



A Jewish Guide to Interreligious Relations



A. James Rudin

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The American Jewish Committee protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.

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Foreword

It has been nearly a decade since Rabbi James Rudin wrote his first *Jewish Guide to Interreligious Relations* (1996). Rabbi Rudin, director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee from 1983 to 2000, is a key figure in interreligious dialogue in this country, serving as chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, founding the National Interreligious Task Force on Black-Jewish Relations, and participating in meetings with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican and in World Council of Churches forums in Geneva. A prolific writer, he has authored numerous books and articles on Jewish-Christian dialogue, religious cults, and Israel. He also writes a column for the Religious News Service. Currently, as senior interreligious adviser to the American Jewish Committee, his expertise continues to be an invaluable resource to the organization as it reaches out to old and new partners.

In the past decade, engagement between people of faith has become more urgent than ever. The multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups, the increased polarization in our country and around the world, and the debate over religious voices in the public square demand greater Jewish involvement with other American faith and ethnic communities. *A Jewish Guide to Interreligious Relations*, revised and updated by Rabbi Rudin, provides the most current information on the groups that make up the religious mosaic of America today.

This booklet is part of an AJC effort called Engaging America, a training and outreach program designed to develop and support Jewish professional and lay leaders to be competent and confident in the art, process, and outcomes of intergroup dialogue and engagement in settings from churches to ethnic organizations to coalition groups. The Jewish people needs a cadre of leaders to reach out to those who do not know us or misunderstand who we are. We need informed and articulate advocates in defense of Israel and Jewish concerns as well as for the wide array of social justice and civil rights issues on our country's agenda.

The Sages teach us that we are not required to complete the sacred work of improving the world, but neither can we walk away from it. We hope that this booklet will serve as a coach and a resource for you to be even more effective in your work on behalf of the Jewish people as we engage America.

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Preface

The rich experience gained over the last several decades in interreligious relations underscores the need for careful preparation for interreligious engagement and a clear understanding of the realistic goals of such exchanges. No Jew should enter into interreligious engagement without some knowledge of where the other participants are “coming from.”

The purpose of this publication is to assist the Jewish community in these vital efforts by describing the history, theology, and social views of our various dialogue partners, delineating how they view the purpose of engagement with Jews, and suggesting how they are likely to respond to our specifically Jewish issues in an interreligious context.

A word of caution: Just as Jews are remarkably diverse in their religious views, beliefs, and practices, so, too, are Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and members of all other faith communities. Even specific groups, such as Southern Baptists or Shi’ite Muslims, are deeply divided over certain issues. Therefore, beware of generalizations!

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Major Issues and Themes for the Jewish Community

For Jews, several key themes are essential for any authentic interreligious encounter, and absent these themes, there can be no genuine Jewish participation in dialogue.

Anti-Semitism

The elimination of all forms of anti-Semitism has, of course, been a fundamental issue for Jews. Although there are many kinds of anti-Semitism, including economic, political, and racial, most scholars agree that theological anti-Semitism still remains a pervasive pathology in many societies in the world. As a result, addressing the religious sources of anti-Semitism must occupy a principal place in the dialogue, especially in Christian-Jewish relations.

Many Christian scholars and church leaders have worked hard to eradicate all vestiges of anti-Judaism from church life, particularly in teaching, preaching, and liturgy, but much remains to be done. Special attention in this regard needs to be given to the interpretation of the Easter story, particularly the Gospel of John. Another essential requirement is a fuller Christian understanding of the rabbinic background of the New Testament, the Jewish identity and background of Jesus, and the Jewish roots of Christianity.

For many Christians, the “Old Israel” along with its “Old Testament” are venerated and remembered with gratitude, but with the coming of Christianity, they believe that Jews and Judaism were spiritually succeeded, fulfilled, completed, replaced, and/or displaced by the New Israel, the New Testament, and the Christian Church. The Hebrews and Israelites of old are generally revered among Christians for having pioneered in religious thought, and the ancient people of God are honored because Jesus of Nazareth was himself a member of the Jewish community.

But when the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people did not become followers of the new religion, and when Jews insisted on affirming the vitality and permanence of their ancient covenant with the God of Israel, many early Christians at first showed impatience, then hostility, and finally contempt for Jews. Tragically, for many Christians the only good Jew was a converted Jew. And because the Jews remained steadfast to their traditional faith, many Church Fathers exhibited an especially venomous attitude toward both Jews and Judaism.

From this Christian “teaching of contempt” emerged a false picture of the Jewish religion that its followers did not recognize. In this distorted portrait, Judaism was perceived as devoid of spiritual values, and the post-biblical books of Jewish teaching and devotion, including and especially the Talmud, were often objects of derision. With the founding of Christianity, the successor to Judaism, the Old Israel was no longer part of the Divine economy. It had forfeited its spiritual vitality.

In such a theological worldview, Judaism had completed its historic mission—that is, the preparation for Christianity. By all reason and faith, Jews and Judaism should have disappeared from history. One contemporary Christian missionary has described Judaism as “a booster rocket” that was jettisoned once the “main rocket,” Christianity, was launched.

This Christian understanding of Jews and Judaism, unfortunately, provided theological support for a host of destructive images, negative teachings, and odious comparisons. Judaism was regularly described as a dry, static religion of strict law while Christianity was portrayed as a merciful faith of compassionate love.

And sometimes, depending upon the time and place, the Christian attitude toward Jews and Judaism went much further than mere theological contempt and hostility; enter the monstrous “deicide” charge. Deicide, literally the killing of God, proclaimed that the Jews had willfully murdered Jesus of Nazareth. And because of this infamous act, the Jewish people then, now, and forever are guilty of the great crime of murdering Divinity.

For many centuries, the deicide charge was frequently employed as a kind of Divine license to harm Jews. Because they had lost their spiritual vocation and because of their alleged sin of killing Jesus, Jews became a theologically surplus people and Judaism a surplus religious faith. Neither had any legitimate role to play on the human stage.

One of the mechanisms for the dissemination of the deicide charge and, with it, theological anti-Semitism has been performances of “Passion Plays” that foster potent anti-Jewish portraits and attitudes. Passion Plays are dramatic presentations depicting the life, trial, and death of Jesus. Traditionally sponsored by churches or religious communities, these plays are increasingly often strictly commercial productions. The world-famous Oberammergau Passion Play, performed every ten years in Bavaria, has been the subject of numerous critical studies by both Christian and Jewish scholars.

In the United States, these plays have attracted large audiences, including Sunday school students and Christian educators. The plays are dramatically powerful sources for reinforcing anti-Semitic attitudes and stereotypes. This is particu-

larly true since the plays are frequently understood by audiences as the “gospel truth”—that is, as biblically accurate rather than reflecting the sometimes vivid imaginations of the various playwrights. Because of these facts, many Christian leaders in the United States have been deeply involved in analyzing Passion Plays, and in seeking the removal of all anti-Jewish dramatic material from them.

Old negative anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews as a people “cursed and punished by God” remain embedded in Christian teaching and preaching along with the image of the exiled “wandering Jew.” Jews have been frequently portrayed as agents of Satan, bloodsucking money-lenders, and “Christ-killers.” All these falsehoods transmit a highly negative image to Christians of Jews and Judaism, contributing to religious anti-Semitism.

But in October 1965, at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council of the world’s Roman Catholic bishops in Rome, the deicide charge of collective guilt was strongly and explicitly repudiated in the historic *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time) declaration:

... what happened in his [Jesus’] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today ... the Jews should not be represented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this followed from Holy Scripture. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work, and in the preaching of the Word of God they teach nothing save what conforms to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

The theological breakthrough of *Nostra Aetate* has been matched by many of the Protestant churches as well as the international church organizations, such as the World Council of Churches. In many Christian denominations, through study of liturgy and the ways Scripture is taught, religious support for anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism has been removed.

The intense controversy in 2004 surrounding *The Passion of the Christ*, Mel Gibson’s personal film version of the last twelve hours of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, was a lightning flash illuminating the sharp fault lines existing on the American religious, cultural, and political landscape. Critics, including both Christians and Jews, charged that the movie transmitted anti-Semitic images that unfairly demonstrated Jewish responsibility and culpability for Jesus’ execution, and some critics further charged that *The Passion* was a setback to building positive Christian-Jewish relations.

The film graphically illustrated scholarly concern that a large amount of unchallenged and uncorrected dualism is at work within many churches. A clear dichotomy prevailed regarding the God of Israel: The “Jewish God” was seen as a

Divine figure of stern wrath and jealousy, while the “Christian God” was a comforting parent filled with grace. The “Old” Testament (an especially pejorative phrase) was fulfilled by the “New” Testament. The “New Israel” (the church) replaced the “Old Israel” (the Jews), liberating “Christian grace” supplanted suffocating “Jewish law,” the loving “people of Jesus” superseded the deceitful “people of Judas.”

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, on the eve of the release of the film in 2004, issued a set of guidelines concerning Passion Plays, saying that they can convey harshly negative images of Jews and Judaism to audiences.

Despite the criticism and controversy, *The Passion of the Christ* film attracted large audiences. Of special interest was the extraordinary support given to Gibson’s cinematic opus by evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics.

But the fears that the film’s popularity would trigger anti-Semitic incidents were not realized at all. In spite of Jewish anxiety, most Christians did not see Jewish culpability in the film, nor did they translate anti-Jewish images into negative views of Jews.

Because of the long and lachrymose record of theological anti-Semitism, it is imperative today that Jewish and Christian participants in interreligious engagement jointly confront that painful history. To minimize or to skip over it will prevent an authentic encounter, and would be a disservice to the memory of the many victims of religious intolerance.

Even though there is no parity, the discussions may bring up the ways that religious communities can polarize and turn people into an “other,” and that should produce self-reflection for Jews as well.

Great care must be taken to distinguish between guilt and responsibility vis-à-vis the Christian participants in any interreligious engagement. Clearly, today’s Christian community is not guilty for the excesses and hostility of the past. However, because of their unique history, Christians do bear a special responsibility to remove the “teaching of contempt” from church teaching, preaching, and liturgy.

Indeed, the distinction between guilt and responsibility is a major item on any Christian-Jewish agenda. Fortunately, the past several decades have seen an extraordinary number of positive Christian declarations, manifestos, and statements condemning the evils of anti-Semitism.

The Second Vatican Council declared:

The Church, moreover, rejects every persecution against any person. For this reason and for the sake of the patrimony she shares with Jews, the Church

decries hatreds, persecutions, and manifestations of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and by anyone. ...

Similar statements repudiating anti-Semitism have been issued by other Christian bodies, including the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Southern Baptist Convention, the United Church of Christ, the United Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, and the Anglican Communion.

In 1987 the General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted a statement affirming that "Judaism has not been superseded by Christianity," and that "God has not rejected the Jewish people." The UCC publicly acknowledged:

The Christian Church has throughout much of its history denied God's continuing covenantal relationship with the Jewish people.... This denial has led to outright rejection of the Jewish people ... and intolerable violence.... Faced with this history from which we as Christians cannot, and must not, disassociate ourselves, we ask for God's forgiveness.

Pope John Paul II declared in 1985:

Anti-Semitism ... has been repeatedly condemned by the Catholic teaching as incompatible with Christ's teaching. ... Where there was ignorance and ... prejudice ... there is now growing mutual knowledge, appreciation, and respect.

And Pope Benedict XVI, while still a cardinal, said of the Jews:

They are not excluded from salvation, but they serve salvation in a particular way, and thereby they stand within the patience of God, in which we, too, place our trust.

Nevertheless, there remains the potential for anti-Semitic attacks fueled by religious ideology. This is especially true in Europe, even though that continent was the site of the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945, a period in which six million Jews were murdered by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.

Since 1945 and the end of the Holocaust, two new generations of Europeans have entered adulthood, that is, millions of people without any personal remembrance of the mass murder of Jews that took place in their home countries.

Because of anti-Semitism on the world stage, it is incumbent for the churches, both in Europe and in North America, to inaugurate a systematic and long-term campaign to implement the noble aims of the post-Holocaust Christian proclamations. And interreligious engagement is an extremely effective means to achieve that goal.

Israel and Zionism

The various interreligious guides that were published before the 1967 Six-Day War contain almost no mention of the modern State of Israel. Its role in the Christian-Jewish encounter in those years was nearly invisible. Although it has been stated many times, an important fact needs to be affirmed once again: The Six-Day War was a critical turning point, not only for the Middle East, but for interreligious relations as well. Today, full dialogue is impossible without Israel occupying a central place in such an encounter. All too often in engagement with Christians, the word “Israel” evokes more emotion and passion than any other.

The reemergence of an independent Jewish state has compelled Christians and Jews to examine themselves and each other in a new light. But, unfortunately, Israel is often a cause of misunderstanding and even antagonism between the two groups.

Many thoughtful Christian dialogue participants readily confess how little they actually know about the State of Israel—its origins, its purpose, its people, its problems, and its hopes. Even though the Middle East is one of the most documented and reported subjects in the entire world, many Christians have gained limited knowledge of the region from authors who refuse to accept the legitimacy and permanence of the Jewish state, or from authors who make exclusive apocalyptic Christian theological claims for Israel.

Neither view is helpful in gaining a balanced and accurate picture of modern Israel. But in interreligious encounters more than a description of Israel is needed; a prescription for action is also required to advance the cause of a just and lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors.

Attention must be given to the intense Jewish love and passion for the Land of Israel that has been eloquently expressed in countless prayers, poems, songs, biblical verses, commentaries, sermons, and books. The long record of Jewish attachment to Israel is extremely well documented and must be an integral part of any dialogue. Jewish self-understanding demands that the inextricable links with the Land of Israel be essential elements in any interreligious meeting.

The distinguished historian James Parkes believes the Jews’ real “title deed” to the Land of Israel is “the actual continuity of Jewish life ... from Roman up to modern times. If the number of Jewish inhabitants has constantly varied, it has been because of circumstances outside Jewish control, and not because Jews had themselves lost interest in living in their ‘promised land.’ On the whole it may be said that it was always as large as possible in view of conditions existing at any one time.”

In addition to the religious and historical attachment to the land, there is also an abiding Jewish commitment to the security and survival of Israel. The reborn Jewish state has set off an earthquake of emotions and fervor that has radically transformed the Jewish people. Israel, with its Jewish majority, has ended nearly 2,000 years of Jewish powerlessness in the world.

Jews are fully aware that Israel, like every other nation-state, has imperfections and defects. Yet they are profoundly stirred by the rebirth of a democratic Jewish state and by the remarkable spectacle of Jews from 130 countries “coming home to Zion” after centuries of living in the Diaspora (Jewish communities outside of Israel).

Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, needs to be included in any discussion of modern Israel. While happily, the infamous UN General Assembly resolution of 1975 that equated Zionism with racism was rescinded, some of the toxicity surrounding Zionism still remains within elements of the Christian and Islamic communities.

Zionism is best understood as a great “tent of meeting” for the Jewish people. There are many legitimate and authentic expressions of the movement that created the State of Israel. Zionism, like its creation, the State of Israel, is not monolithic. Like so much else in Jewish life, it is diverse, often conflicting, and intensely passionate.

Like every other national movement, Zionism cannot be reduced to a mere slogan or catch phrase. Its basic goal of reestablishing and maintaining an independent Jewish state in the Land of Israel remains unchanged. And while there are differing approaches by Jews regarding Zion, they are all united when it comes to Israel’s survival and security.

The rebirth of Israel in 1948 was for many Christians a refutation of a long-held theology. The despised surplus people had risen from the actual ashes of Auschwitz and had reentered history as a free and sovereign people in their own land.

The creation of Israel meant that Jews and Christians as well as Muslims and Jews have crossed into new and uncharted relationships. These new relationships need to be explored within the interreligious dialogue.

That exploration has already begun among many Christian leaders. Marvin R. Wilson, a prominent American Evangelical scholar, has described his own understanding of the State of Israel:

... the remarkable preservation of Israel over the centuries and her recent return to the land are in keeping with those many biblical texts which give

promise of her future. But my concern and support for Israel only begins with the predictive prophetic texts; it does not end there. The more relevant prophetic texts ... are those which speak to Israel's present situation by calling men and nations to practice justice, righteousness, kindness, and brotherhood in their dealings with one another.

