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Pope John Paul II: In Memoriam

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AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

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Cover photo: Pope John Paul II greets Rabbi A. James Rudin, of AJC's Interreligious Affairs Department, while Archbishop Rembert Weakland looks on at the 1993 Catholic World Youth Day in Denver.

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The Legacy of Pope John Paul II

By Rabbi David Rosen¹

We are fortunate to live in an age and place where we can now see the half-century revolution in Christian-Jewish relations as something natural and even obvious. But we would do well to put these changes into perspective, that is to say, in retrospective, to remind ourselves and others of the remarkable transformation that has taken place.

Traditional Christian Attitudes and Teaching

Perhaps nothing demonstrates the sea change more than recalling the response of Pope Pius X to Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, not long before Herzl's death in 1904. Herzl was busy "hawking his wares" for the reestablishment of Jewish independence in the ancestral homeland among the leaders of Europe. To this end, he succeeded in obtaining an audience with Pius X. However, Herzl records in his diaries, Pius's response to the proposal was far from supportive. According to Herzl, Pius told him that because "the Jews have not recognized our Lord; therefore we cannot recognize the Jewish people." The pope declared: "We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem, but we could never sanction it. If you come to Palestine and settle your people there, our churches and priests will be ready to baptize all of you."

Now Pius wasn't especially malevolent toward the Jewish people—on the contrary. Many a church leader would not have given Herzl the time of day. Pius was simply expressing what was the normative view concerning the Jews throughout Christendom down the ages in the wake of Christianity's detachment from its Jewish moorings.

Already in the first century of the Christian era Justin Martyr articulated explicitly what became the accepted Christian interpretation of history when he declared to the Jews: "Your land is waste, your cities destroyed, for you have killed the Savior." Indeed, the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people were viewed as proof of Divine rejection—especially after the Christian conquest of the Roman Empire, a triumph of Christian temporal power that was seen as Divine confirmation. Accordingly, the Church viewed itself as the new and true Israel, having replaced the old one—the Jewish people. As indicated by Justin's words, it was not just supercessionism that pervaded the Christian view of the Jewish people, but also a perception of the latter as guilty of the crime of deicide.

As the Greek Christian writer Origen put it, without discrimination, "The blood of Jesus falls on Jews, not only then, but on all generations until the end of the world." Moreover, St. Cyprian in the third century affirmed that "the Bible itself says the Jews are an accursed people [and that] the devil is the Father of the Jews."

This leitmotif of the Jews being of the devil and in league with Satan was to be a recurrent theme throughout the following almost two millennia and was to be found even in secular Nazi propaganda. But it was the deicide charge that was chiefly used to justify the most terrible actions against Jews. The Protestant chaplain of the Nazi SS, at his trial in Ulm in 1958, declared that the Holocaust was the "fulfillment of the self-condemnation which the Jews brought upon themselves before the tribunal of Pontius Pilate." Accordingly, Jews were viewed as the enemy of God (an idea that served as the inspiration for the Crusader slaughter of European Jewry, especially in the Rhineland) and as a diabolical force of evil. This led to horrendous actions resulting from preposterous defamations and accusations, such as the blood libel, originating in England in Norwich in the eleventh century and reemerging a few generations later in Lincoln (as a result of which the alleged victim was made a saint, Saint Hugh of Lincoln). It also

led to placing the blame upon the Jews for the Black Death and various other plagues, providing justification for pillaging and destroying Jewish communities and burning synagogues, a practice that already in the fourth and fifth centuries had actually been supported by Church leaders such as Ambrose and Cyril.

Ironically, the theological understanding of the meaning of Jewish survival often served to mitigate some of these excesses. Christian theology had to confront why, if the only purpose of the Jewish people was to prepare the way for the Christian dispensation and Jewry had accordingly now been replaced by the Church in the Divine plan, the Jewish people need survive at all. Augustine explained that this was precisely part of the Divine intention that the Jewish people should survive in its ignominy, to wander and be treated with disdain, as proof of their iniquity and obduracy, confirming accordingly the truth of Christianity. Indeed, this rationale led Bernard of Clairvaux to vigorously oppose the murder and destruction of Jewish communities during the Crusades, not out of love of the Jew, but to preserve him as an abject testimony of his rejection by Heaven. Similarly, Pope Innocent III explained that while the "inherited guilt is on the whole [Jewish] nation [as] a curse to follow them everywhere like Cain, to live homelessly; nevertheless, like Cain, they should never be destroyed, but remain as a testimony until the end of time of Jesus' truth and the consequences for those who reject it." Angelo di Chivasso in the fifteenth century summed up this doctrine succinctly: "To be a Jew is a crime—not, however, punishable by a Christian."

This attitude that we refer to today as the "teaching of contempt" provided theological justification for Jewish homelessness and marginalization. Accordingly, the idea of the return of the Jewish people to assume sovereignty in its ancestral homeland was an anathema to the vast majority of Christians down through the ages, and Pope Pius X was simply articulating this normative Christian view to the unfortunate Theodor Herzl. Indeed, as late as 1948, in response to the establishment of the State of Israel, the Vatican publication *Osservatore Romano* stated. "Modern Israel is not heir to

biblical Israel. The Holy Land and its sacred sites belong only to Christianity, the true Israel."

The Shoah

There is, of course, a link between this teaching of contempt toward the Jews and the ultimate tragic consequence of anti-Semitism, the Shoah. However, I believe the contention that Christian teaching was directly responsible for the Holocaust is neither a tenable nor an acceptable argument and should be rejected accordingly. Indeed, as the great American Jewish intellectual Maurice Simon wrote, already before the beginning of World War II, Nazi ideology was also very much an attack on Christianity itself.

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the Final Solution would not have succeeded to the extent that it did without the terrain having been so fertilized over the centuries by the Church's encouragement—active and passive—of the demonization and dehumanization of the Jew.

Precisely for this reason, while the Shoah was devastating beyond all measure for Jewry, it also had profound implications and ramifications for Christianity. As the author and Christian cleric Rev. David L. Edwards put it:

Righteous Gentiles, including some bishops, did save tens of thousands of Jews, but their efforts were small in comparison with the fact of six million murders, a colossal and cold-blooded crime which would have been impossible without a general indifference to the fate of the victims. The Holocaust became European Christianity's most terrible source of guilt—of course, not because the murderers were pious or because church leaders had been entirely silent about the laws and actions of the Nazis over the years, but because of the undeniable record of anti-Semitism in the churches' teaching over the centuries. Not only ignorant peasants or monks but also eminent theologians and spiritual teachers had attacked the Jews as the "killers of Christ," as a people

now abandoned by God. Not only had the Jews of Rome been forced to live in a ghetto until popes no longer governed that city; not only had Luther allowed himself to shoot inflammatory words at this easy target; but almost everywhere in Europe, Jews had been made to seem strange, sinister and repulsive. A long road of disgraceful preaching was one of the paths across the centuries which led to the Nazis' death camps and in the end, not Judaism but Christianity was discredited.

But, as Edwards acknowledges, there were nevertheless many Christian heroes who stood out as exceptions in these most horrific of times. One of them was the nuncio, the papal ambassador, in Turkey during the period of the Shoah; he was one of the earliest Western religious personalities to receive information about the Nazi murder machine. This man, of course, was Archbishop Angelo Roncalli, who helped save thousands of Jews from the clutches of their would-be killers and was deeply moved by the plight of the Jewish people.

Within little more than a decade, after the demise of Pope Pius XII, Roncalli was elected as the new pontiff, taking the name John XXIII. As we know, contrary to popular perception of him as something of a simple man, Pope John proved to be nothing less than a visionary for his time, convening the historic Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, with its far-reaching implications for the Catholic Church.

Arguably the most historic of its documents was the one that dealt with relations with other religions, which we know by its two opening Latin words, *Nostra Aetate*. There can be no doubt that this document, promulgated only in 1965 after Pope John XXIII's death, was profoundly influenced by the impact of the Shoah and transformed the Catholic Church's teaching concerning Jews and Judaism.

It admonished against the portrayal of Jews as collectively guilty for the death of Jesus at the time, let alone in perpetuity (in direct contradiction to the explicit words of authorities like Origen and Pope Innocent III); it affirmed the unbroken covenant between God and the Jewish people (quoting from Paul in Romans II:29), and in so doing, *Nostra Aetate* eliminated in one stroke, as it were, any theological objections to the idea of the return of the Jewish people to its ancestral homeland and to sovereignty within it. The document thus explicitly refuted any suggestion that the Jews are rejected or accursed by God, declaring the contrary to be the case; and it also categorically condemned anti-Semitism.

Karol Wojtyla

The youngest bishop present at that historic council was Karol Wojtyla, who was later to become Pope John Paul II; this was a formative experience in his own *weltanschauung*, with the example and leadership of Pope John XXIII impacting enormously upon him. Wojtyla was quite atypical among the bishops gathered there, precisely in terms of his own personal experience of both living Jewry and the tragedy that befell it.

