, including those serving as leaders or functionaries of Jewish organizations, would become the representatives of Judaism and Jewish causes vis a vis other faiths as well as society at large. Another feature of the dialogue that revealed itself was that willingness to meet with Jewish representatives and dialogue with Jews did not necessarily mean that Christians accepted Judaism as a religion equal to their own, or that Jews gave up on triumphalist elements of their faith, to say nothing about generations-old bitterness towards Christianity and Christian attitudes towards Judaism. Christian participants in the dialogue would continue to be representatives of liberal wings of their faith, while most Jewish participants at this early stage of the dialogue were Reform rabbis or rabbis of the "Historical School," or the fledgling Conservative movement. Yet, contrary to a prevailing myth, Orthodox rabbis and communities were also dialoguing with Christians.¹⁰ While some attempts at dialogue took place in continental Europe, developments there were more limited and the achievements of the early dialogue, as limited as they were, took place in the English speaking world. While the very attempts at dialogue during that period should be viewed as a form of good will, it seems that both Jews and Christians were not yet ready for such a transformation. Matters changed in the following decades.

Systematic Dialogue during Times of Tragedy: The 1920s-1940s

Attempts at dialogue and cooperation in the English-speaking world took a new turn in the 1920s, leading to more permanent results. Following World War I, the triumphalist notions of both Protestants and Jews began to erode, and a number of liberal Protestant and Jewish thinkers would begin offering each other an amount of recognition and appreciation. There was also an advancement of a more systematic and institutionalized dialogue. In 1924, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish activists in the United States established the Committee on Good Will. The motivation for the creation of the Committee was more social than theological and had to do with the rise of hate groups in the public life of English-speaking nations, a reality that alarmed Roman Catholics and Jews, who were often targets of such attacks, as well as some liberal Protestants who were also concerned.¹¹ Similar attempts were taking place in other English-speaking countries. The first National Council of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) was formed in England in 1924, even before the establishment of the American NCCJ in 1928.¹² While the Committee on Good Will concentrated on fighting bigotry, the NCCJ concentrated its efforts on improving the relationship between Jews and Christians and acted as a major vehicle for dialogue between representatives of Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church and

¹⁰ For example, Charap, "Accept the Truth from Whosoever Gives It."

¹¹ Benny Kraut, "A Wary Collaboration: Jews, Catholics, and the Protestant Goodwill Movement," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, edited by William R. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 193-230.

¹² On interfaith dialogue in Britain, see Marcus Braybrooke, *A History of the Council of Christians and Jews* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1991); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Future of Jewish Dialogue* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

Jewish religious leaders. In these institutionalized efforts, Protestant participants came from mainline churches associated with the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, in which conservative churches did not take part. While interfaith dialogue did not bring about, at this time, a full recognition of Judaism, it offered, in the English-speaking countries, permanent frameworks and started a process that eventually would bring about mutual recognition as well as improvement in the relationship between Christian and Jewish communities of faith. This more amiable spirit points to a more open and tolerant atmosphere in the English-speaking world. It should also be attributed, at least in part, to the influence of the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible on the English mind. The avant-garde role of English-speaking nations is evident when looking at the deteriorating relationship between Christians and Jews in continental Europe during the period. While the interfaith dialogue progressed, the developments in the relationships between Christians and Jews were far from ideal. During the 1920s and 1930s, virulent anti-Semitism progressed all over the globe. Even in English-speaking countries a number of Christian groups and individuals joined in attacking Jews, blaming them for the world's problems. This included French speakers and Afrikaners in Canada and South Africa, although many of the defamers were English speakers. One of the most noted American Roman Catholic clergymen during the period, Father Charles Coughlin, a pioneer of radio preaching, used his radio program as a vehicle to attack the Jews and blame them for the troubles of the age.¹³ The Catholic Coughlin was not alone, as a number of Protestant leaders and laymen also blamed the Jews. Henry Ford, Sr. financed the distribution of anti-semitic publications, including an English translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fabricated document according to which the Jews were conspiring to take over the entire world.¹⁴ Protestant ministers who promoted a reactionary political agenda, such as Gerald L. K. Smith, included attacks on Jews in their rhetoric.¹⁵

The rise of organized anti-Jewish rhetoric and policies brought Jewish organizations to institutionalize their involvement with interfaith dialogue. Realizing that building a good relationship with Christian groups was of utmost importance, they turned it into one of the items on their agenda. Groups such as the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Canadian Jewish Congress, World Jewish Congress, the Board of Deputies, or the Anti-Defamation League, made it their business to engage in interfaith dialogue, their leaders serving as representatives in interfaith forums. Christian representatives in the dialogue were often sympathetic to Jewish feelings. However, they did not necessarily represent their denominations as a whole. While opposed to bigotry, the mainstream Christian denominations of the time, not to mention the more conservative churches, were far from recognizing Judaism as a legitimate faith. For the most part, the standing of mainstream churches at that time was that while Christians should treat Jews benevolently, Judaism was not equal to Christianity and could not offer its members spiritual comfort, moral guidelines, and salvation for their souls. Not only conservative groups, but mainstream Christian churches as well, continued their efforts at evangelizing Jews. Not surprisingly, the missions became a major issue brought up whenever Christians and Jews dialogued. From the Jewish point of view, Christian attempts at evangelizing Jews were a stumbling block to a relationship of trust and goodwill. They could not accept the idea that Christians

¹³ Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1985) 403-404; Mary Christine Athans, *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).