The Christian and Islamic historic relationships to the land of Israel are also key components of interreligious relations today. All three religions have attachments, albeit different ones, to the land. Indeed, the various names given to the land clearly reveal the many political, religious, and social forces that have been at work during the last 3,500 years: Canaan, Israel, Judea, the Promised Land, the Holy Land, Palestine, and Southern Syria.

Jerusalem

All three faiths resonate spiritually to the city of Jerusalem. In the Islamic tradition, deeply influenced by Judaism and Christianity, the city, al-Quds (the Holy One) in Arabic, ranks only behind Mecca and Medina in sanctity.

While the defining events of Islam's birth are not related to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad visited Jerusalem when he was miraculously transported there from Mecca. From there he made his nocturnal ascent into heaven on his winged steed, al-Buraq (Lightning).

However, the Christian attachment to the city results from the key events in the life and death of Jesus within Jerusalem. As the city of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, Jerusalem contains many holy places that trigger deep spiritual responses from Christians.

Christians have called Jerusalem *axis mundi*, the center of the world. It is the city where the Passion took place, the city where salvational events unfolded, and it was the scene of Pentecost, the birthday of the Christian church.

While Christian communities have existed in the Holy Land continuously over almost two thousand years, over the centuries, Christians have come to Jerusalem as pilgrims to retrace the steps of Jesus, to visit the holy places associated with his life and death, and to pray. Sometimes the pilgrims came in conflict—in war as Crusaders or as proselytizers, but they also came in peace to build schools, hospitals, libraries, and hospices.

The Jewish passion for *Yerushalayim* (City of Peace) is quite different from the Islamic and Christian connections to Jerusalem. The city decisively entered into Jewish self-consciousness when King David made it the political and religious capital of the Israelites around 980 B.C.E.

For the past 3,000 years there has been an unbroken link between the city and the Jewish people. It is beyond the scope of this publication to describe in detail the central role of Jerusalem in Jewish liturgy, poetry, and writings. However, a verse from Psalm 137—"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning"—and the concluding prayer at the Passover Seder—"Next year in Jerusalem!"—graphically describe the Jewish bond with Jerusalem.

For Jews, Jerusalem is no mere collection of holy places; instead, the entire city is sacred. Krister Stendahl, the former dean of the Harvard Divinity School and a leading Christian scholar, has aptly written:

For Christians and Muslims that term [holy sites] is an adequate expression of what matters. Here are sacred places, hallowed by the most holy events, here are the places for pilgrimage, the very focus of highest devotion. But Judaism is different. ... The sites sacred to Judaism have no shrines. Its religion is not tied to sites, but to the land, not to what happened in Jerusalem, but to Jerusalem itself.

For the sake of achieving interreligious amity, it would be a mistake to equate the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic links with Jerusalem as synonymous with one another.

Like theological anti-Semitism, Israel, and Zionism, Jerusalem is a major topic on the interreligious agenda. But the three faith groups relate to the city in profoundly different ways. Those unique responses to Jerusalem must be honored, and not minimized.

The Holocaust

It took decades for Holocaust survivors to begin to focus on their terrifying experiences in Europe under the Nazis. Many histories, diaries, plays, radio and TV programs, poems, and novels about the Holocaust have appeared since 1970. Today, it is impossible to minimize the Holocaust's importance in interreligious programs. Indeed, one cannot fully understand today's Jewish community either in Israel or in the Diaspora without taking the Holocaust into account. Although the Holocaust—the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945—ended fifty years ago, the public's interest in this monstrous event is growing. In 1986 Pope John Paul II called the twentieth century "the century of the *Shoah*" (the Hebrew term for the Holocaust).

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Research Center in Jerusalem contains a Hall of Remembrance, a museum, synagogue, research center, library, and archives. The center develops teaching material about the Holocaust for schools and collects testimonies and other records from the period. It has placed on line over three million

names of those murdered during the *Shoah*.

But Yad Vashem does something more that should be mentioned in interreligious dialogues. More than 3,000 non-Jewish men and women, from all parts of Europe, have been accorded recognition by the center as "Righteous Gentiles." Each person so honored risked his or her life during the Holocaust to save Jews from the Nazis. Many of the Righteous Gentiles have had trees planted in their honor at Yad Vashem.

In 1993 the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was formally opened in Washington, D.C., and it contains an enormous amount of historical material, as well as exhibits and an extensive educational program. Since its opening, it has drawn large numbers of visitors. It is highly desirable for participants in an interreligious dialogue to visit the Washington Holocaust Museum as a group. And if the dialogue group travels to Israel together, a visit to Yad Vashem is a necessity.

Visits to such centers of Holocaust remembrance are important because the contemporary Jewish community cannot be fully understood without focusing upon the *Shoah*. In the United States, many Christian leaders have pioneered in developing Holocaust studies for students in churches, schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries.

Annual Holocaust commemorations are increasing in many American churches, and in April 1994 there was a formal and official Holocaust Commemoration Concert at the Vatican, at which Pope John Paul II spoke with eloquence about the evils of the *Shoah*:

We are gathered ... to commemorate the Holocaust of millions of Jews..... This is our commitment. We would risk causing the victims of the most atrocious deaths to die again if we do not have an ardent desire for justice, if we do not commit ourselves, each according to his own capacities, to ensure that evil does not prevail over good as it did for millions of the children of the Jewish people.... do not forget us.

As with the other major themes, it is beyond the scope of this booklet to describe in detail the host of painful questions raised by the Holocaust. Nor is it possible to describe the many different responses to the *Shoah* on the part of religious leaders from various faith traditions.

The human loss of the Holocaust is beyond measurement, and many believe the moral questions raised by the *Shoah* defy adequate comprehension or meaning. But when it became clear after 1945 that hundreds of thousands of baptized Christians had committed murderous acts against the kinspeople of Jesus,

and that Christian churches and their leaders had been mainly silent in the face of Nazism, it was apparent that a line of cosmic importance had been irrevocably crossed. Systemic evil had triumphed over Christian moral teachings.

But the fact that there is an abundance of articles, sermons, books, and monographs on the subject does not mean the Holocaust is “too big” or “too painful” for interreligious dialogues. Just the opposite is true. Precisely because the *Shoah* took place in the twentieth century, in Europe, an area of the world where most of the people called themselves Christian, it is imperative that the Holocaust be placed on every interreligious agenda.

In 1998 the Vatican released “We Remember: A Reflection on the *Shoah*.” While the document drew praise—especially Pope John Paul II’s call for an exploration of Christian “responsibility” for the *Shoah*—there is in the sixteen-page document a spirited defense of Pope Pius XII vis-à-vis the Jewish people during the Holocaust. To buttress its case, the Vatican authors cited positive remarks made about Pius XII by four post-World War II Jewish leaders, including the late Golda Meir, a former Israeli prime minister.

But the pro-Pius XII material contained in “We Remember” only intensified the controversy swirling around the record of the wartime pope. Many critics, both Catholic and Jewish, believed it was an error to include a specific defense of Pius XII in “We Remember,” a document intended to be a spiritual reflection on the *Shoah*. The publication of “We Remember” triggered public calls for the Vatican to open its archives and other centers of primary source material to competent Catholic and Jewish scholars, who will bring closure to the vexing question of Pius XII and his wartime actions.

Interreligious discussions of the Holocaust raise some painful and controversial issues for both Jews and Christians. What was the impact of the historic Christian “teaching of contempt” toward Jews and Judaism? Did such anti-Jewish teaching provide a theological justification for the Nazi ideology? Or was Nazism, as some scholars claim, solely a secular pagan movement that was also anti-Christian at its core?

What roles did the various Christian bodies and churches play during the Holocaust years? While some Christians resisted Nazism and saved Jews from death, most were silent or passive. Why? And what was the role of the Vatican during the Holocaust and in the years immediately following World War II? This latter question especially remains a source of continuing controversy.

Some Muslims and Christians incorrectly perceive Israel as a “Holocaust state.” Such a view turns Israel into an abnormality among the family of nations.

Its natural organic growth and its many acknowledged successes are either minimized or simply ignored. Instead, Israel is seen as a pariah state, a creation of the Holocaust.

There is even an attempt by some to “wipe the slate clean.” That is, the Jews suffered in Europe, but today they have a state of their own as a kind of Divine bookkeeping entry, a Divine compensation for losses incurred. The participants in a dialogue must reject such comparisons or equations.

There can never be any kind of human compensation for the *Shoah*. But the Holocaust, in all its tragedy and radical evil, must be part of the interreligious agenda, especially in terms of the universal challenge it presents to all people of faith and humanity.

Mission and Witness

Since these are potent terms, clear definitions are required in interreligious encounter situations.

“Mission” is a term employed by both Christians and Jews, but is usually interpreted in different ways by each faith community. Jewish self-definition includes the mission to extend the message of the one God, ethical monotheism, to the entire world. “On that day the Lord shall be One and God’s name shall be one” (Zechariah 14:9). Jews are to be a “light unto the nations” (Isaiah 42:6), but the Jewish mission has historically been free of coercion, religious triumphalism, or a sense of “victory.”

According to Jewish tradition, the God-revering person who is not Jewish is required only to follow the seven classic laws of Noah: the establishment of courts of justice, and prohibitions against blasphemy, idolatry, incest, bloodshed, robbery, and the eating of flesh cut from a living animal.

Jews have experienced the Christian mission in highly negative ways. For centuries, Jews were the victims of forced conversions, medieval disputations, expulsions, and death at the hands of those Christians who sought to “bring the Jews to Christ.” For over a thousand years in Europe the Jews were generally an oppressed minority within a Christendom that did not permit religious freedom, as we know the term. European Jews lived, until the so-called Enlightenment, in socioreligious, economic, and political conditions that were humiliating and crushing.

Even in modern times Jews are still confronted by coercive Christian missionaries who see Jews only as candidates for conversion and who continue to perceive Judaism as an incomplete religion. Because of this record, the term “mission,” whatever its earliest benign theological roots, is universally regarded by Jews as an

attack upon their sacred history and their religion.

But a growing number of Christian theologians are repudiating this dark side of their religious history and teaching. They are publicly repentant for past Christian injustices that were committed against Jews, and, increasingly, these scholars are emphasizing the Jewish roots of Christianity. In 1973 Billy Graham publicly criticized the excesses of some Christian missionaries. Citing New Testament verses from the Book of Romans, Graham declared:

*I believe God has always had a special relationship with the Jewish people....
In my evangelistic efforts, I have never felt called to single out Jews as Jews....
Just as Judaism frowns on proselytizing that is coercive, or that seeks to commit
men against their will, so do I.*

Today many Christians see “mission” and “witness” differently than in centuries past. They make a clear distinction between the two; mission is perceived as being insensitive and coercive, but witness is the living out of one’s faith without attempting to proselytize or convert another person. For such Christians, witness is free of all hidden agendas or subliminal messages: “You are My witnesses, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 43:12).

Witness, by this definition, is what Jews and Christians do every day as they attempt to serve God in faithfulness. The quality of our family lives, the spiritual values we affirm, the prayer life in synagogues and churches, an active commitment to the moral issues of the time, and the integrity of our religious communities—all of this and much more is honest witnessing.

But such witnessing must be free of deception. One of the nagging and divisive problems is the so-called Hebrew Christian groups that dot the religious landscape. These groups mischievously combine the Christian gospel message with cultural and ethnic aspects of Jewish life, such as the Hebrew language and Jewish humor, food, and holiday observances. Hebrew Christians profess strong public support for Israel, and they oppose anti-Semitism. But in order to recruit prospective Jewish converts, they deliberately misrepresent sacred Jewish symbols and concepts.

Many Christian groups and leaders have denounced the tactics and aims of the Hebrew Christian groups. One Christian aptly declared: “They [Hebrew Christians] are disturbing to Jews ... and alarming to Christians because it misrepresents our faith.”

In any Christian-Jewish encounter, a full discussion of mission and witness is required. And it is also important to focus on the deception and duplicity of any group, and the challenges that this presents for both Jews and Christians.

Major Beliefs and Themes of the Christian Community

Walter Jacob, in his book *Christianity through Jewish Eyes* (New York: Hebrew Union College, 1970), notes that the Jewish understanding of Christianity has “passed through three stages during the first eighteen centuries” of church history. For many of those centuries Christianity was almost totally ignored by Jewish scholars and thinkers.

In time, Christianity was “given some status and recognized as a monotheistic” religion by Judaism, but even then “Jewish interest in Christianity remained peripheral, a paragraph or chapter here and there, but in the enormous Talmudic and Midrashic literature Christianity was hardly mentioned.” Jacob believes that “Judaism, secure within itself, felt no need to define its relationship with the outer religious world.”

But, of course, “the modern world has changed this aspect of Jewish life ... a new stage in our relationship with Christianity has been reached.” And interreligious encounters between Jews and Christians are a vital part of that new relationship.

It is essential that Jews acquire an accurate and adequate understanding of Christianity and Christians if there is to be a fruitful dialogue and the development of mutual respect between the two communities. It is especially important to understand the Jewish roots of Christian theology and faith as well as the historic interaction between the two faith communities.

It is also necessary to understand some of the basic Christian teachings and doctrines as well as the central issues currently confronting the Christian community. One of the most discussed themes in Christian-Jewish encounters is the history and meaning of the first century.

By the time Jesus (the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua) was born in the Land of Israel about 2,000 years ago, there was already in existence a rich and diverse Jewish religious tradition that was based upon the Hebrew Scriptures and a strong collective memory of the Exodus and other defining events. Living under a harsh Roman military occupation, the Jews of Jesus’ day were quite diverse in their religious and political views.

Contemporary scholars, both Jewish and Christian, are devoting extraordinary attention to that important period—an era that encompasses the life and death of Jesus (c. 30 C.E.), the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70, the fall of the Masada fortress in 73, and the four brutal and unsuccessful Jew-

ish wars of rebellion against the hated Romans that culminated in the Bar Kochba revolt of 135.

This new scholarship reveals a spiritually restless Jewish community that was often filled with apocalyptic hopes, fears, and anticipations. Basic Jewish religious terms like “Messiah,” meaning “anointed” (the Greek word for Messiah is “Christos”), and “Son of Man,” mentioned in the Book of Daniel, developed within a complex society rife with expectations that its painful travails would soon end.

Jesus of Nazareth, a young preacher from Galilee, was probably only thirty-three years old when he was executed by the Romans, and during his life he attracted a group of followers who believed their leader possessed a special relationship to God. In any interreligious program it is important to remember that Jesus lived and died as a Jew in the Land of Israel. While the prevailing Greek culture was essential to the growth of Christianity, it seems likely that Jesus himself had a limited, even a negligible knowledge of that culture.

His followers had confidence that Jesus’ death by crucifixion at the hands of the Roman occupiers was not the end of their beloved teacher or his ministry, and a few followers proclaimed that Jesus had, in fact, been resurrected—a basic Jewish theological belief. Along with physical resurrection was the strong belief that Jesus would quickly return to earth, a “Second Coming.” Even though the early “Jesus people” realized their leader was not about to return soon to earth, their faith was not undermined or weakened.

The New Testament books, the written stories about Jesus, emerged in the first century following his death, and one figure, Saul of Tarsus, a city in Asia Minor, dominates those narratives and the early development of what came to be known as Christianity. Over half of the New Testament was written either by him or his followers.

Surprisingly, Saul, or to use his Greek name, Paul, never personally knew Jesus, and was actually an early foe of the new faith. But while traveling to Damascus, he was overcome by a blinding light and heard the voice of Jesus from heaven. As a result of this experience, Paul became a strong believer in Jesus as the longed-for Messiah. Indeed, a twentieth-century Christian scholar, Sydney Ahlstrom, has written that “Christian theology is a series of footnotes to St. Paul.”

As one of his “footnotes,” Paul offered a four-part explanation about Jesus that focused on “Christology,” or Jesus as the Messiah. Paul taught that before his birth, Jesus was “with God,” and then led a brief life on earth. After his death in Jerusalem, Jesus returned to God, the Father in heaven, and now awaits his “Second Coming.”