His childhood experiences and friendships with members of the Jewish community in Wadowice, Poland, had impacted upon his own personal religious outlook long before he even contemplated entering the priesthood. In the interview John Paul II gave to Tad Szulc, published in *Parade* magazine in 1994, he refers to the effect upon him as a boy of listening to Psalm 147 being sung during evening Mass:

O Jerusalem, glorify the Lord, praise your God, O Zion! For He has made the bars of your gates strong and blessed your children within you.

(Incidentally, this psalm is an integral part of the Jewish daily morning prayers.) John Paul II makes it clear in the interview that he fully identified the verse with the Jewish people whom he knew. "I still have in my ears these words and this melody which I have remembered all my life," he declared.

In other words, already as a child, Karol Wojtyla had per-

ceived the Jewish people as blessed by God, not cursed and rejected. In Gianfranco Svidercoschi's notable book, *Letter to a Jewish Friend*,³ which recalls Wojtyla's Jewish friendships of his youth—and, in particular, one which still continues today with an old schoolmate, Jerzy Kluger—we discover another insight into his formative understanding of the relationship with the Jewish people, emanating, interestingly, from Polish culture itself. This was conveyed to him by his respected teacher Mr. Gebhardt, who inspired in him an appreciation of the intellectual heritage of Poland, including the writings of Adam Mickiewicz. At the recent papal concert for reconciliation among the Abrahamic faiths, the major piece of music was Mahler's Second Symphony, known as the *Resurrection Symphony*. Mahler's inspiration in writing this work was Mickiewicz's dramatic epic, *Dziady*. In the conductor's notes in the program, Gilbert Levine observed:

Mickiewicz is to Polish literary history and to the Polish nation, what Shakespeare and Lord Byron are to the English; Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo to the French; Dante and Ugo Foscolo to the Italians; or Goethe and Frederich Schiller are to the German-speaking world. [Mickiewicz] is and has been the inspiration for many of the great movements in Polish letters and in Polish nation building.

Svidercoschi's book narrates how, on the day after anti-Semitic rioting in Wadowice, Gebhardt read out the words of Mickiewicz, written in 1848, which he explained had been "prepared (as) a sort of political manifesto, which was intended to inspire the constitution of the future independent Slav States." Inter alia, Mickiewicz wrote:

...in the nation everyone is a citizen. All citizens are equal before the law and before the administration. To the Jew, **our elder brother** [emphasis added], (we must show) esteem and help on his path towards eternal welfare and in all matters, equal rights.

John Paul II and the Jews

It is surely no coincidence that Pope John Paul II made precisely this term of reference to the Jewish people—"elder brother"—his own coined phrase, to reflect not only a historical vision of the relationship, but also a theological one.

In the introduction to the English version of Svidercoschi's book, the late John Cardinal O'Connor stated his conviction that Pope John Paul II "is unself-consciously shaped by his fundamental gratitude for Judaism as the very root of his Catholicism ... (and) ... he seems simply to assume that his love for [Jews] and for Judaism itself is so strong that his good intentions should be recognized."

In the Szulc interview in *Parade*. John Paul II continued:

And then came the terrible experience of World War II, the [Nazi] occupation and the Holocaust, which was the extermination of Jews just for the reason that they were Jews.... Afterward, whenever I had the opportunity, I spoke about it everywhere.

So we may say that long before his pontificate, Wojtyla's approach toward Jews and Judaism was defined by a positive historical and theological attitude toward them, as well as by the trauma of the Shoah and its implications.

These experiences were clearly seminal in leading Pope John Paul II to what Edward Cardinal Cassidy describes as his "special dedication to the promotion of Catholic-Jewish relations ... [which today reflect] ... a new spirit of mutual understanding and respect; of good will and reconciliation; of cooperation and common goals between Jews and Catholics; and much of the credit for this goes to the Pope who not only has opened the doors of the Vatican to Jewish leaders coming to Rome, but has visited them on his pastoral journeys throughout the world and taken every possible occasion to address in his speeches, questions of concern to the two faith communities."

John Paul II—Master of Grand Gestures

However, what has typified the pontificate of John Paul II has been not only grand gestures and initiatives, but their communication on a grand scale as well.

It is something of a paradox that it has been a Polish pope emerging from a rigid communist society who almost intuitively understood the advertising language of Madison Avenue, communicating to vast numbers through the modern media. Aside from his profound theological insights into and formulations concerning Christianity's relationship with Judaism; his condemnation of the evil of anti-Semitism and his expressions of a profound desire for Christian-Jewish reconciliation, upon which I will further elaborate, two events have conveyed these messages with unparalleled power and force: his visit to the synagogue in Rome in 1986 and his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the year 2000.

His address at the synagogue of Rome was among the most important texts in this revolution in Catholic-Jewish relations, but it was, above all, the image of the pope embracing Rabbi Elio Toaff and demonstrating evidently genuine fraternal love for the Jewish community that remained in the public mind and reached millions who would not and even could not be reached by his words. Indeed, in assessing the major events of 1986, the pope singled out his visit to the Jewish community in the Rome synagogue as the most significant and expressed his conviction that it would be remembered "for centuries and millennia ... and I thank Divine Providence that the task was given to me." ⁴

No less of an impact was felt from the pope's visit to Israel in 2000, which had an enormous effect upon Israeli Jews, in particular. Most Israeli Jews, and especially the more traditional and observant among them, have never met a modern Christian. When they travel abroad, they meet non-Jews as non-Jews—rarely as Christians. Thus their prevailing image of Christianity has been drawn from the negative tragic past.

The papal visit to Israel opened their eyes to a changed reality. Not only was the Church no longer the enemy, but its head was even a sincere friend! To see the pope at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Israel, in tearful solidarity with Jewish suffering; to learn of how he himself had helped to save Jews at that terrible time and subsequently as a priest returned Jewish children from their Christian foster homes to their Jewish families; to see the pope at the Western Wall in respectful reverence for Jewish tradition, placing there the text of the prayer that he had composed for a liturgy of repentance held shortly beforehand in St. Peter's, asking Divine forgiveness for the sins Christians had committed against Jews down through the ages—all these had a profound impact upon a very wide cross section of Israeli society.

These gestures and their visual message have impacted tremendously upon the way Jews view the church, but they have impacted no less, if not more, upon the way Catholics in particular and Christians in general view Jews, Judaism, and the Jewish state.

In both these historic events, as throughout his pontificate, Pope John Paul II articulated the development of the central themes of his legacy for Catholic-Jewish relations—themes that may be traced back to his youth—concerning both the tragic past and its implications, as well as the nature and purpose of the Christian-Jewish relationship.

John Paul II on Anti-Semitism

Already at his first audience with Jewish representatives in March 1979, the pope reaffirmed *Nostra Aetatė*'s repudiation of anti-Semitism and described the latter "as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity." In November 1986, he described acts of discrimination or persecution against Jews as "sinful"; and in August 1991 he described anti-Semitism in particular and racism generally "as a sin against God and humanity."

Moreover, for John Paul II, the tragedy of Jewish suffering and, in particular, the Shoah, was not something just to be acknowledged. In 1985 he issued a call based on the recently released Vatican document "Notes on the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church," to fathom the depths of the extermination of many millions of Jews during World War II and the wounds thereby inflicted on the consciousness of the Jewish people: For this, he declared, "theological reflection is also needed."

Teaching about the Shoah was a preoccupation for John Paul II, and in this regard he emphasized the specificity of Jewish victimhood in the Shoah. In a letter to Archbishop John May in August 1987, he stated that an authentic approach toward the teaching of the Shoah must first grapple with the specific Jewish reality of the event, and that it is from this particularity that the universal message of the Shoah may be derived.

In keeping with this educational theme, that same year, on his visit to the U.S., the pope called on Christians to develop together with the Jewish community "common educational programs which will teach future generations about the Holocaust so that never again will such a horror be possible. Never again!"

Indeed, his aforementioned reference to the theological perversity of anti-Semitism was articulated in a pedagogic context, when he declared in August 1991 that "in the face of the risk of a resurgence and spread of anti-Semitic feelings, attitudes, and initiatives, of which certain disquieting signs are to be seen today and of which we have experienced the most terrible results in the past; we must teach consciences to consider anti-Semitism and all forms of racism as sins against God and humanity." As he has most recently stated, this call, lamentably, has as much relevance today as ever. His message of the crucial need to keep the memory of the Shoah alive as a moral education and warning was one that the pope reiterated time and again, as I was privileged to hear personally when he greeted me on the occasion of the gathering of prayers for peace in the Balkans in Assisi in early 1993.

