

The Catholic Church and the Jews

Dr. Malka Z. Simkovich
Torah in Motion
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I. Christian Documents

I. *Nostra Aetate*: Declaration On The Relation Of The Church To Non-Christian Religions: Proclaimed By His Holiness Pope Paul VI On October 28, 1965

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 her 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. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men, 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....

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 -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. Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.

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, nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading. 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. 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). 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; 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

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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...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, so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.

II. Pope John Paul II's Prayer at the Western Wall, March 26, 2000

God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants
to bring your Name to the Nations:
we are deeply saddened by the behaviour of those who in the course of history
have caused these children of yours to suffer,
and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves
to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.

II. The Jewish Response



Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 1965

I suggest that the most significant basis for meeting of men of different religious traditions is the level of fear and trembling, of humility and contrition, where our individual moments of faith are mere waves in the endless ocean of mankind's reaching out for God, where all formulations and articulations appear as understatements, where our souls are swept away by the awareness of the urgency of answering God's commandment, while stripped of pretension and conceit we sense the tragic insufficiency of human faith.

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What divides us? What unites us? We disagree in law and creed, in commitments which lie at the very heart of our religious existence. We say “No” to one another in some doctrines essential and sacred to us. What unites us? Our being accountable to God, our being objects of God’s concern, precious in His eyes. Our conceptions of what ails us may be different; but the anxiety is the same.... above all, while dogmas and forms of worship are divergent, God is the same. What unites us? A commitment to the Hebrew Bible as Holy Scripture. Faith in the Creator, the God of Abraham commitment to many of His commandments, to justice and mercy, a sense of contrition, sensitivity to the sanctity of life, and to the involvement of God in history, the conviction that without the holy the good will be defeated, prayer that history may not end before the end of days, and so much more. ..

A Christian ought to realize that a world without Israel will be a world without the God of Israel. A Jew, on the other hand, ought to acknowledge the eminent role and part of Christianity in God’s design for the redemption of all men.



Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, “New Revelations and New Patterns in the Relationship of Judaism and Christianity,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 16.2 (1979): 264–265

If Christianity finds the strength to admit the reappearance of revelation in our time, at one stroke this undercuts the entire structure of the “teaching of contempt” tradition. For the bringing forth of revelation truly affirms that God does not repent of giving gifts. At once, it restores God’s gift of Christ to Christian Gentiles as an act of life, of broadening the covenant, rather than an act of cruelty which spiritually and physically destroys the original chosen people.... nor does the recognition undercut the validity of the Gospel message. The further revelation clarifies Paul’s affirmation that Jewish rejection of Christ paves the way for Gentile acceptance into the covenant. ...The later revelation illuminates the earlier, giving the new interpretive key in God’s unbroken promises...

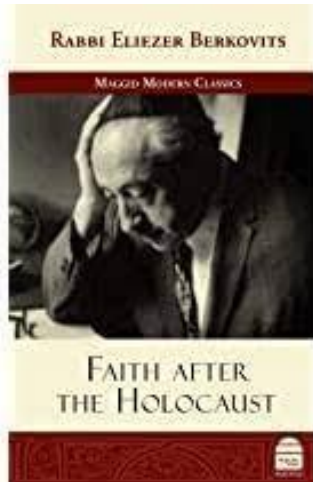
Paradoxically enough, the security of its own confirmation; the restoration of the land, the covenantal sign, releases Judaism to ponder anew the significance of Christianity. It may well be that in its medieval state of powerlessness Israel, gnawed at by the contrast of hope and reality, could only push Christianity away – or, patronizingly, argue that the righteous of the Gentiles have a share in the world to come or that they have the Noachide covenant to live by.... Confirmed now in its resumed redemption, shaken by the

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Holocaust's challenge not to put down others, Judaism can no longer give patronizing answers. It must explore the possibility that the covenant grafted onto it is a way whereby God has called Gentiles to God...

When Jesus's Messianism led to hatred, exclusion, pogrom, it could only be judged false. If it now leads to responsibility, *mitgefühl*, sharing of risk and love, then its phenomenology becomes radically different.