In the first decades following the execution of Jesus, his followers still considered themselves members of the Jewish people and were called *Notzrim* or Nazarenes. The Hebrew term is still used to describe those who later adopted the name Christians.

Most students of the period believe a “parting of the ways” between the Jewish community and the Nazarenes took place around 85, about fifteen years after the Romans had destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem. One result of that separation was a radical and irreversible break centering on the question of whether to preach the Christian message to non-Jews or Gentiles. The answer was not long in coming. It is estimated that by the year 130, a century after the death of Jesus, the majority of Christians came from Gentile, not Jewish, backgrounds.

This turning to the Gentiles was aided by Paul’s teachings that the traditional Jewish laws and rituals like circumcision and dietary restrictions were not necessary for Gentiles to achieve spiritual salvation. Belief in Jesus fulfilled those requirements. Some Nazarenes did not go along with Paul’s abandonment of Jewish practices, but in time Paul’s point of view, combined with his extraordinary preaching to the Gentiles, made it a dominant element of the new faith.

Following the great fire in Rome in the year 64, the emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the disaster, and in an act of imperial scapegoating, Paul was beheaded. Persecution of the Christian faith went on for several centuries after Paul’s death, and the martyrs of that period have been deeply revered by Christians ever since.

If there was no dilemma regarding the delay in Jesus’ return, there was a crisis regarding the new faith’s relationship to Judaism. Once the parting with Judaism took place and the majority of converts were Gentiles, the Jewish origins, milieu, and roots of Christianity were often minimized and even repudiated. And with that breach frequently came a teaching of contempt toward Jews and Judaism.

The early Christian missionaries to the Gentiles had a serious problem as they preached their message about Jesus as the Messiah. Most Gentiles were unfamiliar with the Jewish religious categories that were so important to the early followers of Jesus. The Gentiles could not identify with the Jewish tradition and its specific teachings.

Some scholars argue that the early Christians integrated the Jewish roots of their new faith with various Hellenistic mystery cults that were widely prevalent in the Gentile world of the period. For example, the concepts of a Divine son and a miraculous birth were part of many of those cults.

The Greek term “theology” describes an approach to religion that is based more upon a systematic philosophical approach to interpreting traditional beliefs

and practices. The early Christians worked to incorporate Greek philosophy and theology into their emerging religion. But ultimately Christian theology and belief stressed the “once and for all” Jesus event, especially his death and resurrection.

The 1,900 years of parallel religious development of Judaism and Christianity began during the early centuries of Christianity. A vibrant post-Temple rabbinic Judaism developed, with strong emphasis on the synagogue, the “house of assembly,” as the center of Jewish life.

While Judaism may, in Walter Jacob’s words, have been “secure within itself” vis-à-vis the new faith, the same cannot be said of Christianity’s complex and often ambivalent relationship to Jews and Judaism. Around the year 144, a young Christian named Marcion moved to Rome and began preaching that there are two gods, one without mercy, even evil, and the other the loving father of Jesus the Christ.

In what was to be a fateful formulation with enormous historical consequences, Marcion’s first god was the wrathful deity portrayed in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, and his second or loving god emerged from the pages of the New Testament. But Marcion went even further and boldly declared that ancient Israel, the Hebrew Bible, and the Jewish religion have no meaning for Christians. He believed there must be a clean break with the Jewish roots of Christianity.

Christian leaders labeled Marcion’s radical teachings a heresy, but even today scholars still detect a residual legacy of Marcionism in the troubled relationship that many Christians have in relating positively to Jews and Judaism.

Until the early fourth century, Christianity was a minority faith within the vast Roman Empire, and its adherents were often persecuted for their beliefs. And despite its rapid growth, Christians probably numbered no more than 20 percent of the empire’s total population. But in 313 the emperor Constantine publicly converted to Christianity, and Christians quickly went from being an oppressed minority to being adherents of the state religion.

As a new convert, the emperor was surprised to discover a bitter intra-Christian theological debate that he found “insignificant ... and unworthy of such fierce contention.” It was the battle over the nature of Jesus. Was he truly human or truly divine, or was he both? To answer these questions, in 325 Constantine called 300 bishops, or “overseers,” of the Christian church together in a council in the city of Nicaea. The Nicene Creed that emerged has had a permanent influence upon Christian thinking ever since.

It became a fundamental belief that Jesus was truly divine, of the “same substance” as God, the Father. And with it came the belief in the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a Divinity that appears in three unique forms, even though

they are not three separate gods. Nonetheless, the Trinity has been called a “mystery” and is accepted by Christians on faith.

For the millions of people who identified as Christians, much of the internal theological debate was simply beyond them. However, over the centuries a distinct system of belief and practice emerged that has endured. Sunday became the “Lord’s Day” in distinction to the Jewish Shabbat on Saturday. A yearly church calendar of festivals and saints’ days was developed. Baptism, adapted from the Jewish practice of immersion in water, along with communion and a system of penance provided the Christian with a sacramental system that gave meaning and purpose to life. Interestingly, the Roman Catholic doctrine of seven sacraments did not become official until 1438.

The communion service, or Lord’s Supper, is of special interest because it incorporates the wine and unleavened bread, matzoh, of the Jewish Passover. It became a key part of Christian liturgy, a remembrance of the Passover meal Jesus had with his followers shortly before his death. Many scholars believe the “Last Supper” in Jerusalem was, in fact, a Passover Seder complete with paschal lamb, matzoh, and wine.

Salvation is a central belief of Christianity, and there has been much controversy over its meaning. While a strong faith in Jesus promises life everlasting and personal salvation for believing Christians, what happens to sinners, nonbelievers, and Jews? One stream of Christian thought affirms that the coming of Jesus and the rise of Christianity as the successor faith to Judaism meant that Jews were no longer part of God’s Divine plan. The Jewish people had lost their spiritual vocation, their very reason for existence.

As far as salvation is concerned, Jews are in the same unfortunate position as other non-Christians, and can, of course, attain spiritual salvation only by becoming Christians. This belief was used as justification for the many attempts over the centuries to convert Jews to Christianity.

Other Christians strongly contradicted this view, and declared that Jews are hardly in the same religious position as other peoples who are not Christian. The special promises given them by God, the Jewish covenant, are “irrevocable,” the precise word used by Pope John Paul II in his 1986 address in the Great Synagogue of Rome. Even Paul, in Romans, chapters 9–11, asserts that the promises made to the Jews are eternal and are not conditional upon Jewish conversion to Christianity.

Today some prominent Christian thinkers discern two covenants at work: One is Jewish and the other is Christian. Neither covenant supersedes or cancels out the other, but the issue of salvation remains an important theme in any interreligious encounter.

The Great Schism in 1054 between Eastern Orthodoxy and the Roman church, as well as other divisions and rifts among Christians, is described in another section of this booklet. As a result of this divisive history and often bitter competition, Christians today, even though they number more than one billion people, remain in search of a still-elusive goal: Christian unity.

Because of that complicated history, it is difficult to fully describe contemporary Christianity. However, the overwhelming majority of Christians continues to place extraordinary importance upon classic creedal declarations and affirmations.

In addition, the liturgy and sacramental ceremonies are of central importance. Combined with this traditional view of Christianity are a host of modern Christian movements that include an emphasis upon social justice, human liberation, and women's rights.

Because Christians belong to no specific ethnic group, or people, and because their faith is not rooted in one land or language, they often appear highly "universalistic" in their concerns when compared with the "particularistic" Jews. It is an unfair analogy, since Christianity with its emphasis on the life and death of one person at an explicit time and place in history is indeed a "particularistic" faith. Although Judaism contains a significant "universalistic" stream within its tradition, this canard lingers on. Any authentic interreligious encounter needs to address this false dichotomy.

Like Judaism, Christianity is constantly interacting with the powerful extant cultural, political, and economic forces of contemporary society. And like Jews, Christians are constantly sorting out and debating what must be preserved and cherished from the past, while relating their religion to the problems of the contemporary human situation.

Christians are deeply concerned about their survival as a viable faith community in an increasingly secular world. Examples of this concern abound. In recent years historians have termed our era "post-Christian." Several decades ago Christians were told by some of their theologians that "God is dead." Evangelical church members especially make a sharp distinction between being Christian and merely being a Gentile.

Since the fifth century, Europe and, more recently, North America have been the centers of Christian thought and theology. Today most of the world's Christians now reside in South America, Africa, and Asia. This demographic reality will have profound influence upon the Christianity of the twenty-first century and upon Christian-Jewish relations.

Churches and Church Bodies

The World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is composed of over 340 church bodies, including the Protestant, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, and Reformed traditions, and represents more than 120 countries with some 400 million members. The WCC was founded in Amsterdam, Holland, in 1948 and maintains its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

The WCC maintains an Office on Christian-Jewish Relations in Geneva. The International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) maintains an ongoing relationship with the WCC. IJCIC members include the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, the Israel Jewish Council on Interreligious Relations, the World Jewish Congress, and the rabbinic and lay organizations of the three main streams of Judaism in America.

The WCC defines itself as a “fellowship of churches,” and it stresses Christian unity, education, and witness. Because it is a large global “umbrella,” the WCC reflects many different theological, political, and cultural points of view. This diversity is often revealed when the WCC takes public stands on contemporary political issues.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the WCC was frequently highly critical of Israeli policies. Indeed, the WCC's positions were usually more negative than many statements on the Middle East issued by the American mainline Protestant churches. One Christian observer has called those years “the heyday of unbridled third worldism” that was fueled in part by the churches from the former Soviet Union and the Middle East.

However, in 1975, when the UN General Assembly adopted the infamous resolution that equated Zionism with racism, the WCC's general secretary was quick to condemn the action. Dr. Philip Potter of Jamaica urged the UN to “reconsider and rescind” its action, and he rejected the false definition of Zionism as racist. For Potter, Zionism is a “complex historical process expressing many different aspirations of the Jewish people over the years, and ... subject to many misunderstandings and interpretations. None of these could appropriately be used to condemn Zionism as racism.”

In 1993 the WCC expressed grudging support for the Israel-PLO Oslo Accords. While much of the world was hopeful, even euphoric, about the accords,

the WCC publicly chided Israel for not being forthcoming enough to meet the PLO's demands.

Once the "glow" of the Oslo Accords dimmed, the WCC became even harsher in its criticism of Israeli policies and actions vis-à-vis the Palestinians. Critics have charged the WCC with a double standard when it judged Israel as compared to the PLO and Arab regimes in the Middle East.

The National Council of Churches

It is estimated that 163 million Americans are affiliated with the more than 217 Christian denominations in the United States, according to the *2005 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, published by the National Council of Churches in the U.S. This number compares with a 2001 figure of 159 million Americans who identify with Christian religious groups, according to the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS),¹ which found that 81 percent of Americans claim some religious identification, and 77 percent classify themselves as Christian.

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCC) is an organization of thirty-six Christian communions and denominations representing 45 million people in 100,000 local congregations. Founded in 1950, the NCC carries out a broad-based series of domestic and international programs.

The NCC's member communions are administratively independent, but work together on common issues, such as Christian unity, education, social justice, and international relief efforts.

The NCC membership is composed of mainline Protestant churches, including the American Baptist Churches, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

Also among the Council's members are Eastern Orthodox communions, including several churches whose membership is mainly Arab, the historic black churches of the United States, and two Friends (Quakers) groups. The NCC's headquarters are in New York City.

The historic black churches include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention of America, the National Baptist Convention, USA, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

The Orthodox churches that are members of the NCC are the Antiochian Archdiocese, the Armenian Church of America, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, the Orthodox Church in America, the Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in America. Other member communions are Church of the Brethren, Friends United Meeting, Hungarian Reformed Church in America, Moravian Church in America, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, Polish National Catholic Church of America, the Swedenborgian Church, and the Syrian Orthodox Church in America.

The NCC recognizes that “society is growing more pluralistic in religious makeup and in outlook,” and it maintains an Office on Interfaith Relations, which was established in 1974. The office seeks to “promote mutual respect” between Christians and Jews, as well as between Christians and Muslims.

Since the end of World War II in 1945, the NCC and major segments of the Jewish community, including the American Jewish Committee, have worked cooperatively on many domestic social justice issues. Until the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, interreligious relations in the United States usually meant mainline Protestants and Jews meeting together.

Some of the shared issues have included church-state separation, opposition to anti-Semitism, racism, and sexism, support for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1994, opposition to Christian conversion campaigns that target Jews, opposition to mandated prayers and Bible reading in public schools, a host of interreligious educational programs in Christian seminaries, opposition to South African apartheid, opposition to religious fundamentalism and extremism, such as the religious right, and support for global human rights.

Because the NCC is an umbrella organization with different, even contending constituencies within its membership, its public positions on many issues are frequently controversial. However, the NCC generally reflects the views and policies of the mainline Protestant churches.

This has usually meant a liberal public stance on most domestic and international issues. The NCC has generally supported the perceived rights and positions of various minorities, underdogs, victims, dissidents, and nonconformists. However, because of the conservative theological positions held by both the Eastern Orthodox and the black churches, the NCC has not taken a pro-choice position on abortion, and after long debate and study, the Council did not admit to its membership a body of churches whose membership is homosexual.

Many NCC public statements on the Arab-Israeli conflict issued since the 1967 Six-Day War have drawn sharp criticism from the Jewish community. In those statements, the NCC has consistently affirmed the right of Israel to exist in

security. But it has also strongly supported Palestinian rights and has been a consistent critic of alleged Israeli human rights violations and settlement policies in the territories. Many mainline churches, all NCC members, have adopted similar positions. However, some denominations have taken especially harsh positions on the Jewish state's human rights and settlement practices.

Some critics of the NCC attribute these positions to the persistent pressures exerted by NCC member Arab churches and by Middle East Christians themselves. However, this is only a partial explanation of the NCC's Middle East record.

Several of the mainline churches sent missionaries to the Arab Middle East during the past century and established institutions such as the American Universities in Beirut and Cairo, Bir Zeit University in Ramallah, as well as hospitals, hospices, orphanages, and schools in the region. These extensive missionary programs created a natural affinity between the American host churches, such as the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church, and Middle East Arabs, both Christian and Muslim.

On the other hand, there are many NCC staff members as well as leaders of member churches who are strongly supportive of Israel. The September 1993 accord between Israel and the PLO muted some of the anti-Israel feeling within the NCC and its constituents.

The NCC's most authoritative position on the Middle East, its 1980 policy statement, reflects this balance within the Council. While the policy statement evoked disapproval from the Jewish community, there is much in it that is constructive and positive. It called upon the Palestine Liberation Organization to recognize "Israel as a sovereign state and its right to continue as a Jewish state" while also endorsing "the concept of a PLO State to be established on the borders of Israel." It criticized those who single out Israel for condemnation regarding human rights while conveniently overlooking the severe violations of Israel's Arab neighbors:

The NCC ... recognizes the need to apply similar standards of judgment to all countries of the Middle East in questions of human or minority rights, and to resist singling out only one nation for particular focus without due recognition of other continuing human rights problems throughout the [Middle East] region.

It clearly recognized that ancient theological anti-Semitism exists among some Middle East churches and is being used for contemporary political purposes:

... the theological differences that still exist within the Christian community

over ... the continuing role of the Jewish people ... some theological positions, when combined with the political dynamics of the area could be understood as what the West would call anti-Semitism ... seeds of religious alienation can be carried through the churches themselves. ...

However, since 2000 most of the NCC's public statements placed the blame for the conflict with its Arab neighbors on Israel. An October 2000 statement asserted: "The *fundamental* [emphasis added] source of the present violent confrontation lies in the continued failure to make real the national rights of the Palestinian people...."

In addition to the NCC's Office on Christian-Jewish relations, there has also been a long record of interreligious programming between several NCC member churches and the Jewish community. Indeed, the NCC encourages such encounters because it broadens and enriches the overall dialogue.