But surely the most remarkable aspect of the pope's focus on anti-Semitism has been his willingness to confront the role that Christians have played through the ages in the tragedy of anti-Semitism and the implications thereof. I think it fair to say that this was a gradual process. However, at the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of *Nostra Aetate*, he embraced the impressive words of Edward Cardinal Cassidy, making them his own, and declared that "the fact that anti-Semitism has found a place in Christian thought and teaching requires an act of *teshuva*, repentance."

Almost immediately thereafter, in November 1990, John Paul received the new German ambassador to the Holy See. In his address the pope declared that "for Christians, the heavy burden of guilt for the murder of the Jewish people must be an enduring call to repentance: thereby we can overcome every form of anti-Semitism and establish a new relationship with our kindred nation of the original Covenant."

The Holy See's document on the Shoah, "We Remember," issued in 1998, also acknowledged the prejudices that led Christians to fail in resisting evil against the Jews, and the following year the International Theological Commission, under the presidency of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, issued a text on the subject of "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past," in which it reiterated that this failure requires "an act of repentance (*teshuva*)." Indeed in his apostolic exhortation to the Church in Europe for the new millennium, Pope John Paul II declared that "acknowledgment [needs to] be given to any part which the children of the Church have had in the growth and spread of anti-Semitism in history; forgiveness must be sought for this from God, and every effort must be made to favor encounters of reconciliation and of friendship with the Children of Israel."

However, I think it was John Paul II's liturgy of repentance at St. Peter's in the year 2000 that posterity will recall above all in this regard. The sentences asking Divine forgiveness for the sins Christians committed against Jews over the ages were, as we all know, transcribed onto a sheet of paper, which John Paul II placed in the crevices of the Western Wall on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem some weeks after. The text declared:

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.

On Judaism

Indeed, as the phrase "the people of the Covenant" reveals, Pope John Paul II fully appreciated that what has perverted Christian-Jewish relations in the past was not only a negative attitude toward the Jew, but no less a negative attitude toward Judaism. Already in Mainz in November 1980, he addressed the Jewish community as "the people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked by God" (in keeping with *Nostra Aetate*'s emphasis on Romans II: 29) emphasizing the "permanent value" of both the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish community. Moreover, in citing a passage from a declaration of the German bishops calling attention to "the spiritual heritage of Israel for the Church," he most notably added the word "living," to emphasize the ongoing vitality, validity, and integrity of Judaism.

Two years later addressing delegates from bishops conferences around the world who had gathered in Rome to discuss ways to promote Catholic-Jewish relations, the pope affirmed that both reconciliation with the Jewish people and a better understanding of aspects of the life of the Church require Christians to study and show "due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today." He added: "We should aim, in this field, that Catholic teaching at its different levels in catechizing to children and young people, presents Jews

and Judaism, not only in an honest and objective manner, free from prejudices and without any offenses, but also with full awareness of [this] heritage." He reiterated this sentiment when he visited the synagogue in Rome in 1986, where he used the phrase "elder brothers," subsequently combining it with the language he had used previously, to describe the Jewish people as "our elder brothers of the Ancient Covenant never broken by God and never to be broken."

On Israel

John Paul II also came to appreciate the inextricable religious and national elements within Judaism that render the State of Israel of such importance for contemporary Jewry.

In 1984 in his Apostolic Letter, *Redemptionis Anno*, he declared: "For the Jewish people who live in the State of Israel and who preserve in that land such precious testimonies of their history and faith, we must ask for the desired security and due tranquility that is the prerogative of every nation and condition of life and of progress for society."

Full relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel would have, at least, been a moral and morale boost in this regard. However, I believe it fair to say that the Vatican Secretariat of State's caution on this matter held sway over the pope's inclination and desire. Nevertheless, in the end, as one involved in the negotiations on the establishment of full relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel, I may divulge that it was John Paul II's determination to establish these relations that overcame the various objections of the Secretariat of State—not ideological, but technical—that would have further delayed the diplomatic process.

In the 1994 interview with Tad Szulc published in *Parade* after the establishment of these relations, the pope stated: "It must be understood that the Jews, who for two thousand years were dispersed among the nations of the world, had decided to return to the land of their ancestors. This is their right.... The act of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel is simply an international

affirmation of this relationship."

The establishment of these relations facilitated the pope's historic visit to Israel. The state reception and farewell, as well as his visit to the residence of President Ezer Weizman, very much served to testify to the culmination of a remarkable process and a sign of the pope's genuine respect for the identity and integrity of the Jewish people reflected in its reestablished sovereignty in its historic homeland.

On Christianity's Rootedness in Judaism

Arguably though, the most important theological aspect of the legacy of Pope John Paul II for Christian-Jewish relations has been his development of the concept of Christianity's rootedness in Judaism and what *Nostra Aetate* refers to as "the spiritual bond" that binds them together.

In his first papal audience with Jewish representatives, he expounded upon this phrase to mean "that our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective identities."

He also used the phrase "fraternal dialogue" to describe the goal of Christian-Jewish relations. Dr. Eugene Fisher has pointed out that the use of the term "fraternal" and addressing one another as "brothers and sisters" reflects ancient usage within the Christian community and implies an acknowledgment of a commonality of faith, with liturgical implications.⁵

Indeed the pope has deepened the idea of a spiritual bond by describing it, in March 1984, as "the mysterious spiritual link which brings us close together in Abraham, and through Abraham, in God who chose Israel and brought forth the Church from Israel."

The following year, on the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, he described this spiritual link as "the real foundation for our relationship with the Jewish people—a relationship which could well be called a real 'parentage' and which we have with that [Jewish] religious community alone.... This 'link' can be called a 'sacred'

one, stemming as it does from the mysterious will of God."

In 1986 in Australia, John Paul II declared to leaders of the Jewish community: "The Catholic faith is rooted in the eternal truths of the Hebrew Scriptures and in the irrevocable covenant made with Abraham. We too gratefully hold these same truths of our Jewish heritage and look upon you as our brothers and sisters."

This statement not only reflects the remarkable maturation of the pope's theological understanding of the Christian-Jewish relationship, but also his sensitivity regarding Jewish integrity, reflected in his replacing the previous use of the term "Old Testament" with the term the "Hebrew Scriptures."

In that same year, during his historic visit to the synagogue in Rome, he stated:

The Jewish religion is not extrinsic to us, but in a certain way is "intrinsic" to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.

As already mentioned, he subsequently combined this term with reference to the eternal Divine covenant with Jewry, describing the Jewish people as "the dearly beloved elder brothers of the ancient covenant never broken and never to be broken." I was privileged to be greeted by him with these words when he received me in Assisi in 1993.

Mutual Responsibilities

This unique relationship also brings with it expectations. In the pope's words of address to the representatives of the American Jewish Committee in 1990, he stated:

Our common spiritual heritage ... include(s) veneration of the Holy Scriptures, confession of the One Living God; love of neighbor; and a prophetic witness to justice and peace. We likewise live in confident expectation of the coming of God's kingdom, and we pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. As a result we can effectively work together in promoting the dignity of every human person and in safeguarding human rights especially religious freedom. We must also be united in combating all forms of racial, ethnic or religious discrimination and hatred, including anti-Semitism.

During John Paul II's pontificate, a number of remarkable official Vatican documents were published. Notable among them are the aforementioned 1985 "Notes on Preaching and Catechesis"; the 1988 document entitled "The Church and Racism," which not only condemns anti-Semitism, but also the anti-Zionism that serves as a guise for anti-Semitism; the 1998 document on the Shoah, "We Remember"; and the 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission on the Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible. And this is not to overlook the "Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel," which also has significant theological as well as diplomatic aspects and implications.

These official teachings of the magisterium have enshrined in perpetuity much of Pope John Paul II's unique and historic legacy for Christian-Jewish relations in general.

Issues of Tension

All this is not to deny that there were some issues of tension between the pope and the Jewish community, and sometimes there were actions that he took that caused distress to the latter. Some of these related to the role of the Church and its leadership during the Shoah, and there were actions like the beatifications of Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism, murdered by the Nazis, and of Pope Pius IX, remembered in Jewish historical memory for having supported the abduction of a young Roman Jew, Edgardo Mortara.

However, I am convinced that none of these were ever motivated in the slightest by any intentional insensitivity on the part of the pope—on the contrary. The pope's first commitment and

responsibility were to his faith and Church as he saw them, and all of his actions were determined accordingly. If, in the process of pursuing these goals, he treaded upon any Jewish sensibilities, I am sure that this was something he regretted. However, this did not prevent him from doing what he thought was right for the Church.

Nevertheless, the very fact that moves for the beatification of Pope Pius XII were delayed indicated precisely sensitivity within the Church, and most particularly on the part of the pope, to Jewish concerns in this regard. In my opinion the debate over the role of the wartime pope will never be resolved conclusively no matter how much archival material is revealed, precisely because historical memory and its interpretation are invariably so subjective.

