

NEVER AGAIN

AN EXAMINATION OF CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF
THE HOLOCAUST



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Preface

With the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and the release of *Nostra Aetate* “The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (October 28, 1965), subsequent documents released by the Catholic Church regarding the Jews have been remarkably sensitive and progressive. Undeniably, the horrendous atrocities known as the Holocaust, or Shoah by many members of the Jewish faith, played a role in opening the Church’s eyes to the need for a reevaluation and reform of Catholic liturgy, dialogue and education regarding the Jews. In particular, due to the heavily hierarchical structure of the Church, I will examine the activities and writing of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) to gain a perspective as to the Church’s perceived role and attitude towards Judaism immediately prior to and during World War II. Aside from my examination of Pius XII’s writings and actions as representative of the official Church attitude during the Holocaust, I will focus on the unique dynamics at play in Germany throughout the life of the Third Reich and into the Second Vatican Council. It is in Germany where the tide of the Holocaust could have been stemmed and it is here where some of the main force and support for *Nostra Aetate* emanated. Lastly, although different levels of the Catholic Church played very complicated roles in the Holocaust, my paper will seek to analyze and understand the unique dynamics and developing relationship between Catholicism and Judaism rather than casting judgment on the Church’s role during the Holocaust.

Being Catholic myself, I have attempted to eliminate some level of unstated bias by acknowledging that my paper will examine the role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust from a Catholic perspective. Attention will be paid to the evolution of official Church documents, especially *Nostra Aetate*, in the Church’s attempt to improve relations with the Jews and

Judaism. I will try to show how *Nostra Aetate* was a watershed document that affected major change in official Catholic attitude and stance toward the Jews and Judaism.

I have found it both a blessing and a challenge to conclude that there is both overwhelming interest and a subsequent wealth of scholarly work examining Catholic-Jewish relations. As with most thesis papers, I have been forced to focus my research on a smaller time period in order to tackle the immense amount of material available. To this end, the main crux of my paper will surround the changes in Church attitude that resulted in the miraculous drafting of *Nostra Aetate*. This paper will give only a cursory examination of subsequent Church attitude and documents after Vatican II. Similarly, I will only cover very basic themes and events of the nearly 2,000 years of Catholic-Jewish relations prior to the Holocaust. Although my paper will analyze the situation in Germany to a limited degree, with the exception of Israel, my work will remain in the European sphere and will not attempt to analyze outside world opinion or actions during and after the Holocaust.

To date, countless scholarly works have been written about the Catholic Church and the Holocaust. While some of the major recent works released including: John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope*, James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword*, and Susan Zuccotti's *Under His Very Windows* tend to vilify Pope Pius XII and the Church's role during the Holocaust, several outstanding scholarly works have been produced which have contributed to the development and understanding of Catholic-Jewish relations. Foremost among the scholars producing such phenomenal work is Dr. Eugene Fisher, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Dr. Fisher's works, along with Sister Margherita Marchione, Father Pierre Blet, Jules Isaac, Peter Phayer and Mary Boys has provided the scholarly world and myself with a wealth of information and scholarship on Catholic-Jewish relations.

“For even in the best Christians, even in those who fought most courageously against Nazi anti-Semitism, it is easy to distinguish traces of a kind of subconscious anti-Semitism.”

~Teaching of Contempt by Jules Isaac~

Introduction: Recalling Central Aspects of the Holocaust

On September 1, 1939 the Wehrmacht of Nazi Germany, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, rolled its tanks across the German border into Poland, consequently starting the Second World War. For six agonizing and brutal years, in a war that was to claim over 60 million lives, the allied forces fought against the axis attempt to conquer the world. On August 15, 1945 the forces of the Empire of Japan surrendered and the allied forces emerged victorious.

Unbeknownst to many, another war was being fought in the European theater, a different kind of war; one in which there were no winners.

During World War II, Nazi Germany and its collaborators murdered approximately six million Jews. The Holocaust, or Shoah, is the name used to refer to this systematic, bureaucratic, and state-sponsored campaign of persecution and murder. Holocaust is a word of Greek origin meaning “sacrifice by fire.” Beginning with racially discriminatory laws in Germany, the Nazi campaign expanded to the mass murder of all European Jews. During the era of the Holocaust, the Nazis also targeted other groups because of their perceived “racial inferiority.” Gypsies, people with disabilities, Slavic peoples, Communists, Socialists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals were also among those people termed undesirable. Yet the Jewish case was unique. Jews were sentenced to death by reason of birth. The Nuremberg laws were part of a “State

ideology of immolation.”¹ The murder of east European Jewry by Nazi Germany began in late June 1941 with Hitler’s decision to invade the Soviet Union. What came to be known as the Holocaust, the decision to murder all European Jewry in six death camps, did not begin until the spring of 1942.

When it became apparent that thousands of baptized Christians had committed murderous acts against the fellow children of Abraham, and that Christian churches had been mainly silent in the face of Nazism, “It was apparent that a line of cosmic importance had been irrevocably crossed. Systemic evil had triumphed over Christian moral teachings.”² Faced with increasing knowledge of the role the Catholic Church played in the Holocaust, many in the Jewish community asked, “How many more millions of our brothers and sisters will need to be slaughtered before any word of contrition or repentance is heard in the seats of ancient Christian glory?”³ Unfortunately, it would take nothing less than the sacrifice of millions of innocent Jews to awaken the collective Christian conscience.

Between 1930 and 1965, the Catholic Church completely reversed its position relative to Jews. The centuries-old teaching of contempt gave way to recognition of the ongoing vitality of Judaism. This reversal indicates that the Church recognized it was unprepared for the Holocaust, and that, subsequently, it found itself compelled to rethink its relationship to Jews and Judaism. The answer was to be found in the Second Vatican Council held in Rome from 1962-1965. While the Council covered a range of theological and practical issues in the Catholic Church, the most controversial issue focused around a 15-line statement of Catholic relations towards Jews known as *Nostra Aetate*. *Nostra Aetate*, The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to

¹ Fisher, Eugene J, and Klenicki, Leon. *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 98.

² Fisher, Eugene J. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 13.

³ *Ibid.*, 52.

Non-Christian Religions, became a watershed document that sought to reverse nearly 2,000 years of Catholic disdain toward Judaism. Until this time, fundamentally, Christianity had never made up its mind as to where it stood in terms of its common patrimony with Judaism and its daily outlook and behavior toward Jews.⁴ Admittedly, the Catholic Church faces a long uphill struggle in its attempt to repair nearly two millennia of strained relations and persecution against the Jewish minority. Nevertheless, since 1965 the Vatican has released numerous statements expanding on *Nostra Aetate* and detailing how Catholics and Jews can correct misunderstandings and fallacies in both the theology and practice of their respective faiths.

I argue that the declaration of *Nostra Aetate* was addressed by the Council due to the experiences the then pope, John XXIII, had during World War II. His close proximity and experience with the suffering and persecution of the Jewish population in Europe gave him a new perspective and openness to a reevaluation of the situation that Pius XII was lacking. The papal succession of 1939, bringing Eugenio Pacelli (Pius XII) to the papacy, was the critical event shaping the Catholic Church's response to the Holocaust. It was the Holocaust, not tradition, which was the formative event that occasioned the Church's somersault. In the same way, it was the ascendancy of Angelo Roncalli (Pope John XXIII) that allowed the Church to finally reexamine flawed relations with Judaism that had culminated in the Holocaust.

⁴ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relation*, 40.

Part I: Understanding the Church and the Jews through the Centuries

“One of our most serious and incorrect assumptions concerning the formative centuries of the Jewish-Christian encounter is the notion that the interaction between Jews and Christians was one purely of hostility on the part of Christians and defensive self-isolation by Jews. Rather the relationship was far more dynamic on both sides”

~Interwoven Destinies by Dr. Eugene J. Fisher~

Chapter 1: Catholic Assumptions Regarding the Role and Status of the Jewish Faith

The Webster’s Universal Dictionary defines a Jew as: “Jew – to cheat in trade; as to Jew one out of a horse. To practice cheating in trade; as, he is said to Jew. To Jew down.” The great irony of this definition lies in the fact that a successful Christian business person is looked upon as using the gifts given by God, while a successful Jewish business person is considered a swindler. Rather than a gift, somehow it is a person’s Jewishness that leads to his or her success. Where did such absurd ideas originate? How many other preconceived notions about the Jewish faith are harbored by their Christian brethren? This chapter seeks to reveal many of the inaccuracies present in Catholic teaching and thought on the eve of the Second World War.

Lent, particularly Holy Week with its dramatic Passion narratives, has traditionally been the worst time of the year for Jewish-Christian relations. In centuries past, the Church placed gates around the Jewish ghettos. These gates were not meant to keep the Jews away from the Christians, but rather to protect the Jews from Christian vengeance that continued to be ignited by the Church’s teachings on Jewish responsibility for the death of Christ. The collective guilt for the crucifixion of Christ, otherwise known as Deicide, remained one of the most central

teachings of the Catholic Church regarding Jews and Judaism before the Second Vatican Council. Furthermore, for many Catholics of the time, the Jewish rejection of the Messiah was the source of any tribulations that subsequently fell upon those of Jewish faith.

According to Catholic teaching, one such tribulation caused by the rejection of Christ was the dispersion of the Jews as divine punishment in 70 AD with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. St. Augustine's *City of God* states: "But the Jews who rejected him, and slew him, ... after that were miserably spoiled by the Romans ... and dispersed over the face of the whole earth."⁵ A more recent report of the times published in 1952 entitled, *La catechese chretienne et le peuple de la Bible* studied over 2,000 different French-language books of Catholic instruction. Their investigators reported: "That Jesus Christ foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish people as the punishment for their rejection of their Messiah is the classic argument repeated by almost all manuals, an argument prompted neither by the Gospels nor by history."⁶

Another assumption central to Catholic teaching prior to the Second Vatican Council was the notion that, by virtue of a new covenant (New Testament), Christians have replaced Jews as God's chosen people. One understanding of the writings of the apostle Paul and his understanding of Christianity's place in the world helped to promulgate this notion. Furthermore, such assumption presumes the New Testament and Christianity accurately emphasize love whereas the Old Testament (Hebrew Testament) emphasized legalism, justice, and a God of wrath. "At the time of Jesus, the religion of Israel was mere legalism without a soul."⁷ The Pharisees, who were seen as hypocrites and enemies of Jesus, supposedly depicted this

⁵ Saint Augustine. *The City of God*, XVIII, 46.

⁶ Isaac, Jules. *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1964), 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

oppressive legalism. In essence, Jews were no longer a people blessed by God and Judaism had ceased to be a living faith.

Beginning in the 11th century, Catholicism went so far as to accuse Jews of using Christian blood for ritual sacrifices. Prior to Vatican II, Catholics held a veneration of Simon of Trent, which since the fifteenth century has been celebrated by an annual procession through the streets of Trent, repeating an insult to the whole of the Jewish people. Simon was a child found murdered in 1475. Allegations arose that Jews had murdered him so that his “Christian blood” might be used in the synagogue for the Passover Seder. Although the papacy continually rejected any notion of “Christian blood sacrifices” throughout the centuries, the continued veneration of Simon of Trent prior to the Second Vatican Council reveals just how warped Catholic perception of Judaism had become in certain areas. It then comes as no surprise that when questioned on Germany’s policies towards Jews, Hitler told bishops that he was simply completing what Christian teaching and preaching had been saying about the Jews for the better part of nineteen hundred years.

Perhaps underlying many of these assumptions is the presumption that God has only one blessing to give, as if we were rivals for God’s love. For centuries Catholics acknowledged that the Jews were a great spiritual people of the Biblical period whose magnificent monotheistic religion provided the setting for the coming of Christ. Unfortunately, most Catholics prior to the Second Vatican Council continued to see their religion as a fulfillment of Judaism; thus making the Jewish faith obsolete.⁸

⁸ Boys, Mary. *Has God Only One Blessing* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 5.