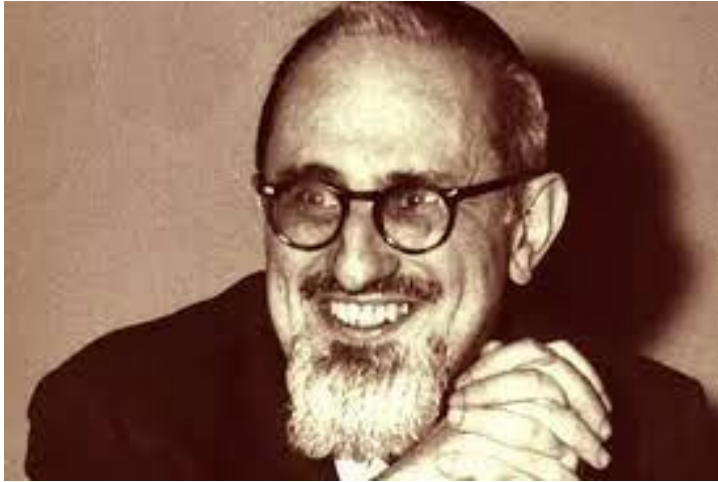


Eliezer Berkovits, *Judaism* 15.1 (Winter 1966) 79, 83–84:

Many Christians and Jews are these days advocating the idea of a Jewish-Christian dialogue. The schema on the Jews recommends such “fraternal dialogues,” in order to foster “a mutual knowledge and respect.” We ought to analyze this from several approaches—emotional, philosophical, theological, and practical. We feel that, emotionally, we are not as yet ready to enter into a fraternal dialogue with a church, a religion, that has been responsible for so much suffering, and which is ultimately responsible for the murder of our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters in the present generation. There are, of course, Jews who are only too eager to undertake such a dialogue. They are either Jews without memories or Jews for whom Judaism is exclusively a matter of public relations, or confused or spineless Jews unable to appreciate the meaning of confrontation in full freedom. For Jewry as a whole an honest fraternal dialogue with Christianity is at this state emotionally impossible....

Further, the idea of inter-religious understanding is ethically objectionable because it makes respect for the other man dependent on whether I am able to appreciate his religion or his theology. In the official summary of the Vatican Council's schema on non-Christians we read that “the Council wants to foster and recommend a mutual knowledge and respect which is the fruit, above all, of Biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.” We find the suggestion that mutual knowledge and respect among people should be the fruit of Biblical and theological studies, as well as of inter-religious dialogue, repugnant. It implies that if I am able to appreciate another man's religious beliefs I ought to respect and love him; if not, my contempt for him is understandable and justifiable. This is still conceived in the old questions tradition of religious persecution. It is not a matter of whether Christianity acknowledges fragmentary truths in Judaism. All we want of Christians is that they keep their hands off us and our children!

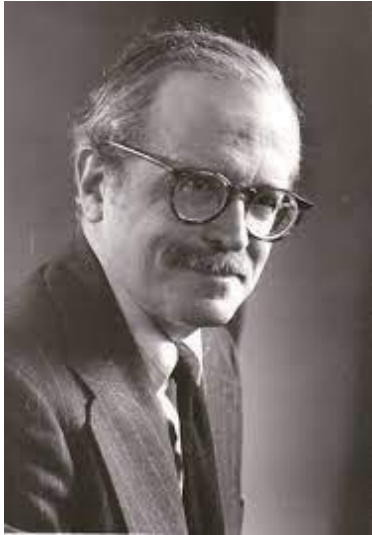
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Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, “Confrontation” *Tradition* 6.2 (1964): 5–29:

We certainly have not been authorized by our history, sanctified by the martyrdom of millions, to even hint to another faith community that we are mentally ready to revise historical attitudes, to trade favors pertaining to fundamental matters of faith, and to reconcile "some" differences. Such a suggestion would be nothing but a betrayal of our great tradition and heritage and would, furthermore, produce no practical benefits. Let us not forget that the community of the many will not be satisfied with half measures and compromises which are only indicative of a feeling of insecurity and inner emptiness. We cannot command the respect of our confronters by displaying a servile attitude. Only a candid, frank and unequivocal policy reflecting unconditional commitment to our God, a sense of dignity, pride and inner joy in being what we are, believing with great passion in the ultimate truthfulness of our views, praying fervently for and expecting confidently the fulfillment of our eschatological vision when our faith will rise from particularity to universality, will impress the peers of the other faith community among whom we have both adversaries and friends. I hope and pray that our friends in the community of the many will sustain their liberal convictions and humanitarian ideals by articulating their position on the right of the community of the few to live, create, and worship God in its own way, in freedom and with dignity.

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Michael Wyschogrod, “Orthodox Judaism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” Boston College, January 28, 1986

It is not possible to split a Jew into two, demanding of him to keep what is most important about his very identity out of the dialogue. All Jewish values are ultimately rooted in revelation and to pretend otherwise is to play a charade which will convince no one. The option is whether to talk with Christians or not to talk with them. If we refuse to talk with them, we can keep theology and everything else out of the dialogue. If we do not refuse to talk with them, we cannot keep what is most precious to us out of the discussion.... ‘Confrontation’ ended the era of Orthodox withdrawal from Jewish-Christian dialogue. If experience and logic have shown that it is not possible to separate the secular from the religious, the dialogue must continue in accordance with its inner dynamics. Such a dialogue will not hurt Judaism. My experience has been that Jews who meet religious Christians emerge strengthened in their faith and grateful for the righteous gentiles who, through Christianity, have approached the God of Israel.

Official Jewish Documents

I. Dabru Emet, September 2000

In recent years, there has been a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish and Christian relations. Throughout the nearly two millennia of Jewish exile, Christians have tended to characterize Judaism as a failed religion or, at best, a religion that prepared the way for, and is completed in, Christianity. In the decades since the Holocaust, however, Christianity has changed dramatically. An increasing number of official Church bodies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have made public statements of their remorse about Christian mistreatment of Jews and Judaism. These statements have declared, furthermore, that Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God’s enduring covenant with the Jewish people and celebrate the contribution of Judaism to world civilization and to Christian faith itself. We believe these changes merit a thoughtful Jewish response. ..We believe it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity...

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Jews and Christians worship the same God. Before the rise of Christianity, Jews were the only worshippers of the God of Israel. But Christians also worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; creator of heaven and earth. While Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews, as Jewish theologians we rejoice that, through Christianity, hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel.

Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book — the Bible (what Jews call “Tanakh” and Christians call the “Old Testament”). Turning to it for religious orientation, spiritual enrichment, and communal education, we each take away similar lessons: God created and sustains the universe; God established a covenant with the people Israel, God’s revealed word guides Israel to a life of righteousness; and God will ultimately redeem Israel and the whole world. Yet, Jews and Christians interpret the Bible differently on many points. Such differences must always be respected.

Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel. The most important event for Jews since the Holocaust has been the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land. As members of a biblically based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised — and given — to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God. Many Christians support the State of Israel for reasons far more profound than mere politics. As Jews, we applaud this support. We also recognize that Jewish tradition mandates justice for all non-Jews who reside in a Jewish state.

Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah. Central to the moral principles of Torah is the inalienable sanctity and dignity of every human being. All of us were created in the image of God. This shared moral emphasis can be the basis of an improved relationship between our two communities. It can also be the basis of a powerful witness to all humanity for improving the lives of our fellow human beings and for standing against the immoralities and idolatries that harm and degrade us. Such witness is especially needed after the unprecedented horrors of the past century.

Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon. Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi extermination of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians. We recognize with gratitude those Christians who risked or sacrificed their lives to save Jews during the Nazi regime. With that in mind, we encourage the continuation of recent efforts in Christian theology to repudiate unequivocally contempt of Judaism and the Jewish people. We applaud those Christians who reject this teaching of contempt, and we do not blame them for the sins committed by their ancestors.

