

Progress in Jewish-Christian Dialogue

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In 1991, I was part of a Jewish group that was served a kosher lunch in the Vatican. This may have been the first kosher meal served and eaten there since the days of St. Peter. The event reflected the remarkable change in Catholic Jewish relations in the last thirty years. It came in the context of the biennial meeting between the Catholic Committee on Religious Relations with the Jews and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultation (IJCIC). These committees and their subsequent meetings were born out of the Second Vatican Council and the *Nostra Aetate* proclamation of Pope John XXIII, which overturned almost 1,900 years of Catholic teachings about Judaism and the Jewish people. Since I have been an active participant in these meetings for the last twenty years, I thought that a recounting of some of the events and results of the encounter between representatives of the Jewish people and the Catholic Church might be of interest in a volume reconsidering the impact of *Nostra Aetate*.

The very first international meeting that I attended was in Venice in 1975. It was held at a Catholic Retreat House and throughout the several days of the meeting, kosher food was served to Catholics and Jews alike. The meeting was characterized by frank and open discussion that seemed an outgrowth of the very cordial relations developed between the participants since the creation of the two committees in 1971.

The Jewish committee consisted of five bodies: the World Jewish Congress and the Synagogue Council, which had been the organizing and founding bodies on the Jewish side; the anti-

Defamation League of B'nai Brith; the American Jewish Committee; and the Israel Interfaith Committee. The key figures on the Jewish side were Dr. Gerhardt Riegner, the Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress, Rabbi Henry Siegman, executive vice-president of the Synagogue Council of America, and the late Rabbi Mark Tanenbaum, who was Director of Interfaith Relations for the American Jewish Committee. The key Catholic figures were Cardinal Willebrands, who headed the Catholic body and continued to do so almost until 1990, and Monsignor Jorge Mejia, who was vice-president of the Catholic Committee on Religious Relations with the Jews.

The discussion in the meetings was far ranging, but it became clear that there were several underlying premises that tended to guide the discussion. One was the general acceptance of the idea that it was necessary to change the perceptions and teachings about the Jewish people. A major step had already been taken in *Nostra Aetate*, which repudiated the attribution of deicide to the Jewish people as a whole and in their various generations and called for new relationships. Another underlying premise that was referred to and clearly affected both Catholics and Jews was that the Holocaust represented a watershed in the history of modern man and a failure of Christian teachings. The implications of this had to be considered and the meaning of the Holocaust and its effects became the central subject of several subsequent meetings. Incidentally, it should be noted that, as years passed, Catholic participants began to use the Hebrew term *Shoah* rather than Holocaust and began to refer to the Hebrew Bible by the Hebrew term *Tanakh* rather than Hebrew Bible and Old Testament.

A third implicit premise that became more and more central to later discussions but was already present in the meeting in 1975 was a recognition that Judaism had not been succeeded and replaced by Christianity but rather that Judaism and Christianity, starting from the same tree, had branched out in different directions and that Judaism had not ended its spiritual history with the Bible but had continued to develop a religious and spiritual culture of which the Church had to be aware and which Catholicism had to study.

In the course of discussion, too, the issue of the diplomatic recognition of Israel by the Church was put on the table. While the Catholic representatives disavowed their right or ability to deal with the subject since, they asserted, they were not empowered to consider political matters, it nonetheless inevitably surfaced as an issue central to Jewish self-perception and was a sometimes formal and sometimes informal agenda item of every subsequent meeting.

While these spoken and unspoken premises did much to shape the agenda, discussion, and character of the meeting, the principal focus of the meeting was the paper of Professor Tomaso Federice. Professor Federice considered the issue of conversion as applied to the Jews and advanced the thesis that any attempt to secure mass conversion of the Jews was unnecessary and undesirable. Basing himself upon the statement of St. Paul in Romans 11:28-29 that God has not revoked his covenant with the Jews, he took the position that the Jews, unlike the gentiles, did not require conversion in order to be "saved." This advocacy of what was, in effect, a two-covenant doctrine, was a revolutionary reversal of Catholic theology. In concert with *Nostra Aetate* it signaled that the Church was prepared to overturn its 1,800 year old theology about Judaism and the Jewish people and to seek a new relationship.