Chapter 2: Six Stages of Christian-Jewish Relations

In the previous chapter, many Catholic assumptions concerning Jews prior to the Second Vatican Council were divulged. Perhaps one of the most fundamental assumptions that has yet to be fully corrected is the reality of Catholic-Jewish relations throughout the centuries. Common Christian perception of Christian-Jewish relations has long assumed that the interaction between Christians and Jews resulted in hostility on the part of Christians and self-isolation on the part of Jews.⁹ Due to recent scholarship, studies of the Gospels of Mark, Mathew, and Luke in parallel columns reveals differing accounts of the Jewish population within each Gospel. A reading of these Gospels and placing them in their proper historical context in relation to the larger social, economical, and political picture reveals a very different story about the history of Christian-Jewish relations. Rather than a continuous history, Dr. Eugene Fisher has divided the history of Christian-Jewish relations into “six stages” that he uses to set the stage for reflection on where Jews and Christians should start dialogue today.¹⁰ This chapter will outline each of these stages in order to develop a clearer understanding of a more accurate history and potential for positive Catholic-Jewish relations.

The first stage in Christian-Jewish relations is the period encompassing Jesus’ ministry to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 AD. In the beginning, as recorded in the New Testament, Christianity saw itself as a part of Judaism rather than a distinct entity. The first apostles and disciples were all Jews. Christian feasts such as Easter and Pentecost were originally celebrated according to the Jewish calendar. Similarly, fundamental beliefs such as the

⁹ Fisher, Eugene J. *Interwoven Destinies: Jews and Christians Through the Ages* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

resurrection of the dead, heaven and hell, and the Last Judgment were all borrowed from the Jewish faith. In fact, Jesus is called “rabbi” in the New Testament for good reason. As far as historians can tell, Jesus had a Jewish mother, participated in Jewish customs and laws, and was viewed by people of his own time as a Pharisee, (i.e. the group of Jews from which rabbinic Judaism emerged). So what caused the increasing tension and ultimate break between Christianity and Judaism as depicted in certain Gospels?

The epistles were the earliest writing set down after the death of Jesus, and even these writings were 20 to 30 years after his death. The apostle Paul spends considerable time in his epistles stressing the uniqueness of Christianity in contrast to other forms of Judaism. Such writing is a main reason that Paul tends to stress only what is negative about the Jewish Law. For Paul, the Torah (first five books of the Hebrew Bible) had once been valid. Since the Torah looked forward to the coming of Christ, the fulfillment of that prophesy rendered the Torah and its believers as obsolete. Unfortunately, Paul’s writing on Jews was taken out of context and became instrumental in influencing the leaders of the early Church in a very negative way regarding Jews.

Next came the Gospels of Mark and Luke (50-60 A.D.). These writings, though subtly harsher than Paul’s judgments on the Law and Judaism, do not depict the Pharisees in a negative fashion. In particular, the Gospel of Mark gives only a handful of references to the Jewish population at all. It is also important to note that neither Christianity nor rabbinic Judaism emerged out of the first century as the traditions that we recognized today. The work of numerous “Fathers of the Church” and the Nicene Creed were still centuries away. Even the Mishnah, the earliest written product of rabbinic Judaism, was not set down until at least the end of the second century.

The second stage of Christian-Jewish relations is called “the parting of ways.” In this stage, the bulk of the New Testament was written. The Gospels of Matthew and John, which were not written down until the year 80 or 90 A.D., have a very different depiction of the Jewish community during the time of Christ. With the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D. after an ill-fated rebellion against Roman rule, only the Pharisees remained as viable Jewish leaders. Because the Pharisees remained as the major competitor of the Christians as interpreters of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament authors, especially Matthew, used highly inflated language to insult the Pharisees.¹¹

Recent historical research has given the scholarly community a better understanding of the difference between various sects of the Jewish community. In the New Testament era, the Pharisees, “Formed a complex, vitally creative movement.”¹² While the Sadducees represented the aristocratic and wealthy class, the Pharisees were seen as representing the common classes. Furthermore, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls beginning the late 1940’s added a new dynamic to the Jewish world of Jesus’ time with the discovery of a Jewish community known as the Essenes.

Overall, the writings of this period reflected the confrontations between the developing Church and rabbinic (Pharisee) tradition. By the time the Gospels were recorded, the Church was in direct competition with rabbinic Judaism for the conversion of the pagan Roman world. With the same God and a common Hebrew Bible, it became increasingly important for Christians to present themselves as unique and apart from their Jewish origins. Unfortunately, early Church writers took their present rivalry with rabbinic Judaism and projected these biases into their

¹¹ Fisher. *Interwoven Destinies*, 144.

¹² Fisher, Eugene J. *Faith Without Prejudice: Rebuilding Christian Attitudes Toward Judaism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 35.

accounts of Jesus' ministry. Thus, it comes as no surprise that many Christians depict the Pharisees as evil hypocrites and enemies of Christ.

The third stage begins with Emperor Theodosius I establishing Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 A.D. and lasts until the end of the 10th century with massive violence against helpless Jewish communities of Christian Europe by the Crusaders.¹³ This period remains a very ambiguous time for Christian-Jewish relations. On the one hand, prominent Church leaders such as Ambrose, Augustine, and John Chrysostom used the New Testament as a basis for condemning Jews to isolation and quarantine from Christian groups. Underlying the segregation, Augustine, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom were very much afraid of Judaism and used vehement remarks to convince the Judaizing Christians that Christian rites were more effective. Between 465 and 694 A.D., some twenty councils issued rulings regarding relations with the Jews. Ranging from the forbiddance of marriage between Jews and Christians to the prohibition of Jews from holding public office, the early Church attempted to discourage Jews from proselytizing Christians by virtual segregation of the two populaces.

According to Augustine, the Jews had the "mark of Cain" and therefore he claimed, "The Church admits and avows the Jewish people to be cursed."¹⁴ Nevertheless, the "mark of Cain" also allowed Jews to practice their religion in peace. As with the story of Cain, though God had condemned the Jews, they were at the same time recognized as God's former chosen people and so were left to worship in their synagogues in peace. Amongst early Christians of a common sort, most had no difficulty in combining their allegiance to Christ with a respect and often times participation in Jewish life of the synagogue. As late as the ninth and tenth centuries, we find accounts of bishops complaining that their Christian flock continued seeking blessings from

¹³ Fisher. *Interwoven Destinies*, 144

¹⁴ Boys. *Has God Only One Blessing*, 7.

rabbis, indicating that perhaps on a community level, relations between the two faiths may have been as much positive as negative.¹⁵

Overall, the first millennium for Christian-Jewish relations was not altogether that hostile. We find numerous accounts of positive interactions between Jews and Christians, as well as Jews holding prominent positions in Christian communities. Unfortunately, according to Dr. Fisher, the year 1096 A.D. marked a drastic turning point in relations.

In 1096 A.D. a Papal call to liberate the “Holy Land” from infidels (Muslims) resulted in a peasant Crusade that mercilessly attacked Jews in the Rhineland communities of Worms, Mainz, and Cologne. The reasoning was very simple: Jews were closer at hand. This tragic event commences the fourth stage of Christian-Jewish relations from the tenth through the sixteenth centuries. During this period, the Church taught contempt against Jews and Judaism. Although initially only theoretical, these teachings developed into such tragic Christian acts against their Jewish brethren as forced exiles, baptisms, and ghettos as well as Talmud burnings and blood libels. Both popes Gregory IX (1227-1241) and Innocent IV (1243-1254) ordered the burning of Talmuds. At one point a vicious rumor circulated throughout Christian Europe that the Jews had poisoned the wells of Christians causing the Black Death.

Apart from the negative papal statements and policies released during the late Middle Ages, it is interesting to note that even the reform movement initiated by Martin Luther continued many of the Church practices and attitudes regarding Jews and Judaism. In Luther’s first writing on the Jews in 1514, he reiterated that God had rejected the Jewish people and their suffering was a direct result of their rejection of the Messiah. Along with the rest of Christian tradition, Luther was inconsistent with regard to the theological interpretation of suffering. “When Christians suffered, it was a sign that they were God’s new Israel, sharing in the suffering

¹⁵ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relation*, 5.

of Christ and as martyrs to the truth of the Gospel. But when Jews suffered, it was a sign of God's rejection and punishment of them for their iniquities."¹⁶

Although forced conversion of Jews was officially banned with mixed results, it remained an excommunicable offense to disrupt Jews at their worship throughout the Middle Ages. The end of the Middle Ages (12th –16th centuries) witnessed the Jews being expelled from much of Western Europe. Aside from the Muslim lands, the Papal States and areas such as Poland became the only remaining refuges for Jews after being expelled from the rest of Christian Europe. The Spanish Inquisition, in particular, was extremely oppressive for the Jewish populations. The Inquisition began to view rabbinic Judaism as a biblical heresy. Jews were no longer seen as a remnant from the Biblical past that had been superseded, but rather as a demonic force to be contained and ruthlessly suppressed.¹⁷ Subsequently, the Inquisition resulted in the physical expulsion of Jews from Spain. In some cases, even Jews who were baptized were interrogated and assaulted for being “New Christians.” Yet even in arguably one of the darkest periods of Christian-Jewish relations, we find many ambiguities present.

In the twelfth century, for example, Popes Alexander III and Innocent III set down a “Constitution for the Jews.” Though the popes approved of oppressive measures such as forced ghettos, the Constitution explicitly forbade forced conversion of Jews, the disruption of Jewish worship and feasts, and desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and involuntary servitude. We also find Pope Gregory X (1271-1276) renewing the *Sicut Judaeis* originally issued by Pope Gregory I. Aside from upholding the rights of the Jews to worship, Gregory X added that accusations against Jews based solely on Christian testimony was invalid without Jewish witnesses as well.¹⁸

¹⁶ Fisher. *Interwoven Destinies*, 113.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ Dalin, David G. *The Myth of Hitler's Pope: How Pope Pius XII Rescued Jews from the Nazis* (Washington, DC: Regnery Pub., 2005) 20.

Research has also uncovered instances of fruitful interaction between Church and Synagogue musicians during the Middle Ages. Even works and teachings of religious thinkers could transcend the distinct boundaries between Catholics and Jews. But these instances were far from the norm.

In the end, historians often find conflicting teachings and actions within the Church regarding relations with Jews. On the one hand, the Church produced high moral and ethical teachings based on justice and love, teachings very similar to those expressed by Judaism. On the other hand, members of the Church at large participated in murderous, hateful, and contemptuous behavior towards Jews and Judaism. “The nineteen hundred year record of Catholic attitudes and actions directed toward the Jewish people is, by and large, a tragic one, filled with suffering and persecution.”¹⁹ By the late Middle Ages, the Church awakened to the true nature of the Talmud which demonstrated that Jewish history did not end with the death of Christ. It thus became evermore necessary to eliminate the Jewish presence from orderly Christian society during this time. Nevertheless, it remains dangerous to project the state of affairs of the late Middle Ages with regard to Christian-Jewish relations back several hundred years into the period of Jesus’ ministry and the subsequent recording of this period in the New Testament.

The fifth stage of Christian-Judaic relations lasts from the Enlightenment to the eve of World War II. Although the enlightenment freed Jews from the ghettos and established their legal equality throughout most of Europe, Jews were still considered “outsiders” by much of European society. To make matters worse, though the modern world enabled the Jews to contribute significantly to European culture and society, new socio-economic factors supplemented the old religious bigotry of Christian teaching.

¹⁹ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 11.