Catholic-Jewish Reconciliation and Mutual Respect

Notwithstanding these areas of tension, Pope John Paul II's genuine concern for the well-being of Jewry and the promotion of Catholic-Jewish reconciliation and mutual respect were one of the pillars of his pontificate.

Another statement of the pope to the American Jewish Committee in 1985, in fact, sums up his own remarkable contribution toward Catholic-Jewish reconciliation and understanding:

I am convinced, and I am happy to state it on this occasion, that the relationships between Jews and Christians have radically improved in these years. Where there was ignorance and therefore prejudice and stereotypes, there is now growing mutual knowledge, appreciation and respect. There is above all, love between us; that kind of love, I mean, which is for both of us a fundamental injunction of our religious traditions.... Love involves understanding. It also involves frankness and the freedom to disagree in a brotherly way where there are reasons for it.

Assuredly, these words testify powerfully to the remarkable journey of transformation and reconciliation since the dialogue of

the deaf between Herzl and Pius X. To the extent that there is today, in the words of the pope, "love, understanding and frankness," in Christian-Jewish relations in general and Catholic-Jewish relations in particular, we owe him, Pope John Paul II, an enormous debt of gratitude for a remarkable legacy. Even if Catholic-Jewish relations will not be blessed with a successor to Pope John Paul II who will demonstrate quite the same degree of commitment to these relations, what has been achieved in this regard, especially during John Paul II's pontificate, has guaranteed firm and resolute foundations for Catholic-Jewish relations that they may continue to only go from strength to strength.

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Notes

- 1. This paper is based upon an address given by Rabbi David Rosen at Georgetown University on February 2, 2004. It was previously published in a slightly different form by the International Council of Christians and Jews, at http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?id=2188. It was revised slightly after the pope's death.
 - 2. Tad Szulc, Parade Magazine, April 3, 1994.
- 3. Gianfranco Svidercoschi, *Letters to a Jewish Friend* (Italy: Mondadori, 1992).
 - 4. National Catholic News Service, Dec. 31, 1986.
- 5. Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds., *Spiritual Pilgrimage: Pope John Paul II, Texts on Jews and Judaism*, 1979-1995 (New York: Crossroad, 1995), p. xii.

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A Jewish Perspective on Pope John Paul II

By Rabbi A. James Rudin

Because Karol Joseph Wojtyla was Polish-born, his election as pope on October 16, 1978, was met with widespread skepticism within the Jewish community. There was concern that the new pope would reflect the traditional anti-Semitism that marked much of Jewish history in Poland. But John Paul II proved the skeptics wrong. His extraordinary contributions to building mutual respect and understanding between Catholics and Jews are historic in nature, and he will be remembered as the "best pope the Jews ever had."

In addition to the pope's own theology, both geography and chronology were partly responsible for his unique relationship with Jews and Judaism. On the eve of World War II in 1939, when the future pope was nineteen, the Polish Jewish community of 3.5 million was a center of rich spiritual, intellectual, and cultural resources, and represented 10 percent of that country's total population. In his native Wadowice, a quarter of young Karol's schoolmates were Jews.

Wojtyla was a young man during the German occupation of Poland and was a personal witness to the Shoah in which six million Jews were murdered throughout Europe. But Poland was the Nazis' chief killing field, and the monstrous Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp was not far from Wojtyla's own hometown. By war's end, over three million Polish Jews had been killed.

After that horrific experience, Pope John Paul II needed no academic seminars or scholarly papers to instruct him about the radical evil of the Holocaust. The tragedy was indelibly etched in both his head and his heart. During his first papal visit to Poland in June 1979, John Paul II knelt in prayer before the stone marker that had been set up in memory of the Jews murdered at Auschwitz-

Birkenau. In later years he called the Shoah "an indelible stain on the history of the [twentieth] century."

In his travels, the pope actively sought visits with the Jewish communities in many lands, and he repeatedly condemned anti-Semitism, hatred of Jews and Judaism, as a sin against God. John Paul II's visit to Rome's Great Synagogue on April 13, 1986, was the first visit by a pope to a Jewish house of worship since the days of the Apostle Peter.

In his synagogue address, the pope reminded Catholics that Jews are "our elder brothers in faith" and that the Jewish covenant with God is "irrevocable." On April 7, 1994, the pope hosted an historic Vatican concert to commemorate the Shoah. I was present at that occasion and vividly remember John Paul II's poignant plea never to forget the Jewish victims of the Holocaust—among whom were many of his childhood friends and classmates.

A few months earlier the Holy See and the State of Israel had established full and formal diplomatic relations. This important action, combined with the pope's public denunciations of anti-Semitism and his reverent remembrance of the Holocaust, changed the initial Jewish perception of John Paul II. His personal intervention in 1995 satisfactorily resolved the decade-long crisis over the location of a convent in Auschwitz. As a result, the Carmelite nuns finally left the death camp building where the Germans had stored the poison gas used to kill Jews.

On March 12, 1998, the Vatican released *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.* Although there was much criticism from both Catholics and Jews about the document itself, John Paul II's brief introductory letter was universally praised. In it, the pope urged Catholics to "examine themselves on the responsibility which they too have for the evils of our time."

In March 2000 the pope visited Israel. Once again I was privileged to be present at an important event in his pontificate. Unlike Pope Paul VI's brief visit to Israel in the mid-1960s, when the pontiff never once mentioned the name of the Jewish state, John Paul II

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was an honored guest at the official residence of the Israeli president and in the offices of the Chief Rabbinate. The pope's sorrowful visit to Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Memorial, where he met with Polish Jewish survivors, was televised around the world. The most lasting image of the entire pilgrimage—perhaps of his entire pontificate—was John Paul II's slow walk to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Judaism's holiest site, and his insertion of a prayer of reconciliation into one of the wall's many crevices.

But there were also serious Catholic-Jewish flashpoints during John Paul II's long reign. In June 1987 he accorded full diplomatic honors to President Kurt Waldheim of Austria during a visit to the Vatican. At the time of the visit, the United States had placed Waldheim on its "watch list" and had forbidden him entry into the United States because of his wartime activities in the Balkans. After years of hiding his record, Waldheim was accused of participating in war crimes against Jews and other groups. The intense negative reaction to the Waldheim visit nearly caused the cancellation of the pope's scheduled meeting a few months later with American Jewish leaders in Miami. But the meeting took place, and the pope electrified his audience by declaring, "Never again!" in reference to the Shoah. John Paul II had another highly successful meeting with Jewish leaders during his visit to the United States in October 1995.

Toward the end of his long pontificate, however, some serious problems arose in Catholic-Jewish relations, most notably around the question of making the appropriate wartime records of the Vatican available to a team of Catholic and Jewish historians. It is an issue John Paul II's successor must confront if those relations are to grow in strength. While the Vatican document *Dominus Iesus*, issued in 2000, did not specifically mention Jews or Judaism, questions were raised whether the Holy See had abandoned the pope's strong commitment to positive interreligious relations.

In early 2004 there was another flashpoint when the pope appeared to offer an endorsement for Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*. John Paul II was reported to have seen it at a private screening and commented: "It is as it was." Vatican sources were

quick to deny any papal approval of the film, but the controversy remained. A year later the pope's new book, *Memory and Identity: Conversations between Millenniums*, drew criticism from some European Jewish groups. They charged that John Paul II unfairly compared the "evil" of abortion with the horrors of the Shoah. Vatican officials claimed that this was a misinterpretation of the pope's words.

But by the time those issues arose, John Paul II was already covered with the mists of legend. In death, he has earned an imperishable place in Jewish history, because under his gifted, indeed revolutionary leadership, the Catholic Church intensified the long overdue process of healing its relationship with its "elder brother."

My most vivid memory after ten meetings with John Paul II, goes back to an encounter in the papal library in 1990. When he learned that our American Jewish Committee leadership delegation was flying from Rome to Warsaw the next day, John Paul II grew rhapsodic, began to sway and said, "Ah, Friday afternoons, Sabbath candles in the windows, psalms being sung, children's voices...." He was mentally back home among his Jewish neighbors and friends in Wadowice. I think he really never left them.

Rabbi A. James Rudin is AJC's senior interreligious consultant.

John Paul II: The Tikkun Olam Pope

By Lisa Palmieri-Billig

Like other outstanding spiritual and political leaders, Karol Wojtyla began his career as an actor.

Born with a talent for communication, an overpowering sensitivity, and empathy for the human condition, steeped in a deeply religious Polish Catholic environment but surrounded by Jewish friends and classmates, most of whom were wrenched from him by the Nazis, he consequently embraced the moral imperative of transforming consciences according to his faith. Indelibly branded spiritually by the Shoah, by World War II, and Communist tyranny, he embraced his mission fervently as an opportunity for contributing to healing the world (in Hebrew, "tikkun olam"). In fact, he may well go down in Jewish history as the "tikkun olam" pope.