Baptist Churches

There are over twenty separate denominational groups of Baptists in the United States. The term "Baptist" stems from the doctrine that total immersion in water links a Christian to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. There are nearly 34 million Baptists in America (according to the American Religious Identification Survey, 2001), of whom over 16 million belong to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), making it America's second-largest Christian body. The SBC, with 42,000 churches, has registered steady growth since 1970, when there were 11.6 million members.² The SBC has its major publishing house in Nashville, Tennessee, and many of its denominational offices are in Atlanta, Georgia. It is not a member of either the WCC or the NCC.

In recent years the SBC has had a series of well-publicized intra-church conflicts pitting theological conservatives against moderates. The conservatives have emerged the winners in these bitter struggles for control of the denomination's six seminaries, its publishing house, and the church bureaucracy. One SBC leader has described the battles as a "fight for control of the SBC's body and soul, and the religious conservatives have clearly won."

In the early 1990s the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) was established by SBC moderates, and approximately 2,000 congregations are affiliated with the new group. The CBF is open to interreligious programs with the Jewish community, and it continues to affirm strongly the traditional Baptist positions on church-state separation and religious liberty.

The American Baptist Churches (ABC) are theologically more moderate

than the SBC, and they are sometimes referred to as “northern Baptists.” The denomination, founded in 1814, numbers about 1.5 million members.³ Its headquarters are in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The ABC seeks to be part of a “cooperative Protestantism,” and is a constituent of the NCC and WCC.

The ABC was one of the first national Christian denominations to designate a special Holocaust Remembrance Sunday in its annual church calendar. Although it is a member of the NCC, the ABC has adopted far fewer resolutions critical of Israel than other mainline groups. ABC congregations have generally been active in fostering positive Christian-Jewish relations.

In 1845 the white Baptist churches of the United States broke into northern and southern branches over several divisive issues, including the question of slavery. The two groups, ABC and SBC, still remain separate denominations, and unlike the Presbyterians, who were reunited in 1983, there are few signs of a reunion taking place in the foreseeable future.

There is no hierarchy in the Baptist tradition, and each congregation is independent in all ecclesiastical matters. The Anglican Church in Britain persecuted the Baptists during the seventeenth century, and Baptists fleeing the mother country founded the colony of Georgia. Presidents Harry Truman, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton were Southern Baptists. Warren G. Harding was a northern or American Baptist.

Because of their painful experiences at the hands of the British crown and the Church of England, Baptists have historically been strongly committed to separation of church and state, religious liberty, and freedom of conscience. However, some recent positions adopted by the SBC have been interpreted by observers as a weakening of the historic Southern Baptist stand on church-state separation.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the SBC was actively involved in Christian-Jewish programs, especially with the American Jewish Committee, but, unfortunately, as the battle for control of the Convention intensified, interreligious relations became a casualty. However, many local Southern Baptist pastors, lay leaders, and university faculty members have continued with Baptist-Jewish dialogue programs.

In 1972 the SBC adopted a resolution condemning anti-Semitism. The resolution concluded:

Southern Baptists covenant to work positively to replace all anti-Semitic bias with the Christian attitude and practice of love for the Jews, who along with all other men are equally beloved of God.

Generally speaking, the SBC as well as other Baptists remain strong public

supporters of Israel. Much, but not all, of that support is based on the theological belief that the existence of a Jewish state, the “ingathering of the Jewish exiles,” is a necessary precondition for the second coming of Jesus. For many Baptists, Israel plays an integral part in their theology, and much of that belief system is based on biblical texts. Israel is God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6-8), the State of Israel is a fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 43: 5-6, Ezekiel 37), Israel occupies a special place in God’s kingdom (Ezekiel 36:30, 33-38, Amos 9: 1-15, Zechariah 8:22-23, and Romans 9-11). In such a faith system, Israel has a God-ordained right to the land (Deuteronomy 28-30, Acts 7:5). While not all Baptists share these views, they do represent the spiritual beliefs of millions of people.

Another Baptist group, the Alliance of Baptists, was formed in 1987 and is headquartered in Washington, D.C. Some among its 64,000 members continue their affiliations with the SBC.⁴ The Alliance describes itself as seeking “to build bridges of reconciliation in a world that desperately needs to be brought closer together.”

As part of that effort, the Alliance adopted a resolution in March 1995 confessing past sins against Jews and Judaism, denouncing all expressions of anti-Semitism, and urging Baptists to engage in genuine dialogue with Jews.

Historic Black Churches

In the 1970s there was a strong movement among many American Protestants to form a large “United Church.” There was much enthusiasm for bringing the various mainline denominations into union. But there was also powerful opposition to the proposal, and the historic black churches, mostly Methodist and Baptist, were especially wary of a new “mega-church” that might mean an end to their distinctiveness. The proposed United Church never became a reality, and the black churches’ opposition was a key factor in deciding the outcome of the debate.

The historic black churches represent one institution that has wide credibility within the American black community. The church has always remained with its people in the inner cities, and like the synagogue of pre-1939 Eastern Europe, the black church remains the central political, cultural, social, and, of course, spiritual center of the community. It is no accident that so many black civic and political leaders in the United States are also ordained ministers—for example, Jesse Jackson, John Lewis, Benjamin Hooks, and William Gray III.

Despite its many problems, the black church remains the one place where blacks can be totally “at home” with their own unique traditions and style of worship. The analogy with the synagogue is obvious. For Jews, the most direct means

of relating to the more than 38.7 million black Americans (according to the U.S. Census Bureau) is through the churches.

While Jews have been the world's greatest victim people, sadly, blacks hold that tragic distinction in the United States. In a twist of history, Jews, victims of anti-Semitism, and blacks, victims of racism, are bound together in the shared agony of victimization.

Black churches frequently have progressive positions on the major social justice issues, but they are often conservative on theological questions. Official relations between the black churches and the Jewish community are generally good, but black-Jewish relations do not occupy a major place on the black churches' program agenda.

The black churches' key issues include affordable housing, quality education, fair employment opportunities, prison reform, strengthening the black family, opposition to racism, and other similar concerns. Historically, apartheid in South Africa was a major international concern of the black churches.

Because blacks constitute a significant percentage of America's armed forces, black church leaders are especially sensitive to the use of U.S. military force in the world. All five historic black churches described below are members of both the NCC and the WCC. The black Methodist denominations have about 5.4 million members, and there are 13.8 million members in black Baptist churches.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, white slave owners in America transmitted their religion, usually Protestant Christianity, to their slaves. In a remarkable way, the blacks transformed their masters' faith into a liberation movement with a heavy emphasis on the biblical Exodus story. Indeed, the black slaves formed a spiritual affinity with the ancient Hebrews who were held in Pharaoh's bondage. Ironically, the white slave owners provided the slaves with an extraordinary spiritual weapon in the black freedom struggle.

Because of their identification with the Hebrew Bible, many black Christians have a special affinity for the Land of Israel, and they are regular visitors or religious pilgrims to Israel. At the same time, some black church leaders also identify with the Palestinians as fellow victims. This bifurcation must be kept in mind when Jews engage black Christians in interreligious dialogue.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) was officially organized in 1816. However, its original "defining moment" came in 1787 in Philadelphia when Richard Allen, a black Methodist pastor, was forced in the middle of prayer to move to a balcony of St. George's Methodist Church. Allen refused to do so and in protest he started the Bethel Chapel, now the mother church of the AME.

In 1793 nearly 40 percent of all American Methodists were black, but the

twin issues of slavery and racial segregation divided the Methodist faith community as they did many other churches as well. Allen became the first black bishop in any church in the United States. He died in 1831, and is widely revered as one of the major leaders of the early black church in America.

Today, the AME numbers about 2.5 million members with about 8,000 churches throughout the country.⁵ Following Allen's lead, the AME stresses concern for poverty and the ongoing struggle for social, political, and economic justice. The AME retains a church polity involving bishops, and it is a member of both the NCC and WCC.

The AME General Conference meets every four years, but congregations are highly individualistic and independent. A worship experience that includes preaching, shouting, singing, prayer, testimony, and conversion is a key element in church life.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion) began in 1796 in New York, when James Varick, the son of a slave and a Dutch slave owner, formed the first black church in that city. Varick, AME Zion's first bishop, was a strong abolitionist, and Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass were church members.

Today the AME Zion membership numbers about 1.4 million,⁶ and there are congregations on five continents. But church members are especially concentrated in the eastern part of the United States. Like the AME, the AME Zion has a general conference every four years. It, too, retains the office of bishop, but its 3,200 churches are independent. The AME Zion Church is a member of the WCC and the NCC and is an active participant in Christian ecumenism.

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) is the smallest—with 850,000 members⁷—of the three historic black Methodist church bodies. Most CME members live in the South. The church was founded in 1870 in Jackson, Tennessee, five years after the Civil War.

Unlike the AME and the AME Zion, the CME was established in full cooperation with white Methodist churches. Like the other two black Methodist churches, it supports congregations overseas in Africa and the Caribbean area. The CME is also a member of the WCC and the NCC. The church follows the Methodist pattern of holding a general conference every four years.

The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., is the largest and oldest of the three major black Baptist denominations. The Convention has five million members in 9,000 churches.⁸ It holds an annual convention to transact church business, and is a member of the NCC and the WCC.

A smaller black church group is the *National Baptist Convention of America*, which was organized in 1880. The denomination meets annually in a national con-

vention, and its membership is about 3.5 million.⁹ The National Baptist Convention of America is a member of the NCC and WCC.

The Progressive National Baptist Convention was founded in 1961 in Cincinnati, Ohio, and has a membership of 2.5 million.¹⁰ Like the other two black Baptist bodies, this denomination holds an annual convention and is a member of the NCC.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was established in 1832 in Lexington, Kentucky. From its inception it has sought unity among the various Christian churches and denominations. The 3,700 congregations of the Christian Church have about 770,000 members.¹¹ Over 80 percent of the church's members live in nine Midwest and Southwest states. Texas and Missouri have the largest concentration of Disciples. U.S. presidents James A. Garfield, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Ronald Reagan were Disciples of Christ.

Congregations are highly independent, and there is no official dogma or theological doctrine except for belief in Jesus and baptism by immersion. The Disciples' headquarters are in Indianapolis, Indiana, and the church holds a general assembly every two years.

The Christian Church is highly ecumenical and was a founder of both the NCC and the WCC. It engages in many domestic and international programs of education, family planning, care of the mentally retarded, and aid to victims of wars and natural disasters.

The Disciples, both nationally and on a congregational level, have been strong supporters of Christian-Jewish engagement. And although the Disciples are members of the NCC, the church has not taken the highly critical positions toward Israel that some other mainline churches have done. Unlike the Presbyterian Church and the United Church of Christ, the Disciples have not sponsored a missionary program in the Middle East.

Eastern Orthodox Churches

In 1955 sociologist Will Herberg published *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, a book that achieved wide prominence. For many years, Herberg's tripartite formula served as the basis for many interreligious programs in the United States.

At the time, it was a useful framework because it provided an equal place at the interreligious table for Judaism, and the book also endorsed the concept of reli-

gious pluralism. But Herberg's tidy arrangement, even at its inception, was an incomplete picture of religious life in America because it omitted, among other groups, Eastern Orthodox Christians. The term "orthodox" means "correct belief."

Almost from the beginning of Christianity, there was a clean separation between East and West. Over time Western Christianity became centered in Rome and spread to Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, Germany, and Poland. Eastern Christianity's center became Constantinople, the "second Rome," and it extended to much of Greece, the Middle East, Asia Minor, the Balkans, Romania, and Russia. Eastern Orthodox Christians did not accept the claims to spiritual primacy of the bishop of Rome, the pope, and in 1054 there was a permanent break, the "Great Schism," between Western and Eastern Christianity.

Byzantine rulers such as Justinian (527-565 C.E.) closely linked church and state, and a rich mixture of faith and culture emerged. The rise of Islam in the East placed exceptional pressure on Eastern Orthodoxy, and in 1453 Constantinople fell to the Muslims. Today the Turkish city is better known as Istanbul.

The ecumenical patriarch is the spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians, and he resides in Istanbul, although few of his followers still live in Turkey. However, Orthodox Christianity is the majority religion in Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece.

In 1993 the ecumenical patriarch, Bartholomaios I, sent a warm personal greeting to an international conference of Orthodox Christian and Jewish leaders that was held near Athens, Greece. He declared that Orthodoxy "has never encouraged racist ideas and theories such as the persecution and genocide of people who belonged to a different culture or worshiped God in a different way." In 1568 an earlier ecumenical patriarch, Metrophanes, also condemned attacks against Jews: "Do not oppress or accuse anyone falsely; do not make any distinctions or give room to the believers to injure those of another belief."

While the Eastern Orthodox regard themselves as the "first Christians," and they number 200 million, their faith is little understood in the West, where Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are the dominant expressions of Christian faith. Eastern Orthodox Christianity places enormous emphasis upon the worship service and the liturgy, and the churches often reflect the various nationalities that comprise Orthodoxy—Greek, Russian, Serbian, Georgian, etc. Orthodox priests may marry before ordination.

Although Eastern Orthodoxy is the majority Christian denomination in modern Israel, most American Jews know little about the Orthodox churches or the long and complex Jewish history that took place within the Byzantine Empire.

A small Greek village north of Athens is one remarkable chapter of that lit-

tle-known history. Jews have lived in Chalcis for 2,200 years, making it one of the oldest communities in the Diaspora. Part of that history is inside the Chalcis synagogue. Inscribed on a marble wall plaque are the names of those who aided the Chalcis Jewish community during the Nazi occupation of Greece during World War II. Among the honorees are two Orthodox clergymen of that grim period: Metropolitan Damaskinos of Athens and the local priest, Father Gregorius. A Christian cross is inscribed in the marble next to each name.

Several of the Chalcis Jews who were youngsters during the war have told how Father Gregorius placed his life in danger by hiding Jews from the Nazis. The priest also hid the synagogue's Torah scrolls. When the war ended, the Jews of Chalcis returned, and they affectionately called the heroic priest "St. Gregorius."

The rest of Greek Jewry was not so fortunate. Historians estimate that 60,000 Greek Jews were murdered during the Holocaust and only 16,000 survived. And it has often gone unnoticed that Bulgaria, with its strong Orthodox Christian tradition, saved 50,000 of its Jews, or 78 percent of the prewar Jewish population, from annihilation at the hands of the Nazis. In any dialogue between Jews and members of Eastern Orthodox churches, it is vital to examine Byzantine Jewish history, its bright chapters as well as its dark moments.

The two largest Eastern Orthodox communions in the United States are the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America with about 1.5 million members and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) with slightly over one million members.¹² Both church bodies are members of the NCC and the WCC. The Greek Orthodox headquarters are in New York City.

The OCA's members are mostly of Russian origin, and its headquarters are in Syosett, New York. There are also other Orthodox groups in the United States including Arab, Serbian, Coptic (mostly Egyptian), Armenian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Syrian, and Albanian churches.

Several of these Orthodox communions have coreligionists among the 144,000 Christians who live in Israel.¹³ About 72,000 of those are Eastern Orthodox, mainly Arabs. The status of Eastern Orthodox Christians residing in the Jewish state is carefully observed and commented on by the Orthodox Christian communities in America.

Greek immigrants to the United States began to arrive in large numbers at the beginning of the twentieth century, but the first Greek Orthodox Church was founded in New Orleans during the Civil War in 1864. Until recently, the Greek population in America was, like other immigrant communities, tightly knit, with religion acting as a cohesive force. But today Greek-Americans are facing many of the same external pressures that are also impacting upon American Jews.

Beginning in 1970, the American Jewish Committee has sponsored several national and local conferences with the Greek Orthodox Church. In addition, the AJC and the Pan Hellenic Congress have worked together on a series of joint programs and activities for nearly two decades. In 1993, following the resumption of Greek-Israeli diplomatic relations, there was an interreligious study mission from the United States to both Greece and Israel.

Relations between the OCA and the Jewish community have been more tentative for several reasons. First, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the OCA leadership focused much of its attention on the status and survival of the Russian Orthodox Church under communism. In addition, many American Jews whose families fled czarist Russia or communist persecution in the Soviet Union linked the dominant Russian Orthodox Church with extreme nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism.