Though Jews under persecution by the Church typically had the option to convert, the new pseudo-scientific racism of modern anti-Semitism saw one's "Jewishness" as an incurable and inherited disease that could only be cured through elimination. The "contempt for the Jews" so prevalent in the late Middle Age Christian tradition cannot alone account for the atrocities and mentality of Nazi Germany. Nineteenth century racial anti-Semitism built upon old religious bigotry of the Church using pseudoscientific terminology about race and genetics. The New pseudo-scientific racism sought to justify colonialization and the slave trade industry. For the Nazis, there was no question of ghettos, containment, or even forced conversion. For centuries the Jews were scapegoats of any ill falling upon society as well as Christian insecurities; now they were fated to die by reason of birth. "Despite the virulent anti-Semitism of the Nazi party, Germans could vote for its candidates because they had already been exposed to a milder Christian form of this disease for centuries."²⁰ How did the Catholic Church respond to the new pseudo-scientific racism of modern anti-Semitism? Prior to the Holocaust, their response was lukewarm at best.

Although the Church had defined the dogma of Papal Infallibility in matters of faith and morals at the First Vatican Council (1870), the popes did not speak officially about the Jews. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Church did not give a high priority to Catholic-Jewish relations simply because the Vatican itself had not given the matter of anti-Semitism a high priority.²¹ There are certainly instances where popes did speak out against anti-Semitism. Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) spoke out in defense of the Jews, and especially in defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French military officer falsely accused of treason in the famous Dreyfus Affair of 1894. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation was that much of the Catholic clergy believed

²⁰ Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing*, 43.

²¹ Phayer, Michael. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 7.

that the isolation of the Jewish population was the best way to combat any imagined “Jewish threats” to Christianity. The idea of Jews being sent to camps during the Third Reich was not so very foreign to the ghettos historically condoned by the Catholic Church.

In September of 1938, as Hitler made increasing demands for Lebensraum (living area), Pope Pius XI began to build a bridge between Catholics and Jews. Becoming deeply concerned about fascist racism late in his life, he told a group of Belgian Catholics that Christians are children of Abraham, making anti-Semitism something that should be abhorred by the Church. Unfortunately, Pius XI’s actions were too little and too late. He died in 1939 before his encyclical could be released that spoke of Catholics being “Spiritual Semites.” With the onslaught of World War II and the subsequent atrocities committed during the Holocaust, Ronald Modras writes: “Neither the Vatican, nor any other church, nor the world Jewish community... was institutionally or psychologically prepared to deal with the historically unprecedented emergency that was the Holocaust.”²² The Catholic Church simply had not addressed certain conscious and subconscious biases towards the Jews and Judaism. This failure to address these problems coupled with a limited theory of human rights may have significantly curtailed Catholic institutional response to Nazism.²³ On September 1, 1939, German forces crossed into Poland, thus commencing the sixth stage of Christian-Jewish relations that was to last until 1965. The remainder of this thesis will focus on the sixth and final stage, which I term “Redemption.”

²² Modras, Ronald. “Christian Anti-Semitism and Auschwitz: Some Reflections on Responsibility,” *New Theology Review* 10/3 (1997), 61.

²³ Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing*, 72.

Part II: Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust

If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first... Remember the word I spoke to you, 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

~John 15:18-20~

Chapter 3: Pius XII

On March 2, 1939, after three intense days of deliberation, it was announced that Eugenio Pacelli was to be the next leader of the Catholic Church, taking the name Pius XII. Recognizing that fascist aggression was beginning to spiral out of control, the Vatican sought a leader who could maintain peace. As Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pacelli was the perfect candidate. In 1933, in accord with the wishes of Pope Pius XI, Cardinal Pacelli signed a Concordat with Germany in order to protect German Catholics and the Church. In 1937, Pacelli participated, to a large degree, in the drafting of Pope Pius XI's encyclical entitled, "Mit Brennender Sorge" (With Burning Anxiety), which depicted National Socialism as the arrogant abandonment from Jesus Christ, the denial of Christ's doctrine, a cult of violence, an idolatry of race and blood bent on overthrowing human liberty and dignity.²⁴ The document urged German Catholics to resist the appeals of the quasi-paganism of the Nazi regime and attack the racism that compromised a core part of National Socialism. So strong was Cardinal Pacelli's opposition to the Third Reich that the day after his election to the papacy the Nazi newspaper, *Berliner Morgenpost*, stated: "The election of Cardinal Pacelli is not accepted with favor in Germany because he was always opposed to Nazism and practically determined the policies of the Vatican under his

²⁴ Marchione, Margherita. *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 146.

predecessor.”²⁵ At the onset of his papal reign, Pius told Vatican officials that “to me the German question is the most important; I will reserve handling it to myself.” He added, “Naturally I will follow German matters closer than all others.”²⁶ Pius XII even invited German bishops to write to him directly, so that he had a means of corresponding with the country. With such experience in German affairs, why did Pius XII respond to Hitler’s aggression in the fashion that he did? Why didn’t the Pope and the Church explicitly condemn Nazism or excommunicate Adolf Hitler at the very least?

To understand the actions and writings of Pius XII during the Second World War, it must be established that Pius XII was first and foremost a diplomat and all of his subsequent actions taken during the Holocaust should be viewed through this lens. Pius learned his diplomatic skills from the example of Benedict XV, the Pope whose policy of strict neutrality in the First World War was seen as Christ-like leadership. “First faith, then reason, then experience taught Pius that provocative declarations beget violent response.”²⁷ Pius XII’s reserved remarks also reflected the Church’s desire to avoid previous mistakes. Two were largely of the Church’s own making, namely, the Church’s condemnation of the French Revolution and the refusal of the popes from Pius IX to Pius XI to recognize the government of unified Italy. Taking one political side over another caused the Church to lose serious influence in the respective countries. Thus, Pius XII’s policy of neutrality was completely in line with the neutral responses of previous popes. Although the Pope implicitly condemned Nazism, had he explicitly condemned the Nazis, he would also have had to condemn Allied atrocities such as the immoral bombings of Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki in the same breath.

²⁵ Ibid., 57.

²⁶ Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 49.

²⁷ Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*, 22.

Pope Pius XII spent the first several months of his papacy negotiating and pleading for peace both publicly and behind the scenes. With Adolf Hitler placing increasing pressure on Benito Mussolini to join the imminent war, Pope Pius did not overlook any opportunity to support the neutrality of the Italian government. He was rewarded with a degree of success in negotiations that temporarily convinced Mussolini to stay neutral. Negotiations with Hitler, as other leaders of Europe had learned, were absolutely futile. In his first encyclical, released October 20th, just over a month after the beginning of the war, Pius XII continued to plead for peace. He also pleaded for the acceptance of Jews by stating that in the Catholic Church there is, “neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision.”²⁸ For Pope Pius, peace always remained his first goal. His 1941 Christmas message on the Vatican Radio was described by the *New York Times* as “the lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe this Christmas... In calling for a ‘real new order’ based on ‘liberty, justice and love,’ to be attained only by a ‘return to social and international principles capable of creating a barrier against the abuse of liberty and the abuse of power.’”²⁹ On Christmas Eve 1942, while the Nazi power was at its height, Pius was the lone voice on the European continent that sent a message implicitly condemning the Nazi regime. British scholar Anthony Rhodes documents that the Gestapo saw the message as virtually accusing the German people of injustice towards the Jews.³⁰

Aside from radio messages and documents denouncing Nazi racial crimes, Pius XII also directly acted to save Jews. It is common fact that no broad actions involving Catholic churches in Rome are carried out without the Pope’s approval. On the eve of German deportation of Jews from Rome, Pius gave the order to provide sanctuary for Jews; opening the Vatican and no less

²⁸ Summi Pontificatus as quoted by David Dalin, *The Myth of Hitler’s Pope*, 73.

²⁹ Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*, 61.

³⁰ Rhodes, Anthony. *The Vatican in the Age of Dictators: 1922-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1973), 272.

than one hundred-fifty convents and monasteries in Rome. In large part because of Pius' actions, only 1,015 Jews of Rome's 6,800 were deported. In his book *Three Popes and the Jews*, author Pinchas Lapide states that Pius XII: "Was instrumental in saving at least 700,000 but probably as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands."³¹

Recently, several authors have stated that Pius XII could have responded to the crisis in a much different and more effective manner, saving thousands more lives in the process. Dr. Michael Phayer acknowledges that while Pius XII did employ diplomatic means as effectively as possible, diplomatic means are only sufficient within the boundaries of a civilized behavior. The atrocities of the Holocaust and the mentality of Hitler ruptured the boundaries of civilization beyond all measure, thus rendering diplomatic means useless.³² Father John Langan argues that Pius XII did follow the principles of neutrality, but he "allows his commitment to neutrality and his pastoral care for all parties to restrict his consideration of the practical implications of these principles in such a way that outside observers have reason to judge him to be complaisant in the face of overwhelming evils."³³ Certainly Pius XII could have supported individual or group resistance with financial and moral support at the very least. That he refused to do so indicates to many that absolute neutrality prevailed over principled resistance to evil.

Despite this opposition, the condemnation of Nazism had other drawbacks as well. After the beginning of the war in 1939, when German Catholics refused to pray for a Nazi victory, Hitler ordered over seven hundred German monasteries and convents closed. It must be remembered, that in addition to the six million Jews murdered, an equal amount of non-Jews, including over a million Catholics, were deliberately murdered as well. Hitler viewed the

³¹ Pinchas Lapide as quoted in David Dalin, *The Myth of Hitler's Pope*, 13.

³² Phayer. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 161.

³³ Langan, John P. *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Christmas Messages of Pius XII (1939-1945)* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004) 187.

Catholic Church as an enemy to Nazism that needed to be eliminated once the current war was won. During the war, hundreds of priests and nuns were sent to concentration camps. A recently discovered document reveals a message from Hitler to “massacre Pius XII with the entire Vatican.” The document plan, referred to as “Rabat-Fohn,” named the Eighth Division of the SS Cavalry and the reason is to be “The Papal Protest in Favor of the Jews.”³⁴

In regards to the question of excommunication, papal precedent revealed the extreme ineffectiveness of such an action over the last four or five centuries. Excommunicating Luther did not slow his Protestant movement, and certainly only prompted Henry VIII to separate from the Catholic Church. The Vatican power to excommunicate held weight only in a small period of time during the Middle Ages and never demonstrated power of that kind since.

Excommunication of Hitler in a country whose army was mostly Protestant anyways was not only futile, but dangerous as well. It was well understood that Hitler had a remarkable fury and was extremely unpredictable and irrational. Bishops and priests alike warned Pius that open defiance would only lead to great brutality from the state that was already tightly monitored by the Gestappo. A papal statement would only serve to tighten the oppressive screw of the Nazi regime in occupied countries, only this time the Pope would receive blame. As Pius wrote in February 1941 to German bishops: “Where the pope wants to cry out loud and strong, it is expectation in silence that is unhappily imposed on him; where he would act and give assistance, it is patience and waiting that are imposed.”³⁵

Nevertheless, according to Sister Pasqualina Lehnert, in the summer of 1942 the Pope was ready to attempt such open defiance and drafted a fiery denunciation of Nazi atrocities. Pius XII strongly considered gambling that the Nazis would not respond with overwhelming and

³⁴ Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*, 72.