His was not a clerical voice of resigned obedience or presumptuous humility. Pope John Paul II's voice and body language always rang true, whether he was interpreting Scripture, proclaiming moral precepts, expressing pathos, deep inward spirituality, humor, or even, at times, righteous anger.

An episode stands out in the rush of transchronological film clips that the Italian media have spliced together on the occasion of his death, embodying his unswerving and radical values that have never bent to circumstances. During a speech in the 1980s in Agrigento, a fiery pope spewed forth with the fury of a biblical prophet against men of the Mafia that humiliate and destroy the love of life so characteristic of Sicilians. The resounding energy of his words revealed his extraordinary physical and mental stamina and the motivation that enabled him to survive the wounds of a nearly mortal attack as well as a series of operations and illnesses with total lucidity and unchanged determination. This very same energy becomes the epitomy of gentleness and tenderness in the endless

scenes of his personal encounters with the sick, the poor, the suffering, and with youth.

A vision of human dignity and respect for the sanctity of life, based on the biblical statement that humankind was created in the image and likeness of its Creator, have made of John Paul II not only a wielder of religious and political transformations, but also a man of dialogue. He considered Judaism a prime concern because of our common roots and, at times, tragically intertwined common history, and then all the other world religions. Not only did this pope willfully serve as an enemy of all totalitarian ideologies and as an undisputed catalyst of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, but he made reconciliation with Jews, and consequently with other religions and all people of goodwill, a primary objective.

A master of the mediatic use of symbolism, John Paul II systematically paved the path toward reversing a two-thousand-year Christian tradition of theological anti-Judaism that was an underlying agent for European anti-Semitism and Jewish suffering, culminating in the Shoah. A few months after being named pope, during his first trip abroad, he visited Auschwitz. Stopping at the inscriptions listing the numbers of victims, he said, "No one can pass by here with indifference."

While his theological positions have sometimes clashed with Jewish sensitivities (such as his reference to Auschwitz as a "Golgotha" of the Jewish people, implying that Jews were sacrificial victims in a Divine plan of salvation rather than victims of human evil), his intent of restoring full dignity to the Jewish people, religion, and land developed in a steady crescendo throughout his papacy.

He furthered two soul-searching international theological colloquiums in the context of the jubilee year—one on "Anti-Judaism in the Christian Milieu" and another on "The Inquisitions." They provided the basis for the requests for pardon for "the errors of sons and daughters of the Church" commemorated at the Vatican just before John Paul II's trip to Israel in 2000. During his pontificate several important documents on relations with Jews have been promulgated by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Jews.

It was his respect for Jewish sensitivity that led him in 1989 to intervene with a personal request to the Carmelite nuns in Auschwitz to transfer their convent away from inside the area of the former Nazi concentration camp. He himself had helped create the foundation "The Church that Suffers" which helped finance the building of the convent, but when he understood the Jewish perception that the nuns' presence there, together with a huge neighboring cross, was "Christianizing" the memory of a genocide whose Jewish victims were approximately 90 percent of the total, he took this unprecedented measure.

John Paul II received streams of visits by countless Jewish delegations representing the world's major Jewish organizations, and he never failed to meet with local Jewish communities in cities all over the world during his endless travels. No pope before him had ventured to bestow such significance on Catholic-Jewish relations.

The symbolic formalities of his historic visit to the Rome Main Synagogue on April 13, 1986, the first such visit in history, were carefully planned to give both religious authorities equal space, despite the clear imbalance of their numeric following. After the initial embrace, Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff sat in an armchair side by side with Pope John Paul II. The same ceremonial formalities were applied years later when the pope hosted a concert dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust, directed by Sir Gilbert Levine in Vatican City's Sala Nervi Auditorium. He and Rabbi Toaff, together with the president of Italy, sat in equally spaced special armchairs in the midst of the audience.

A half year after the pope's visit to the Rome synagogue, he called for an unprecedented first Interreligious World Prayer Day for Peace in Assisi. Separate but simultaneous delegations of the Christian denominations, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Native Religions, and Jainism—all offered their prayers for peace. This was another landmark in a universal dialogue for peace undertaken by the Polish pope.

The visual impact of John Paul II's visit to Israel has become an icon. The slow steps of a bent, white-cloaked pope advancing toward the Western Wall, the trembling hand slipping a prayer into a crack, requesting forgiveness for the responsibilities of the Church for the suffering of the Jewish people (from which he had tactfully eliminated the sentence, "in the Name of Christ our Lord," pronounced earlier during the Jubilee Year Day for Pardon in the Vatican), the filmed ceremony at Yad Vashem, have all contributed to canceling the negative stereotypes of Jews imaged in previous Catholic teaching.

In 1992 Pope John Paul II proclaimed that "anti-Semitism is a sin against God and against man." Quite a contrast to 1965 when *Nostra Aetate* timidly—yet clearly challenging the conservative, pro-Arab wing of the Church—stated that the Church "deplores" anti-Semitism, but "not for political reasons." Or even before that, when official Vatican media, such as the *Osservatore Romano* or *Civilta' Cattolica* published openly disdainful, even anti-Semitic articles, creating the pervasive atmosphere of the era of Pius XII.

During those very same years, Karol Wojtyla, in Poland, moved countercurrent to the predominant anti-Judaic culture of Catholicism. Anecdotes of his actions then give evidence of his early commitments. A well-known episode is that, at war's end, Priest Karol Wojtyla of Krakow advised a Polish Catholic woman who had hidden a Jewish child to seek the survivors of his family rather than to adopt him and convert him to Christianity. That happened during the period when Pius XII had issued orders to the nunzio in France to try to keep baptized, or even unbaptized, Jewish children saved in convents and monasteries from joining their Jewish relatives or institutions.

The fiber of Karol Wojtyla's character, together with his personal biography, his childhood friendships with Jewish playmates and families subsequently persecuted and murdered because of their Jewish identities, all have been determinant factors of this papacy.

John Paul II's efforts to establish respectful religious relations with Jews and combat anti-Semitism have gone hand in hand with efforts to reach out to Israel. While the Vatican's first mention of the State of Israel dates back to October 1977 in a letter from Paul

VI to then President Ephraim Katzir, requesting the release of Monsignor Hilarion Capucci, held in an Israeli prison for smuggling to the PLO, the term was not used again officially until John Paul II's 1984 apostolic letter *Redemptionis Anno*, in which he invoked for the State of Israel "a desired security and just tranquillity for the Jewish people, who in that land preserve such precious witness of their history and their faith." His recognition of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state has been consistant, balanced by his recognition of the rights of Palestinians to coexist in a state next to Israel. Had it not been for the Vatican Secretariat of State's fears for Christian minorities in Arab countries, the pope would have agreed to drawing up diplomatic ties between Israel and the Vatican long before the signing of the Fundamental Agreement on December 30, 1993.

Vatican diplomacy, above and beyond the pope's moral sphere of action, had found the courage to take this step only after Israel and the PLO were already negotiating in Madrid, and the Vatican could also simultaneously open talks on diplomatic ties with the PLO. At a Vatican press room conference held in July 1992, announcing the creation of a bilateral Israel-Vatican commission, Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro replied to a question by stating that "Palestinians and other Arabs cannot protest against our starting a process leading to diplomatic recognition of Israel, when they themselves are now sitting at a negotiating table with Israeli authorities."

Jews today all over the world are thinking of the pope with warmth, and many have been praying for his recovery. His profile to Jews who may not be familiar with the positive acts he has accomplished is frequently that of a moral authority, a very special and good human being.

The Rome Jewish community, which for 2,000 years has lived across the Tiber from the Vatican and been subject to the ups and downs in its mostly subservient relations with its powerful neighbor, is perhaps more skeptical than others. Yet through the years, this pontiff has managed to dispel suspicion and win hearts.

The morning after the sudden worsening of the pope's health, Rome's chief rabbi, Dr. Riccardo Di Segni, led a delegation of Roman Jews to St. Peter's Square, where they chanted psalms for the pope's recovery. Later, during a press conference called at the synagogue just before Shabbat, "to reply to the many phone calls" he had received, the rabbi said, "Psalms belong to both of our traditions and are a very strong expression of prayer. Let's hope the pope's strong fiber will help him overcome even this crisis." He spoke of salient moments of this papacy in terms of Catholic-Jewish relations and praised the pope for his commitment to "systematically promoting studies on Jewish-Catholic relations" and "creating a greatly improved atmosphere of dialogue, even if our theological positions retain their differences, albeit with mutual respect."

A precedent had been set on the eve of John XXIII's death, Rabbi Di Segni recalled. At that time, Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff prayed at St. Peter's together with three other Roman Jewish leaders. John XXIII, "the good pope"—considered a predecessor of John Paul II—was recalled by Rabbi Toaff as the pope who once stopped his papal carriage in front of the synagogue and blessed the Roman Jews just as they were pouring out from services.