At the same time, the question of the relation of the Catholic Church to another monotheistic faith, Islam, was broached. Catholic representatives made the point that while Christianity must see itself as having a definite relationship with Judaism, it had no such relationship with Islam. Nor did they apply to Islam the "double covenant" doctrine that they were applying to Judaism. They therefore did not mean to apply the new conversion doctrine to Islam.

Some social gestures that were symbolic concluded the meeting. One was the visit of the entire assembled body to the Ghetto and the synagogue, with some attendant ceremonies. The other to which Jewish leaders of the area were invited was the visit paid to the meeting by the Cardinal of Venice, who very soon thereafter became the short-lived Pope John Paul I. Apologizing for the lateness of his arrival because "my gondola was held up in traffic,"

he made it plain that he agreed with the purpose, the time, and the unspoken premises of the meeting.

I left Venice with the conviction that there was a historic opportunity for our generation, which had already witnessed a revolution in history as a result of the Holocaust and the birth of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state after 1,900 years, to effect a basic change in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people and to strike a major blow against anti-Semitism.

Nonetheless, there were limitations on the process that required a great deal of understanding and forbearance on both sides. On the Catholic side there were, as we were warned, elements who were strongly opposed to what were regarded as fundamental changes in Catholic theology: certainly there was more reciprocity to it in the Catholic circles in the United States, who functioned in a pluralistic society, than in the more monolithic European communities. On the other hand, there were cardinals and bishops in Europe who had witnessed the Holocaust at first hand and who felt that the Church had a grave moral responsibility to respond to it and to battle anti-Semitism. In the leadership of this group were Cardinal Willebrands and, when he came to head the Church, Pope John Paul II.

On the Jewish side, there was a limitation on relationships that stemmed largely from the Orthodox component of the Synagogue Council of America. They were in part skeptical of the sincerity of the Church and hesitant to engage in a situation that might result in a discussion of theological issues. A basis for their participation was proposed by the late Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, a major Halachist and philosophic mentor to the modern Orthodox group, who proposed that discussion be limited essentially to social issues. The Jewish side was limited by this formula since the Orthodox group was able to veto the participation of the Synagogue Council of America, the overall representative of synagogue and religious Jewry in the committee. Nonetheless, as Rabbi Soloveitchik himself had stated, rabbis and priests inevitably brought a religious outlook to their discussions, and thus a healthy dose of theological and religious thinking invariably found its way into our meetings.

However, it was largely Catholic theology that was under discussion and that needed rethinking on two scores. First, Christianity had to develop a theology about Judaism in order to define itself, and it did so. Judaism had no similar need. Second, the Church has been the oppressor of Jews in the name of its theology. Accordingly, the new approach to Jews and Judaism was followed by the proclamation of guidelines on teaching Judaism to Catholics. Two such guidelines were issued, one in 1975 after consultation with Jews and one, in 1985, that was issued without prior involvement.

The *Guidelines* that appeared in 1975 clearly carried further the themes dealt with in *Nostra Aetate*. Reflecting both papal statements made by Pope Paul VI and discussions between the Jewish and Catholic communities, it proceeded to amplify subjects that had been left vague in *Nostra Aetate*. The value of ongoing dialogue between people who appeared again and again at the meetings of the two committees was demonstrated by increased sensitivity on both sides to the concerns and language of their partners. To cite an example: *Nostra Aetate* makes no mention of the post-biblical religious and cultural tradition of Judaism. In the *Guidelines* in 1975, the statement is made that the history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem, but went on to develop a religious tradition. The notes in 1985 have a section on Judaism and Christianity in history; they refer to the permanence of Israel as a sign to be interpreted within God's design and go on to speak of "the continuous spiritual fecundity by Judaism in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern time." In this regard, it is interesting to note that when the committees met in Rome in 1990, the pope, who in his address had previously quoted only from the Bible, made it a point to quote from the Talmud. Monsignor Francesco Fumagalli, who was then serving as Secretary of the Catholic Committee made it a point to call my attention to it as a special gesture.

However, despite the progress of the dialogue, the Jewish Committee was upset by some of the statements in the 1985 notes and by some of the things that were not said. This document, unlike

the 1975 *Guidelines*, was not submitted to Jewish evaluation prior to its appearance.