However, several prominent OCA leaders were strong public supporters of the Soviet Jewry movement. In the early 1990s the Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky publicly called for the United Nations to rescind the infamous General Assembly resolution that equated Zionism with racism.

The Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church is part of the Anglican communion, which has self-governing churches in over eighty countries throughout the world. The Anglican Church, also known as the Church of England, became separate from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534 when King Henry VIII declared royal supremacy in ecclesiastical matters. The archbishop of Canterbury is the spiritual head of the communion. It is estimated that the majority of Anglicans now reside in the Third World—that is, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

“Episcopal” or bishop refers to the independence that each bishop exercises in the church. Many of the earliest English settlers at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607 were members of the Church of England, which became autonomous in 1789, following the American War of Independence. There are about 150 Episcopal bishops in the United States. The church’s headquarters are in New York City, and it is a member of the NCC and the WCC.

Historically, the Episcopal Church has produced many of America’s most influential leaders in politics, industry, and education. Eleven American presidents—George Washington, James Madison, James Monroe, William H. Harrison, John Tyler, Zachary Taylor, Franklin Pierce, Chester A. Arthur, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gerald Ford, and George H. W. Bush—were Episcopalians. No other

denomination has produced as many presidents.

Like some other mainline Protestant churches, the Episcopal Church membership has been in steady decline since 1966, when there were 3.6 million members. Today the number is about 2.3 million,¹⁴ of whom about 60 percent were not raised as Episcopalians but chose the church as adults.

While the Episcopal Church has a hierarchical clergy structure including bishops, it perceives itself as a “representative democracy” with decision-making shared between clergy and laity. Like the U.S. Congress, the church has two legislative bodies: a House of Bishops and a House of Lay and Clerical Deputies. The church’s General Convention meets every three years to formulate national policy.

During the past thirty years Episcopalians on both the national and local levels have been active in Christian-Jewish relations. In addition to the church’s Ecumenical Office, there is also a Presiding Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Christian-Jewish Relations. Many dioceses and local congregations have developed positive relationships with their Jewish neighbors.

As is typical of many mainline Protestant churches, the national policy resolutions of the Episcopal Church have often been highly critical of Israel’s human rights and settlement policies in the territories. A resolution adopted at the 1991 General Convention declared that the Episcopal Church “stands on the side of the oppressed, including both the Palestinian people and the people of Israel, in their struggle for justice,” and it urged the U. S. government to hold in escrow aid to Israel in an amount equal to “any expenditures by the government of Israel to expand, develop or further establish Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.”

At the same General Convention, a resolution was adopted that deplored “anti-Jewish prejudice ... in whatever form or on whatever occasion and urge[d] its total elimination from the Episcopal Church, its individual members, its various units.”

In 2004, the Episcopal Church decided that it should be proactive in endorsing constructive engagement that supports peace. There is a strong reservoir of support for Israel at the regional and local levels of the church. Like many other Christian bodies, the Episcopal Church has repudiated and deplored “all expressions of anti-Jewish prejudice.”

Evangelical Churches

The term “evangelical” comes from the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning “good news.” By this definition, all Christian churches are “evangelical,” that is, they seek

to spread the “good news” of the Gospels to the entire world. However, within the United States, the term “evangelical” is generally associated with those Christians, mostly Protestants, who affirm that the Bible, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, is the sole authority for religious belief and practice. Among some Evangelicals this affirmation of biblical truth is termed inerrancy.

Most Evangelicals have had a personal conversion experience, either instantaneous or one that evolved over a period of time. This phenomenon is sometimes called being “born again,” and it involves the acceptance of Jesus as one’s personal savior and Messiah. A third striking feature of Evangelicals is the need to “go into all the world and preach the gospel,” to evangelize either collectively or individually.

An Evangelical scholar, Thomas A. Askew, has noted that:

... [E]vangelical Christianity has never been a religious organization, nor primarily a theological system, nor even a containable movement. It is a mood, a perspective, an approach grounded in biblical theology, but reaching into the motifs of religious experience ... The evangelical faith has roots that reach back to European Reformation theology ... as well as to the Puritan tradition.

This booklet will use these working definitions of Evangelical Christianity. It is estimated there are over 50 million Americans who are Evangelicals, and they live in all sections of the country. Evangelicals are members of many different churches; indeed, almost every mainline church has within it a strong Evangelical component. For example, the United Methodist Church “continues its strong evangelical heritage. Within each congregation is a vital center of biblical study and evangelism—a blending of personal piety and discipleship.”

The Southern Baptist Church, described in an earlier section, is the largest Evangelical denomination in the United States. One of the fastest growing Evangelical bodies is the Assemblies of God, headquartered in Springfield, Missouri. In 1970 the Assemblies listed 625,000 members, and the current figure is 1.1 million.¹⁵

Although smaller in membership, the Evangelical Free Church of America, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is another center of Evangelical Christianity. While mainline church membership has declined, sometimes sharply, since 1970, the Evangelical numbers including members, new churches, and income, have all increased. The noted church historian Martin E. Marty has described the recent rise of the Evangelicals as “the most significant religious trend in the United States.”

Historically, Evangelical Christianity was the mainstream of American

Protestantism until the 1890s, when it appeared to be eclipsed by the liberal churches. Evangelicals were shunted aside after 1920 and especially following the famous Scopes “monkey trial” in Tennessee that pitted Evangelical William Jennings Bryan against the religiously liberal Clarence Darrow as contending lawyers. The success of the play and film *Inherit the Wind* in the 1950s seemed to confirm liberal religion’s victory over Evangelicalism. But it was not to be.

Evangelical Christianity continued as the main spiritual expression of millions of Americans, particularly those residing in the South and Southwest. But it was not until the 1970s that Evangelical Christianity reemerged as a strong and highly visible movement. Jimmy Carter’s election as president in 1976 and the enormous popularity of the evangelist Billy Graham were only two confirmations that some significant changes had taken place.

David F. Wells, an Evangelical scholar, graphically describes those changes:

[L]iberal Protestants [the NCC and the mainline churches] had always taken it for granted that ... there was a divine mandate securing for them their role as custodians of the culture. In the early 1970s this notion was unceremoniously abandoned and the remaining heirs of the liberal tradition became culture’s chief critics.

The rise of the Evangelicals came as a surprise for many in the American Jewish community. For more than two centuries Evangelicals and Jews never really encountered one another as vibrant and unique spiritual communities. In such a situation, it is little wonder that mutual misperceptions, negative stereotypes, and caricatures emerged.

Pejorative terms like “redneck,” “cracker,” “Elmer Gantry,” and “bigot” were sometimes used to describe the contemporary Evangelical community, and such pernicious epithets as “Christ killer,” “scribes and Pharisees,” and “Shylock” were hurled at the Jewish community.

The formative American experience for each community was decisively shaped in distinctly separate areas of the nation. For Jews it was the urban centers of the Northeast and Midwest, and for Evangelicals it was America’s South and Southwest. Only in recent decades have Jews and Evangelicals, like millions of other Americans, moved into all parts of the United States. With this mass migration has come increased contact between the two communities.

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that a systematic program was undertaken to overcome the centuries of mutual suspicion and ignorance. The Evangelical-Jewish encounter that began at that time was the “third wave” in inter-religious relations in the United States.

The liberal/mainline Protestant churches were the first to enter into significant dialogues with Jews after World War II, and the Roman Catholic Church followed them in 1965. The first Southern Baptist-Jewish national conference took place in 1969 in Louisville, Kentucky, and the first Evangelical-Jewish national meeting was in New York City in 1975. The American Jewish Committee was the cosponsor of both of these pioneering efforts. Numerous other national and regional meetings have followed since then.

Whenever Jews and Evangelicals meet in dialogue, they soon discover five areas of mutual interest and agreement:

1. A similar congregational structure of independent synagogues and churches.
2. A deep respect and reverence for the integrity and authenticity of the Hebrew Bible.
3. An abiding commitment to the security and survival of both the people and the State of Israel.
4. A shared commitment to the principle of church-state separation in the United States.
5. A common opposition to anti-Semitism both here and overseas.

Evangelicals have been among the most public supporters of Israel within the Christian community. The reason for that support of modern Israel has been described in another section of this booklet. It is a theological commitment that runs deep and cannot be shaken by the international machinations of “realpolitik.”

While mainline churches have been highly critical of certain Israeli policies, many American Jews and Israelis have warmly welcomed the Evangelicals’ strong support of the Jewish state. Indeed, the largest number of American Christians who visit Israel each year come from Evangelical churches, and Evangelicals can be counted upon to petition U.S. and UN officials regarding the pressing needs and concerns of Israel.

At the same time, many Evangelicals are active in campaigns to convert Jews to Christianity. Hebrew Christian groups have sometimes been successful in gaining support, both financial and moral, from Evangelical churches and their leaders. Many Evangelical leaders are currently pressing for mandated prayer and Bible reading in America’s public schools, a position that is rejected by most American Jews. And many members of the religious right are also Evangelical Christians.

Clearly, on some issues, such as vigorous public support for Israel, Evangelical-

icals and Jews stand together. But on other key issues, it is the mainline churches that often act in coalition with the American Jewish community.

But one must be careful not to draw the dividing lines too sharply on such complex issues. Not all Evangelicals are strong supporters of Israel, and not all Evangelicals seek the conversion of the Jewish people to Christianity. And as indicated in an earlier section, not all mainline church leaders are harsh critics of Israel, and there are conversionist elements within some of those liberal churches as well.

Like all other religious groups, Evangelicals are not of one voice on all questions and issues. For example, the late William S. LaSor was a leading Evangelical theologian, but he rejected attempts to convert Jews. LaSor declared:

Just as I refuse to believe that God has rejected his people [the Jews] (Romans 11:1) and that there is no longer any place for Israel in God's redemptive work or in the messianic hope, so I refuse to believe that we who were once not his people, and who have become his people only through his grace, can learn nothing from those who from of old have been his people.

The Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) must be included in any description of the Evangelical churches in the United States. The SDA church has a membership of about 724,000.¹⁶ It grew out of an eighteenth-century religious revival in America that affirmed the imminent return of Jesus to earth. When this did not take place in 1844 as predicted, some of the disappointed Adventist Christians retreated deeper into Bible study and prayer.

In their quest for spiritual truth, they recognized the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, as the true Sabbath, hence the name Seventh Day Adventists. The SDA was officially organized in 1863, and its headquarters are in Tacoma Park, Maryland.

The SDA is strongly Evangelical, somewhat akin to Baptists in worship and theology, and strongly missionary in its outlook. One of the SDA church's unique features is its large parochial school system in the United States. Nearly 800,000 students attend 5,300 SDA educational institutions ranging from kindergarten through college. The SDA also publishes material in more than 180 languages. Because of its emphasis on the return or advent of Jesus, SDA members are highly supportive of Israel, which they perceive as a necessary precursor for the expected return of the Christian Messiah.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has 4.9 million members,¹⁷ down from 5.7 million in 1970. There is also the highly conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod numbering 2.5 million members.¹⁸ The ELCA

is a member of the NCC and the WCC, but the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is not.

The ELCA's headquarters are in Chicago, and the Missouri Synod is based in St. Louis. The ELCA holds a church-wide assembly every other year. The ELCA also maintains an Interreligious and Ecumenical Office.

Lutherans trace their spiritual roots to the German priest Martin Luther (1483-1546), who left the Roman Catholic Church in 1517 and became a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation. His opponents contemptuously called his followers "Lutherans," and like other disdainful terms, this expression became the name of a religious group.

Many American Lutherans are of Scandinavian or German background. Lutherans stress religious doctrine more than most Protestant denominations, and Luther's teachings are an integral part of the church's tenets. Lutherans maintain a hierarchical church structure including bishops, but they perceive themselves as a democratic church with independent congregations.

Recent relations between Jews and Lutherans have been positive. On the international level, the Lutheran World Federation adopted a constructive resolution in 1981, and the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. issued a statement in 1971 calling for mutual respect and understanding between the two communities: "[I]t is especially necessary to foster and expand such conversations [Lutheran-Jewish dialogue] on more local levels ... to heal the wounds of the past, and to understand better our common heritage and common humanity."

Because Luther's later writings are filled with particular hostility to Jews and Judaism, the ELCA's Church Council in 1994 adopted a remarkable resolution that repudiated the anti-Jewish writings and teachings of Martin Luther:

In the long history of Christianity there exists no more tragic development than the treatment accorded to the Jewish people on the part of Christian believers.... Lutherans ... feel a special burden in this regard because of certain elements in the legacy of the reformer Martin Luther and the catastrophes, including the Holocaust of the twentieth century, suffered by Jews in places where the Lutheran churches were strongly represented....

In the spirit of that truth telling, we ... must with pain acknowledge also Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and violent recommendations of his later writings against the Jews ... we reject this violent invective ... we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations ... we particularly deplore the appropriation of Luther's words by modern anti-Semites for the teaching of hatred toward Judaism or toward the Jewish people. ... We recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel ... and

we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us. Finally, we pray for increasing cooperation and understanding between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community.

This action by the ELCA reflects a significant trend that is currently under way among many Christian bodies. It may be impossible to amend or eliminate the elements in the New Testament and in other Christian teachings that have been used to foster anti-Semitism. However, those negative elements regarding Jews and Judaism can be officially repudiated and placed within an historical context that greatly reduces their potential to negatively influence today's Christians. The 1994 ELCA Church Council statement on Luther's teachings about Jews and Judaism is helpful in this area.

Following the pattern of other mainline churches, on a national level, the ELCA has issued some resolutions that are highly critical of Israeli policies, particularly in the territories. In 1991 the ELCA called for the advancement of the Middle East peace process while, at the same time, it urged the U.S. government to oppose housing loan guarantees to Israel until the "construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories is stopped." In 2005 a new document authored by the Commission on the Church's Relations with the Jews called for constructive investment in peace rather than negative attitudes.

As with other Protestant churches, there are many Lutheran pastors and lay people who are strongly committed to the safety and security of the State of Israel.

The Society of Friends

The Friends began in England in the 1650s under the leadership of George Fox (1624-91), and represented the "left wing" of Puritan Christianity. From their beginning, the Friends have affirmed the equality of the sexes in all things religious, and a basic feature is the emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers."

There are about 217,000 Friends or Quakers in the United States.¹⁹ William Penn (1644-1718), who in 1681 founded the English colony in America that bears his family name, was a Friend. Pennsylvania's first Yearly Meeting was established the same year in Philadelphia, and the city has remained a center of Quaker life ever since.

Two Quaker groups, Friends United Meeting and the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, are members of both the NCC and the WCC. The United Meeting has its headquarters in Richmond, Indiana.

Friends generally do not have rituals, sacraments, Bible readings, or ser-

mons. They rely on an individual's "inward light" for religious inspiration, although the Indiana-based Friends Meeting is more "Christian" than the Philadelphia Quakers. For Friends, the central aspect of religious life is the worship of God.

Presidents Herbert Hoover and Richard Nixon were Quakers. Although the Friends are few in number in the United States, they exercise a moral power that exceeds their membership statistics. This is particularly true with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), an organization that has won wide international recognition, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.

The Friends, along with the Brethren and the Mennonites, are a "peace church." Many American Quakers were conscientious objectors during past wars, although some performed alternative service like ambulance driving.

The Friends in general, and the AFSC, in particular, have taken strong critical stands against Israeli policies in the territories. Since many American Jews support the philanthropic work of the AFSC, this stance has sometimes created serious tension between the two communities.

Mormon Churches

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormon Church, was founded in Fayette, New York, in 1830 by twenty-one-year-old Joseph Smith. Apart from the native religions of the American Indians, the Mormon Church is the only religion that began in the United States.

Today it is America's fastest growing religion, numbering 12.2 million members in 140 countries, about 5.6 million of whom live in the United States,²⁰ making it our nation's fourth largest Christian group. The church headquarters are in Salt Lake City, Utah, and a smaller Mormon group, the Reorganized Church of the Latter-day Saints, is in Independence, Missouri.