³⁵ Blet, Pierre. *Pius XII and the Second World War: According to the Archives of the Vatican* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), xiii.

brutal retaliation. Before he could release his denunciation, the Pope received his answer. On July 26, 1942 Dutch bishops, including Archbishop of Utrecht Johannes de Jong, issued a decree that openly condemned Nazi deportations of Dutch workers and Jews. The Nazi response was total. Over 40,000 innocent Catholics of Jewish descent were rounded up and never heard from again.³⁶ After this event, Sister Lehnert said the Pope was convinced that while the Bishop's protest cost forty thousand lives, a protest by him would mean at least two hundred thousand innocent lives that he was not ready to sacrifice.³⁷ While politicians, generals, and dictators might gamble with the lives of people, a Pope could not. Pius XII often repeated what he told the Italian ambassador to the Vatican in 1940, "We would like to utter words of fire against such actions [German atrocities] and the only thing restraining us from speaking is the fear of making the plight of the victims even worse."³⁸

Perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of many people's thoughts today regarding Pius XII's actions during the Holocaust is the narcissistic attitude that they would have done better. How large a proportion of the world today speaks out against the atrocities being committed in the Sudan? Much like the present world, people during the Holocaust simply couldn't comprehend the degree and immensity of the genocide. Simply put, the Vatican was not institutionally prepared to deal with an emergency on the scale of the Holocaust. Though the Vatican originally sought to negotiate refuge and create national relief committees for Jews forced out of their homelands, after 1942 the Holy See's activity was now solely directed towards opposing a deportation whose end became increasingly clear, yet perhaps not anymore comprehensible.

³⁶ Presser, Jacob. *The Destruction of the Dutch Jews, translated by Arnold Pomerans*. (New York: Dutton, 1969), 148.

³⁷ Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*, 23.

³⁸ *Actes et Documents du Saint-Siege Relatifs a la Second Guerre Mondiale*, vol. VI (Vatican City: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 1972), 423.

As early as 1942, the Holy See's Charge d'Affairs in Bratislava, Giuseppe Burzio, wrote that deportation was for the most part the equivalent of a death sentence. On May 22, 1944 he sent a copy of the "protocol of Auschwitz" to the pope.³⁹ Even by the end of 1942, the Holy See had received accounts from at least nine different countries about the ongoing murder of the Jews. Nevertheless, such information was also available to leaders around the world. Jan Karski, a liaison officer of the Polish underground who infiltrated both the Warsaw Ghetto and a German concentration camp in late 1942 reported his findings in audiences with both Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. He was virtually ignored in both instances. Much like the rest of the world, the Vatican was a virtual dead end for information about the genocide. In reality, it wasn't until the Nuremberg trials that people realized that the war crimes were even about the Jews. Prior to the realizations at Nuremberg, Nazi war criminals were simply to be tried on crimes against humanity.

Could Pope Pius XII have shared information about the Holocaust with Catholic resistance movements in greater Germany or with the thousands of other networks he had throughout the world? Should Pius XII have sounded the trumpet and condemned Nazism and all its evils? Even if Pius XII had fully comprehended the immensity of the Holocaust, what could he have done differently? Critics of Pius XII tend to ignore the reality of who had the power and the will to destroy mercilessly from 1933-1944. These critics pretend that Pius XII possessed some kind of extraordinary ability that no one else in the world had, to make Hitler obey him.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, these questions remain controversial yet are frustrated by the Vatican records of the time. To date only four men: Pierre Blet, Angelo Martini, Burkhardt Schneider and Robert A. Graham have seen the documents and writings of the Vatican during the Second World War in

³⁹ Blet. *Pius XII and the Second World War*, 158.

⁴⁰ Marchione. *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*, 13.

their entirety. They were assigned the task of reviewing the documents and between 1965 and 1981 a twelve volume work of their research entitled *Actes et Documents du Saint Siege relatifs a la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* was published by the Vatican Press. Even with complete information, people today cannot possibly fully comprehend the situation faced by individuals during the Holocaust. It remains that only Pius XII can truly answer what the intentions in his heart were regarding the plight of the Jews. “Judgments about Pius XII’s public statements, quiet diplomacy, and ‘silences’ seem, in hindsight, not between good and evil, but between two evils in the midst of evil.”⁴¹

Chapter 4: Germany and the Church During the War

According to the December 23, 1940 issue of *Time* magazine on page 38, renowned physicist, Jew, and agnostic Albert Einstein stated:

*Being a lover of freedom, when the Nazi revolution came in Germany, I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth, but no, the universities immediately were silenced. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers, whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love of freedom, but they, like the universities, were silenced in a few short weeks... Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler’s campaign for suppressing the truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom.*⁴²

Although much of present Germany is composed of the Protestant faith, during the Second World War, a largely Catholic population dominated most of southern Germany in the region known as Bavaria. In a pastoral letter dating as early as February of 1931, the bishops of eight

⁴¹ Blet. *Pius XII and the Second World War*, xv.

⁴² Albert Einstein as quoted in Margherita Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*, 33.

Bavarian dioceses stated that the rising National Socialist Party of Adolf Hitler rejects “the basic premises” of Catholic teaching. The Bavarian bishops acknowledged that racial superiority and anti-Semitism were contrary to Christian teaching.⁴³ Recognizing that Nazi ideology was both incompatible and threatening to the Catholic faith in Germany, the papacy strove to create a truce with the German government that took the form of the Concordat of 1933. At best the Concordat provided a legal framework from which the papacy could protect the legal rights of its flock; but in reality the agreement proved to be an amendable document that also served as an obstacle limiting Catholic protest on matters such as the Jewish question which was outside the scope of the agreement. What was the attitude of Catholic bishops in Germany during the Holocaust? What role did the 1933 Concordat play in saving the Church and Jews from Nazi oppression? Finally, at the end of the Holocaust, what role did German Catholics believe they played in retrospect?

In principle and most oftentimes in practice, Catholic teaching proved to be completely incompatible with the National Socialist ideology of the Hitler regime. Hoping to protect Catholics against the increasingly oppressive Nazi regime, in 1933 Cardinal Pacelli was ordered by Pope Pius XI to sign a Concordat with Germany in order to protect the religious freedom of German Catholics and the Church. Although Hitler signed the agreement on July 20, 1933, in a move that was to foreshadow events to come, five days later he abolished the Catholic Youth Movement and soon after forbade the publication of Catholic newspapers and religious processions.⁴⁴ Indeed, such was the animosity between Church and state that the Archbishop of Munich, Michael Cardinal von Faulhaber, who led the Catholic opposition in Germany against the Nazis, narrowly avoided assassination in 1934 by Nazi thugs and had his residence attacked

⁴³ Dalin, *The Myth of Hitler's Pope*, 38.

⁴⁴ Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*, 56.

by a Nazi mob in 1938. During Lent 1937, after repeated violations of the Concordat and the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical "Mit brennender Sorge" (With Burning Sorrow) with the help of German bishops and Cardinal Pacelli. It was smuggled into Germany and read in all German Catholic churches at the same hour on Palm Sunday 1937. It did not explicitly mention Hitler or Nazism, but it firmly condemned the Nazi doctrines.

Despite the contempt Catholic leaders in Germany maintained towards the Nazi regime, German Catholic response to the Holocaust was limited for several reasons. Prior to the Holocaust, Jewish-Catholic relations had become cordial and somewhat friendly as exemplified by the close relationship between Cardinal Faulhaber and Rabbi Leo Baerwald. Nevertheless, as we saw earlier, for many Catholic clergy the deportation of Jews to "hold camps" was an altogether acceptable solution to the Jewish question that had plagued the Church for centuries. For some bishops, including Cardinal Adolf Bertram and Conrad Grober, complete ignorance of the Holocaust was claimed as the rationale for their limited intervention on behalf of the Jews. In many ways, Pius XII's tenacious insistence on retaining and abiding by the established Concordat inhibited bishops from speaking about matters not directly related to the Catholic Church. The fact that Cardinal Adolf Bertram, Conrad Grober and several other bishops failed to identify Nazi atrocities being committed towards Jews simply reveals the ways in which the 1933 Concordat was deliberately utilized by Catholic clergy to ignore atrocities not directly related to immediate Church survival. Unfortunately, due to suppression of free speech and political parties, it was the role of the German bishops such as Bertram and Grober to seek out and protest the Holocaust in some form.

Although some German bishops did not openly speak about the Holocaust, there were also those such as Bishop Konrad Graf von Preysing , Bishop Faulhaber and Bishop Dietz who offered straightforward and courageous opposition to the ideology and tactics of the Nazis. The effect of these protests was somewhat limited by the lack of a unified statement on the murder of the Jews. Nevertheless, in their 1942 Fulda meeting, German bishops heavily debated releasing a document calling for an end to the persecution of the Jews. In 1943 they rejected the draft for a number of reasons. To begin with, in a heavily hierarchical structure, the German bishops willing to act looked to Pius XII or his nuncio In Berlin, Cesare Orsenigo, to push them in this direction. Cautiously, Pope Pius refrained from granting any such direction for the issuing of an explicit statement condemning Nazi treatment of the Jews. Secondly, many of the bishops saw the Concordat as an obstacle forcing them to refrain from speaking their minds about issues not directly related to church matters. Lastly, many of the bishops felt that an explicit statement against Nazi actions would place the Church in grave danger.

In the end, though lacking a unified voice, many German bishops spoke out on their own against the murder of Jews. However, these individual protests limited the boldness with which the bishops could express themselves. The end result of this was a standoff: the Nazis were unable to “move the German people from passive anti-Semitism into vicious racism,”⁴⁵ and the Catholic clergy were unable to embolden the general population to speak out against Nazi racism. This standoff made it possible for Hitler to remove almost 9,000 Jews out of Bavaria during the war while the public remained indifferent.

Immediately following the war, while the World Council of Churches called for a statement of guilt to be issued by the German Protestant church, Pius XII forcefully defended the integrity of the German church and its members. Pius was quick to state that German Catholics

⁴⁵ Phayer. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 78.

were martyrs, and that most Catholics had opposed Nazism with all their hearts.⁴⁶ As a result of German Catholic leaders insisting that they were victims of the Nazis, postwar church leaders expressed few words of sorrow for the real victims, the Jews. Many bishops claimed they had put up the same sort of passive resistance that was derived “from the higher example set by Jesus when he was brought before the High Priests, before King Herod, and Pilate.”⁴⁷ Perhaps more controversial than the response of German Catholic leaders to the Holocaust was the actions taken by the Vatican to provide refuge for Holocaust perpetrators. Several cases stand on record of the Vatican attempting to reduce the sentences of Nazi war criminals, or worse, allowing fugitives and war criminals to escape justice. Bishop Hudal and Father Dragonovic helped notorious Holocaust perpetrators such as Franz Stangle (commandant of the Treblinka death camp, and Adolf Eichmann (deportation chief of the Reich Main Security Office) to escape. Though the Holy See claims these men acted independently of the Vatican, evidence points to the contrary.

In many situations, it was the Concordat, not ill will towards Jews, which had kept the German bishops from speaking out about Nazi anti-Semitism prior to and during the war. Limited knowledge, a sense of their own victimization, and priorities aside from the plight of the Jews enabled the suppression of most Holocaust reflection throughout the late 1940's and 1950's in Germany. Because Germany had perpetrated the Holocaust, changing Catholic-Jewish relations was much slower and more complicated than in western countries. The mood of the country in the 1950's did not support the topic of Catholic-Jewish relations that would serve to remind the public of the Holocaust. Overall, the situation in Germany regarding Catholic-Jewish relations after the Holocaust can be summed up in a single word – silence.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁴⁷ Phayer. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 146.

Chapter 5: Christian-Jewish Relations Between WWII and Vatican II

While Catholic-Jewish relations in Germany were largely left unaddressed in an attempt to move on and avoid remembrance of the Holocaust, the rest of Europe reestablished a “business as usual” mentality. Rather than addressing the Holocaust, most of Europe and the world were now preoccupied trying to combat the Communist aggression that had replaced the fallen fascist governments in their threat to democracy. During the late 1940’s and throughout the 1950’s there were no major indications that Catholic-Jewish relations within the Church would change. Why was there not a greater outcry for reform of Catholic teaching and attitudes regarding the Jews? Why were the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust virtually silent during this time? If the revolutionary Second Vatican Council was called in the early 1960’s, what forces prompted the Pope to call such a meeting?