The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture. Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition. That difference will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other; nor by exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians’ faithfulness to their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.

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A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice. An improved relationship will not accelerate the cultural and religious assimilation that Jews rightly fear. It will not change traditional Jewish forms of worship, nor increase intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, nor persuade more Jews to convert to Christianity, nor create a false blending of Judaism and Christianity. We respect Christianity as a faith that originated within Judaism and that still has significant contacts with it. We do not see it as an extension of Judaism. Only if we cherish our own traditions can we pursue this relationship with integrity.

Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace. Jews and Christians, each in their own way, recognize the unredeemed state of the world as reflected in the persistence of persecution, poverty, and human degradation and misery. Although justice and peace are finally God's, our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our world. In this enterprise, we are guided by the vision of the prophets of Israel: *It shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established at the top of the mountains and be exalted above the hills, and the nations shall flow unto it . . . and many peoples shall go and say, "Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in his paths."* (Isaiah 2:2-3)

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, University of Chicago; Peter Ochs, University of Virginia; David Novak, University of Toronto; Michael Signer, University of Notre Dame



Jon D. Levenson, "How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue:"

Dabru Emet suffers from one of the great pitfalls of interfaith dialogue as it has come to be practiced over the past several decades. Given the history of religiously inspired contempt and animosity, it is inevitably tempting in such exercises to avoid any candid discussion of fundamental beliefs and to adopt instead the model of conflict resolution or diplomatic negotiation. The goal thus becomes reaching an agreement, in the manner of two countries that submit to arbitration in an effort to end longstanding tensions or of a husband and wife who go to a marriage counselor in hopes of overcoming the points of contention in their relationship. Commonalities are stressed, and differences—the reason, presumably, for entering into

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dialogue in the first place—are minimized, neglected, or denied altogether. Once this model is adopted, the ultimate objective becomes not just agreement but mutual affirmation; the critical judgments that the religious traditions have historically made upon each other are increasingly presented as merely the tragic fruit of prejudice and misunderstanding.

<https://www.commentary.org/articles/jon-levenson-2/how-not-to-conduct-jewish-christian-dialogue/>



David Berger, “Response to Dabru Emet”

This is in many ways an admirable statement composed by people for whom I have high regard. I agree with much of it, including the controversial but carefully balanced passage denying that Nazism was a Christian phenomenon. However, I did not agree to sign it for several reasons. First, for all its exquisitely skillful formulation, it implies that Jews should reassess their view of Christianity in light of Christian reassessments of Judaism. This inclination toward theological reciprocity is fraught with danger. Second, although it is proper to emphasize that Christians “worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, creator of heaven and earth,” it is essential to add that worship of Jesus of Nazareth as a manifestation or component of that God constitutes what Jewish law and theology call *avodah zarah*, or foreign worship—at least if done by a Jew. Many Jews died to underscore this point, and the bland assertion that “Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews” is thoroughly inadequate. Finally, the statement discourages either community from “insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other.” While intended for the laudable purpose of discouraging missionizing, this assertion conveys an uncomfortably relativistic message.

<https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analyses/dabru-emet-berger>

2. To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians

After nearly two millennia of mutual hostility and alienation, we Orthodox Rabbis who lead communities, institutions and seminaries in Israel, the United States and Europe recognize the historic opportunity now before us. We seek to do the will of our Father in Heaven by accepting the hand offered to us by our

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Christian brothers and sisters. Jews and Christians must work together as partners to address the moral challenges of our era.