A more recent international precedent took place last month during John Paul II's stay at Gemelli Hospital. Approximately thirty rabbinical members of the World Union of Progressive Judaism, led by Rabbis Mark Winer and Uri Regev, gathered in front of the hospital's entrance to pray for him. The *kippah*-wearing group was noted and filmed by RAI-TV cameras, resembling similar scenes in Jewish communities around the world today.

The silence of his absence will be very loud indeed.

Rome, April 2, 2005

Lisa Palmieri-Billig is AJC's representative in Rome and to the Holy See. This article was previously published in the Jerusalem Post on April 3, 2005.

Four Audiences of AJC Leadership with Pope John Paul II

On four occasions, in 1985, 1990, 1995, and 2004, American Jewish Committee leadership delegations met with Pope John Paul II in the Vatican. These audiences were in addition to meetings that various individual representatives, such as Rabbi A. James Rudin, had with the pontiff, and reflected the intense Jewish-Catholic dialogue of those years.

Following are excerpts from the remarks of four AJC presidents— Howard I. Friedman, Sholom Comay, Robert S. Rifkind, and Harold Tanner—to the pope and the pontiff's responses.

Statement by Howard I. Friedman President, American Jewish Committee February 14, 1985

Your Holiness,

It is with warm sentiments of esteem and respect that I express the heartfelt greetings of *shalom*, of peace and well-being, to you on behalf of this delegation of leaders of the American Jewish Committee.

We regard this audience with Your Holiness as a particularly auspicious occasion in the history of the Catholic Church and the Jewish people. We meet with you to acknowledge the anniversary of two climactic events:

First, 1985 marks the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II and the defeat of the demonic ideology of Nazism, whose core was racial and religious anti-Semitism. Second, 1985 commemorates the twentieth anniversary of the ending of Vatican Council II and its adoption of the historic declaration *Nostra Aetate*.

As the Nazi trauma appalled us with despair over human evils, so the twentieth anniversary of the close of Vatican Council II inspires all of us with hope and promise for a more humane future. The adoption of the Vatican Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, on October 28, 1965, marked a decisive turning point in the nearly 2,000-year encounter between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people.

Nostra Aetate repudiated anti-Semitism and the infamous canard of collective Jewish responsibility for the death of Christ. It thereby rejected distorted teachings of Christian doctrine which have resulted in centuries of anti-Jewish hatred, prejudice, suffering, and the prolonged shedding of Jewish blood. Nostra Aetate was a definitive acknowledgment by the Church of the permanent validity and legitimacy of Judaism as the authentic religious faith of the Jewish people.

We wish to acknowledge the act of justice and service to truth represented by that Declaration, and your own moving pronouncements calling for mutual respect and collaboration between Catholics and Jews in common service to humanity. It is no exaggeration to state that as a result of these far-reaching pronouncements, and the practical actions they have inspired, greater progress in improved Catholic-Jewish relations has taken place during the past two decades than in the past two millennia.

The American Jewish Committee takes special pride in this encouraging process, for we were privileged to have been intimately involved, through collaboration with the late Augustine Cardinal Bea and his Secretariat, throughout Vatican Council II.... Yet much remains to be done. We pledge our continued cooperation in helping further Catholic-Jewish solidarity and friendship. We sincerely hope that the forthcoming Synod of Bishops you have called will give further impetus in this direction.

As a pioneering human-relations agency, the American Jewish committee has shared Your Holiness's vision of upholding human dignity by vigorously advocating the universality of civil and political liberties—and, in particular, religious liberty—for all peoples

everywhere, especially those in oppressive totalitarian societies.

At this moment, we are actively engaged in close cooperation with Catholic Relief Services and other relief agencies in seeking to relieve the suffering, hunger, and deprivation of millions of fellow humans being in Ethiopia, and in Africa generally. That life-saving collaboration between the Catholic and Jewish peoples, in service to an anguished humanity, is the latest testimony to the new spirit made possible by Vatican Council II.

Your Holiness, American Jewish Committee leaders come to this audience with you after a ten-day intensive mission in Israel. We have met with Israeli Jews, Christians, and Muslims, with Palestinian Arabs, with government leaders and ordinary people. Everywhere we have found a great yearning for peace, for coexistence, for an end to conflict, violence, and terrorism. We know that these goals are dear to the heart and mind of Your Holiness.

Our visit to Israel has reinforced our conviction that the primary obstacle in peace in the area is the ongoing illusion of most of Israel's neighbors that somehow, without formal recognition by other states of Israel's sovereign legitimacy, her continued existence can be undermined.

Nothing would contribute more to peace in the area than the dispelling of that illusion. That is why the extension of full recognition throughout the civilized world is so vital.

We appreciate deeply your clear grasp of that reality as expressed in your Apostolic Letter, *Redemptionis Anno*, which emphasized the Church's de facto recognition of the State of Israel and the deep ties between the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem....

Your Holiness, we recognize the complexity of the problems involved, but we dare to hope that the spirit that inspired your Apostolic Letter will lead to steps that will formalize the diplomatic ties between the Holy See and the State of Israel and her people.

Such a historic act, we believe, would be a watershed event in Catholic-Jewish relations. It would help create the sense of reality which is indispensable to peace. We would consider it a happy development and confirmation of the decisions of Vatican Council II. Above all, it would be an act of profound spiritual and ethical significance in advancing the cause of world peace.

May God bless you and strengthen the work of your hands.

Response of Pope John Paul II February 1985

Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to receive this important delegation of the American Jewish Committee, headed by your president, and I am grateful to you for this visit. You are most welcome in this house, which, as you know, is always open to members of the Jewish people.

You have come here to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, on the relation of the Church with non-Christian religions, the fourth section of which deals at length with the Church's relation with Judaism.

During my recent pastoral visit to Venezuela, I received some representatives of the Jewish community there, in an encounter which has now become a normal feature of so many of my pastoral visits around the world. On that occasion, in response to the greeting address of Rabbi Isaac Cohen, I said that "I wish to confirm, with utmost conviction, that the teaching of the Church proclaimed during the Second Vatican Council in the declaration *Nostra Aetate* ... remains always for us, for the Catholic Church, for Episcopate ... a teaching which must be followed—a teaching which it is necessary to accept not merely as something fitting, but much more as an expression of the faith, as an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as a word of the Divine Wisdom."

I willingly repeat those words to you who are commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the declaration. They express the commitment of the Holy See, and of the whole Catholic Church, to the content of this declaration, underlining, so to speak, its importance.

After twenty years, the terms of the declaration have not grown old. It is even more clear than before how sound the declaration's theological foundation is, and what a solid basis it provides for a really fruitful Jewish-Christian dialogue. On the one hand, it places the motivation of such a dialogue in the very mystery of the Church herself, and on the other hand it clearly maintains the iden-

tity of each religion, closely linking one to the other.

During these twenty years, an enormous amount of work has been done. You are well aware of it, since your organization is deeply committed to Jewish-Christian relations, on the basis of the declaration; on both the national and the international levels, and particularly in connection with the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism.

I am convinced, and I am happy to state it on this occasion, that the relationships between Jews and Christians have radically improved in these years. Where there was distrust and perhaps fear, there is now confidence. Where there was ignorance and therefore prejudice and stereotypes, there is now growing mutual knowledge, appreciation and respect. There is, above all, love between us—that kind of love, I mean, which is for both of us a fundamental injunction of our religious traditions and which the New Testament has received from the Old. Love involves understanding. It also involves frankness and the freedom to disagree in a brotherly way where there are reasons for it.

There is no doubt that much remains to be done. Theological reflection is still needed, notwithstanding the amount of work already done and the results achieved thus far. Our biblical scholars and theologians are constantly challenged by the word of God that we hold in common.

Education should more accurately take into account the new insights and directives opened up by the Council and spelled out in the subsequent "Guidelines and Suggestions for the Implementations of *Nostra Aetate* n. 4," which remain in force. Education for dialogue, love and respect for others, and openness towards all people are urgent needs in our pluralistic societies, where everybody is a neighbor to everybody else.

Anti-Semitism, which is unfortunately still a problem in certain places, has been repeatedly condemned by the Church tradition as incompatible with Christ's teaching and with the respect due to the dignity of men and women created in the image and likeness of God. I once again express the Catholic Church's repudiation of all

oppression and persecution, and of all discrimination against people—from whatever side it may come—"in law or in fact, on account of their race, origin, color, culture, sex or religion."

In close connection with the preceding, there is the large field of cooperation open to us as Christians and Jews, in favor of all humanity where the image of God shines through in every man, woman and child, especially in the destitute and those in need.

I am well aware of how closely the American Jewish Committee has collaborated with some of our Catholic agencies in alleviating hunger in Ethiopia and in the Sahel, in trying to call the attention of the proper authorities to this terrible plight, still sadly not solved, and which is therefore a constant challenge to all those who believe in the one true God, who is the Lord of history and the loving Father of all.