These notes contained many positive statements. Among them was the declaration of Pope John Paul II that the covenant between God and Jewish people “has never been revoked.” Furthermore, the notes elaborated on the Jewish roots of Christianity, emphasizing that “Jesus was always and remained a Jew.” They also called attention to interpret hostile statements in the New Testament to early historical circumstances and called on clergy to take account of this in Lenten sermons. They went on to give a more favorable definition of Pharisees and condemned anti-Semitism. Reference for the first time was made to the Holocaust and to the state of Israel. Both references were deemed inadequate by the Jewish body.

While appreciating the positive thrusts of the notes, the Jewish Committee felt that some elements were lacking from the declaration and that some statements reflected a Christian triumphalism. Specifically, it was felt that the universal meaning of the Holocaust was ignored, that the religious significance of Israel was denied, that there seemed to be a new emphasis on “typology” and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible as a preparation for Jesus.

At that time, I was the chairman of IJCIC and I was in touch with Cardinal Willebrands to indicate that we wanted a serious discussion of the notes. The whole matter was, indeed, discussed at our biennial meeting in October. Explanations and interpretations of the text were offered by Monsignor Mejia and Dr. Eugene Fischer, and several critiques from the Jewish side were set forth by Dr. Riegner, Dr. Geoffrey Wigoder, and Rabbi Leon Klenicki. The Christian explanation was basically twofold. First, that the document was entitled: *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catachesis in the Roman Catholic Church*. It was, therefore, couched in theological language that had meaning for Catholics and sought to clarify and set new approaches to Judaism within the context of traditional Catholic theology. The other approach was to point out the progress that had been made and reflected in the *Notes* in the twenty years since *Nostra Aetate*.

There was much validity in both points and the IJCIC participants were, I believe, convinced of the good will of our Catholic fellows and also felt that there was increasing sensitivity to the Jewish position. However, I raised the point in my address to the pope that language which needed a great deal of interpretation and which was defended as a private Catholic theological language was undesirable in an era when communication was to the world at large.

Nonetheless, several major ideas emerged from our confrontation. One was an acceptance of the idea that the Jewish body ought to be consulted before any major pronouncement bearing upon Judaism was made. The second, which had far-reaching consequences, was the increasing recognition of the idea that Jews and Judaism ought to be seen as they see themselves. The imperative emerging from the acceptance of this notion was that Catholics needed to study post-biblical Judaism and to be sensitive to the central concerns of the Jewish people.

Two incidents may make it clear how important recognition of these ideas was, and is. The first was my experience in speaking to the faculty and students of a Catholic college in Minnesota. After my lecture, a group of nuns approached me to say that as devotional literature they were reading the writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel on the grounds that it spoke to their spiritual needs more profoundly than anything in contemporary Catholic devotional literature. The second incident, far more significant, is what emerged at a meeting of our two committees that was held in Amsterdam in. Dutch Jewry had refused to meet with the pope on his visit to Holland. The Dutch Jews who were present at our meeting made it plain why they had rejected the invitation. They spoke of the fact that there had been more than 125,000 highly integrated Jews in Holland prior to the second World War and that there were now only 25,000 who had survived. They complained of the fact that despite the horrors of the Holocaust, the Catholic Church refused to acknowledge and act upon what was a central element in the life and thought of the surviving Jews, the state of Israel. Cardinal Willebrands, presiding at the meeting, and himself

a Dutch man, was visibly moved at the intensity of feeling that was displayed and promised to convey the message to the Vatican.

This sense of a need to see the Jewish people and Judaism as they see themselves and to understand that the Jewish community was prepared to be forthright and aggressive in stating its position was central to the controversy that developed in 1987. It broke forth at a time when I was chairman of IJCIC and, as a result, I had a significant share in the developments and in the resolution of the matter. Moreover, it was a watershed in the relations between the two faiths, a central event that has had ongoing consequences.

The whole matter started with a proposed papal visit to the United States during which the pope proposed to engage, as had been his habit, with Jewish leadership. From the Jewish side, it was decided that American Jewry should be represented by the four groups who played a role in interfaith relations, the Synagogue Council of America, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the B'nai Brith Anti-Defamation League. It was agreed that a formal meeting would be held in Miami in a hall which seated 196 people and that to it would be invited major figures of the American Catholic Church and of Jewish organizational leadership. The pope was to speak and a representative of American Jewry was to speak. I advocated that the Jewish spokesman should be the president of the Synagogue Council of America, the representative body of religious Jewry and an organization of which I had previously been president. The suggestion was accepted and Rabbi Gilbert Klapperman, who was then the president of the Synagogue Council and an Orthodox rabbi, was the designated speaker. It was anticipated that this would be a formal meeting in which no new ground would be broken.