¹⁴ Neil Baldwin, *Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

¹⁵ On Gerald L. K. Smith and the Jews during the period, see Glen Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith, Minister of Hate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). On the rise of anti-Semitism in America during the period, see Leonard Dinerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 48-149; Frank E. Eakin, *What Price Prejudice: Christian Antisemitism in America* (New York: Stimulus, 1998), 95-100.

could sincerely express respect towards Jews while at the same time seeking to convert them away from their ancestral faith. Committed to an improvement in the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, Christian participants in the dialogue would begin distancing themselves from the efforts to evangelize Jews.¹⁶

An early proponent of a new liberal attitude that recognized Judaism as a legitimate religious tradition was the Unitarian minister John Haynes Holmes of the Community Church in New York.¹⁷ Holmes, who advocated a progressive social and political outlook, became a close friend of Steven S. Wise, an independent Reform rabbi who shared Holmes' social agenda. As early as the late 1920s the influential minister was relating to Judaism as a religion that deserved respect and as a faith able to offer its adherents spiritual content and moral guidance.¹⁸

A more systematic promotion of the same opinions was offered by Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the leading Protestant theologians in the English-speaking world between the 1930s and 1960s. His was a groundbreaking outlook, on the part of a central Christian figure, that offered recognition and acceptance to Judaism as a religious tradition equal in worth to Christianity. Niebuhr, who grew up in the German-American Evangelical Church, worked for a number of years as a minister in a working-class neighborhood in Detroit. In the course of his work, he encountered socially-active Jewish religious leaders and visited Jewish congregations. Rejecting the triumphalist Christian Protestant attitudes that had prevailed before World War I, he concluded that Jews had high moral standards and social consciousness and were therefore not in need of the Gospel. Consequently, he militated against the propagation of the Christian gospel among the Jews. Niebuhr's attitude, which he expressed as early as 1926, signified a revolution in Christian Protestant thinking about Jews and Judaism. With few exceptions, mainstream Protestant theologians and church councils followed a traditional Christian line, constructed by the Church fathers in the early centuries of Christianity. Having rejected their Messiah, the Jews lost their position as the covenant people, God's first nation. According to that view, God's promises to Israel were inherited by the Christian church, and Judaism, as a separate faith from Christianity, had no reason to exist except as a group holding witness to the triumph of Christianity.

Niebuhr pioneered an approach that accepted the legitimacy of a separate Jewish existence alongside Christianity and the idea that Jews, holding a valid religious tradition of their own, did not have to convert to Christianity. His pioneering outlook posed an alternative to traditional Christian attitude towards Judaism. Moving to serve as a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he advocated a neo-Orthodox theology of "Christian realism," the socially progressive Niebuhr founded *Christianity and Crisis*, a journal promoting Christian social activism. Niebuhr became a supporter of Zionism and in the early 1940s helped found the Christian Council for Palestine, which mustered American Christian Protestant support for the establishment of a Jewish state in what was then British Palestine.¹⁹

¹⁶ Kraut, "A Wary Collaboration: Jews, Catholics, and the Protestant Goodwill Movement," 210.

¹⁷ See, for example, John Haynes Holmes, *Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Community Pulpit, 1928); Stephen Wise, *Challenging Years: The Autobiography of Stephen Wise* (New York: C. P. Putnam, Sons, 1948), picture on p. 169. Holmes spoke at the 25th anniversary of the Free Synagogue in New York.

¹⁸ On the friendship between Holmes and Wise, see *Stephan S. Wise: Servant of the People, Selected Letters*, edited by Carl Hermann Voss (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), 125, 143, 159; John Haynes Holmes, *The Sensible Man's View of Religion*, 174-175.

¹⁹ On Niebuhr and his attitude toward Jews, the idea of missionizing them and the Zionist movement, see Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Rapprochement between Jews and Christians," *Christian Century*, January 7, 1926, 9-11; Reinhold Niebuhr, "Jews after the War," *Nation*, February 21, 1942, 214-16; February 28, 1942, 253-55. See also Dan Rice, "Reinhold Niebuhr and Judaism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45 (March 1977), 101-146; Egal

During the same years, a number of Jewish thinkers also developed more open attitudes on the relationship between Judaism and other faiths. In the years following World War I, the triumphalist classical Reform Jewish theology of the late nineteenth century weakened considerably, if it did not disappear completely. A younger generation of Reform thinkers opened up to Christian-Jewish equality as never before. Few followed Stephen Wise when he called upon Jews to adopt Jesus as one of their own, or Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionist theology, which suggested that Jews give up on their claim to be the chosen people and move to bless God for having chosen them together with all other nations.²⁰ But like some of their Christian counterparts, a number of Jewish thinkers were more open to further recognition and dialogue.

Growing Recognition following World War II

Holmes' and Niebuhr's positions were a minority opinion, the majority of mainline Christians not yet accepting the stance adopted by the progressive ministers, but matters changed after World War II. The spirit created by the war, including the camaraderie that developed between Jewish and non-Jewish soldiers serving in the armed forces during the war, as well as between Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic chaplains, helped change the relationships between the faiths. The struggle against Nazism made racist anti-Semitism significantly less acceptable in polite Western societies, and such virulent forms of anti-Jewish agitation decreased significantly in Europe and America during the post-war years. The social and economic changes that came about in the years following the war were also congenial to progress in the relationship between the faiths. In America, Canada, Britain and elsewhere, many Jews moved from the working class and immigrant quarters into the middle classes and suburbia. To a growing number of Christians, Jews seemed like ordinary law-abiding middle-class citizens, not to be blamed for social, political, or economic problems.²¹

The new atmosphere, which spelled more acceptances, brought about changes on the theological level as well. More Protestant thinkers followed Reinhold Niebuhr in advocating the idea that Jews were not in need of the Christian gospel and had a vital religious tradition of their own to sustain them. During the 1950s-1960s, pro-dialogue groups within mainline churches, such as the Presbyterian Church USA or the United Methodist Church, gained the upper hand, and a growing number of Protestant denominations decided that they had no more interest in allocating money and manpower to evangelizing Jews. In New York, a Presbyterian and Jewish congregations shared the same house of worship, serving as both the Village Presbyterian Church and the Village Temple. In the atmosphere created by such an experiment there was less room for the traditional Christian Replacement Theology and the missionary agenda.²²

Feldman, "Reinhold Niebuhr and the Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 46 (Summer/Fall 1984), 292-302; Richard Wrightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Egal Feldman, "American Protestant Theologians on the Frontier of Jewish-Christian Relations, 1922-1982," in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, edited by David A. Gerber (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 363-85; Eyal Naveh, "The Hebraic Foundation of the Christian Faith, According to Reinhold Niebuhr," *Judaism* 41 (Winter 1992), 37-56.