As a young man, Smith received a vision telling him that he would restore God's church as it was "originally organized" by Jesus. A heavenly messenger led the young Smith to some gold plates that recounted early religious life in America. According to Mormon tradition, Smith translated the plates into English and named the work the Book of Mormon in honor of one of the ancient prophets. In addition to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, Mormons use the Book of Mormon as a third sacred scripture.

Smith and his early followers moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, a small Mississippi river town. A flourishing Mormon community developed there in the 1840s, but when Smith was murdered in 1841, the fearful Mormons began a 1,400-mile "exodus," led by Brigham Young, and established their "western Zion" in Utah.

Because of the Mormons' reverence for the Hebrew Bible, there is a Jordan River in Utah and a Zion National Park; the Great Salt Lake is compared to Israel's Dead Sea. Also in 1841, Orson Hyde, a Mormon leader, traveled to Palestine and proclaimed that the land was destined to become "the gathering place of the Jews."

Mormons place enormous emphasis upon genealogy, and they maintain meticulous records, not only about their own families, but of others as well. The family unit is central in Mormon tradition, and because marriage is considered to be eternal, there is a belief that all family members will be reunited after death, for "time and eternity."

Mormons abstain from tobacco, alcohol, harmful drugs, and caffeine. Although there is no professional clergy, males above the age of twelve are inducted into the priesthood. Mormons maintain a strict hierarchical church structure, and the leader or president is the church's "prophet, seer, and revelator."

The Mormon Church is highly patriarchal, and it has recently attracted national attention because of its excommunication or "disfellowship" of six members who were publicly critical of the church or who had expressed feminist critiques about Mormon teachings and history. Despite these actions and earlier charges that the church is anti-black, the church continues to grow, adding nearly 400 new meetinghouses a year. There are over 40,000 Mormon missionaries throughout the world.

Mormons participate fully in American society, including business and politics. Examples of prominent Mormons are Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, Harry Reid of Nevada, Gordon Smith of Oregon, and hotel executive J. Willard Marriott.

Until recently there was little contact in the United States between the Jewish community and the Mormon Church because the population centers of the two communities were far apart. However, as Jews and Mormons have moved into all parts of the country, the contacts have increased. This is especially true in California, Arizona, and other Western states that have large Jewish and Mormon communities. However, there are still few formal dialogue programs involving Jews and Mormons.

In the 1980s Brigham Young University (BYU) sought permission to build a Near East studies center on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Israeli authorities were concerned that the center would serve as a missionary center for the Mormon Church. After long and intense negotiations, BYU was permitted to construct its center in Israel's capital city, but the Mormon institution formally agreed to obey all local laws, including the ordinance forbidding active religious proselytization.

The BYU center is used exclusively for educational purposes, and each student at the Jerusalem branch of BYU is required by the Mormon Church to sign a nonproselytizing pledge. History was made in December 1992, when the world-famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir from Salt Lake City performed in Israel for the first time.

The Mormon Church posthumously baptized many Jewish victims of the Holocaust, a practice that drew sharp criticism not only from the families of the “baptized,” but from many other Jewish and Christian leaders as well. In May 1995, after intense negotiations between Mormon and Jewish officials, the church publicly repudiated the practice and agreed to cease such activity. In addition, the Mormons agreed to remove or purge the “baptized” Jews who were not ancestors of living members of the church from their official records. This agreement was reaffirmed in 2005.

Pentecostals and Charismatics

The word “Pentecostal” comes from the Greek term *pentekoste*, meaning fiftieth. It refers to the fiftieth day after the first Easter, when Jesus was resurrected. According to Christian tradition, on that day there was an outpouring of the “Divine spirit” upon the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, and this event is considered the birth-day of the Christian church.

Today Pentecostals link themselves to that occurrence, believing they represent pure and totally holy Christianity. They believe other Christians have departed or strayed from the “Divine spirit,” while they alone maintain the true faith.

The Pentecostal movement began in this country with the “Great Awakening” led by the Northampton, Massachusetts, Calvinist preacher Jonathan Edwards (1703–58). His sermons and those of today’s Pentecostal leaders frequently cause listeners to scream, shout, cry, leap into the air, and even faint from either fear or ecstasy.

Pentecostals are found in thousands of independent churches, some of which are affiliated with national Christian bodies. Although precise membership figures are impossible to gain, Pentecostalism is a growing movement in America and cuts across economic classes, geographical borders, race, ethnicity, and gender. Some scholars have called it the “right wing” of Evangelical Christianity.

Pentecostal theology is highly conservative and pietistic, and is often characterized by a strong repudiation of alcohol, entertainment, and gambling. Humans are basically sinful, and only God’s special blessings can avert a life of spiritual pain and suffering. Those blessings can be obtained in the Pentecostal worship experience.

Closely linked to the Pentecostal movement is charismatic Christianity. Charismatics believe they possess God's unique gifts to heal the sick and to offer prophecies about the future. Sometimes "glossolalia," speaking in strange tongues, is employed in Pentecostal church services to cure the ill. Although most Christian churches discourage, sometimes even forbid, glossolalia, many Christian leaders believe its use is increasing in the United States.

Indeed, there have been bitter disputes between Pentecostals and other Christians regarding religious education, critical biblical scholarship, social action programs, ecumenism, evolution, modernity, and a host of other issues. Generally, Pentecostals do not engage in organized dialogues with the Jewish community.

However, Pentecostals are growing in number, and, hopefully, they will participate in future interreligious activities. Pentecostals were highly active and visible as the year 2000 approached. The beginning of the twenty-first century marked a millennium, with many prophetic voices announcing the return of Jesus to earth, one of the basic tenets of Pentecostal theology.

It is important that the Jewish community recognize the growing presence of Pentecostals among their Christian neighbors.

The Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Presbyterian Church (USA), with 3.2 million members,²¹ is the result of a 1983 reunion between the northern and southern wings of the churches that had been divided since the Civil War. The church is headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, and the church holds membership in the NCC and the WCC.

The church membership is mainly white, with large concentrations of Presbyterians around Charlotte, North Carolina, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Presbyterian Church has a number of Hispanic, Asian, and black members.

In 1970 church membership numbered slightly over four million, but Presbyterians, like many other mainline churches, have suffered a steady drop in membership. Some have attributed this decline to the church's very visible, high-profile liberal stance on many controversial issues. But others defend the church's public record, calling it a "prophetic voice."

The Greek word *presbyteros* means "elder." Elected elders, both clergy and lay, govern the church, which prides itself on a democratic method of conducting its activities, including the development of liturgy and theology.

In 1541 John Calvin (1509-64), a French lawyer, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and established the spiritual foundation of the Reformed movement within Protestant Christianity. Calvin lived until his death in Geneva as

the spiritual leader of the city. Today the World Council of Churches has its headquarters in Geneva.

Presbyterians played a major role in the American War of Independence, and the church's democratic governing structure provided a useful model for the framers of the U.S. Constitution. Seven American presidents—Andrew Jackson, James Knox Polk, James Buchanan, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, Woodrow Wilson, and Dwight Eisenhower—have been Presbyterian, second only in number to the Episcopalians.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church meets annually to enact church business. Delegates usually adopt a wide range of statements on many ecclesiastical, domestic, and international issues. In recent years, the General Assembly has frequently been highly critical of Israeli policies.

In the 1970s and 1980s the General Assembly was often a contentious battleground between those Presbyterian leaders who wanted to single out Israel for special condemnation and those who advocated a more balanced public position for the church. A significant number of Presbyterian clergy and lay leaders are strong supporters of Israel and are active participants in interreligious programs throughout the United States. Their support is usually not linked to biblical prophecy or eschatology (end-time theology). Rather, it is often based on the twin concepts of justice and morality for the Jewish people.

According to this position, the Jewish people have been brutally victimized by Christians in many parts of the world for nearly twenty centuries. The Holocaust took place in Europe and was carried out by many men and women who were baptized Christians. That unspeakable horror is viewed as the culmination of centuries of negative Christian teachings and practices toward Jews and Judaism.

Presbyterians and other Christians who affirm this position argue that the creation of the State of Israel can in no way atone for past Christian sins against the Jewish people, nor can it wipe the slate of history clean for Christianity. Solidarity with the people and the State of Israel, however, is one concrete and compassionate way to begin the necessary process of eradicating Christian anti-Semitism and building a healthy and respectful relationship with the Jewish people.

At its 1987 General Assembly the Presbyterian Church adopted a “study paper” on Christian-Jewish relations that broke important new ground. The Presbyterian document specifically called upon Christians to “repudiate” the historic “teaching of contempt” for the Jewish people and their religious tradition. The study paper also cautioned Presbyterians: “When speaking with Jews about matters of faith to acknowledge that Jews are already in a covenantal relationship with God ... in dialogue, partners are able to define their faith in their own terms.”

The statement also affirmed “the continuity of God’s promise of land [Israel] along with the obligations of that promise to the people Israel.” Although only a study paper, the 1987 Presbyterian statement has been widely used and is a building block in developing a new Christian understanding of Jews and Judaism. The Presbyterian study paper can be used constructively in Christian-Jewish dialogues.

A major flashpoint in Presbyterian-Jewish relations developed in June 2004 when the PCUSA General Assembly passed resolutions that refused to shut down funding for deceptive missionary campaigns aimed at Jews, and called for a study focused on selective divestment of investments in companies doing business in Israel. The implementation of this resolution addressed companies that support any violence in the Holy Land.

Concerned that many Christians, especially Evangelical Protestants, support Zionism, the Jewish national liberation movement, on theological grounds, the Presbyterians rejected “Christian Zionism” as a legitimate expression of Reformed Christian belief.

The PCUSA delegates voted to continue funding new churches specifically aimed at converting Jews to Christianity—efforts that stray far from usual Presbyterian evangelization. Alarmed by a declining membership, the PCUSA now endorses the establishment of churches similar to the Avodat Yisrael (“Worship Service of Israel”) congregation in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania. Some Presbyterian critics believe the action repudiates the 1987 PCUSA document. In 2005, the Church voted to defund Avodat Yisrael.

The PCUSA’s divestment action was a not-so-subtle attempt to equate Israel morally with the former apartheid regime in South Africa. American churches used divestment in the 1970s and 1980s in their campaign to end apartheid. Bitter opposition to divestment quickly arose within the PCUSA. Meanwhile, attempts to lessen the conflict over the divestment resolution continue.

The Reformed Church in America

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) traces its roots to 1628 and America’s first Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam. For many years the church was called the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, and its services were conducted in Dutch and its ministers were trained in the Netherlands.

The present name was adopted in 1867. The RCA maintains its headquarters in New York City, and is a member of both the NCC and the WCC. Two American presidents, Martin Van Buren and Theodore Roosevelt, were members

of the Dutch Reformed Church.

The earliest population centers of RCA members were in New York and New Jersey, and later in Michigan and Iowa. In 1965 RCA membership was 385,000, and today the membership is about 278,000,²² reflecting the general decline in mainline churches.

The RCA reflects a strong Calvinist or Reformed Protestant theology and church structure. Church membership now includes Hispanics, blacks, and Asians, in addition to those of Dutch background. One of the RCA's major international concerns was the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and its support of the black Reformed Churches in that country. The RCA has also adopted resolutions that were highly critical of Israel.

The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest single body of Christians in the United States, numbering some 71 million²³ members. The worldwide Catholic population exceeds one billion. Brazil has more Catholics than any other country. The term "catholic" means "universal," and the church is under the spiritual leadership of the bishop of Rome, who by virtue of his position is the supreme pontiff or pope of the entire Church. The pope resides in Vatican City.

There are 180 Catholic dioceses and archdioceses in the United States, each headed by a bishop. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) is headquartered in Washington, D.C., along with the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC). The latter organization deals with the church's public, educational, and social concerns throughout the country and internationally. The former deals with such church concerns as priestly formation and training, liturgy and family life, and ecumenical and interreligious relations.

There are some 380 Catholic bishops in the United States and approximately 50,000 priests, 94,000 sisters, and 6,200 brothers. The latter are not ordained but often serve as teachers, nurses, social workers, and in other capacities. John F. Kennedy was the only Roman Catholic elected president of the United States.

There are many Catholic-related colleges and universities as well as theological seminaries in the United States. In addition, there is a network of Catholic parochial schools that offer instruction from kindergarten through senior high school.

The first immigration of Catholics and Jews to the colonies in America began in the 1600s. Jews arrived in Dutch New Amsterdam (today's New York

City) in 1654 from Portuguese Brazil as refugees from the Inquisition. The oldest continuous Catholic settlement in the colonies began at St. Mary's, Maryland, in 1634. Maryland became a haven for Catholics who were not welcome in other British colonies.

But it was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that millions of Jews and Catholics came to the United States. In some ways, both communities share recent immigrant experiences. Catholics, mainly from Ireland, Italy, and Poland, began to encounter Jews, often in the same schools, urban neighborhoods, and work places.

The immigration experience changed some long-held perceptions and stereotypes, but it did not fundamentally alter the basic outlook and teaching about each other that was carried by the new arrivals from Europe. Mutual suspicion and theological bias kept Jews and Catholics separated and distrustful of each other. At the same time, Catholics and Jews were themselves often victims of prejudice and discrimination in the United States. Recent Roman Catholic immigration to the United States has come from Latin America and the Caribbean, while Jewish newcomers to America are increasingly from the former Soviet Union, Iran, and Israel.

The revolutionary change in Catholic-Jewish relations began in 1965 at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in Rome. The world's Catholic bishops issued the landmark *Nostra Aetate* declaration, an authoritative Catholic teaching that repudiated the false belief that Jews are guilty of deicide. *Nostra Aetate* also specifically condemned anti-Semitism, and it called for "mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as fraternal dialogues."

In 1966 the NCCB established a Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations. The office is located in Washington, D.C. There is also a Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews that is based in Vatican City.

Since the Second Vatican Council concluded in 1965 there have been many important follow-up Roman Catholic statements and declarations. Chief among them are two official Vatican documents on Catholic-Jewish relations: the 1975 "Guidelines" and the 1985 "Notes." The "Catechism of the Catholic Church," published in English in 1994, also contains significant material on the subject.

As a result of the breakthrough achieved with *Nostra Aetate*, there have been more positive encounters between Catholics and Jews than there were in the first 1900 years of the church, dramatically symbolized by Pope John Paul II's visit to the Great Synagogue in Rome in 1986. This was the first such visit by a pope in history.

One of the notable positive achievements of improved Catholic-Jewish relations was the formal establishment of Vatican-Israel diplomatic relations in June 1994. This action normalized relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people throughout the world, and it closed the chapter on an important unresolved issue of the dialogue. But flashpoints continue to occur between Catholics and Jews, as well as between other Christians and the Jewish community.

When the Auschwitz convent controversy first began in the mid-1980s, a group of European Jewish and Catholic leaders jointly agreed that the Carmelite convent should be moved to new quarters away from the original death camp structure where it was initially located. Although the crisis escalated and strained Catholic-Jewish bonds throughout the world, the controversy was satisfactorily resolved thanks to the strength and effectiveness of relationships that had been carefully nurtured for over twenty years.

In January 1991, the Polish Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter that, among other notable things, strongly condemned anti-Semitism and asked “forgiveness” from the Jewish community for anti-Jewish acts that were carried out by Polish Catholics during World War II. At a meeting of the international Jewish-Catholic Liaison Committee in Prague in 1990, Cardinal Cassidy expressed the need for “*teshuvva*” or repentance toward Jews on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. In 2004, the Vatican reaffirmed its commitment to the State of Israel, repudiating anti-Zionism as a form of anti-Semitism.

Since the Second Vatican Council, thousands of lay Catholics and Jews have participated in intensive “living room dialogues” throughout the United States. Many of these have been cosponsored by the American Jewish Committee in cooperation with appropriate Catholic partners. These dialogues need to be intensified and broadened.

However, there is concern that the historic advances in Catholic-Jewish relations achieved since 1965 may be minimized or even marginalized as both communities turn inward to address their unique problems and issues. Indeed, for many young Catholics and Jews, both clergy and lay, there is a sense that all the work in interreligious relations has been completed.