I know also your concern for the peace and security of the Holy Land. May the Lord give to that land, and to all the people and nations in that part of the world, the blessings contained in the word "shalom," so that, in the expression of the Psalmist, "justice and peace may kiss."

The Second Vatican Council and subsequent documents truly have this aim: that the sons and daughters of Abraham—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—may live together and prosper in peace. And may all of us love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our soul, and with all our strength. Thank you again for your visit. *Shalom*!

Statement by Sholom D. Comay President, American Jewish Committee March 16, 1990

... It has been twenty-five years since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and its adoption of the historic declaration *Nostra Aetate*. During the past quarter century, the American Jewish Committee has been privileged to play a major role in building mutual respect and understanding between Roman Catholics and the Jewish people. We have engaged in this effort because, like you, we share a profound commitment to overcoming the mistrust, suspicion, and prejudice that have so often poisoned Catholic-Jewish relations.

Nostra Aetate, and several Catholic teaching and implementation documents that followed from it, have irrevocably transformed Catholic-Jewish relations. The 1974 Vatican "Guidelines," the 1985 "Notes," and your own leadership efforts, including the 1986 address at the Rome Grand Synagogue and your addresses the following year in Miami and Los Angeles, have been significant contributions to this vital undertaking.

Indeed, we believe that the development of constructive Catholic-Jewish relations throughout the world is one of the great success stories of this century. We especially commend the superb leadership of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews here at the Vatican, and the Office of Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States. And we appreciate the excellent work being done in the fields of Catholic teaching, preaching, and liturgy.

The American Jewish Committee, America's pioneer human rights organization, works closely with Catholics on a host of universal concerns including human rights and religious liberty, immigration and refugees, racism, world hunger, war and peace, destructive religious cults, and bioethics. The American Jewish Committee warmly welcomes the extraordinary positive changes through those past twenty-five years, and we reaffirm our pledge to

work cooperatively with the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in the years ahead. We are especially proud that the American Jewish Committee maintains close relationships with Polish-American organizations and other like-minded ethnic and religious groups in the United States, ... to foster dialogue and mutual respect....

While we celebrate the extraordinary changes that are currently taking place in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, we are saddened and profoundly concerned by the growing reports of anti-Semitism in that part of the world. The existence of openly anti-Semitic organizations, public rallies and demonstrations, publications, and threats of violence are increasing in number.

We strongly believe that the Church (and your Holiness) have a significant role to play in shaping the new Eastern Europe that is rapidly emerging. As you so eloquently declared—oppression, persecution, and anti-Semitism must be repudiated and opposed "from whatever side it may come."

Your continued active leadership in publicly opposing all forms of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (by speaking out in terms that are clear to all) will help to guarantee that the recent gains, so painfully achieved, will not be lost by a resurgence of this ancient pathology. Together we must make every effort to ensure religious liberty, individual freedom, and personal security for all peoples and groups.

The efforts by the Holy See to bring a mutually satisfactory resolution to the convent issues at Auschwitz are deeply appreciated. When we leave Rome, our delegation will visit Poland for a series of meetings with Catholic and government leaders.... We hope and expect that the present convent will be vacated at the earliest practical date, in accordance with the agreement.

We believe the successful resolution of this crisis proves the ongoing strength, and not the weakness, of the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. The fact that we were able to work together to achieve a solution to a most difficult problem should not be underestimated, and hopefully, the solution to the Auschwitz convent crisis can serve as

a model to follow when other serious confrontations may arise between our two communities.

In less than ten years, Christmas will mark the beginning of the third Christian millennium of their faith. The current decade provides an opportunity to work for peace throughout the world in anticipation of the year 2000. And no part of the globe is more in need of the healing power of peace and reconciliation than the Middle East, an area sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Hopefully, the 1990s will be the decade when a just and lasting peace between the State of Israel and its neighbors is finally achieved....

In your Miami address, you declared: "After the tragic extermination of the Shoah, the Jewish people began a new period in their history. They have a right to a homeland, as does any civil nation, according to international law."...

One of the most severe problems in achieving a Middle East peace is a prevalent belief held by many of Israel's foes that without formal diplomatic recognition by the international community, Israel's legitimacy, even its very existence, can somehow be undermined. By taking the necessary steps now to establish full and formal diplomatic relations with the State of Israel, we believe the Holy See will help dispel that myth and will make a significant contribution to the peace process.

Such a step would be an eternal contribution to achieving peace. Such an act by the Holy See would send a clear signal to the entire world that Israel is indeed a fully recognized member of the international family of nations, and would enable the Holy See to make its right contribution to peace, for the benefit of all people living in that troubled region.

Peace will require a *peacemaker*, like President [Anwar] Sadat. Your Holiness can be that peacemaker; what a wonderful contribution that would be to peace in the world.

We live in extraordinary, perhaps even miraculous times, and it is the mark of leadership to capture and use those moments in history when great and positive change is possible. That was the case twenty-five years ago when the Second Vatican Council adopted the Nostra Aetate declaration. And that is the case today when old patterns of thought and repressive systems of government are everywhere being severely challenged. It is our hope that history will judge us as equal to the challenges of today as were those men and women, including yourself, who a quarter century ago successfully reversed the harmful patterns of 1,900 years of Catholic-Jewish relations.

May God bless you with many more years of continued gifted leadership. The American Jewish Committee, for its part, pledges to continue its effort to achieve those goals we share. There is much work left to do, and as the Talmud reminds us: "The day is short, the work is difficult and God, the Sovereign of the Universe, is urgent."

Response of Pope John Paul II March 1990

Mr. President.

Distinguished members of the American Jewish Committee,

Shalom! This is my greeting to each of you as I welcome you to the Vatican. Our meeting today reminds me of a similar visit of the American Jewish Committee in 1985 for the purpose of commemorating the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration of the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. That Declaration does not cease to impart an important and timely message, inspiring us with hope and promise for the future.

Although the Catholic teaching concerning Jews and Judaism is summarized in Article Four of the Declaration, many of its fundamental elements are also present in other documents of the Council. References to the same topic can be found in the Dogmatic Constitutions on the Church and on Divine Revelation, in the Declaration on Religious Freedom, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, and in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Perhaps the time has come, after twenty-five years, to make a systematic study of the Council's teaching on this matter. We would do well to pursue this as part of our dialogue. Today, I would like to limit myself to some general observations.

Nostra Aetate speaks of "the spiritual bond linking the people of the New Covenant with Abraham's stock" (No. 4). This reference is complemented by another text found in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. There we read: "Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the People of God. In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (Romans 9:4-5). On account of their fathers, this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues (Romans 11:28-29)" (No. 16).

The origin of our "common spiritual heritage" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4) therefore is to be found in the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Within this common heritage we may include veneration of the Holy Scriptures, confession of the One Living God (Exodus 20:3, 23; Deuteronomy 6:4), love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), and a prophetic witness to justice and peace. We likewise live in confident expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom, and we pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

As a result, we can effectively work together in promoting the dignity of every human person and in safeguarding human rights, especially religious freedom. We must also be united in combating all forms of racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination and hatred, including anti-Semitism. I am pleased to note the significant level of cooperation that has been achieved in these areas over the past quarter century, and it is my fervent hope that these efforts will continue and increase.

In the new and positive atmosphere that has developed since the Council, among Catholics it is the task of every local Church to promote cooperation between Christians and Jews. As the successor of Saint Peter, I have a special concern for all the Churches, and am therefore committed to furthering such a policy throughout the world. At the same time I gratefully acknowledge the initiatives taken by yourselves in this area. I hope that your forthcoming meeting in Poland with the Episcopal Commission for Dialogue with the Jews will be a very fruitful one. May it be a hopeful sign of genuine brotherhood between Christians and Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, and thus contribute to the process of peaceful and democratic development taking place there.

This initiative and the continuing exchange of information between your Committee and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews reflect our common desire for better understanding and greater harmony. May this serve to benefit both of our communities and to foster justice and peace in the world, especially in the land of the Fathers and in Jerusalem—the Land

and the city considered holy by million of believers: Jews, Christians and Muslims.

May that day come when all nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks," when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). Upon all of you I invoke an abundance of Divine blessing.

Statement by Robert S. Rifkind President, American Jewish Committee February 6, 1995

Your Holiness.

My colleagues and I are profoundly honored to be received by you. We greet you with the utmost respect and esteem.

By your leave, I would recite the blessing that is said upon coming into the presence of an esteemed leader:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given of Your Glory to flesh and blood....

In 1985 and again in 1990, the leadership of the American Jewish Committee was privileged to meet with you to commemorate the achievements of the Second Vatican Council, which concluded in 1965.

On this occasion, we are pleased to take note of the thirtieth anniversary of the *Nostra Aetate* Declaration issued by that council. That Declaration has been the foundation stone in the development of positive relations between Roman Catholics and Jews throughout the world over the last three decades. In that declaration the Church deplored "hatred, persecution, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source." Further, the Declaration called for "the promotion of mutual understanding and respect" by practical, tangible steps, including "brotherly dialogues."