There were several reasons explaining the lack of concern for reforming Catholic-Jewish relations. To begin with, the Catholic Church saw itself as a principle victim of the Holocaust and had yet to fully grasp the real meaning of the Shoah and its principle targets. Secondly, the Vatican simply had higher priorities. Repairing wartorn countries and addressing the threat of Communism occupied much of the Church’s energy during this time. There was also very little request for a reexamination of Catholic-Jewish relations. Not only had the Church largely denied any responsibility for the Holocaust, but also Pope Pius XII enjoyed near-universal acclaim for aiding European Jews and enjoyed an enviable reputation amongst Christians and Jews alike throughout the remainder of his life. Lastly, there was no sufficient outcry from the Jewish communities of the world to change Catholic attitudes and practices regarding Jews.

One of the main events that ushered in a new understanding of Jews and Judaism was the rebirth of Israel in 1948. Finally the Jewish people had ended their sojourn and established a place where they were no longer outsiders. For Judaism, the land of Israel plays two crucial roles: first, as the “concrete homeland of the people, making possible the institutions of the Jewish religion”; second, as a “symbolic expression of the harmony and intimate love between God and the people.”⁴⁸ Jews discovered that the only way to protect themselves was to establish a state and take responsibility so that the covenant people could be kept alive. Interestingly, for the first several years of its creation, the nation of Israel was very much at odds with those Holocaust survivors who sought refuge within the country.

In the second half of 1945, some 90,000 Jewish refugees came to Palestine from Europe. All had lived under Nazi occupation; some had been in concentration camps. In the next three years, another 60,000 survivors came, and in the first year of statehood, nearly 200,000 more refugees came. Thus, at the end of 1949, nearly 350,000 Holocaust survivors were living in Israel comprising almost a third of the population. Many of these survivors felt that it was a “patriotic duty” to tell their stories, as often they were the last living Jews who could recall what happened to their communities. Sadly, their stories of courage and triumph fell on deaf ears.

Author Tom Segev writes that the Zionist response to the rise of the Third Reich and the subsequent arrival of Jewish refugees was greeted by a largely compassionless response from the Jewish community in Palestine.⁴⁹ Members of the next generation of Israel tended to avoid Holocaust survivors. An educator in a teacher’s magazine released in Israel stated: “Our children read and hear much about the destruction of the Exile, the Jews under occupation, yet their hearts

⁴⁸ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 61.

⁴⁹ Segev, Thomas. *The Seventh Million: the Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 11.

are hard and uncaring about it all.”⁵⁰ For many Israelis, the Holocaust came to be seen as a Jewish defeat. Its victims were scorned for having let the Nazis murder them without putting up a fight. In time, this attitude became a “psychological ghost that haunted the State of Israel.”⁵¹ To this end, the state of Israel became apprehensive toward the survivors and it became the task of the country’s leaders to implant a new personality and values into the survivors. In short, the survivors were expected to take on a new identity that avoided any remembrance of the atrocities only years before.

While some Holocaust survivors felt a duty to tell their story to the world, many remained silent and even fabricated stories to their children to hide the fact that they had been persecuted during the Holocaust. Yehiel De-Nur, among the chief prosecution witnesses at the Adolf Eichmann trial, discarded his name after Auschwitz. For many like De-Nur, it was easier to assume a new identity rather than trying to pick up the pieces of the unspeakable atrocities plaguing their former lives. De-Nur himself was treated by Jan Bastiaans, the medical director of the Center for War Injuries in Leiden, Holland. Bastiaans specialized in “concentration-camp or (KZ) syndrome.” Though appearing in WWI survivors, the most severe cases stemmed from survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. Bastiaans found that adjustment to life after the Holocaust took as long as 30-40 years, if at all. For thousands of survivors, the memory of the Holocaust was too painful to confront. These survivors relied on heavy emotional defense mechanisms. Though they appeared to recover on the outside, the pain simply became introverted. The Holocaust survivors came from another world, and to the end of their days,

⁵⁰ Segev. *The Seventh Million: the Israelis and the Holocaust*, 109.

⁵¹ Ibid

many remained prisoners. Years later, many of these Holocaust victims were found to suddenly lose all their strength, fall mentally or physically ill, and in too many cases, committed suicide.⁵²

The period of silence, almost a generation long, is a measure of the depth of the trauma suffered by Holocaust victims. Nearly two-thirds of European Jewry and one-third of the entire Jewish population were destroyed. Put in American terms, it is as if the entire population of the East Coast had been massacred.⁵³ To start the healing process, an event of gigantic importance would be needed to awaken the country and its victims out of their coma of silence.

On May 11, 1960, Adolf Eichmann, Deportation Chief of the Reich Main Security Office during the war, was kidnapped from Buenos Aires and taken to Israel by the Israel intelligence agency known as Mossad. On April 11, 1961, Eichmann stood trial in an Israeli court. The trial caused huge international controversy as well as an international sensation. The Israeli government allowed news programs all over the world to broadcast the trial live with few restrictions. The trial itself was never meant to focus on the deeds of Eichmann, but rather the suffering of Israel. Eichmann's role was simply to be there, in the glass booth. The real purpose of the trial was to give voice to the Jewish people who had been persecuted and murdered in every generation and nearly every place simply because they were there and not in their own country. The trial, more than nearly any other act, helped solidify the justification for a Jewish state.

In the evening hours of May 31, 1962 Adolf Eichmann was hanged in the Ramla prison. Eichmann's trial served as therapy for the nation, starting a process of identification with the tragedy of the victims and survivors. "In encouraging them to unlock what had been sealed within their memories, and to relate their personal stories, Eichmann's death served to redeem an

⁵² Segev. *The Seventh Million*, 7.

⁵³ Fisher & Klenicki. *In Our Time*, 8.

entire generation of survivors.”⁵⁴ At long last the silence of many survivors had been broken, Jews and gentiles alike were ready to examine the Holocaust in a search for answers.

For the Catholic Church, this meant a reassessment of traditional church teachings of contempt towards Jews throughout the centuries. After the Holocaust, there were a few Christians in western Europe and North America beginning in the 1950’s who attempted to deal with the age-old problem of the church anti-Semitism. On the Catholic side, Augustin Bea, S.J., at the Vatican, Paul Demann in France and Belgium, Johannes Willebrands, in the Netherlands, Charles Boyer, S.J., at the Gregorian University in Rome, and Gregory Baum and John Oesterreicher in North America were pioneers. The first significant breakthrough came from the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCCJ) gathered in Seelisberg, Switzerland in 1947. The ICCJ discussed a range of topics, including Jewish-Christian cooperation in combating anti-Semitism, relations with governments, the tasks of the churches, and civic and social engagement.⁵⁵ Despite pioneering efforts such as these, the 1950’s saw little change in Catholic-Jewish relations. This all changed with the Eichmann trial. For the first time since Nuremberg, Germans were provided with a view of the totality of human slaughter that had come to be known as the Holocaust. Eichmann’s chief prosecutor, Gideon Hausner, even suggested that the Vatican knew about the Holocaust but Pope Pius XII did not speak out because of the predicament in which it would place German Catholics.

Faced with a remembrance of the Holocaust, Catholics suddenly realized that the evil portrait of Judaism had implicated the Church in a genocide to which it was largely silent.⁵⁶ Confronted with a need to rid the Church of its teaching of contempt towards Jews, the Church only awaited some spark that would ignite that miraculous change in Catholic-Jewish relations

⁵⁴ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 327.

⁵⁵ Boys. *Has God Only One Blessing*, 73.

⁵⁶ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 208.

found in Nostra Aetate and during the Second Vatican Council. Little did many Catholics know at the time of Eichmann's trial, but the flames of change had already been ignited.

Part III: The Miracle of Vatican II

“Save yourself for your work, the world is waiting for it.”

~Smuggled message to Jules Isaac from his wife on her way to a concentration camp~

Chapter 6: Pope John XXIII, Jules Isaac and the Birth of Nostra Aetate

They say it takes only one to make a difference in the world. Arguably one of the greatest examples of the truth of this statement can be found in the life and actions of Jules Isaac. Jules Isaac was born November 18, 1877 in Rennes, France. For the first 60 years of his life, Isaac did not personally experience anti-Semitism. He pursued an academic career, becoming a professor of history, a humanist, and a widely respected scholar. In 1936 he was appointed the Inspector General of Education for France. With the German occupancy of France in 1940, Isaac, a Jew, was stripped of his post. At this point Isaac began to examine the roots of anti-Semitism and started to contemplate why there was such silence and apathy in the Christian world concerning the fate of European Jewry. Isaac felt that Hitler's program of genocide was the culmination of a long history of hatred towards Jews that was established and grew within Christianity.⁵⁷ In 1943, as he continued to work on the problem of anti-Semitism, tragedy struck. While he was away the

⁵⁷ Isaac, Jules. *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1964), 5.

Gestapo rounded up his wife, son, daughter, and son-in-law. With the exception of his younger son, the rest of his family perished in a death camp. On a quest to fulfill the last words of his wife, Isaac poured his heart into his work.

In 1947, a 600 page manuscript by Isaac entitled *Jesus et Israel* was published. In his book, Isaac compared the texts of the Gospels with qualified Catholic and Protestant commentaries. The comparison of these commentaries revealed a totally distorted picture of Jesus' attitude toward Israel as well as an erroneous depiction of Israel's attitude towards Jesus. Isaac was able to successfully demonstrate that these inaccurate commentaries, found in books, footnotes, sermons, or catechism lessons, are largely responsible for Christian anti-Semitism.⁵⁸ His book was enormously successful and had a large impact on laymen as well as clergy of all faiths throughout France. In 1949, following papal authorization to translate the Good Friday prayer for the Jews, *pro perfideis judaeis*, using the milder translation "unfaithful," Jules Isaac finally received an audience with Pius XII. Isaac urged the Pope to completely suppress the word in the Good Friday prayer. Isaac also pleaded with Pius XII to change the Good Friday devotion so that Catholics would again kneel for the Jews, an act that hadn't been done in 12 centuries. Pius XII granted both of these pleas, yet very little else changed during his lifetime.

With the death of Pius XII in 1958, Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was elected as the next pope taking the name Pope John XXIII. Angelo Roncalli had served in Bulgaria, Istanbul, and Paris during the war aiding Jews fleeing Europe. In constant contact with the Vatican during the war, Roncalli was able to use his diplomatic skill to help countless Jewish refugees escape the Nazis and seek safe haven in Palestine.⁵⁹ As Apostolic Delegate in Istanbul during the Second World War, he saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews from deportation

⁵⁸ Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt*, 9.

⁵⁹ Cushing, Richard. *Call me John: a Life of Pope John XXIII* (Boston: St. Paul's Edition, 1963), 44.

and was able to obtain thousands of immigration certificates, which he sent to the papal nuncio in Budapest. Most importantly, John XXIII's experiences with the suffering of the Jewish people in the Second World War became a formative part of his life. As pope, John XXIII quickly showed the world that, unlike Pius XII, Catholic-Jewish relations was high on his priority list.

During the Good Friday prayer in 1958, Pope John XXIII interrupted the mass and had the prayer said without the phrase "perfidious Jews." "With one stroke of the pen,"⁶⁰ John XXIII eliminated the word perfidious in the prayer for the Jews, both in Latin and in the vernacular. In 1959 he did away with two other prejudicial sentences, one in the Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart, the other in the ritual of baptism of converts. So revolutionary was John XXIII's outlook on relations with the Jews that in 1960, when a group of American Jews representing the United Jewish Appeal came to Rome to thank Pope John for his efforts to relieve the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust, the pope greeted them with the words, "I am Joseph, your brother!"⁶¹ Highly encouraged by the actions of the Pope, Jules Isaac requested an audience with John XXIII. Upon the recommendation from the French ambassador to the Holy See, Pope John met with Isaac on June 13, 1960. The conversation lasted only twenty-five minutes, yet it began one of the most profound renewals of Church teaching and practice in its 2,000 year history.⁶²

"How in a few minutes," Isaac reminisced, was he "to make (the Pope) understand that at the same time as a material ghetto there has been a spiritual ghetto in which the Church gradually enclosed old Israel"; that there had always been a Catholic "teaching of contempt towards the Jews."⁶³ Isaac presented the Pope with a carefully prepared report outlining a program to reconcile Christian teaching with more authentic Church doctrine. He also presented his own

⁶⁰ Isaac. *The Teaching of Contempt*, 11.