In addition, there is also a sense that there has been limited, even negligible, implementation within the Catholic community of *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent Church teachings on Jews and Judaism. A common perception is that the extraordinary statements, declarations, and teaching guidelines still remain little known inside Catholic seminaries and churches.

The American Jewish Committee, the archdiocese of Los Angeles, and the

Southern California Board of Rabbis have done some of the most significant work in Catholic-Jewish relations in Los Angeles. They have published excellent joint statements on such themes as abortion, caring for the dying person, the single-parent family, the nuclear reality, chemical dependency, the Holocaust, the common good, and salvation/redemption. There have been other joint Catholic-Jewish statements dealing with moral values in education, pornography, and a condemnation of Holocaust revisionism.

Catholics and Jews will always differ on deeply held theological beliefs, and much of the American Jewish community differs with Catholic leaders on some church-state issues such as public funding of parochial schools, including vouchers or financial assistance to parents of such students. But increasingly, the two ancient faith communities are working together on a host of social justice concerns, including racism, immigration, world peace, bioethics, and human rights.

There is also serious Catholic-Jewish work going on in the sensitive and important areas of health care, church-state relations, public morality, and questions centering on public tuition aid for parents of parochial school students.

Because the Catholic-Jewish relationship is so intensive and far-reaching, extensive background material on all these issues is available for dialogue participants from both the American Jewish Committee and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The Unitarian Universalist Association

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, has a membership of about 158,000.²⁴ The Association represents the 1961 merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church. American Unitarianism arose within the Protestant Congregationalist movement of the eighteenth century, and it became an independent religious group in 1825.

The UUA has about 1,000 churches throughout the United States. As a noncreedal denomination, it has no specific doctrine or dogma, and UUA churches are highly individualistic in spiritual orientation. Some are quite "Christian" in theology and practice, while other congregations can be classified as "humanist." The term "Unitarian" indicates a non-Trinitarian belief in a single personality of God.

Many American philosophers and political leaders were Unitarians, including Presidents John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Millard Fillmore, and William Howard Taft. Ralph Waldo Emerson and presidential candidate Adlai E. Stevenson were also Unitarians.

Because of its traditional liberalism, the UUA has historically been an advocate for the downtrodden and history's victims. In the 1970s and 1980s, the UUA often took strong positions in favor of Palestinian rights. In addition to the usual criticism of alleged Israeli human rights violations and settlement policies, the UUA has frequently questioned the use of the Bible as a justification for Israeli actions and doctrines.

However, the Jewish community has generally found the UUA to be supportive on many important domestic concerns, including the separation of church and state, the Equal Rights Amendment, civil rights, and other issues.

The United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ (UCC) was formed in 1957 when the Congregational Church merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The UCC traces its American roots to the first Pilgrim settlers who arrived in New England in the seventeenth century. The Evangelical and Reformed Church was originally made up of German immigrants to the United States, but today the UCC exhibits little or no specific ethnic identity, although some congregations are almost entirely black, Asian, or Hispanic. President Calvin Coolidge was a Congregationalist, a predecessor of today's United Church of Christ.

Numbering about 1.3 million members,²⁵ the UCC maintains its headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio. Like other mainline churches, its membership has slipped since 1970, when it had just under two million members. Seventy-one percent of UCC members live in the northeast quarter of the United States, with large population centers in Ohio and New England, and there is some congregational strength in California.

The UCC is a member of the NCC and the WCC, and the church's beliefs, practices, and liturgy place it within mainstream Protestantism. The church's General Synod, which meets every two years, has adopted many liberal policy statements. Indeed, the UCC is one of the most liberal churches on the American religious landscape.

In addition to the strong condemnation of Christian anti-Semitism in its groundbreaking 1987 statement on Christian-Jewish relations, the same resolution urged "local congregations ... of the UCC actively to engage in dialogue with the Jewish community in order to establish relationships of trust and to participate in a joint witness against all injustice in the world."

At the same time the church has been highly critical of alleged Israeli human rights violations in the territories. This is partly the result of the UCC's

long history of missionary efforts in Arab Middle East countries, especially Syria.

The UCC leadership sees no inconsistency in this dual positioning of the church. That is, the UCC is strongly opposed to anti-Semitism, and works closely with the American Jewish community on many domestic issues, including church-state questions. But, at the same time, the UCC is also sharply critical of what it perceives as Israeli excesses. Once again, while the national policy on Israel reads one way, there are many UCC clergy and lay leaders who are among Israel's strongest supporters within the American Christian community.

The United Methodist Church

Like the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church (UMC) traces its roots to Britain. An early leader was John Wesley (1703-91), an austere Anglican priest who developed an active daily schedule of prayers and spiritual responsibilities that were based on faith in God's mercy. His critics scornfully used the term *methodist* to describe Wesley's systematic religious activities, and the once-derisive term has remained ever since.

The Methodist Church in the United States was officially established in 1784 in Baltimore. Today, the UMC is the largest of thirteen Methodist bodies in the United States, and it has about 35,000 churches with 8.2 million members.²⁶ It, too, has suffered a membership decline since 1970, when it had 11.6 million members. The United Methodist Church is a member of both the NCC and the WCC. It is represented throughout the United States and has been called a true "American church." Presidents Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, William McKinley, and George W. Bush were Methodists.

While the UMC's social policies are generally liberal, it contains a wide spectrum of beliefs on a host of theological, domestic, and international issues. For example, George McGovern and George Wallace, who were presidential candidates in the 1960s and 1970s, were both Methodists, but they reflected strikingly different political views.

There is a national UMC Office on Interreligious and Ecumenical Affairs in New York City.

The church's General Conference, the highest legislative body of the UMC, meets every four years. In the interim, the church's seventy-three regions or conferences carry out the policies determined by the General Conferences. In 1972 the General Conference adopted a statement on Christian-Jewish Relations.

Some of the key sections of the 1972 statement include a denunciation of anti-Semitism and a strong call for Methodists to affirm the spiritual vitality of the

Jewish covenant with God. Some of the highlights of the 1972 statement include:

Christians must also become aware of that history in which they have deeply alienated the Jews. They are obligated to examine their own implicit and explicit responsibility for the discrimination against and the organized extermination of Jews, as in the recent past [the Holocaust]. The persecution by Christians of Jews throughout centuries calls for clear repentance and resolve to repudiate past injustice and to seek its elimination in the present.... The Christian obligation to those who survived the Nazi holocaust, the understanding of the relationship of land and peoplehood, suggest that a new dimension in dialogue with Jews is needed....[I]n such dialogues, an aim of religious or political conversion, or of proselytizing, cannot be condoned ... there is no tenable biblical or theological base for anti-Semitism.... [A] reduction of Jewish or Christian beliefs to a tepid lowest common denominator ... is not sought in this [dialogue] process.

In 1996 the UMC's General Conference adopted an updated Statement on Christian-Jewish relations that declared: "We believe that God has continued, and continues today, to work through Judaism and the Jewish people." The UMC statement also said: "[W]e deeply repent of the complicity of the Church and the participation of many Christians in the long history of the persecution of the Jewish people."

As with other mainline churches, the national statements of the UMC have generally been sharply critical of Israeli policies in the territories, but many of Israel's strongest supporters in the United States are Methodists.

Islam

Despite the horrific terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the growth of Islamic-Jewish relations in the United States still represents a “new frontier” in interreligious relations. Because the Muslim population is growing in America, Muslim-Jewish conversations are taking place with a seriousness and an openness that were rarely experienced before. And, as with all authentic interreligious encounters, it is happening without compromising deep faith commitments. But, as indicated below, the tragic events of 9/11 have created serious problems for the emerging Jewish-Islamic dialogue.

“Islam” means “total submission” to God or Allah, and “Muslims” are those who have submitted themselves to God. The Qu’ran—the word means “recitation”—is a Divine revelation of 114 *suras* or chapters that was given by God to the last and greatest prophet, Muhammad (570-632).

Muhammad was born in Mecca, but the last ten years of his life were spent in Medina, where the Islamic faith rapidly developed into a strong religious community throughout the Arabian Peninsula. There are over one billion Muslims in the world, and Indonesia has the largest Islamic population—over 210 million—of any nation.

Muslims believe the Qu’ran’s 6,000 verses are perfect and unchangeable. These verses especially represent core Islamic beliefs: “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, Say, ‘He is God, the One God, the Everlasting. He has not begotten nor has He been begotten; and there is none like unto Him’ (Sura 112:1-4). ‘O believers, believe in God and His messenger [Muhammad] and the Book [the Qu’ran] He has sent down ... Whoever disbelieves in God, His angels, His Books, His messengers, and the Last Day, has surely gone astray into far error’ (Sura 4:136).

A system of Islamic law, *shari’a* (“way”), grew up after Muhammad’s death, in part because the Qu’ran has mostly general guidelines and few specific instructions. Not unlike the Jewish *halakha* (also meaning “way”), the *shari’a* offers a comprehensive set of laws covering many aspects of human life.

Most Muslims follow Sunni (“practice”) Islam. In a power struggle following Muhammad’s death, one party, or Shi’a, claimed that the prophet’s nephew was the legitimate successor to Muhammad. The Shi’a was unsuccessful, and a permanent division within Islam resulted. Today, the Shi’ites are an Islamic minority, but they are especially strong in Iran and Iraq.

There are certain basic obligations, the Five Pillars of Islam, for practicing

Muslims. They are:

1. Profession of faith in one God and in Muhammad as His prophet
2. Ritual prayer five times a day
3. Giving of alms to the needy
4. The fast of Ramadan, a strict daybreak-to-sunset fast during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad

Today an important factor aiding Islamic-Jewish relations is the proliferation of religious faiths in the United States and America's strong historic record of religious pluralism. This provides an excellent foundation for positive Islamic-Jewish relations. Although both groups are minorities in this country, happily, religious liberty is not based upon numbers. And American religious pluralism encourages groups to enter into dialogue with one another.

The American Jewish Committee was the cosponsor of the first two national Islamic-Jewish national conferences, held at the University of Denver in 1993 and 1994. Follow-up meetings have taken place on regional and local levels.

There is no one central address for Muslims who live in the United States. Instead, there are a host of Islamic religious, cultural, educational, political, and communal organizations, along with approximately 950 mosques.

It is estimated there are between seventy-five and a hundred imams or religious leaders in the United States, most of whom were trained overseas. The primary function of an imam is to serve as a spiritual teacher and role model. Unlike rabbis and Christian clergy, imams are not expected to be pastors to their congregations.

There is no agreement on the precise number of Muslims in this country; a recent AJC study placed the number between 1.9 and 2.8 million.²⁷ Nearly 10 percent of all recent immigrants to the United States have been Muslims. The largest Muslim population centers in this country are in New York, California, New Jersey, and Illinois, states that have large Jewish communities as well.

Three major groups constitute the bulk of the Islamic community in the United States: Arabs, mainly from the Middle East; Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India; and African Americans (the largest of the three). Many members of the first two groups are recent immigrants, while most African American Muslims were born in the United States.

While most of these African American Muslims came to Islam through the unorthodox movement of Elijah Muhammad, the bulk of the movement has been brought into the Muslim mainstream under the leadership of his son, Warith Deen

Muhammad. This movement articulates a moderate Islamic worldview and has cooperated with the Jewish community on a number of common concerns.

However, a splinter group of less than 10 percent of the movement remained as an idiosyncratic sect under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan, preaching a mixture of religious ideas together with an ideology of black empowerment. This group, calling itself the Nation of Islam, is headquartered in Chicago and today numbers about 10,000 followers. Farrakhan's extremist anti-Jewish, anti-white rhetoric have gained wide media attention with what one observer described as "banalities, half truths, distortions, and falsehoods."

Many Muslims in America are deeply concerned about assimilation, indifference to the faith, education, and fears that young Muslims are losing their Islamic identity. It all has a familiar sound to American Jews, and these issues offer an opportunity for serious interreligious conversations.

There are also some specific concerns that merit attention and joint exploration in any Islamic-Jewish meeting. The first theme is the expression, "We are all children of Abraham." There is a rich tradition in Jewish and Islamic thought about Abraham. He is the father of both Isaac and Ishmael, who have in history become identified as Abraham's heirs and the progenitors of Jews and Muslims.

Another theme is the phrase "the Golden Age" of Jewish civilization in Spain. There was great Jewish creativity under Islamic rule between the ninth and fifteenth centuries. But Jews and Muslims need to delve deeply into that period of history. A discussion of the status of religious minorities under Islamic rule is critical in any meeting between Jews and Muslims.

A third area is the term "People of the Book," which is found in the Qu'ran. What did this phrase actually mean in the daily lives of those who lived in Islamic societies? What are the Islamic sources for guaranteeing minority rights and for developing a theological basis for religious pluralism?

In addition to these three historical issues, there are other concerns. Since the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government has initiated inquiries into alleged illegal activities of various Islamic leaders, organizations, and charities. Some of those investigations led to trials and court cases resulting in guilty verdicts for those charged with criminal activity.

Some imams fled the U.S. following 9/11, while others were objects of investigation and legal prosecution. There was also deep concern about the anti-American, anti-Jewish, and anti-Christian sermons and publications that appeared in the Arabic language within the U.S. after 9/11.

Central to any Jewish-Islamic encounter are several basic questions: How

do Muslims in America relate to the resurgence of physical violence and political extremism that was carried out in the name of Islam? How do Muslims relate to the American principle of separation of religion and state? To democratic rule? To building mutual respect and understanding between faith communities?

Asian Religions

Although there was a small Jewish community in Cochin, India, and another in Kaifeng, China, throughout history Jews have not lived in large numbers among either Hindus or Buddhists. As a result there has been little or no contact between members of these two Asian religions and Jews. However, this is changing for two principal reasons. First, Israel, the Jewish state, has diplomatic and trade relations with India, China, Japan, and other countries with sizable numbers of Hindus and Buddhists. Second, as Hindus and Buddhists increase in number in the United States, there will be expanded contact between them and the American Jewish community.

This phenomenon represents a unique opportunity to develop positive relations with representatives of two religions that have had limited contact with Jews. And the histories of both Hinduism and Buddhism are relatively free of the theological antagonism and theological anti-Semitism that have so often colored Christian-Jewish and Islamic-Jewish relations.

The December 2004 tsunami catastrophe killed over 300,000 people in Southeast Asia. Among the victims were Buddhists and Hindus as well as Muslims. The speedy responses of both the American Jewish community and Israel to that natural disaster were extraordinary. For many Asians this was their first direct contact with Jews and Israelis, and that contact, albeit a tragic one, offers an opportunity for further engagement on the part of the American Jewish community and Israel.

Hindus in the United States

In 1893 Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu leader, traveled from India to Chicago, where he participated in the first Parliament of the World's Religions. Although he was the only Hindu at the Parliament, he helped introduce Hinduism to America. A century later, a second Parliament also took place in Chicago, and at the 1993 meeting hundreds of Hindus were present.

Today it is estimated there are between one million and 1.3 million Hindus in the United States,²⁸ constituting about 0.3 percent of the nation's population. Most Hindus live in urban centers, but increasingly Hindus reside in all parts of America. There are over 732 million Hindus in the world, with India the largest Hindu population center.

Most Hindus are recent immigrants from India who came to the United States following the passage of the 1965 immigration act. There are significant

numbers of American-born newcomers or converts to Hinduism, including some American Jews. There are approximately 105 Hindu centers and organizations, eighty-one temples, and over fifty periodicals in the United States.

Hinduism has no founder and no formal beginning, but the basic Hindu scripture, the Vedas, was probably written in northeast India and has existed in its present form since 1000 B.C.E. Hinduism is a complex system of thought, writings, and practices. Perhaps the best-known Hindu writings are the Bhagavata Purana, written in the eighth century C.E., and the Upanishads, which were composed between 800 B.C.E. and 300 B.C.E.

The Upanishads stress the doctrine of reincarnation, the law of karma—that is, that the nature of rebirth will be determined by an individual's ethical conduct—and the concept of *samsara*, the belief that the rebirths will continue indefinitely.