However, something notably unexpected occurred. The pope had received Kurt Waldheim in an audience. A former Secretary General of the U.N., Waldheim had been elected president of Austria in a campaign in which it was revealed that he had concealed and lied about his membership in the Nazi party and about his participation in army actions that involved shipping Jews and others to concentration camps. The election campaign evoked

anti-Semitic attitudes in Austria and his success profoundly disturbed the World Jewish community. Leaders of Western nations had refused to meet with Waldheim. The papal audience, therefore, aroused great feeling among Jews. While various explanations were offered, the matter was never properly explained. The reaction of the Jewish organizations to the reception of Waldheim was to announce that they would not meet with the pope when he came to America. The confrontation that ensued captured the attention of the press, television, and radio and was widely discussed. As Chairman of IJCIC, I presided at meetings at which the matter was debated and I would descend from the meeting to find television and radio and press teams waiting for a report.

Matters continued in this vein for some weeks while Cardinal Willebrands and I corresponded in search of a solution. Clearly, Catholic-Jewish relations, which had been developed with so much effort, were in danger of being broken off. Finally, Cardinal Willebrands suggested that Bishop Keeler of Harrisburg, who was in charge of the ecumenical elements of the papal visit, and I should be in touch. Bishop Keeler indeed contacted me and advised me that he, Cardinal Casseroli, the Secretary of State of the Holy See, the Papal Nuncio, and Cardinal O'Connor had met on the matter. He told me that Cardinal Casseroli, who was in the States for a two-day visit, would remain an extra day if I and some associates would meet with him at the residence of the Papal Nuncio. I appeared the following day, together with Rabbis Mark Tanenbaum, Wolfe Kelman, and Henry Michelman.

Our meeting was frank and cordial. We expressed our anger at the Waldheim meeting and indicated that we felt that the Church had to confront its role in relation to the Holocaust and to anti-Semitism in general. I went on to say that the limitations that were placed upon the Catholic committee—that they could deal only with religious matters and that political matters were beyond their competence—were unacceptable to us, since the political and religious aspects of Israel and the Holocaust could not be separated. Cardinal Casseroli expressed appreciation of the nature of the discussion, said that this was the first time that he had met with a

group of rabbis, and that he had to get back to Rome “to talk with the boss.”

The American Catholics who were eager that we meet with the pope were not very hopeful that much would result from our meeting. Bishop Keeler felt that the best we could hope for was a statement by the pope deploring the Holocaust. In point of fact, some ten days later I heard from Cardinal Willebrands inviting me to come to Rome with four others and to meet with his committee, which would now include a representative of the Secretary of State, to meet with Cardinal Casseroli in the Vatican, and to meet with Pope John Paul II informally in his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo. It was an unexpected but welcome invitation and we set a date for the meeting in late August. I then took off on vacation to Europe and Israel.

We gathered later that Cardinal Casseroli had been impressed by the direction of the exchange that had occurred with a small group and sought to repeat the discussion in the meeting with the pope. Ultimately, other Jewish organizations asserted their claim to participate and we ended up with nine members, a number I had to negotiate from Jerusalem with Cardinal Willebrands. Nonetheless, the meeting with the pope was informal, although there was less of interchange than there might have been with a smaller group. It did, however, conclude with all of us standing around and making casual talk, during which the pope reminisced about his boyhood and also expressed a desire to visit the Holy Land.

Once in Rome, we were entertained at their home by the American Ambassador and Mrs. Raab, who were tremendously interested in the meeting. Dr. Gerhardt Riegner, who, as always, was an indispensable part of the process and who had remained in touch with the Vatican authorities throughout, and I met with Cardinal Willebrands. We agreed on several propositions, among them that there would be representation of the Holy See on the Catholic committee.

However, there were two major elements in the agreement. The first was that the Catholics stated that there were no theological objections to the existence of a sovereign Jewish state and that the

issues were political. They thus disputed the widely held belief among Jews and Christians that there were theological reservations. This, it seems to me, laid the groundwork for mutual recognition between Israel and the Holy See, which came some years later.

The second major statement was the proposal advanced by Cardinal Willebrands, in line with previous discussions, that a major Catholic statement would be developed and, ultimately, issued, assessing the role of the Church in the growth of anti-Semitism from the Lateran Council (thirteenth century) on and the role of the Church in relation to the Holocaust.