²⁰ On Wise's controversial sermons, see Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 302. On Kaplan and the early Reconstructionist movement, see Richard Libowitz, *Mordecai M. Kaplan and the Development of Reconstructionism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983); Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994).

²¹ Glazer, *American Judaism*, 106-128.

²² Ben Merson, "The Minister, the Rabbi and Their House of God," *Collier's*, February 17, 1951, 27, 36-37.

Paradoxically, the Cold War enhanced the atmosphere of interfaith reconciliation as it helped legitimize middle class religious expressions in all their varieties, including Judaism, in the American, and, at times, European public arenas. The United States and its western allies were engaged during the 1950s in an intensive global struggle and ideological debate with communism. Participation in religious life became equated with the "American way." In America, Jews participated in the spirit of the age, building hundreds of suburban synagogues, architecturally in line with the tastes and values of the period. Dwight Eisenhower, whose presidency took place during the period, expressed the new mood when he stated that he expected good Americans to be church or synagogue goers. Judaism became, in the 1950s, one of the three "public religions" of America.²³ Dialoguing between Jews and Christians intensified and took a variety of forms. In New York, for example, Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic clergymen operated a radio program together. The scope of participation in the dialogue also enlarged considerably during the period. While at the turn of the century attempts at systematic dialogue were carried out mostly by representatives of the liberal wings of Judaism and Christianity, interfaith dialogue in the 1950s reached the mainstream of the religious communities. In New York, for example, Cardinal Francis Spellman, the Roman Catholic leader of the Archdiocese of New York, made interfaith dialogue and reconciliation between the faiths a high priority. In Britain, clergymen of the Church of England, such as James Parkes (1896-1981), were active in organizing Christian-Jewish meetings and theological exchanges, expressing recognition and approval of Judaism. On the Jewish side, leaders and activists of the Reform and Conservative movements played a major role in the reinvigorated dialogue. Orthodox Jewish leaders were more reluctant to take an active part in the dialogue, although in a number of countries, including Britain, France and South Africa, they were often the major, if not the only, rabbinical representatives. Influenced by the opinions of Yosef Dov Soloveichik, many Orthodox institutions and leaders (but not all) asserted that while civic cooperation between members of different faiths was acceptable, theological give and take was forbidden. Ultra-Orthodox Jews would not take part in the dialogue.

Christian and Jewish religious leaders also participated in mutual political interfaith initiatives. The most remarkable interfaith activity of that kind took place in the context of the American Civil Rights Movement.²⁴ They encountered in such groups many familiar faces, white Protestants and Catholics, as well as black leaders and activists, most of them clergymen.²⁵ The mutual efforts created at times personal friendships and a sense of camaraderie.²⁶

The improved relationship between the faiths made open anti-Semitism in Western societies less culturally acceptable, but more covert forms of anti-Jewish sentiments still ran strong. A sociological survey conducted at the initiative of the Anti-Defamation League in the early 1960s discovered that prejudices against Jews were prevalent among the majority of Christians in America, and were especially strong among members of the more conservative Christian groups. Members of groups taking part in the dialogue with Jews were relatively more tolerant.²⁷

²³ Glazer, *American Judaism*, 106-28); Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960).

²⁴ Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

²⁵ Clayborne Carson, "The Politics of Relations Between African-Americans and Jews," *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994) 131-143; Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong?: The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free Press).

²⁶ Cf. Susannah Heschel and Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Introduction" in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, edited by Susannah Heschel (New York: Noonday Press, 1996).

²⁷ Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

The Advancement of the Dialogue during the 1960s-1970s

The 1960s marked an important turning point in the relationships between Jews and Christians in Western societies and beyond. The movement of interfaith dialogue, which began gaining momentum already in the 1950s, was strongly enhanced in the mid and late 1960s by revolutionary developments in the relationship between the religious faiths that had taken place on an international level. The changes were brought about in part by the rise of a Christian ecumenical movement, which revolutionized the relationship between different Christian churches and between Christianity and other faiths as well. In 1948, representatives of mainline Protestant churches gathered in Amsterdam and established the World Council of Churches (WCC). The aim of this global ecumenical institution was Christian cooperation, reconciliation and, as an ideal, unity. The ecumenical spirit it promoted eventually affected interfaith relations as well.²⁸ In its early days the WCC was composed primarily of mainline, mostly national, Protestant churches, but its membership grew to include Greek Orthodox, Middle Eastern, and Third-World churches as well. While in its early years the WCC promoted missions among Jews, the commitment of the member churches, and of the organization as a whole, to such an agenda declined sharply. By the 1960s-1970s, most churches affiliated with the WCC changed their approach, abandoning missions, and emphasizing instead dialogue and recognition.²⁹

The most profound breakthrough on a global scale in interfaith relations that strongly affected the relationship between the religious communities in America occurred during and following Vatican II, the Roman Catholic general council that convened intermittently between 1962 and 1965. The Council was initiated by Pope John XXIII (1881-1963), who wished to reform the church, change its relationship to contemporary culture, and bring about an historical reconciliation between the Roman Catholic Church and other faiths. The Council attempted to put to rest some of the old hostilities between the different Christian churches, as well as between Christianity and other religions, and promoted an atmosphere of forgiveness and acceptance. In its first stages, the Council concentrated on inner reform and intra-Christian relationships. The Council, its significance, and the potential for Jewish-Christian relations were not lost on Jewish leaders and a number of Jewish organizations lobbied for the inclusion of Judaism and the Jewish people in the Council's agenda for reconciliation. The Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Congress, for example, sent representatives to Rome to keep in touch with the Council and its leaders. Golda Meyer, Israel's minister of Foreign Affairs, also tried to send an envoy to the Council, but was rejected. Influenced by the developments in the relations between the faiths prior to the Council, a number of Catholic bishops and dignitaries, who devoted their careers to the advancement of Catholic-Jewish relations, such as Monsignor John M. Oestreicher (1904-1993), were instrumental in advancing the reconciliatory agenda regarding the Jews.³⁰ Among other initiatives, he served in effect as a liaison for Jewish representatives at the Council. Toward its very last sessions, Vatican II came out with an historic resolution on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Among other things, it stated: "The Church...cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His

²⁸ R. M. Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution* (London: Burns Oates, 1967); L. E. Dirk, *The Ecumenical Movement* (New York: World Council of Churches, 1969); Marcus Braybrooke, *Inter Faith Organizations, 1893-1979* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1980).