1. The Shoah ended 70 years ago. It was the warped climax to centuries of disrespect, oppression and rejection of Jews and the consequent enmity that developed between Jews and Christians. In retrospect it is clear that the failure to break through this contempt and engage in constructive dialogue for the good of humankind weakened resistance to evil forces of anti-Semitism that engulfed the world in murder and genocide.
2. We recognize that since the Second Vatican Council the official teachings of the Catholic Church about Judaism have changed fundamentally and irrevocably. The promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* fifty years ago started the process of reconciliation between our two communities. *Nostra Aetate* and the later official Church documents it inspired unequivocally reject any form of anti-Semitism, affirm the eternal Covenant between G-d and the Jewish people, reject deicide and stress the unique relationship between Christians and Jews, who were called “our elder brothers” by Pope John Paul II and “our fathers in faith” by Pope Benedict XVI. On this basis, Catholics and other Christian officials started an honest dialogue with Jews that has grown during the last five decades. We appreciate the Church’s affirmation of Israel’s unique place in sacred history and the ultimate world redemption. Today Jews have experienced sincere love and respect from many Christians that have been expressed in many dialogue initiatives, meetings and conferences around the world.
3. As did Maimonides and Yehudah Halevi,[1] we acknowledge that the emergence of Christianity in human history is neither an accident nor an error, but the willed divine outcome and gift to the nations. In separating Judaism and Christianity, G-d willed a separation between partners with significant theological differences, not a separation between enemies. Rabbi Jacob Emden wrote that “Jesus brought a double goodness to the world. On the one hand he strengthened the Torah of Moses majestically... and not one of our Sages spoke out more emphatically concerning the immutability of the Torah. On the other hand he removed idols from the nations and obligated them in the seven commandments of Noah so that they would not behave like animals of the field, and instilled them firmly with moral traits....Christians are congregations that work for the sake of heaven who are destined to endure, whose intent is for the sake of heaven and whose reward will not be denied.”[2] Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch taught us that Christians “have accepted the Jewish Bible of the Old Testament as a book of Divine revelation. They profess their belief in the G-d of Heaven and Earth as proclaimed in the Bible and they acknowledge the sovereignty of Divine Providence.” Now that the Catholic Church has acknowledged the eternal Covenant between G-d and Israel, we Jews can acknowledge the ongoing constructive validity of Christianity as our partner in world redemption, without any fear that this will be exploited for missionary purposes. As stated by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel’s Bilateral Commission with the Holy See under the leadership of Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen, “We are no longer enemies, but unequivocal partners in articulating the essential moral values for the survival and welfare of humanity”.[4] Neither of us can achieve G-d’s mission in this world alone.
4. Both Jews and Christians have a common covenantal mission to perfect the world under the sovereignty of the Almighty, so that all humanity will call on His name and abominations will be removed from the earth. We understand the hesitation of both sides to affirm this truth and we call on our communities to overcome these fears in order to establish a relationship of trust and respect. Rabbi Hirsch also taught that the Talmud puts Christians “with regard to the duties between man and man on exactly the same level as Jews. They have a claim to the benefit of all the duties not only of justice but also of active human

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brotherly love.” In the past relations between Christians and Jews were often seen through the adversarial relationship of Esau and Jacob, yet Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berliner (Netziv) already understood at the end of the 19th century that Jews and Christians are destined by G-d to be loving partners: “In the future when the children of Esau are moved by pure spirit to recognize the people of Israel and their virtues, then we will also be moved to recognize that Esau is our brother.”[5]

5. We Jews and Christians have more in common than what divides us: the ethical monotheism of Abraham; the relationship with the One Creator of Heaven and Earth, Who loves and cares for all of us; Jewish Sacred Scriptures; a belief in a binding tradition; and the values of life, family, compassionate righteousness, justice, inalienable freedom, universal love and ultimate world peace. Rabbi Moses Rivkis (Be'er Hagoleh) confirms this and wrote that “the Sages made reference only to the idolator of their day who did not believe in the creation of the world, the Exodus, G-d’s miraculous deeds and the divinely given law. In contrast, the people among whom we are scattered believe in all these essentials of religion.”[6]
6. Our partnership in no way minimizes the ongoing differences between the two communities and two religions. We believe that G-d employs many messengers to reveal His truth, while we affirm the fundamental ethical obligations that all people have before G-d that Judaism has always taught through the universal Noahide covenant.
7. In imitating G-d, Jews and Christians must offer models of service, unconditional love and holiness. We are all created in G-d’s Holy Image, and Jews and Christians will remain dedicated to the Covenant by playing an active role together in redeeming the world.