⁶¹ Phayer. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 209.

⁶² Fisher. *Faith Without Prejudice*, 3.

⁶³ Stacpoole, Alberic. *Vatican II Revisited by those who were there* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1986) 72.

practical suggestion, the creation of a committee that would study the question of Christian-Jewish relations. John XXIII responded that: “I have been thinking about that ever since you began to speak.”⁶⁴ At the end of the conversation, Isaac asked the pope if things would change, the Pope answered: “You have every right to more than hope.”⁶⁵ True to his word, in 1960 John XXIII decreed that a subcommission of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity would be formed and he personally entrusted Cardinal Augustin Bea to head the subcommission.

Chapter 7: Vatican II and the Emergence of *Nostra Aetate*

Only three months after his coronation, Pope John XXIII had a captivating thought. “Without ever having thought of it before... the words ‘ecumenical council’ (were) contrary to all my suppositions or imagination on the subject. The first to be amazed by this proposal of mine was I myself.”⁶⁶ So it was that during his observance of the Conversion of St. Paul, January 25, 1959, he let his intentions be known publicly. Pope John XXIII announced to the world that he had decided to call the first ecumenical council in nearly a century. The Pope recognized that the First Vatican Council (1869-70) had ended abruptly with many issues left untouched. He also recognized that the significant developments in biblical studies, liturgy and catechetics made it necessary to bring the Church up to date. From Pope Pius X (1903-10) onwards there had been a strong conservative stance taken by the papacy that was becoming increasingly incompatible with the changing world around them. Pope John XXIII was the first Pope in decades who

⁶⁴ Isaac. *The Teaching of Contempt*, 14.

⁶⁵ Fisher. *Faith Without Prejudice*, 5.

⁶⁶ Cushing. *Call me John*, 61,

“allowed the dynamic forces that were present within the Church to be unleashed with full creative and pastoral wisdom.”⁶⁷

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) was technically the twenty-first of the General Councils held by the Church. Vatican II was the first to be truly universal. Observers from the rest of Christendom as well as the world’s press were allowed to observe the Council, which was in no way secret. The Council had an active participation of up to 2,540 prelates, over four times the number of any other Council save Vatican I.⁶⁸ Vatican II was also conducted in a blaze of publicity with all four sessions in 1962, 1963, 1964, and 1965 being subject to detailed narrative and analysis in contemporary books, articles and debates around the world. The Council was convened with three objectives: renewal of the Church, the updating of the Church to the modern world, and the furtherance of Christian unity or ecumenism.

After announcing the convening of the Second Vatican Council, letters were sent out to the Church’s bishops throughout the world requesting suggestions on issues that needed to be addressed during the Council. The results were astonishing. Of the over 2,000 bishops surveyed, not a single voice mentioned addressing the Church’s relationship with Jews or anti-Semitism.⁶⁹ Even Pope John XXIII, who had a predisposition to the plight of the Jews, had not considered addressing Catholic-Jewish relations until his fateful meeting with Jules Isaac. Nevertheless, once the issue was brought to the Vatican’s attention, Cardinal Bea and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, with John XXIII’s full approval, rigorously applied themselves to drafting a statement on Catholic-Jewish relations.

The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, SPCU, was originally charged with making a draft of recommendations that would be the starting point for the Bishops of Vatican II

⁶⁷ Stacpoole. *Vatican II Revisited by those who were there*, xii.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁶⁹ Stransky, Thomas. “Nostra Aetate Lecture Series” Session 1, October 4, 2006.

when the Council convened in 1962. Miraculously, the SPCU managed to do a bit more than simply produce recommendations for the Council. Juridically, the SPCU in fact functioned like the Preparatory Commissions that were to cease once the Fathers had convened and the Council had set up its own working tools. Nevertheless, the SPCU managed to become the exception. On August 6, 1962 the SPCU was simply confirmed as an organ of the Council itself, with the same structure and functions it had enjoyed during the preparatory stage.⁷⁰ This miraculous action stemmed in large part from the close relationship of Pope John XXIII and Cardinal Bea.

According to Father Schmidt, “They understood each other perfectly... few people understood Pope John’s idea of the Council and worked so hard to put it into practice as did Cardinal Bea.”⁷¹ This relationship was to keep the document of *Nostra Aetate* alive during the turbulent times to come.

From the beginning there was no doubt as to how the Bishops of the Council would vote on the Declaration formed by the SPCU, but the persistent behind-the-scenes opposition to it on the part of political forces in the Near East nearly eliminated *Nostra Aetate* from the Council. The recent formation of Israel had caused enormous political tension throughout the Middle East. Because of the situation, the Second Vatican Council moved very cautiously in any statement regarding Judaism or Islam. In June 1962, the schema and its subject were removed from the Council agenda after protests from two Arab countries. Cardinal Bea, the unsung hero of *Nostra Aetate*, sent a memorandum to Pope John XXIII appealing for the reinstatement of the document on the Council agenda. John XXIII granted this in December of that year. Nevertheless, the Document survived only because in early 1963 the SPCU enlarged the schema to include all non-Christians (*Nostra Aetate*). This decision proved decisive, as a declaration on Christian-

⁷⁰ Stacpoole. *Vatican II Revisited by those who were there*, 70.

⁷¹ Schmidt, Stjepan, S.J. *Augustin Bea: the Cardinal of Unity* (New York: New City Press, 1992), 533.

Jewish relations would not have stood on its own due to the heavy pressure from many Arab countries. The decision also enriched the Document by adding stances on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and lastly all general brotherhood of men. Through the widening of the Document, the Church set the groundwork for mutual dialogue and respect with the other major religions of the world apart from Judaism.

On October 18, 1963 it was announced to the press that the final text of the schema was submitted in June to the Council fathers. During the third phase of the Vatican Council, starting in September of 1964, approximately thirty-five speeches and twenty seven written memoranda were received for the document which covered a mere two pages of print.⁷² Finally, on October 28th, 1965 the document known as *Nostra Aetate* (The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) was put to a vote. As late as the last week before the vote, newspapers were speculating that the section on the Jews would be reduced to a single sentence or scrapped altogether.⁷³ Instead, the support for the Document was total. Out of 2,312 votes cast, there were 2,221 in favor and only 88 against. This meant that the document had been accepted by 96% of the Catholic bishops from around the world. On that same day, the world held its breath to see the reaction from the Middle East. The result was complete silence. Not a single violent act originating from the approval of *Nostra Aetate* occurred.

Perhaps equally as astonishing as the emergence of *Nostra Aetate* was the action of German bishops during the Second Vatican Council. While Catholics from various national backgrounds played important roles in rethinking Jewish-Catholic relations, the role of the German church was essential. Throughout the late 1940's and most of the 1950's, the German Catholic church largely ignored the horrible history of their country. Nearly 9/10 of the German

⁷² Schmidt. *Augustin Bea: the Cardinal of Unity*, 512

⁷³ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 1.

Jewish population had been murdered and few, including the remaining Jews, were ready to confront that terrible past.

During the Second Vatican Council, the German bishops confronted their church's past during the Holocaust. First, they recognized German guilt for the Holocaust. They also admitted the fault of Catholic Germans and their leaders for not speaking out against the Nazis. Lastly, they expressed their profound sorrow for the Jewish people, an expression that was made publicly.

There were several reasons for the change in the attitude of German bishops regarding the Holocaust. First and foremost, the bishops at Vatican II were not the same as those during the Holocaust. A new generation of German bishops with new perspectives on the atrocities of the Holocaust was present during the Council. Secondly, Pius XII was enormously respected in Germany, and thus the bishops waiting until his passing to begin to speak out. It was not until 1959 that German bishops began to speak with a new voice in regards to the Holocaust. Lastly, the trial of Eichmann in 1960 electrified Germany. Germans were forced to confront the atrocities they had failed to stop during World War II. Indeed, Germans around the country began to critically reexamine their horrible past. The lasting psychological effects of the Holocaust led to a longing to uncover the hidden causes and agents of the Nazi genocide.⁷⁴ Even Pope Pius XII's reputation suddenly began to be challenged. In 1963 Rudolph Hochhuth released his famous play, *The Deputy*, which presented Pius XII as a hypocrite who remained silent during the war.

On Sunday, June 11, 1961, German bishops read a letter to all the nation's Catholic churches: "We confess before You that millions of persons in our midst were murdered because they belonged to the race from which the Messiah took on flesh... We beseech You: teach all

⁷⁴ Marchione. *Pope Pius XII Architect for Peace*, 14.

those among us, who are guilty through deed, omission, or silence, understanding and conversion.”⁷⁵ As the Council got under way, the German contingent apologized publicly for their inhumane extermination of the Jewish people. They confessed: “We turned our backs... And were silent about the crimes committed against the Jewish people during the Holocaust.”⁷⁶ In 1964 the German bishops made a point of issuing a letter that especially welcomed any Council statement on the Jews because of the injustices perpetrated against the Jews in the name of their people. Appropriately enough, the very country that had such an enormous hand in creating anti-Semitism was the same country in the end that worked the hardest to see its end.

Chapter 8: Examinations and Implications of *Nostra Aetate*

The passage of *Nostra Aetate* became a watershed document in Christian-Jewish relations. “Never before has a systematic positive, comprehensive, careful and daring presentation of the Jews and Judaism been made in the Church by a Pope or a Council.”⁷⁷ Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum has argued that relations of Christians and Jews reached a point of ripeness and maturity much like the relations between black and white societies in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement. Much like Catholic-Jewish relations, “The moment of crisis, or moment of truth, in relations between black and white people is tested and resolved to the degree to which we overcome the contradictions between our professions of love, charity, and justice with our practices which have often stood in flagrant opposition to our pious

⁷⁵ Phayer. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 214.

⁷⁶ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 15.

⁷⁷ Stacpoole. *Vatican II Revisited by those who were there*, 222.

verbalizations.”⁷⁸ *Nostra Aetate* was also a watershed document in that it became the foundation for many important and far-reaching Roman Catholic statements and guidelines on Catholic-Jewish relations since 1965. Catholic bishops in Latin America, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United States, France, Switzerland, West Germany, and Brazil have all issued strong statements beyond *Nostra Aetate* calling for improved relations between Jews and Catholics.⁷⁹ What exactly did *Nostra Aetate* state and how did it change Catholic attitude towards Jews? What was the Jewish reaction to *Nostra Aetate*? Lastly, since the release of the Document in 1965, what other major statements on Catholic-Jewish relations have been released?

Nostra Aetate (The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) reaffirmed the best and most positive of ancient Christian traditions concerning Jews. Rather than examining the differences between Christianity and other religions, *Nostra Aetate* focused on points that Catholicism and Judaism had in common, thus forming the base to engage in fruitful dialogue. The drafting of the document also forced the Church to look back at its long and complicated history with the Jews to locate and eliminate the root of anti-Semitism in its teaching. In doing so, the Church sought to answer to very important theological difficulties: how to deal with difficult biblical texts which at first sight might seem incompatible with a positive presentation of Judaism, and secondly, how the Church was to confront the intervention of the Jews in the death of Jesus on the Cross and the subsequent accusation of deicide (murder of God). According to Dr. Fisher, the Church attacked the heart of anti-Semitism within the Church by denying its two central tenets: “What happened in his (Jesus’) passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today... The Jews should not be represented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this followed from Holy

⁷⁸ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 39.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 14.