Thirty years later, we are gratified by the progress that has been made in the implementation of the words of *Nostra Aetate*. We are very mindful of your own personal contribution to the development of mutual respect and understanding between Roman Catholics and Jews. We take particular note of your historic visit in 1986 to the synagogue of Rome, on which occasion you described the Jewish people as "elder brothers in faith." Likewise, we note that in your most recent book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, you expressed pleasure that the "insights" of the Second Vatican Council "are finding their concrete expressions" as Catholics and Jews work together to build a better future.

I am pleased to tell you that for two years now the American Jewish Committee and the Polish Episcopate have jointly sponsored a program by which Jewish and Catholic professors of religious studies from the United States and Poland teach in each other's institutions of higher learning. Further, next week, the AJC and the Pontifical Gregorian University will inaugurate a new program under which an American Jewish scholar will teach here in Rome a course on Jewish thought since the Holocaust.

The recent establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel has made a major contribution to the improvement of relations between Catholics and Jews all over the world. The establishment of relations also helps in a significant way to further the Arab-Israeli peace process in the Middle East, for the success of which we all pray. We believe that in each of these ways you have made an incalculable contribution to the achievement of peace on earth.

Tomorrow, we will travel from Rome to Jerusalem, the City of David, which will next year celebrate its 3,000th anniversary. There we will spend five days meeting with the political, cultural, and religious leadership of Israel. You have on several occasions expressed your wish to visit Israel, and we hope that your wish will soon be realized. I know that the citizens of Israel and their leadership eagerly look forward to your spiritual pilgrimage to the land that has such deep meaning for millions of people throughout the world.

This year marks not only the thirtieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, but also the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust. We are keenly aware that you have given repeated testimony to the significance of the Shoah. Your sponsorship of last April's Vatican concert that commemorated the Shoah has been deeply appreciated, and the American Jewish Committee is proud to have been intimately involved in that historic event. You have aptly called the twentieth century "the Century of the Shoah," and you have emphasized that the events and significance of that time, through which you lived, must not be forgotten.

...We and you share the view that the Shoah stands as a mon-

ument to the danger of moral relativism, to the reality of man's capacity for evil, to the wickedness of denying the humanity of any of God's children, and to the need for collective action in resisting evil. Those lessons—bought so dearly and with such pain—must not be forgotten. Thus, we cannot fail to express our profound alarm at the campaign in some quarters to rewrite history, to falsify facts, to minimize the utter depravity of what was done, to rehabilitate the reputations and polish the records of those who combed the continent of Europe to find the human fuel for the fires of Auschwitz. We believe that, for the sake of all future generations, Catholics and Jews both must do their utmost to expose and resist the revisionists, the deniers, and the falsifiers.

May I suggest that one significant way to contribute to historic truth and combat falsification and revisionism would be for Catholic and Jewish scholars to study together the documents in the Vatican Archives that relate to the years of the Holocaust. Such a joint effort would serve as an example of how men and women of good will can together confront the truth of the past for the sake of the future.

Even as we note the establishment of new bridges of understanding between peoples, even as we note the grave evils of the past, we must recognize with deep concern the revival of xenophobia, ethnic hatred, and anti-Semitism in Europe since the collapse of the Communist regimes. These reemerging forces of darkness pose a grave threat to peace. We welcome the Church's strong stand and the vigorous exercise of your teaching office in actively opposing these manifestations of anti-Semitism. Indeed, I urge you to consider the publication of an encyclical affirming the Church's opposition to all forms of anti-Semitism. Such an encyclical, reflecting your powerful denunciations of this sin against God and humanity, would represent an enduring contribution to human welfare and a crowning achievement of your ministry.

Finally, the civilized world faces the growing scourge of international terrorism—the deployment of random violence against innocent men, women, and children in order to terrorize and

intimidate tears at the very fiber of civilization.

Six years ago, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Holy See accurately noted that "[t]errorist acts which have Jewish persons or symbols as their targets have multiplied in recent years." And the 1993 Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel states that both parties "declare their respective commitment to the promotion of the peaceful resolution of conflicts among states and nations, excluding violence and terror from international life."

Unfortunately, the frequency and violence of acts of terrorism aimed at Jews has increased. Sadly, much of today's terrorism is being carried out in the name of religion and religious ideology.

For its part, the American Jewish Committee seeks allies in the struggle against terrorism, and it is heartened by the knowledge that the Roman Catholic Church can be counted on as a partner in opposing this bloody plague.

During the last thirty years we have been engaged together in a historic effort to build bridges of mutual respect and understanding. Together we have energetically worked to develop a new and lasting relationship between Catholics and Jews.

I believe we stand at a unique moment in history. Your own extensive travels reveal a deep spiritual hunger among Catholics everywhere, and there is a similar quest within the Jewish community as well.

It is my sincere hope that we can together seize this moment of spiritual and theological yearning and move to the high ground of faith. Indeed, history will judge us harshly if we fail to mobilize all of our resources in this critical undertaking.

The American Jewish Committee is proud of its close cooperative work with the Roman Catholic Church. The past three decades have been years of significant progress, and we look forward to continued cooperation in the future. I pray that God will bless you with many more years of faithful and dedicated leadership.

Statement by Harold Tanner President, American Jewish Committee February 5, 2004

Your Holiness.

We are deeply honored to be received here by you today.

We know that we do not need to introduce you to the American Jewish Committee. Official delegations of our organization's leadership have been privileged to have been received by you on four different occasions during your pontificate, and our respective directors of interreligious affairs have been privileged to meet with you in many other contexts. This has, above all, reflected your remarkable goodwill and friendship toward the Jewish community at large, and I believe it has also reflected your appreciation of the AJC's commitment to and unique record in the field of Christian-Jewish relations.

Our purpose today is to express our profound gratitude and admiration for your exceptional personal contribution to this process, during the more than a quarter of a century of your pontificate. Your visit to the synagogue in this city in 1986 will go down in history as an event of enormous impact and significance. In the same way your visit to Israel in the year 2000, after the establishment of full relations between the Holy See and the Jewish state, was a most powerful testimony of the genuine transformation of the Church's relationship with the Jewish people. We are, of course, profoundly appreciative of your manifold statements on the unique relationship between our two faiths and your description of the Jewish people as the Church's dearly beloved elder of the unbroken and eternal covenant.

You have also been particularly forthright in condemning all prejudice and bigotry—especially anti-Semitism. We know that this is not coincidental due to your own personal background and experience, and you have emphasized that we must work devotedly to ensure that the memory of the Shoah and its implications for

humanity at large are studied and taught to future generations. But because we bear the wounds of this particular experience, we are, of course, especially perturbed these days by the present wave of anti-Semitic expression and violence. We therefore are particularly grateful to you for the categorical statements of the Holy See condemning this perversity.

We also recall the remarkable concert you held to commemorate the Shoah, and notably, you have just hosted a concert expressing the hope and goal of reconciliation among the three monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Naturally we deeply share that aspiration, but know that there is a long road ahead before we will come close to that goal.

In this regard we are especially horrified by the way religion has been abused in the Middle East and around the world, to justify and even glorify the killing of innocents. We are grateful for your powerful statements condemning violence in the name of religion, and we pray that the world at large will listen and recognize the truth of your words.

Your Holiness, we also take this opportunity to thank you for your Church in the United States. I believe it true to say that no Jewish community at any time and in any place has enjoyed the degree of warm friendship and collegial cooperation that we have enjoyed with the Catholic Church in America. We know that this is due in no small regard to your own courageous leadership, and we profoundly thank you for it. We pray that the Almighty will give you the strength to continue in this leadership and that your Church around the world will continue to advance along the path that you have forged, following your example in the years ahead.

As you yourself have stated regarding the Divine injunction to Abraham to be a blessing in the world—this is our common charge. But in order to achieve it, we must first be a blessing to each other.

You, Your Holiness, have truly been a blessing to the Jewish community—and for this we are truly grateful.

Pope John Paul II's Greetings to the American Jewish Committee February 5, 2004

Distinguished Friends,

With affection I greet you, the members of the American Jewish Committee, as you come to the Vatican. It is with gratitude that I recall your 1985 visit to mark the twentieth anniversary of the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which has so significantly contributed to the strengthening of Jewish-Catholic relations.

As we now approach the fortieth anniversary of this historic document, there is regrettably a great need to repeat our utter condemnation of racism and anti-Semitism. Violence in the name of religion is always a desecration to religion. Countering this alarming trend requires that together we stress the importance of religious education which promotes respect and love towards others.

In these days our attention remains drawn to the Holy Land, which continues to be afflicted by violence and suffering. It is my fervent prayer that a just solution will be found which respects the rights and security of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Upon all of you, I invoke the gift of peace. Shalom aleichem.