²⁹ "First Assembly of the WCC, Amsterdam, Holland, 1948, The Christian Approach to the Jews," in Helga Croner (ed.), *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Stimulus Books, 1977), 72-85.

³⁰ A convert who emigrated to the U.S.A. from Austria, John M. Oestreicher founded at Seton Hall University an institute for Jewish-Christian relationship.

inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant...the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accused by God."³¹ The document also warned against the accusation of Deicide, the claim that the Jews collectively and in all generations were responsible for the killing of Jesus, whom the Christian tradition has viewed as the Messiah and the Son of God.³² The resolution was revolutionary, opening a new phase in Jewish-Christian relationships and serving as a stepping stone for further dialogue and additional declarations on the part of Christian Churches in their relation to Jews.³³

The Catholic Church's declaration, which represented the opinions of the church's elite of the mid-1960s, influenced not only the attitudes of the ranks and file of Roman Catholics around the globe. It also gave impetus to the relations of Protestant groups and, to a much lesser extent, Orthodox churches. A number of Protestant churches as well as ecumenical groups followed Vatican II in issuing statements that came to clear the air in relation to the Jews, including a denial of the Deicide charge. Some of these statements went much further theologically than that of the Vatican II Council in their attempt to bring about reconciliation with the Jewish people.³⁴ During and after Vatican II, liberal Protestants proclaimed—sometimes more emphatically than the Vatican II document—that the Jews were not guilty of the murder of Jesus. Among the first Protestant groups to issue such a statement was the Synod of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in the United States:

The charge of deicide against the Jews is a tragic misunderstanding of the inner significance of the crucifixion. To be sure, Jesus was crucified by *some* soldiers at the instigation of *some* Jews. But, this cannot be construed as imputing corporate guilt to every Jew in Jesus' day, much less the Jewish people in subsequent generations. Simple justice alone proclaims the charge of a corporate or inherited curse on the Jewish people to be false.³⁵

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., an ecumenical, largely liberal organization, to which conservative Protestant denominations have taken exception, issued the following statement: "Especially reprehensible are the notions that the Jews, rather than all mankind, are responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, and God has for this reason rejected his covenant people."³⁶

Both Protestants and Catholics were motivated, at least in part, by a sense of guilt over the historical role of Christian anti-Jewish accusations in bringing about the mass murder of Jews during World War II. Numerous Christian thinkers reached a realization that Nazi hatred of Jews

³¹ Croner (ed.), *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations*, 1-2.

³² On the council and its attitude toward Jews, see Arthur Gilbert, *The Vatican Council and the Jews* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1968).

³³ Cf. Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones*; Helga Croner, ed., *More Stepping Stones to Jewish Christian Relations* (New York: Stimulus Books, 1985).

³⁴ See such declarations as Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations* and *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and Its Member Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1988).

³⁵ Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations*, 87.

³⁶ Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations*, 87. For similar statements in the 1970s and 1980s, see Helga Croner (ed.), *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations*, 86.

had been fed by ages of anti-Semitic incitement stemming from Christianity's adverse and hostile attitude towards Judaism and Jews.³⁷

One immediate result of the new atmosphere in interfaith relationships affected missions. The Roman Catholic Church as well as mainline Protestant churches decided to shut their missionary enterprises among Jews.³⁸ They were influenced in no small measure by the strong Jewish objection to the missionary activity which Jews continuously voiced in the midst of the evolving dialogue. Missions and recognition, Jews insisted, did not go hand in hand. In addition, a new attitude gained more ground, in Christian liberal circles, towards the Jewish heritage. The position Reinhold Niebuhr advocated as early as the 1920s became much more accepted by liberal Christian thinkers. It was developed further during the 1960s and 1970s with great vigor by liberal Protestant theologians, mostly in English speaking countries, such as Roy A. Eckardt, Paul M. Van Buren, and Franklin Littell, as well as by Catholic thinkers such as David Tracy and John T. Pawlikowski.³⁹ For the most part, the liberal segments of Western Christianity gave up on the claim to be the sole possessors of the road to salvation. They accepted the idea that other churches and even non-Christian religions could offer moral guidelines and spiritual meaning to their adherents, Judaism not excluded. Evangelizing the Jews remained the declared agenda of the more conservative Protestant churches that did not take part in the dialogue, such as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod or the Southern Baptist Convention.⁴⁰ The conservatives have continuously insisted that Christianity is the only viable religion and only its adherents have truly found the path to salvation. Such has also remained the position of most Orthodox, Middle Eastern and Third World churches.

A growing number of Protestant and Catholic theologians came to characterize Judaism as a religious community in covenant with God. In America, these have included Paul Ricoeur, A. Roy Eckardt, Paul M. Van Buren, and Franklin H. Littell, to name just a few of the more noted ones.⁴¹ This outlook, which places Judaism on an equal spiritual and moral footing with Christianity, became the province of liberals in English-speaking countries more than of European and Third-World Christians. Within German Protestantism, for example, this attitude has developed in a slower and more limited fashion, while in the Third World churches it was completely rejected.⁴² The new climate of interfaith dialogue embodied a greater degree of mutual recognition and legitimacy, motivating a keen Christian attempt to eradicate prejudices against the Jews and establishing a new basis for a relationship between the faiths. Having acquitted the Jews of deicide, the years-old accusation of having killed Jesus, liberal Protestants and Catholics went a step further to clear the atmosphere of hatred that this and other similar charges had created.