The communiqué setting forth the results of our meetings was presented at a press conference that involved Bishop Pierre Duprey, vice-president of the Catholic body, and me, and which was widely reported and featured on Italian television. As a result of these meetings, IJCIC and the American bodies involved decided to restore the meeting with the pope ten days later in Miami. However, meanwhile some significant changes took place. The Orthodox bodies in the Synagogue Council resolved not to participate and forbade the Orthodox President of the Synagogue Council, Rabbi Klapperman, from participating. As a result, I returned on a boat from Europe several days before the meeting in Miami to learn that I had been designated by the Jewish bodies to deliver the address on behalf of the Jewish communities.

It was a strong statement of our feelings on the Waldheim matter, a review of our relations with the Catholic Church, a statement of what we thought needed to be accomplished, and an expression of hope for the future. It had been somewhat modified, but I felt quite comfortable in delivering it, save for changing one or two words that I felt were no longer appropriate—an action for which I paid a considerable price for several years with some of the Orthodox contingent. The pope, in turn, spoke of the relationship between Jews and Catholics in highly positive terms and spoke movingly of the Holocaust.

The whole event in Miami, given the background of controversy, elicited unusual interest. It was widely reported in the newspapers and pictured on television. The *pièce de résistance* was

provided by the *New York Times*, which not only printed both my speech and that of the pope, but had an unexpected picture on the front page, showing me delivering my speech and the pope listening attentively, rather than the more obvious picture of the pope speaking. This picture was widely reprinted abroad and for some months I kept receiving copies of papers from Europe and even from Asia.

There were some other interesting touches to the occasion. One, which I had not appreciated at the time, mentioned to me by Mrs. Wexler, president of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, was that it was unprecedented for the pope and another to sit on the same level.

The second was that when I went over to congratulate the pope on his speech, he said to me that he was worried about his pronunciation. I assumed that he referred to the six Hebrew words that he had used, among them *Shanah Tovah*, since Rosh Hashanah was close. I replied that pronunciation comes from the heart, not from the lips. And the remark was quoted by a reporter who had overheard it, without really being aware of the context.

The whole confrontation of 1987 had positive effects in that it led to a more open and forthright relationship between us, and put Israel and the Catholic role in anti-Semitism squarely on the agenda. These subjects were not followed up as rapidly as they should have been, partly as a result of further Jewish dissatisfaction with some remarks of then-Cardinal Ratzinger that were subsequently explained by the Cardinal. Nonetheless, the meeting held in Prague in 1990 was centered around the Catholic Church and anti-Semitism and there was, further, a major statement of responsibility set forth by the German Bishops in the meeting in Jerusalem in 1994. These statements have been supplemented by major statements of the pope condemning anti-Semitism. We all look forward to a formal statement in the name of the Catholic Church on the whole issue.

One major outcome of all of these events was the development of new and warm relations between the Jewish community and the American Catholics. Bishop Keeler picked up my remarks, that no

matter what the outcome of that meeting, American Jews and American Catholics needed to talk and act together. Some few weeks later he called me to propose that a committee of bishops be set up, to supplement the splendid work of Dr. Eugene Fisher and to meet on a regular basis with representatives of the Jewish community. I proposed that the Jewish partner be the Synagogue Council of America. As a result, the two committees were set up and have met twice a year to explore issues of common concern and with agreement on common actions. The role of Bishop Keeler, now Cardinal Keeler, was invaluable in developing the pattern and his involvement and concern rapidly made him the central figure in relations with the Jewish community. His statesmanship and his warmth, of which I have been a grateful beneficiary, have given a special and unique tone to Jewish-Catholic relations.

The impact of the relationship has been felt in Catholic seminaries, in changes in Catholic textbooks, in the teaching in Catholic schools, in public statements of the Church, and in the ease of relationships between Catholic and Jewish representatives. The strength of the relationship has been tested on issues in which there was potential disagreement, as there was in the position on the Middle East mandated by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and drafted by a committee consisting of Cardinal O'Connor and Archbishops Keeler and Mahoney. Much attention was given to Jewish input and reaction, with the result that the document presented was essentially acceptable to all and quieted controversy.