3. Between Jerusalem and Rome: Reflections on 50 Years of *Nostra Aetate*

In the biblical account of creation, God fashions a single human being as the progenitor of all humanity. Thus, the Bible’s unmistakable message is that all human beings are members of a single family. And after the deluge of Noah, this message is reinforced when the new phase of history is once again inaugurated by a single family. In the beginning, God’s providence is exercised over a universal, undifferentiated humanity.

As God chose Avraham, and subsequently Yitzchak and Yaakov, He entrusted them with a dual mission: to found the nation of Israel that would inherit, settle and establish a model society in the holy, promised land of Israel, all while serving as a source of light for all mankind.

Ever since, particularly in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. by the Romans, we Jews encountered persecution after exile after persecution. And yet, *the Eternal One of Israel does not lie*,¹ and His eternal covenant with the nation of Israel manifested itself time and again: despite the greatest adversities, our nation has endured.² After the darkest hour since the destruction of our holy Temple in Jerusalem, when six million of our brethren were viciously murdered and the embers of their bones were smoldering in the shadows of the Nazi crematoria, God’s eternal covenant was once again manifest, as the remnants of Israel gathered their strength and enacted a miraculous reawakening of Jewish consciousness. Communities were reestablished throughout the Diaspora, and many Jews responded to the clarion call to return to Eretz Yisrael, where a sovereign Jewish state arose. The Jewish people’s dual obligations – to be *a light unto the nations*³ and to secure its own future despite the world’s hatred and violence – have been overwhelmingly difficult to fulfill. Despite innumerable obstacles, the

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Jewish nation has bequeathed many blessings upon mankind, both in the realms of the sciences, culture, philosophy, literature, technology and commerce, and in the realms of faith, spirituality, ethics and morality. These, too, are a manifestation of God's eternal covenant with the Jewish people.

Undoubtedly, the Shoah constitutes the historical nadir of the relations between Jews and our non-Jewish neighbors in Europe. Out of the continent nurtured by Christianity for over a millennium, a bitter and evil shoot sprouted forth, murdering six million of our brethren with industrial precision, including one and a half million children. Many of those who participated in this most heinous crime, exterminating entire families and communities, had been nurtured in Christian families and communities.⁴

At the same time, throughout that millennium, even in very dark times, heroic individuals arose – sons and daughters of the Catholic Church, both laymen and leaders – who fought against the persecution of Jews, helping them in the darkest of times. With the close of World War II, a new era of peaceful coexistence and acceptance began to emerge in Western European countries, and an era of bridge-building and tolerance took hold in many Christian denominations. Faith communities reevaluated their historical rejections of others, and decades of fruitful interaction and cooperation began. Moreover, though we Jews had achieved political emancipation a century or two before, we were not yet truly accepted as equal, full-fledged members of the nations in which we lived. Following the Shoah, Jewish emancipation in the Diaspora, as well as the right of the Jewish people to live as a sovereign nation in our own land, finally became obvious and natural.

During the ensuing seven decades, Jewish communities and spiritual leaders gradually reassessed Judaism's relationship with the members and leaders of other faith communities.

Fifty years ago, twenty years after the Shoah, with its declaration *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4), the Catholic Church began a process of introspection that increasingly led to any hostility toward Jews being expurgated from Church doctrine, enabling trust and confidence to grow between our respective faith communities.