³⁷ For example, Franklin Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: the Theological Roots of Antisemitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

³⁸ On the debates within the Lutheran churches, for example, see Arthur Gilbert, "New Trends in the Protestant Mission to the Jew," *Conservative Judaism* 19 (Spring 1965), 51-56.

³⁹ Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*; Roy A. Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brother: The Encounter of Jews and Christians* (New York: Scribner's, 1967); Paul M. Van Buren, *Discerning the Way: A Theology of the Jewish Christian Realities* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

⁴⁰ Bruce J. Lieske, *Witnessing to the Jewish People* (St. Louis, Missouri: Board for Evangelism, the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, 1975), esp. 11-17, 46-48.

⁴¹ See, for example, Franklin H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*; A. Roy Eckardt, *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Paul Van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*, 3 vols. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980, 1983, 1988). The French-born Paul Ricoeur labored for many years at the University of Chicago.

⁴² Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

In the late 1960s, Protestants and Catholics systematically examined textbooks that had been used in their religious schools and removed passages with anti-Semitic overtones or that drew a negative portrait of the Jews. A 1972 survey found that the charge of deicide had almost disappeared from Christian textbooks in America.⁴³ Not only liberal churches, but conservative ones as well became more sensitive to the manner in which they presented Jews in their publications. This does not mean that the old accusations against Jews disappeared in Christian popular culture. For example, Jews have continued to be portrayed as the slayers of Jesus or as the motivating cause behind his death in musical and theatrical works, such as passion plays. In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a stage production of the 1970s, the Jews cry out: "Crucify him, crucify him." In the 2000s, Mel Gibson's film, *the Passion of the Christ*, which adopts the narrative and message of traditional passion shows, presented the Jewish crowd as demanding the crucifixion of Jesus from an innocent Roman governor. Such negative presentations of Jews, which have gone on for long centuries, and have deep cultural roots, have not been easy to eradicate.

No less daring than clearing the textbooks of negative images of Jews have been theological works carried out by liberal Christian theologians who undertook to examine the corpus of Christian writings in order to acquire a more profound understanding of the ideas and claims that had produced the negative images of the Jews. A number of Christian theologians, historians, biblical scholars, and writers have traced the negative attitudes adopted toward the Jews in the early centuries of Christianity, or to theologians in the Middle-Ages and the Reformation.⁴⁴ Christian theologians have dealt with the significance of the Holocaust for Christianity.⁴⁵ Though sensitive to the suffering that had been the lot of the Jews, Christians tried to ascribe a universal significance to the murder of millions of innocent people, prompting at times an uneasy feeling among Jewish participants in the Dialogue.⁴⁶

Perhaps the most impressive development that followed the interfaith dialogue has been the growing curiosity among Christian thinkers, scholars, clergymen, and students about Jewish history and texts. Many Christian scholars have come to view Judaism as a tradition worth studying, among other things because it sheds light on the history of Christianity. Christian and Jewish scholars have, since the 1960s, paid increasing attention to the Jewish origins of Christianity. Since the 1960s a number of influential scholars have pointed to the Jewish roots of the Christian tradition. Turn of the twenty-first century scholarship of early Christianity tends to speak about rabbinical Judaism and Christianity as two traditions that developed during the same

⁴³ Gerald Strober, *Portrait of the Elder Brother* (New York: American Jewish Committee and the National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1972).

⁴⁴ For example, Rosemary Ruther, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Root of Antisemitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974); James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001); John T. Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). Such studies often defended the New Testament against the charge of anti-Semitism, claiming that negative attitudes towards Jews do not appear in the Scriptures, but only in later Church commentaries on the New Testament. See David Flusser, "Jewish-Christian Relations in the Past and Present," *Judaism and Early Christianity* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapalim, 1979), 454 (Hebrew).

⁴⁵ For one of many examples, see Alice L. Eckardt and A. Roy Eckardt, *Long Night's Journey into Day* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988).

⁴⁶ Eva Fleisher, *Auschwitz—Beginning of a New Era: Reflections on the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1977); Abraham J. Peck (ed.), *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Stephen R. Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 120-140; Alan L. Berger, Harry Cargas and Susan Nowak, eds., *The Continuing Agony: From the Carmelite Convent to the Crosses at Auschwitz* (New York: Global Publications, 2002).

period, emerging from the same cradle.⁴⁷ Christian scholars have increasingly taken an interest in the study of Jewish history, thought, mysticism, and religious law from the post-biblical period to the present. Jewish Studies have become part of the curriculum at Protestant and Catholic theological seminaries, at times taught by Jewish scholars who have studied at rabbinical seminaries or Jewish or Israeli universities. In divinity schools, theological seminaries, and departments of religious studies, "Old Testament Theology" has often changed into "Hebrew Bible" and Christian students have come to read biblical Hebrew in the Sephardic pronunciation prevalent in modern-day Israel. The openness on the part of Christians towards the study of Judaism has affected American and European universities, and at times, Asian universities as well. Hundreds of Christian and secular universities have incorporated the study of Judaism as a discipline of study during the same period. But not only theologians and academicians participated in interfaith dialogue.