Scripture.”⁸⁰ Most importantly, it remains important to understand that *Nostra Aetate* is directed at Christian, not Jews, and does not “forgive” anyone.

The institution of *Nostra Aetate* was instrumental in changing Catholic attitudes towards their Jewish brethren. The Document acknowledges that both religions were from the same seed with the same fathers of the Church (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and the same patriarchs found in Moses and the prophets. Going beyond mere acceptance of the existence of Judaism, the Document expresses that any attitude that repeats the ancient stereotypes or prejudices against the Jews does not have a right anymore to legitimate existence in the Church. Implicit within the Declaration was also an urging for Catholics to learn how Jews understand their own religion. Though not directly stated until subsequent documents, *Nostra Aetate* was, without a doubt, a response to the Holocaust. It became a “never again” statement. Never again would Christians and Jews be unaware of their shared roots. Never again would Christians stand idly by while their Jewish brethren suffered. Never again would the Church teach contempt towards the religion whose olive tree roots have provided sustenance onto which “have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.”⁸¹

Despite the apparent complete reversal in Catholic attitude and teaching regarding Jews, many Jewish people were not initially receptive to the document. A substantial portion of the Jewish community reacted to the headlines of the newspapers, which reported the release of the Document. Such statements included “Vatican Council Exonerates Jews for Death of Christ”; “Catholic Church Absolves Jews of Crucifixion.” Naturally, large segments of the Jewish community reacted with resentment, if not worse.⁸² Some members of the Jewish community were also initially dissatisfied with the seemingly watered-down version of the Document by the

⁸⁰ Fisher, *Faith Without Prejudice*, 32.

⁸¹ *Nostra Aetate*, see appendix A.

⁸² Fisher, *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 51.

omission of the word *deicide* and the replacement of the word “condemns” by “deplores.” There were also some Jews as well as Catholic bishops who wanted to see an explicit apology for centuries of Christian anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, many in the Jewish community saw that *Nostra Aetate* was a starting point that had the potential to usher in more positive relations than the two faiths had experienced in nearly 2,000 years. (For the complete text of *Nostra Aetate* refer to appendix A.)

As Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, President of the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, reminded his hearers during a celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in 1980, the document can only be properly read and understood within the context of subsequent statements of the Holy See, the Popes, and Episcopal Conferences in interpreting and implementing it.⁸³ Though *Nostra Aetate* certainly placed the Church on the right track with Catholic-Jewish relations, there remained a need to prepare and publish an official document for the application of *Nostra Aetate*. To this end, in October 1974, Pope Paul VI instituted a Vatican “Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews,” which in January of 1975 issued the “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration of *Nostra Aetate*.” By comparing the 1975 “Guidelines” with *Nostra Aetate*, one can see the dramatic progress made in Catholic-Jewish relations in just 10 years.

In its section on “Teaching and Education,” the document lists and corrects a number of misunderstandings in Catholic-Jewish relations. For example, the Old Testament was not to be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism. The “Teaching and Education” also recognized that the history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, but rather went on to develop a deep and valued religious tradition. Reaffirming Vatican II’s condemnation of anti-

⁸³ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 2.

Semitism, the 1975 “Guidelines” called for a positive reformulation of the Christian understanding of Judaism based on the “essential traits by which the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious history.”⁸⁴

Though the 1975 “Guidelines” contained a preamble, which acknowledged that *Nostra Aetate* found its historical setting in the memory and persecution of Jews during the Second World War, it wasn’t until the 1985 “Notes” that the Holy See mandated the development of a catechesis for the Holocaust. In the 1985 *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church*, the Church recognized that the Catechesis should help in understanding the meaning for the Jews of the extermination during the years 1939-1945 and its consequences. After all, the Holocaust occurred in Christian Europe and in an almost complete silence from Christians and Christian religious organizations.⁸⁵

Although there remains years of work to be done to mend Catholic-Jewish relations, the documents released after *Nostra Aetate* exemplify the increasingly productive and progressive movement of the relations. It remains truly remarkable to examine how one document set the stage for such rapid change in relations between Christians and Jews after nearly 2,000 years of animosity. Apart from the 1975 “Guidelines” and the 1985 “Notes,” the Catholic Church has made enormously progressive steps during the years of Pope John Paul II culminating in the release of the 1998 document *We Remember: A Reflection of the Shoah* and the subsequent release of the US Catholic Bishops’ *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah: Implementing the Holy See’s ‘We Remember’* in 2000. Since the release of *Nostra Aetate* hundreds of groups have been created to examine Christian-Jewish relations. Among those is the International Jewish

⁸⁴ Fisher. *Faith Without Prejudice*, 25.

⁸⁵ Fisher. *In Our Time*, 85.

Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), which brought together five major Jewish organizations in the early 1970's and was later renamed the International Liaison Committee. This committee has met twelve times since in various places around the world. It is composed of official representatives on each side, both Catholic and Jewish, and has studied difficult questions such as mission and proselytism, as well as religious freedom. Similar Liaison Groups or Committees have sprung up both nationally and internationally especially among international Church bodies, such as the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Church of England, and even the Orthodox Churches.⁸⁶

Chapter 9: Correcting the Assumptions: Catholic Education post *Nostra Aetate*

In chapter one we examined the Catholic assumptions regarding the role and status of the Jewish faith on the eve of the Holocaust. Although the Catholic Church has changed its official attitude towards Jews by leaps and bounds, we must also examine how the new attitude has been implemented in the education that the everyday Catholic receives. After all, there were remarkably progressive documents made even during the Middle Ages, yet official stance and common practices often were at complete odds. How have the textbooks and teaching regarding the Jews changed since the watershed document was released? Apart from the textbooks, what are some pivotal anti-Jewish assumptions that have been corrected through mutual dialogue between Catholicism and Judaism?

⁸⁶ Stacpoole. *Vatican II Revisited by those who were there*, 226.

As the Reverend Edward Flannery, author of *The Anguish of the Jews*, has written, “most Christians have torn out of their history books the pages that Jews have memorized.”⁸⁷ To understand the impact of *Nostra Aetate*, one merely has to look at Catholic textbooks prior to this time. In the United States, the Catholic textbook self-study project carried out at St. Louis University under the supervision of Trafford Maher and summarized in book form by John Pawlikowski in *Catetchetics and Prejudice* revealed that accusations of collective guilt, assertions that Jews are a people accursed and rejected by God, and notions that Jews willfully and culpably blinded themselves to Jesus’ significance can be found in the majority of Catholic textbooks well into the 1960’s, nearly twenty years after the Holocaust!⁸⁸ These same results were found in the Louvain research project, which analyzed textbooks in the French-speaking countries of France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada between 1949 and 1964.⁸⁹ Cardinal Bea, head of the SPCU that eventually issued *Nostra Aetate*, welcomed the documentation, which helped convince him of the need for an authoritative repudiation of anti-Semitism in the highest levels of the Church.

After *Nostra Aetate* Catholics and Jews began to fill in the blanks in the pages. Shortly after the Declaration, the Vatican put an end to the veneration of Simon of Trent, the ritual blood libel episode celebrated since the 15th century. In his dissertation for New York University in 1976, Dr. Fisher studied sixteen major religious textbooks used in grade school and high school levels. The 161 student texts and 113 teacher’s manuals were published between 1967 and 1975. He found that although there remained some negative comments, American Catholic religious materials are significantly more positive toward Judaism than before the Second Vatican

⁸⁷ Flannery, Edward H. *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 56.

⁸⁸ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 125.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

Council. Dr. Fisher examined textbooks published after Vatican II using a decimal scale in which a perfect score, a 1.0, was achieved by completely neutral or positive statements toward Jews throughout the textbook. Any negative statements would subsequently lower the decimal score. He found that from 1967-1976 the score of American textbooks went from a 0.432 to a 0.674.

As stated in *Nostra Aetate*: “Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.”⁹⁰ The Document added that the preaching of the word of God needed to conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ in regard to teaching on the Jews. These recommendations have been followed by the Department of Education of the United States Catholic Conference. Together with the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, special courses on Jews and Judaism for Catholic teachers were developed. The educational program, *Understanding the Jewish Experience*, offers background information on Judaism from the earliest days to the twentieth century’s experience. For example, within the educational program is a booklet entitled *Abraham, Our Father in Faith*, which provides teachers on the elementary and secondary levels with background and classroom materials on Judaism that can easily be incorporated into Catholic teaching.⁹¹ To date, most American Catholic textbooks used in parochial schools have been purged of anti-Jewish material as have Catholic textbooks in European countries where the Holocaust took place.⁹²

Despite the changes in Catholic textbooks, the Church has a long way to go. Many Jews, like many Catholics, are not aware of the enormous changes in Catholic thinking regarding Jews and Judaism since Vatican II. It remains a challenge for Catholics and Jews alike to inform their children of these developments both in educational materials and through teacher education. This

⁹⁰ *Nostra Aetate*, see appendix A

⁹¹ Fisher & Klenicki. *In Our Time*, 85.

⁹² Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 15.

means that Christians will have to take the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) more seriously along with the New Testament, and likewise, Jews will have to overcome their hesitation to expose themselves to the New Testament. As Father Stransky stated during the *Nostra Aetate Lecture Series*, the “Our Father” remains a perfect prayer for both Christians and Jews. It remains unfortunate that Catholics and Jews are not comfortable with each other enough to use this mutual prayer without some sort of stigma attached to it.⁹³ Remnants of the old biases and teaching of contempt still remain, in part, because teachers’ manuals fail to give an adequate background and context necessary for the correct interpretation of difficult passages in the New Testament, such as those in Matthew and John.⁹⁴ More emphasis needs to be placed on the Jewish origins and roots for such New Testament concepts as the kingdom of God and salvation.

Apart from Catholic textbooks, mutual Catholic-Jewish dialogue has helped to overcome many of the theological difficulties and assumptions that provided the ground for anti-Semitism to grow. “Such an admission that the Church can understand its own nature only in dialogue with a living Judaism is literally breathtaking to one who knows the history of the dark days of suspicion and polemic.”⁹⁵ As Jules Isaac points out, “have Moslems and Christians the right to reproach Jews for their separatism? Without it, the Jews would not have handed on to the Christians, or to Islam, the torch of monotheism.”⁹⁶

Catholic-Jewish dialogue, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a subsequent reexamination of the Scriptures has helped both sides to better understand the historical scene during the time of Jesus. The Catholic Church now acknowledges that it was Pilate and Pilate alone who had the power to condemn Jesus to death. At any rate, the Pharisees and the Essenes

⁹³ Stransky, Thomas. “Nostra Aetate Lecture Series” Session 1, October 4, 2006

⁹⁴ Fisher. *Faith Without Prejudice*, 129.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁶ Isaac. *Teaching of Contempt*, 30.

had no political power, unlike the Sadducees, to condemn Christ to death. On a more practical note, historians have stated that crucifixion is a Roman form of capital punishment and would not have been used by the Jewish community to execute one of its own. Cardinal Bea sums it up best by arguing that the New Testament itself recognized the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time were not formally guilty of Deicide since both the Gospels (Luke 23;24) and (Acts 3:17, 13:27) as well as the Council of Trent, state that the Jews acted without full knowledge of Christ's divinity. Rather, Christ's death was the sin of all mankind. Even if the Jews present had crucified Christ, Jules Isaac points out that the dispersion of the Jews had happened since the Babylonian exile in 587 BC, and thus there were thousands of Jews who were not present and had no idea who Jesus Christ was. How can these Jews be judged under the "collective guilt" accusation?