In this regard, Pope John XXIII was a transformative figure in Jewish-Catholic relations no less than in the history of the Church itself. He played a courageous role in rescuing Jews during the Holocaust, and it was his recognition of the need to revise “the teaching of contempt” that helped overcome resistance to change and ultimately facilitated the adoption of *Nostra Aetate* (no. 4). In its most focused, concrete, and, for the Church, most dramatic⁷ assertion, *Nostra Aetate* recognized that any Jew who was not directly and personally involved in the Crucifixion did not bear any responsibility for it. Pope Benedict XVI's elaborations and explications of this theme are particularly noteworthy. In addition, basing itself on Christian Scriptures, *Nostra Aetate* asserted that the Divine election of Israel, which it calls “the gift of God,” will not be revoked, stating, “God ... does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues.” It issued the injunction that “the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God.” Later, in 2013, Pope Francis elaborated upon this theme in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “God continues to work among the people of the Old Covenant and to bring forth treasures of wisdom which flow from their encounter with His word.”¹⁰

Nostra Aetate also paved the way for the Vatican's 1993 establishment of full diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. Through the establishment of this relationship, the Catholic Church showed how it had truly repudiated its portrayal of the Jewish people as a nation condemned to wander until the final advent. This historic moment facilitated Pope John Paul II's pilgrimage to Israel in 2000, which served as another powerful demonstration of a new era in Catholic-Jewish relations. Since then, the last two popes have also made similar state visits.

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Nostra Aetate strongly “decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone” as a matter of religious duty. Accordingly, Pope John Paul II repeatedly affirmed that anti-Semitism is “a sin against God and humanity.” At the Western Wall in Jerusalem, he recited the following prayer: “God of our fathers, You chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the Nations. We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer, and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.” Pope Francis recently recognized a new, pervasive and even fashionable form of anti-Semitism, when he told a World Jewish Congress delegation: “To attack Jews is anti-Semitism, but an outright attack on the State of Israel is also anti-Semitism. There may be political disagreements between governments and on political issues, but the State of Israel has every right to exist in safety and prosperity.”¹¹

Finally, *Nostra Aetate* called for fostering “mutual understanding and respect,” and for conducting “fraternal dialogues.” In 1974, Pope Paul VI heeded this call by creating the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews; the Jewish community, in response to this call, has met regularly with Church representatives.

We applaud the work of popes, church leaders, and scholars who passionately contributed to these developments, including the strong-willed proponents of Catholic-Jewish dialogue at the end of World War II, whose collective work was a leading impetus for *Nostra Aetate*. The most important milestones were the Second Vatican Council, the establishment of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, the recognition of Judaism as a living religion with an eternal covenant, the appreciation of the significance of the Shoah and its antecedents, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. The theological writings of the heads of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews have contributed much to the Church documents which followed *Nostra Aetate*, as have the writings of numerous other theologians. In its recent reflections on *Nostra Aetate*, “The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable,” the Pontifical Commission unambiguously endorsed the notion that Jews are participants in God’s salvation, calling this idea “an unfathomable divine mystery.”¹² It further proclaimed that “the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews.”¹³ Though the Catholic Church has not disavowed witnessing to Jews, it has nonetheless shown understanding and sensitivity towards deeply held Jewish sensibilities, and distanced itself from active mission to Jews.

The transformation of the attitude of the Church toward the Jewish community is strikingly exemplified by the recent visit of Pope Francis to a synagogue, which renders him the third Pope to make this highly significant gesture. We echo his comment, “From enemies and strangers we have become friends and brothers. It is my hope that closeness, mutual understanding and respect between our two communities continue to grow.”

These welcoming attitudes and actions stand in stark contrast with centuries of teachings of contempt and of pervasive hostility, and herald a most encouraging chapter in an epic process of societal transformation.

Initially, many Jewish leaders were skeptical of the sincerity of the Church’s overtures to the Jewish community, due to the long history of Christian anti-Judaism. Over time, it has become clear that the transformations in the Church’s attitudes and teachings are not only sincere but also increasingly profound, and that we are entering an era of growing tolerance, mutual respect, and solidarity between members of our respective faiths. Orthodox Judaism – through the American Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America – had already been a part of the International Jewish Committee for

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Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) set up in the late sixties, as the official Jewish representative for relations with the Vatican...