In the atmosphere of reconciliation that developed in the aftermath of the Vatican Council, numerous regional groups of Christians and Jews organized, mostly in the American continent and Europe. Liberal and mainstream Protestants of various denominations, together with Roman Catholics and, at times, Greek Orthodox and even (albeit rarely) Monophysite churches have formed meeting groups with Jews, discussing issues of mutual concern, and engaging in interfaith community projects. At times, communities would invite each other to visit their sanctuaries and participate as observers in the services. Visiting other communities of faith has become a standard feature of Sunday school curricula in liberal Jewish and Christian communities in America.⁴⁸ Likewise, it became quite usual for Protestant or Catholic congregations to pay visits to Jewish synagogues during services. Until the 1960s, synagogues had been exclusive Jewish territories, with non-Jews showing little interest in visiting Jewish houses of worship. In the 1980s and 1990s, this reality changed, and synagogues became attractive to non-Jews, who, in groups or as individuals, began visiting synagogue services in relatively large numbers. While some of the visitors have come at the invitation of Jewish friends and others have come as part of interfaith visits or study tours, many have come out of curiosity or in search of a new community of faith. In the open market of religions of the latter decades of the 20th century, especially in the United States, Judaism has become, almost in spite of itself, an option that many spiritual seekers, most of them from educated middle-class Christian backgrounds, have seriously considered. By the turn of the 21st century, tens of thousands of Christians have come to celebrate Passover Seders, often in communal events organized by their churches. In many countries, Christians have organized councils of Christians and Jews, affiliated with the World Council of Christians and Jews, which was established in the dialogue era of Vatican II and has national councils throughout the world affiliated with it.⁴⁹

Although the interfaith dialogue has had remarkable achievements in decreasing negative stereotypes and improving relationships between Jews and Christians, it would be wrong to describe the attitude of mainstream Christianity toward the Jewish people as merely that of amity and friendship. Jewish observers have noted that official recognition did not necessarily equal full acceptance, while others have complained that old anti-Jewish sentiments have at times been

⁴⁷ For example, Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ An example would be the *Midrasha* in Durham, North Carolina.

⁴⁹ See William W. Simpson and Ruth Weyl, *The International Council of Christians and Jews*, (Happenheim: International Council of Christians and Jews, 1988); ICCJ News, no. 27 (Autumn/Winter 2002).

replaced by anti-Israeli ones.⁵⁰ During the same years of the rapid advancement of dialogue and reconciliation, especially after the 1967, many liberal Christians have become pro-Arab, strongly criticizing Israeli policies. Ironically, the same churches and organizations that take part in the dialogue and have come to recognize Judaism as a legitimate faith have become supporters of anti-Israeli lines. This has become increasingly evident since the 1970s, as liberal Christian groups and organizations, including the World Council of Churches, developed a strong commitment to national liberation movements, identifying the Israelis as oppressors.⁵¹ In addition, many Christian denominations have realized that their Middle Eastern co-religionists were mostly Arabs. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, churches in the Third World have gained greater influence in international church councils, such as the World Council of Churches, thus exercising influence on American and European Christian opinions as well.⁵² The relations of liberal Christian churches towards Jews since the late 1960s can be defined therefore as somewhat paradoxical—offering Judaism growing recognition but objecting to the Jewish state and its policies as well as to the political agenda of Jewish organizations on Middle-Eastern issues. Christian denominations, however, have often spoken with different voices. Within the same churches, there are theologians committed to dialoguing with Jews and Christian-Jewish reconciliation, who strive to build an appreciation for Judaism in their communities. The same churches also include activists and theologians who are concerned over Palestinian rights, view Israel as an oppressor, and who do not necessarily take interest in Christian-Jewish relationships. Jewish representatives in the dialogue, especially during the 1960s-1970s, have often seen it as their mission to include Israel on their agenda and to try to convince the non-Jewish participants in the dialogue of the importance of the Land of Israel for the Jewish people as well as the well-being of the Jewish state. In that, they were not always successful.

Conservative Christian Dialogue with Jews

The relationship between conservative Protestants and Jews developed along somewhat different lines than the relationship between Jews and liberal Christians. The conservatives as a rule were more hesitant to join official dialogue groups, yet Jews and conservative evangelicals have found less official means of dialogue and the attitudes of conservative evangelicals towards the Jews have also undergone huge transformations throughout the twentieth century.

As with liberal and mainstream Christians, the attitudes of conservative evangelical Protestants toward the Jews have reflected the nature of this segment of Christianity, its faith, and agenda. A major component of the evangelical theology is the belief that only those individuals who undergo a personal religious experience of conversion in which they accept Jesus as their savior will be saved and granted eternal life. Evangelical Protestants are therefore committed to spreading the Christian gospel world-wide. In evangelical eyes, granting legitimacy to the religious beliefs of others is an act of neglect towards them, and so conservative evangelicals do not lend themselves easily to dialoguing with representatives of other faiths. In their vision, all humanity should convert to Christianity in its evangelical interpretation. Conservative evangelicals

⁵⁰ Cf. Judith Hersheopf Banki, *Christian Responses to the Yom Kippur War: Implication for Christian Jewish Relations* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1974); Michael Lerner, *The Socialism of Fools: Antisemitism on the Left* (Oakland: Tikkun Books, 1992).

⁵¹ See, for example, C. M. King, *The Palestinians and the Church, 1: 1948-1956* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981); Larry Elkin, *Enduring Witness: The Churches and the Palestinians* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985).

⁵² See R. J. Zwi Weblowsky, "Jewish-Christian Relations: New Territories, New Maps, New Realities," in Otto D. Kulka and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr (eds.) *Judaism and Christianity Under the Impact of National Socialism* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1987), 531-6.

look upon the Christian Bible as the message of God to humanity and as the source of authority on how to live a Christian life. They have stood for what they have perceived as a literal interpretation of the Bible, historically opposing more progressive schools of biblical studies.

Many in the evangelical camp subscribe to a pre-millennialist messianic hope in the Second Coming of Jesus and his thousand-year reign on earth. In contrast to traditional Christian claims to be "true Israel," most evangelicals have viewed the Jews as historical Israel and the object of biblical prophecies about a glorious future, when the Messiah arrives and Israel is restored to its land. Evangelical Christians have welcomed the rise of the Zionist movement and the Jewish waves of immigration to Palestine as "signs of the time," indicators that the current era was ending and the apocalyptic events were about to begin.⁵³ They have seen in the establishment of the State of Israel preparation of the ground for the eventual building of the kingdom of God on earth. The Arab-Jewish war in 1967 had a very different effect on evangelical-Jewish relationship than on liberal Christian-Jewish attitudes. For evangelicals, the war in which Israel conquered the historical parts of Jerusalem, served as a proof that Israel was indeed born for a purpose, that the messianic times were near and that the Jewish people would play a crucial role in the events of the End Times. Their support for Israel increased throughout the 1970s-2000s, and they have become an important component of the pro-Israel lobby in America, and other countries with growing evangelical populations. While some Jews have been suspicious of conservative Christians, viewing them as a threat to an open pluralistic society, and many others resented evangelical missionary activities, a number of Jewish leaders and activists came to appreciate the Conservative Christian support.