Catholics now realize that they must take each section of the New Testament in relation to other sections in order to reconstruct the essential message of Jesus. As stated in *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent documents regarding relations with the Jews and Judaism, the Old Testament is not superseded by the new, nor is the Jewish religion superseded by Christianity. Judaism is a religion of redemption. Christianity is essentially Jewish in origin and owes much of its faith to the Pharisee branch of Judaism. To understand the teaching of Jesus, one must be open to the teaching of the Pharisees since Jesus showed himself to be a Pharisee in many respects.⁹⁷ The fundamental teaching of Judaism, much like Christianity, is a world rooted in an infinite source of life and goodness, which we call God.

Perhaps of all the progress made in Catholic-Jewish relations, none remains more astonishing than the increasing reversal in attitudes about a Jewish homeland. The realization that genocide was taking place did not spur the Vatican to change its policies regarding the Holy Land during the Second World War. Historian John Conway has pointed out that the Vatican

⁹⁷ Fisher. *Faith Without Prejudice*, 53.

never wavered from its path regarding Palestine, even in the middle of the Holocaust.⁹⁸ During Vatican II, the confrontation with the Holocaust combined with the founding of Israel in 1948 forced Catholics to confront the long held theology that God had punished Jews by dispersing them around the world. “Out of the ashes of Auschwitz, these despised surplus people had risen and re-entered history as a free and sovereign people in their own land.”⁹⁹ The Church is a worldwide religious community with no particular ethnic or cultural identity. Judaism, on the other hand, is defined not only as an instrument of redemption, but with a people that share a definite ethnicity and culture with intrinsic reference to a land and a state.¹⁰⁰ Whatever difficulties Catholics had in sharing these views, progress has been made to understand and accept this link between land and people, which Jews have expressed in their language and worship for over 2,000 years.

⁹⁸ Phayer. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 50.

⁹⁹ Fisher. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Stacpoole. *Vatican II Revisited by those who were there*, 233.

Conclusion: The Future of Catholic-Jewish Relations

As we have seen, *Nostra Aetate* became a watershed document that ushered in a new era of Catholic-Jewish attitude and dialogue. It has taken 2,000 years for *Nostra Aetate* to arrive. Two old men, Jules Isaac and Pope John XXIII, revealed to the world the power of persistence and love. Although miraculously progressive changes have taken place since the Document, it remains only a solid step in the long walk necessary to prepare the damages caused by the teaching of contempt for the last 2,000 years. Certainly the Catholic Church has experienced setbacks and “growing pains” in its attempt to improve its relations with Jews and Judaism; nevertheless, the increasing dialogue is always a positive sign. As Dr. Fisher states: “Openness to and respect for the other, as other, form the basic supports for the bridge which can cross over the chasm of time that separates Jews and Christians.”¹⁰¹ Dialogue between the two faiths, rather than an attempt to convert, needs to recognize and promote the mutual understandings between Christians and Jews. Both religions seek the answer to the same question that explains humankind’s ultimate reason for being. While the two religions have started at different points, both follow a parallel course whose similarities need to be recognized and promoted in a mutually beneficial manner.

The atrocities known as the Holocaust, or Shoah, have left people with hard questions. Perhaps most difficult: where was God during the Holocaust when his people needed him the most? It is my belief that God was where he always was, suffering, starving, and dying with his people. For too long Christian negative attitudes and stereotypes against the Jew and Judaism held sway. Too many innocent people paid the price for this anti-Semitism during the Holocaust where Christians fell into a moral trap that encouraged participation, or at the very least,

¹⁰¹ Fisher. *Faith Without Prejudice*, 9.

indifference when their brethren needed them the most. There should never have been a Holocaust. That there was is a testament to how far Christians have strayed from the true teaching of love preached by Christ. Were *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent statements on Jews and Judaism a sufficient response to the Holocaust? Of course not. There is nothing in this world that can ever make up for the merciless slaughter of 6 million innocent Jewish men, women, and children. Nevertheless, if “unmerited suffering is redemptive, then 6 million Jewish men, women, and children redeemed the Catholic church and freed it from its sin of anti-Semitism.”¹⁰² It took the full realization of the death of 6 million to awaken the Church to its 2,000 year old teaching of contempt; a factor, either direct or indirect, in the death of millions. Never again.

¹⁰² Phayer. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 216.

Appendix A

DECLARATION ON
THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS
NOSTRA AETATE
PROCLAIMED BY HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI
ON OCTOBER 28, 1965

1. In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely the relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth.(1) One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men,(2) until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.(3)

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

2. From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of

life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.(4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

3. The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their desserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham's sons according to faith (6)-are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.(7) Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles. making both one in Himself.(8)

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).(12)

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men,(14) so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.(15)

Appendix B: The Development of *Nostra Aetate*

The following chart¹⁰³ lists several areas in which the wording of the original *Nostra Aetate* document evolved and was clarified by the subsequent *Vatican Guidelines (1974)* and *Notes for Preaching and Catechesis (1985)*.

Appendix 1: <i>Nostra Aetate</i> , 1965	Appendix 2: <i>Vatican Guidelines</i> , 1974	Appendix 3: <i>Notes for Preaching and Catechesis</i> , 1985
1) “The Church decries hatred, persecutions and manifestations of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and by anyone”	-- “condemn, as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity, all forms of anti-Semitism and discrimination”	-- “The urgency and importance of precise, objective and rigorously accurate teaching on Judaism for our faithful follows too from the danger of anti-Semitism, which is always ready to reappear under different guises”
2) – makes no mention of the post-biblical religious tradition of Judaism	-- “The history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem but rather went on to develop a religious tradition”	-- “The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without a trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God’s design... accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages, and in modern times.”

¹⁰³ This chart and all its information is taken directly from Eugene Fisher, *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 19.

<p>3) – “the spiritual bonds which tie the people of the New Covenant to the offspring of Abraham”</p>	<p>-- “the spiritual bonds and historical links binding the Church and Judaism</p> <p>-- “these links and relationships”</p>	<p>-- “Because of the unique relations that exist between Christianity and Judaism – ‘linked together at the very level of their identity’ (John Paul II) – founded on the design of the God of the Covenant, the Jews and Judaism should not occupy an occasional or marginal place in catechesis: their presence there is essential and should be organically integrated”</p>
<p>4) – makes no reference to traditional false stereotyping of the Pharisees or to misunderstandings which can arise from reading the New Testament or in the liturgy</p>	<p>-- mandates an “overriding preoccupation” in liturgy and education to provide adequate background for scriptural readings “which Christians, if not well informed, might misunderstand because of prejudice,” and specifies John’s Gospel and the treatment of the Pharisees.</p>	<p>-- Two major sections of the text (III and IV) spell out the issues in detail, e.g.: Jesus “extolled respect for” the Law and “invited obedience to it” (III, 13). He shared “with the majority of Palestinian Jews of that time, “ central elements of Pharisaic doctrine (III, 17). “... references hostile or less than favorable to the Jews have their historic context in conflicts between the nascent church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus” (IV, 21, A).</p>

<p>5) – defines the Jews solely in biblical terms, i.e., in reference to their past : “the Jewish religion,” the “chosen people,” “the wild olive shoots,” “the Jews” (8 times always in the context of the New Testament). Limits itself to “the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews.”</p>	<p>-- speaks of the Jews of today as well as biblically, and in modern terms “Judaism,” “Jewish brothers,” “the Jewish people” (twice, and in specifically religious context, being followed immediately by “the Christian people”). Encourages Christians to learn “by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious tradition” (IV, 1).</p>	<p>-- Citing John Paul II, calls the “common patrimony” of the church and Judaism “considerable” calling on catechists and preachers “to assess it carefully in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today” (I, 3: cf. VI, 25).</p>
<p>6) -- makes no reference to the Holocaust of European Jewry</p>	<p>-- refers to the Holocaust as the “historical setting” of <i>Nostra Aetate</i> and the present Jewish/Christian dialogue.</p>	<p>-- mandates the development of Holocaust curricula in religious education programming: “catechesis should... help in understanding the meaning for the Jews of the extermination [Shoah] during the years 1939-45, and its consequences” (VI, 25).</p>
<p>7) -- no reference to State of Israel</p>	<p>-- no reference to State of Israel</p>	<p>-- speaks of the “religious attachment” between the Jewish covenantal “fidelity to the one God.” Affirms “the existence of the biblical tradition” and as an essential aspect of Jewish covenantal “fidelity to the one God.” Affirms “the existence of the State of Israel”</p>

<p>8) – Crucifixion “cannot be blamed on all Jews then living without distinction nor upon the Jews of today... Christ freely underwent his Passion and death because of the sins of all men.”</p>	<p>Repeats <i>Nostra Aetate</i></p>	<p>-- Adds details: Christians more responsible than “those few Jews” because we sin knowingly (IV, 22). “... the Pharisees are not mentioned in accounts of the Passion” (III, 19).</p>
<p>9) – Does not try to deal with significance of the Jewish “no” to Christian claims concerning Jesus and the significance of the Christ event.</p>	<p>-- Calls on Christians to “strive to understand the difficulties which arise for the Jewish soul – rightly imbued with an extremely high, pure notion of the divine transcendence – when faced with the mystery of the incarnate word” (I).</p>	<p>-- Begins to grapple with it as “a fact not merely of history but of theological bearing of which St. Paul tries hard to plumb the meaning” (IV, 21, C and F) and hints at a positive response to “the permanence of Israel” as “a sign to be interpreted within God’s design” (VI, 25).</p>
<p>10) – presents the Church as the new people of God(4, & 6).</p>	<p>11 Avoids supercessionist implications and states instead: “The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition founded on it must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism with no appeal to the love of God and neighbor (DT 6:5, Lv 19:18)”.</p>	<p>-- Jews are to be presented as “the people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked by God” (I, 3, citing John Paul II at Mainz, Nov. 17, 1880), and “a chosen people” (VI, 25). Both Jews and Christians “are driven... by the command to love our neighbor” (II, 11).</p>

<p>11) – does not deal, as such, with the “promise/fulfillment” theme.</p>	<p>-- Distinguishes “fulfillment” of the promises in Christ from “their perfect fulfillment in his glorious return at the end of time” (II).</p>	<p>-- “... the people of God of the Old and the New Testament are tending towards a like end in the future: the coming or return of the Messiah – even if they start from different points of view” (II, 9: cf. also II, 1-2 and I, 5).</p>
<p>12) -- does not deal with typology</p>	<p>-- does not deal with typology</p>	<p>-- terms typology “perhaps the sign of a problem unresolved.” Attempts to frame the question in terms of both the Church and Judaism as “awaiting” their “definitive perfecting” and “final consummation” in the End Time (II, 4-9). Allows for other models for relating the Scriptures (II, 2).</p>
<p>13) – no direct reference to joint witness to the world, though the possibility is implicit in the affirmation that God “does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues.”</p>	<p>-- “Jewish and Christian tradition, founded on the Word of God... will work willingly together, seeking social justice and peace on every level” (IV).</p>	<p>-- “... hanging on the same word, we have to witness to one same memory and one common hope in Him... We must also accept our responsibility to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah by working together for social justice... To this we are driven... by a common hope for the Kingdom of God” (II, 11).</p>

<p>14) – no explicit acknowledgement of the validity of Jewish witness, to the Church or to the world, <i>post-Christum</i>. Implicit in present-tense translation of phrase from St. Paul: “Theirs are the sonship and the glory and the Covenant and the law and the worship and the promises” (Rm 9:4-5). Many Christian translations of the New Testament (e.g. the <i>New American Bible</i>) had tended to translate this key phrase in the past tense: “... theirs were...”</p>	<p>-- still implicit, e.g. in IV.</p>	<p>-- “A numerous Diaspora... allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness—often heroic—of its fidelity to the one God and to exalt Him in the presence of all the living” (VI, 25). Affirms that Christian catechesis cannot adequately convey the Christian message without taking into account past and present Jewish tradition (I, 2-3; II, 11; III, 12, 17-18, 20; VI, 25).</p>
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