Professor Nathan Katz of Florida International University in Miami, a specialist on Hinduism, notes that when “Jews and Hindus converse there are no ulterior [conversionist] motives.” While conversion is not stressed at such meetings, there is enormous emphasis upon the difficulty of preserving one's distinctive minority culture in the Diaspora that both communities experience in America. Inter-marriage, drugs, alcohol, and religious indifference are problems among American Hindus. In addition, adequate translations of sacred Hindu texts into English are urgently needed.

Interestingly, both the Jewish and Hindu Diasporas in America are self-chosen. That is, it is quite possible for Hindus and Jews to move to either India or Israel, but many members of both communities choose to live in the United States.

Hindus and Jews are often in the same socioeconomic class, and the two groups are strongly committed to the principle of church-state separation and to antidiscrimination laws in housing, employment, and education. Both Hindus and Jews have deep ties to their countries of origin, either recent or ancient: India and Israel. Like Judaism, Hinduism stresses the home as the most important element in transmitting religious practices and beliefs.

Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) was the twentieth century's most important Hindu leader. During his lifetime he remained highly critical of Zionism, and his correspondence with Martin Buber in the late 1930s is an important part of Hindu-Jewish history. Many observers attribute much of India's historic coolness, even hostility, toward Israel to Gandhi's attitudes. Happily, India and Israel have recently established diplomatic relations.

While there has been an emergence of a militant Hinduism in India that is often in violent confrontation with Muslims in that country, there is little historic

record of anti-Jewish feelings on the part of Hindus toward Cochin and other communities. The establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and India has provided increased opportunities for fruitful encounters between Hindus and Jews in the United States.

Sikhs, a later and now fully distinct offshoot of Hinduism, with its center in Amritsar in India, number some 22 million in the world and over 2 million in the U.S.

Buddhists in the United States

Siddhartha Gautama (565-486 B.C.E.), who became known as Shakyamuni, the Buddha, lived in northeast India, near present-day Nepal. He was married and the father of a son, but at age twenty-nine he abandoned his family for the life of a religious ascetic. The Buddha taught that by freeing oneself from the suffering caused by passion and illusions, one can attain spiritual enlightenment.

His teachings spread widely in the centuries following his death, and today Buddhism is a highly complex series of beliefs and teachings with a devotional literature including the Buddha's sermons as well as the writings of many later Buddhist leaders. There are about 360 million Buddhists in the world.²⁹

Buddhism is especially strong in Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. There are also Buddhists in South America, Canada, Mexico, Taiwan, Great Britain, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and Poland. During the Vietnam War, some Buddhist priests in that country actively opposed the Saigon government. Protests included acts of self-immolation by Buddhist priests that were seen on American TV.

In 1899 Shin Buddhism reached Hawaii, and this group today has more than a hundred temples in the United States. The Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) are headquartered in San Francisco and number about 20,000 members. However, there are many Buddhists who are members of other groups within the faith.³⁰ Most Buddhists live in large cities, especially San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York City.

Like other Asian religions, Buddhism has gained converts in the United States. These include entertainment world celebrities as well as others who are attracted to the rigors of Zen Buddhism or the appeal of the exiled Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama.

In 1994 the Dalai Lama, who developed close relations with the Jewish community, visited Israel for the first time. He was warmly received there and, in general, Buddhist-Jewish relations in the United States are good.

Of special note is the BCA's position regarding prayer in the public schools, which is similar to that held by many American Jews:

The Buddhist Churches of America and its members strongly oppose any proposal permitting any form of organized prayer or other religious observance in public schools and public institutions, which are organized, supervised or sanctioned by any public entity, except as permitted by current constitutional law....

Buddhist leaders have stressed that "there is only one summit to a mountain, but there are many paths leading to it." They also claim that in its 2,500-year history, "Buddhism has not engaged in violent religious wars to convert the followers of other religious persuasions.... Buddhism joins hands with all religions ... for peace in the world."

Feminism in the Interreligious Dialogue

Historians, journalists, and other observers of the American religious scene generally agree that the feminist movement is of major importance—one that will have long-lasting effects for decades to come. Indeed, one observer has called it “the single most important social movement of the late twentieth century.” It is vital that the issues raised by the feminist movement become an integral part of every Jewish encounter with other faith communities.

Many Protestant denominations ordain women clergy. For centuries, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox women have been nuns or sisters, but these two communities do not have women members of the priesthood. Within Judaism, the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist branches train women for the rabbinate. Orthodox Judaism does not. Among Muslims, there are no female imams.

The role of women in the various religious traditions is a key issue in any dialogue. Some topics that lend themselves to exploration include the current status of women within their faith communities, with special emphasis on sexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, and racism. Attention should also be given to the status of women within religious law, liturgy, observance, sacred writings, and theology. The question of inclusive language in the various religious traditions is another important topic.

In interreligious encounters that involve the Jewish community, it is imperative that women be part of all Jewish delegations, especially rabbis and scholars who are women. The absence of Jewish women, particularly rabbis, from the dialogue substantially impoverishes the encounter and presents an incomplete picture of the Jewish community as it actually exists.

The Religious Right

The emergence of the religious right in the United States has important implications for the Jewish encounter with the Christian community. In her 1994 American Jewish Committee study, *The Political Activity of the Religious Right in the 1990s*, Rabbi Lori Forman wrote:

The Religious Right is made up primarily of Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists.... In the early 1920s a subgroup came to be known as fundamentalists ... those determined to wage an aggressive war against theological and cultural modernism.... Fundamentalists entered the political arena relatively recently. For years they followed a policy of strict separation from ... the world of politics. This was based on their conviction that the world was sinful and not worthy of their involvement, since Jesus' Kingdom would soon arrive.... In the 1970s, politicians of the secular New Right reached out to the fundamentalist and evangelical churches ... to expand their political base.... Today ... the fundamentalists have overwhelmingly abandoned their old distrust of politics ... this trend is likely to continue.

It is beyond the scope of this booklet to describe in detail the various leaders, agendas, and organizations that comprise the religious right, but there is an enormous amount of published material on the subject that is readily available. Rabbi Forman's booklet is helpful in this area of inquiry.

In July 1994 a group of 100 Christian and Jewish leaders issued *A Shared Vision: Religious Liberty in the 21st Century*, a statement that affirmed the traditional principles of church-state separation, religious liberty, and the proper role of religion and politics.

The American Jewish Committee was a signatory organization of *A Shared Vision*, and the document should be required reading for Jewish participants in interreligious dialogue. Copies of *A Shared Vision* are available from the AJC's Interreligious Affairs Department and the Baptist Joint Committee, 200 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, D.C., 20002.

A Shared Vision described groups like the religious right as believing:

... that the Founders [of America] never meant to separate the institutions of church and state or to prohibit the establishment of religion. Such a view is historically inaccurate and endangers our common welfare because it uses religion to divide rather than unite the American people.

At its heart, the religious right believes that America has lost its moral compass as a nation. There are some leaders of the religious right who constantly

invoke “Divine authority” for their policies and platforms, and who characterize their opponents as “sinful” or “ungodly.” Behind the catchy rhetoric of “family values” and “moral tradition,” the religious right is attempting to take over the Republican Party in the United States and establish a “Christian America” that will embody the religious right’s particular and exclusivist theological beliefs and supposedly solve our society’s problems.

For the Jewish community, several significant points need to be remembered regarding the religious right. There is, of course, no objection to the religious right’s participation in the American political process. Separation of church and state does not mean the separation of religion and politics. However, many Americans, including Jews, do raise objections to the religious right’s exclusivist, nonpluralistic vision of America.

In the religious right’s attempt to “Christianize” America and the world, what is the place of non-Christians? What would be the status of those Christians who do not share the particular religious beliefs of the religious right? One of the affirmations of *A Shared Vision* is the conviction that where religion is concerned, “no person should be made to feel an outcast in his or her own land.”

Many within the religious right are strong public supporters of Israel. However, interreligious relations is not a kind of quid pro quo game in which Jews conveniently overlook the disturbing domestic political agendas of their dialogue partners because of support for Israel. Because the Christian-Jewish agenda is a broad-based one, support on one key issue does not guarantee agreement or consensus on other vital questions.

The religious right is opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, registration of firearms, “secular humanism,” government aid to artists or artistic groups that are “obscene, profane, or in other ways subvert family values,” and “special rights” for gays and lesbians. It supports term limits for elective offices, vouchers for parents of private school students, capital punishment, student-led prayer in public schools, an abstinence-based sex-education curriculum, the teaching of “scientific creationism” in public school science classes, and limited immigration to the United States.

It is ironic that the religious right is seeking to project its agenda politically at a time when recent American population studies indicate that the United States is becoming increasingly a multireligious, multiethnic, and multiracial society. Americans are more, not less, diverse in their religious identities. The attempt by the religious right to create an exclusive and constricted “Christian America” flies directly into the face of these facts.

Many Jews suspect the presence of anti-Semitism within the religious right even though, as Rabbi Forman points out, “it is difficult to point to any explicit anti-Semitic statements in its [the religious right’s] carefully worded rhetoric ... but Pat Robertson [a prominent religious right leader] blames liberal Jews in America for ‘their ongoing attempt to undermine the public strength of Christianity.’” Indeed, Robertson came under strong attack for his views about Jews and Judaism, particularly as expressed in two of his books published in the early 1990s: *The New World Order* and *The New Millennium*.

The 2004 election of George W. Bush to a second term confirmed the extraordinary potency of religious issues in the political arena. Tapes of Bush’s 1998 private conversations with Douglas Wead revealed the electoral importance attached to the fundamentalist Christian community and the shadow it cast over the 2000 race for the White House. Bush, then the governor of Texas who was preparing for a presidential campaign, told Wead: “...there are some code words. There are some proper ways to say things, and some improper ways....”

The “code words” Bush spoke of were key issues for the religious right that could be conveniently lumped together as the “Three Gs”—God, guns, and gays—but they also include opposition to abortion and embryonic stem-cell research, attacks on popular culture, and support for unrestricted expressions and symbols of Christian faith in the shared communal square, especially in public schools and courtrooms. These values—said to be the major concern of nearly one quarter of the voters in 2004—trumped jobs, health care, education, the war in Iraq, and even terrorism as election issues.

Political observers, many of them stunned by the high priority voters placed on religious issues, emphasized that white Evangelicals supported Bush over Senator John Kerry by a four-to-one margin. But they often overlooked the fact that Bush, a United Methodist born-again Christian, also received 52 per cent of the Roman Catholic vote, sixty percent of the Hispanic Evangelical ballots, a quarter of Jewish votes, and, surprisingly, sixteen percent of black Evangelicals. There were also millions of Bush voters who identify as Christians, but are not Evangelical in their theology or religious practice.

However, it is the white Evangelical community that supplies the religious and political ideology as well as the foot soldiers, a.k.a. voters, who fuel the current “religious war.” Key initiatives on the religious right’s agenda include banning same-sex marriages, outlawing abortion, aggressively promoting religion in all phases of public schools, opening “faith-based” action programs in all 435 congressional districts, and working for the appointment of “constitutionally and theologi-

cally” sound judges to the Supreme Court and all other legal positions.

Clearly, an analysis and response to the religious right’s challenge to the principle of church-state separation and other traditional American values and laws must be included in interreligious dialogues.

How to Organize an Interreligious Engagement Program

The following suggestions, derived from decades of American Jewish Committee interreligious programming, may help ensure a successful and meaningful encounter. The Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee is always ready to assist in all phases of interreligious programming.

1. Interreligious engagement should lead to mutual respect and understanding between religious groups. It is also possible for the dialogue process to produce joint action on specific problems or themes including public statements, educational materials, the interpretation of key issues for public officials, and/or overseas study missions. In all cases, there must be no hidden agendas on the part of the participating individuals or groups.

2. There should be adequate joint planning by the Jewish participants and their partners in interreligious engagement. This planning includes not only the specific logistical details of the program, but the specific themes and topics as well. The planning process is an integral part of the total dialogue experience.

3. In addition to the Jewish sponsor—that is, the American Jewish Committee—appropriate cosponsorship from other faith communities is extremely desirable. The cosponsor(s) can be a local house of worship, a clergy association, seminary, religious or community organization, college or university, or institute.

4. The precise number of sessions should be announced at the beginning of the program so participants will know exactly how much time they are expected to give to the undertaking.

5. If possible, there should be an equal number of participants from each community, and women from the involved religious communities should be adequately represented.

6. An appropriate balance is needed between clergy and laypeople among the participants. Obviously, this does not apply if the program is for clergy only or for laypeople only. It is always important to ensure that clergy members do not dominate a dialogue when laypeople are present. While the clergy are professionally involved with their religion, it is the laity who constitute the membership of every religious community.

7. While some dialogues do take place in a home setting, it is generally better to house an interreligious program in a synagogue, church, mosque, school, or similar public location. The programs can be rotated from a Jewish location to the cosponsor's building or site.

8. Two discussion leaders should be selected in advance, one from each community. These leaders should meet prior to the formal program so they can jointly develop the project, decide on ground rules, etc.

9. Ideally, basic reading materials from both communities should be sent to all participants in advance of the dialogue. Experience has shown, however, that participants frequently do not read articles and papers before dialogue sessions. But once the dialogue is under way, participants often turn in great interest to the printed material they have received. All participants should receive the same materials to ensure a successful program.

10. Once a dialogue project has started and matured, it may be useful to feature guest speakers or specialists who can focus on a specific issue or theme. However, this should not take place until the participants themselves have had an opportunity “to bond” and to establish their own identities in the dialogue process.

11. Caution should be exercised regarding “interreligious services,” to ensure that the character and sensitivities of each religion be respected. The danger in interreligious services is that, no matter how well intentioned, they can result in reducing the particular faith commitments of the participants to the lowest common denominator. Preferably, each religious community should be encouraged to conduct its own authentic service. Christian participants should be invited to attend a Jewish service, and vice versa, as a way of developing mutual understanding and respect.

12. The presence of “Hebrew Christians” in interreligious activities usually skews the dialogue and creates unnecessary dissonance and polarization.

13. Once the programs are concluded, contact should be maintained with the participants by the American Jewish Committee or any other Jewish cosponsor. Participants often return for additional programs, and they are an excellent means of strengthening and publicizing the dialogue in the media, churches, synagogues, mosques, schools, and other community institutions.

Notes

1. Kosmin, Barry, Egon Mayer, and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey* (New York: CUNY Graduate Center, 2001); http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_studies/aris.pdf.
2. Southern Baptist Convention Web site at <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/default.asp>.
3. American Baptist Churches-USA Web site at <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/10facts.pdf>.
4. These numbers are based on National Council of Churches membership statistics, found at http://www.electronicchurch.org/2002/NCC_members.htm.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Israel, http://www.cbs.gov.il/hodaot2004/01_04_342e.htm.
14. National Council of Churches membership statistics, http://www.electronicchurch.org/2002/NCC_members.htm.
15. *American Religious Identification Survey*, pg. 12.
16. Ibid.
17. National Council of Churches membership statistics, op.cit.
18. Web site of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=73>.
19. *American Religious Identification Survey*, op. cit.
20. According to the Latter-day Saints Web site, <http://www.lds.org/newsroom/page/0,15606,4034-1---10-168,00.html>. ARIS found 2.8 million Mormons in its 2001 survey.
21. According to the National Council of Churches statistics, 2005, op. cit. However, the ARIS survey, 2001, found 5.6 million Presbyterians.
22. National Council of Churches, op. cit.
23. Figure based on a survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2002, at <http://pewforum.org/publications/reports/poll2002.pdf>. However, according to the ARIS study of 2001, the number is 50 million.
24. According to the Unitarian Universalist Association Web site at <http://www.uua.org/aboutu-ua/statistics.html/>.
25. National Council of Churches, op. cit.
26. Ibid.
27. Tom W. Smith, *Estimating the Muslim Population in the United States* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2002).
28. See <http://www.pluralism.org/resources/statistics/index.php>. According to ARIS, the figure was 766,000 in 2001. See also Tom W. Smith, *Religious Diversity in America: The Emergence of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Others* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2002).
29. See http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/bud_statwrld.htm.
30. ARIS puts the total Buddhist population among U.S. adults at a little over one million.

A Selected Bibliography

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