Some liberal Jewish and Christian observers have pointed to the problematic elements of the conservative evangelical relationships with the Jews. Evangelical conceptions of the Jewish people, though not lacking in warmth and goodwill, are not free of negative stereotypes. Evangelical Christians believe that until the Jews accept Jesus as their personal Messiah they remain in a state of spiritual and moral deprivation. According to the evangelical understanding, Judaism cannot grant salvation to its believers, nor can the observance of its precepts have any value or serve any purpose after Christ's death on the Cross.⁵⁴ A number of evangelical authors have expressed frustration that the Jews had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah when he first appeared. Had they done so, the Kingdom of God upon Earth would have come into being already then. The primary means for conservatives to express their faith that Jews were still destined for a central role in God's plans for humanity has been to invest time and efforts in evangelizing them, as well as engage in acts of good will and welfare among Jews.

In conservative Protestant writings, the Jews often had been portrayed as the perpetrators of secular ideological and political movements such as communism, socialism, or secular humanism, which, in the conservative view, had aimed to destroy Christian civilization. Until the 1970s, evangelicals and Jews did not really have too many opportunities to encounter each other, a fact that contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes on both sides.⁵⁵ A study by sociologists commissioned by the Anti-Defamation League in the early 1960s pointed to more anti-Jewish prejudices among conservative evangelicals than among liberal Protestants or Roman

⁵³ Cf. Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000*.

⁵⁴ For example, Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁵⁵ Cf. a popular book circulated in evangelical circles, Leonard C. Yassen, *The Jesus Connection: To Triumph Over Antisemitism*, with introduction by Billy Graham (New York: Crossroad, 1986).

Catholics.⁵⁶ However, a similar study initiated by the Anti-Defamation League in the mid-1980s showed a drastic decline in the extent of such prejudices among the conservatives.⁵⁷ This change should be accounted for by the increased evangelical interest in and involvement with Jewish and Israeli affairs since the Arab-Israeli war in 1967 and the subsequent increase in information available to evangelicals on these topics.

While evangelicals have not seen Judaism as a religion offering its adherents spiritual meaning or eternal salvation, scholars of this camp have also joined in searching for the roots of Christianity in Second Temple Judaism. A number of conservative institutions, such as Wheaton College, have included Judaic studies in their curriculum. Evangelical students have visited Israel, at times participating in archeological digs there.⁵⁸ Conducted periodically by evangelical churches, colleges, Bible schools, and pro-Israel groups, visits to Israel have become common features of evangelical life. While evangelicals warmed up to Jews, Jewish warming up to evangelicals was slower, with many Jews still viewing evangelicals suspiciously.

The messages of evangelical missions to the Jews, and the glorified role Jews play in evangelical eschatology and imagery brought about an evangelical-Jewish movement: Jews, who have adopted the evangelical Protestant faith, yet have wished to retain their Jewish identity.⁵⁹ The rather assertive movement of messianic Jews or Jewish Believers in Jesus has become an important agent in shaping the evangelical-Jewish relationship. Missions too are agents of shaping evangelical opinions on Jews and Israel, distributing material on Israel among evangelical Christians, and lecturing on Israel in churches, and organizing tours to that country. Ironically, missions to the Jews and the Messianic-Jewish community serve as pro-Jewish interest groups within the larger evangelical community, promoting support for Israel and requesting a high priority to evangelization efforts among the Jews. While messianic Jews have strived for recognition as legitimate Jews, mainstream Jewish organizations have refused, as a rule, to dialogue with such groups.

Although conservative Protestants do not recognize the legitimacy of a religious faith not founded upon the acceptance of Jesus as a savior, and although Jews are committed to safeguarding their continued existence as a unique community, there have been some attempts at evangelical-Jewish conversations.⁶⁰ As a rule, evangelical leaders who have participated in the dialogue did not represent missionary organizations, but rather voices of intellectuals and academics within evangelical Christianity. On the Jewish side, participants included leaders of Jewish organizations, often coming from conservative Jewish groups, including Orthodoxy. Among the organizations established in America in the 1980s to further understanding between conservative Christians and Jews is the Holy Land Fellowship of Christians and Jews, founded by the Orthodox Rabbi Yehiel Eckstein. Eckstein has emphasized the importance of the Holy Land and the State of Israel to Jews and evangelicals alike and viewed support for Israel as a common

⁵⁶ Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

⁵⁷ Lynne Lanniello, "Release for Press," Anti-Defamation League, New York (8 January 1986).

⁵⁸ Cf., for example, copies of the periodical *The Jerusalem Perspective*. Cf. also Robert Lindsey, *A New Approach to the Synoptic Gospels* (Jerusalem: Dugit Publishing House, 1971).

⁵⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History and Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1974); David A. Rausch, *Messianic Judaism: Its History, Theology and Polity* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982).

⁶⁰ A. James Rudin and Marvin R. Wilson (eds.), *A Time to Speak: The Evangelical Jewish Encounter* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987); Marc Tanenbaum, Marvin R. Wilson and A. James Rudin, *Evangelical and Jews in Conversation on Scripture, Theology, and History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978).

basis for cooperation and understanding between the two groups. The Holy Land Fellowship has collected increasing amounts of money for helping in the immigration and absorption of Jews in Israel.