We acknowledge that this fraternity cannot sweep away our doctrinal differences; it does, rather, reinforce genuine mutual positive dispositions towards fundamental values that we share, including but not limited to reverence for the Hebrew Bible. The theological differences between Judaism and Christianity are profound. The core beliefs of Christianity that center on the person of “Jesus as the Messiah“ and the embodiment of the “second person of a triune God” create an irreconcilable separation from Judaism. The history of Jewish martyrdom in Christian Europe serves as tragic testimony to the devotion and tenacity with which Jews resisted beliefs incompatible with their ancient and eternal faith, which requires absolute fidelity to both the Written and Oral Torah. Despite those profound differences, some of Judaism’s highest authorities have asserted that Christians maintain a special status because they worship the Creator of Heaven and Earth Who liberated the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage and Who exercises providence over all creation.

The doctrinal differences are essential and cannot be debated or negotiated; their meaning and importance belong to the internal deliberations of the respective faith communities. Judaism, drawing its particularity from its received Tradition, going back to the days of its glorious prophets and particularly to the Revelation at Sinai, will forever remain loyal to its principles, laws and eternal teachings. Furthermore, our interfaith discussions are informed by the profound insights of such great Jewish thinkers as Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, and many others, who eloquently argued that the religious experience is a private one which can often only be truly understood within the framework of its own faith community. However, doctrinal differences do not and may not stand in the way of our peaceful collaboration for the betterment of our shared world and the lives of the children of Noah. To further this end, it is crucial that our faith communities continue to encounter and grow acquainted with one another, and earn each other’s trust.

Despite the irreconcilable theological differences, we Jews view Catholics as our partners, close allies, friends and brothers in our mutual quest for a better world blessed with peace, social justice and security. We understand our mission to be *a light unto the nations*, which obliges us to contribute to humanity’s appreciation for holiness, morality and piety. As the Western world grows more and more secular, it abandons many of the moral values shared by Jews and Christians. Religious freedom is thus increasingly threatened by the forces of both secularism and religious extremism. We therefore seek the partnership of the Catholic community in particular, and other faith communities in general, to assure the future of religious freedom, to foster the moral principles of our faiths, particularly the sanctity of life and the significance of the traditional family, and “to cultivate the moral and religious conscience of society.” One of the lessons of the Shoah is the obligations, for Jews as well as gentiles, to combat antisemitism in particular, especially in light of once again growing antisemitism. These lessons have to be expressed both in the educational and in the legal spheres of all nations, without compromise.

Furthermore, as a people who suffered from persecution and genocide throughout our history, we are all too aware of the very real danger facing many Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere as they are persecuted and menaced by violence and death at the hands of those who invoke God’s Name in vain through violence and terror. We condemn hereby any and all violence against any person on account of his beliefs or his religion. We similarly condemn all acts of vandalism, wanton destruction and / or desecration of the hallowed places of all religions. We call upon the Church to join us in deepening our combat against our generation’s new barbarism, namely the radical offshoots of Islam, which endanger

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our global society and do not spare the very numerous moderate Muslims. They threaten world peace in general and the Christian and Jewish communities in particular. We call on all people of good will to join forces to fight this evil. Despite profound theological differences, Catholics and Jews share common beliefs in the Divine origin of the Torah and in the idea of an ultimate redemption, and now, also, in the affirmation that religions must use moral behavior and religious education — not war, coercion, or social pressure — to influence and inspire.

We ordinarily refrain from expressing expectations regarding other faith communities' doctrines. However, certain kinds of doctrines cause real suffering; those Christian doctrines, rituals and teachings that express negative attitudes toward Jews and Judaism do inspire and nurture anti-Semitism. Therefore, to extend the amicable relations and common causes cultivated between Catholics and Jews as a result of *Nostra Aetate*, we call upon all Christian denominations that have not yet done so to follow the example of the Catholic Church and excise anti-Semitism from their liturgy and doctrines, to end the active mission to Jews, and to work towards a better world hand-in-hand with us, the Jewish people. We seek to deepen our dialogue and partnership with the Church in order to foster our mutual understanding and to advance the goals outlined above. We seek to find additional ways that will enable us, together, to improve the world: to go in God's ways, feed the hungry and dress the naked, give joy to widows and orphans, provide refuge to the persecuted and the oppressed, and thus merit His blessings.