Right-wing Orthodox Jews, too, have come to appreciate the conservative evangelical political agenda. Rabbi Daniel Lapin from Seattle founded in 1991 a group called Toward Tradition, "a national coalition of Jews and Christians seeking to advance the nation toward traditional, faith based, American principles of limited government, the rule of law...free markets, a strong military, and a moral public culture."⁶¹ Orthodox rabbis like Lapin decided that they have more in common with conservative Christians than with liberal ones. Establishing such new organizations, rabbis like Eckstein and Lapin have created alternative dialogue groups unaffiliated with older, more institutionalized mainstreams ones. They have not been the only ones to pursue such a course.

Enlarging the Scope of the Dialogue

Between the late nineteenth century and the 1960s, the interfaith dialogue took place almost exclusively among Christians, and between Christians and Jews, and concentrated on improving the relationship between the two religious traditions. In 1893 Jewish rabbis sat side-by-side with Hindu, Buddhist, and Moslem delegates at the World Parliament of Religions, but until the latter decades of the twentieth century there were no systematic attempts at continued dialogue between Jews and members of non-Christian faiths. This reality was altered in the 1960s through the 2000s. While most Christian groups continued to see their relationship with the Jewish community as a major item on the interfaith agenda, they wished to dialogue with representatives of other faiths as well. During the 1980s-2000s, dialogue with Moslems became a major item on the Christian, and to a somewhat lesser extent, the Jewish interfaith agenda. Christian and Jewish leaders engaged more and more of their energies dialoguing with Moslem leaders. Such a dialogue was not an easy one. For many Moslems, including those not from the Middle East, Jews have been associated with Israel and were the supporters of a country that they often resented. Especially for liberal Christians, such a dialogue became urgent in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. For some of them, such a dialogue gained precedence over dialoguing with Jews. In a number of Christian churches, different activists, holding at times to opposing views, prefer to dialogue and promote rapprochement with either Jews or Moslems. Although a number of Jewish religious leaders raised their voice against the vilification of Islam and the harassment of Moslems in America, Moslem leaders have often trusted Christian representatives more than Jewish ones.⁶²

During the 1980s-2000s, new modes and forums of what could be called alternative interfaith dialogue developed between Jews and non-Jews. A solid pro-Israeli attitude on the part of Jewish representatives in the more official dialogue groups has characterized the interfaith dialogue since the 1940s and intensified in the late 1960s in the wake of the 1967 war. However, in the early 1980s, in the wake of the Israeli war in Lebanon, a number of Jews, in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere, founded alternative forms of dialogue in which Jewish leaders, who became critical of Israeli policies, came together with Christian and Moslem critics of Israel, attempting to promote peace negotiations or safeguard civil rights in Israel and its occupied territories.⁶³ Alternative forms of dialogue grew throughout the 1990s-2000s, correlating with larger

⁶¹ www.towardtradition.org

⁶² Yigal Schleifer, "No Dialogue, Only Mutual Distrust," *The Jerusalem Report* (September 23, 2002) 16-17.

⁶³ On such gatherings, see Otto Maduro, ed., *Judaism, Christianity and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

developments within the Jewish community in America, Britain and other countries. On the Jewish liberal side, a growing discontent with the older established representative bodies gave rise to the creation of new, alternative ones. The New Israel Fund, for example, has placed itself as an alternative to the veteran United Jewish Appeal, as a Jewish fundraiser for Israeli causes. It is no coincidence that the New Israel Fund has offered support to a number of "alternative" interfaith dialogue groups in Israel. Many of the participants in such activities in Israel are immigrant rabbis from English speaking countries, who are affiliated with all Jewish religious denominations.

Conclusion

As the interfaith dialogue heads into the 21st century, one can look back at over a century of Christian-Jewish dialogue and reach some conclusions. Essentially a liberal Christian initiative, Christians taking part in the dialogue in its early stages did not wish to resolve old-time issues. But they were willing to address current Jewish-Christian concerns and offer a forum to Jewish and Christian representatives. Interfaith dialogue grew into an unprecedented movement of Christian-Jewish reconciliation in the decades following World War II. At the turn of the twentieth century, the dialogue came to include discussions between Jewish, Christians, and representatives of other religious communities as well. While the interfaith dialogue affected the Christian and Jewish communities at large, it remained overwhelmingly the domain of ministers, priests, nuns and rabbis who became the official spokespersons of their communities, representing their issues, and interests.

Interfaith dialogue reached its zenith in the 1960s-1970s, when impressive unprecedented achievements were made in improving the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. This movement has, at least on the theoretical level, put to rest old accusations and animosities, bringing about more correct and tolerant relationships between the communities. Centuries-old Christian accusations against Judaism and Jews and unfavorable stereotypes were removed from sermons, textbooks, and scholarly works. For the most part, these changes took place consciously among liberal Christians, although they influenced some conservative groups as well. During the 1960s-1980s, a number of Christian theologians expressed an unprecedentedly generous understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, offering theoretical frameworks to the changes, while various councils and groups produced unprecedentedly reconciliatory statements.

The dialogue has been somewhat less successful, from a Jewish point of view, when its agenda turned towards the Israeli-Arab conflict. Many liberal Christians refused to tie pro-Israeli sentiments with reconciliation between the faiths. Paradoxically, just when the dialogue reached a historical peak bringing an unprecedented improvement in the relationship between Christians and Jews, it also reached a crisis. Christian groups that showed willingness to transform and reverse their opinion on Judaism and Jews refused to accept what seemed to them as a non-critical Jewish enchantment with the State of Israel. At the turn of the 21st century, some Jews and non-Jews alike created alternative dialogue groups, in which they have voiced their more critical opinions.

While interfaith relations have progressed dramatically, they have not brought about a full reconciliation between Jewish and Christian groups, with pockets of bitterness and suspicions remaining unresolved. Not all Catholics and Protestants, even members of mainstream churches, have accepted the legitimacy of Judaism. A series of more conservative Western churches developed more positive assessments of Jews, but on their own terms, which do not correspond with the liberal Christian paradigm. Some groups have not altered their opinions. Still, the

developments since the 1960s give room to optimism. At least in Western countries, Christian-Jewish relations have progressed remarkably.