A further test of the new relationship between the Jewish World and the Catholic Church came in connection with Auschwitz. A group of Carmelite nuns had taken over a building in Auschwitz as a convent, with the intention of offering prayers and memorials for the 1½ million people who had been killed there. This evoked a strong reaction among Jews, led by European survivors. Jews felt that Auschwitz-Birkenau was, essentially, a Jewish cemetery of 1½ million souls, although non-Jews had died there too, and that it should not be preempted by any religious group. Various Catholic dignitaries, both in Europe and in America, agreed and agreed that the nuns ought to be moved to a location outside the camp. Several

European Cardinals met with Jewish representatives and agreed to raise the money to provide a convent and educational facilities outside the camp. Everyone was agreed except the nuns and, as a result, the matter dragged on for several years with much delay and consequent bitterness. By now, the matter is largely, though not totally, concluded. However, there was a very unpleasant interlude and it required the intervention of the pope to get the nuns out.

In an attempt to bring matters to a head, Rabbi Avi Weiss, a convinced activist, started to climb the fence around the convent within Auschwitz. He was attacked by Polish workers at the site and the whole event was much publicized. It led to a rise of anti-Semitic feeling in Poland, a country in which only six thousand Jews remain of the 3½ million whose history in Poland dated back for almost a thousand years. This, in turn, led to a homily by the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Glemp, which he later contended was designed to quiet the anti-Semitism outburst, but which was widely regarded as a highly anti-Semitic statement. As a result, when Cardinal Glemp proposed a visit to the United States to meet the very considerable Polish element in the country, the Catholic authorities in America dissuaded him for fear of evoking very hostile reactions in this country. However, a year later he raised the issue of a trip again and this time the Catholic hierarchy here agreed, on the condition that he offer an apology/explanation of his remarks. They sought a meeting with representative Jewish bodies. Most of them, however, refused to meet with him.

Several organizations and several individuals who were active figures in interfaith relations, I among them, did assemble for a meeting in Washington. Twelve of us were there together, with members of the Catholic hierarchy including Cardinal Law and Archbishop Keeler, to hear Cardinal Glemp indeed offer an apology and explanation of his motives. In the course of his comments, he pointed out that he had been born in a small mining town in 1930 and did not know any Jews, since he was only nine when Poland was conquered by the Germans. I suggested that this might explain why he did not understand how odious his remarks were to Jews and further suggested that he add to his statement that what he had said

about Jews had been based upon misinformation. He agreed and, indeed, said the same at the press conference that followed. The whole incident was so unusual and unprecedented that I remarked at the press conference that the distance we had travelled in Catholic-Jewish relations could be measured by the fact that, in the past, a Jew would not have met a cardinal, would not have dared to be critical of him, and would certainly never have received an apology.

“From the bitter there came forth the sweet.” The result of the whole matter was that Cardinal Glemp invited us to come to Poland, and to bring lecturers on Judaism and Jewish history to Catholic theological schools and universities. The lectures have, indeed, been undertaken by the American Jewish Committee Interfaith Department under the admirable leadership of Rabbi James Rudin. A group of five Jews, of whom I was one, did visit Poland and met the Catholic hierarchy. We were received by Cardinal Glemp with a very positive statement about the role of Jews in Poland and very cordially by Cardinal Franciszek Macharski in Cracow. We were accompanied on the trip by Monsignor Francesco Fumagalli, then serving as the Secretary of the Vatican Committee on Religious Relations with the Jews, who had made all the arrangements for the meetings. Monsignor Fumagalli, it should be noted, was valued by us for the dedication and concern he brought to his role. One unusual element of our relationship is that he had studied at the Hebrew University and was fluent in Hebrew. We frequently talked in that language.

We were accompanied throughout by Bishop Muszynski (now Archbishop), who had undertaken the role of ecumenical relations with the Jews and who discharged it with great warmth and concern. Younger than Cardinal Glemp, he had never encountered Jews until he met the few remnants after the war and had to learn about the Holocaust and its enormity when he undertook his role. The conclusion of our visit to Poland was a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, with all its chilling impact, heightened by the fact that we were there in the middle of February. But almost equally chilling was the site of the razed ghetto in Warsaw and the monument at the place from which Jews had been shipped. It consisted of two great

tablets and they were inscribed with representative Jewish and Hebrew names, according to the letters of the alphabet, a few lines for each letter. All the names were there, including my own name, that of my wife, and those of our children.

The same trip took us briefly to Czechoslovakia and for several days to Hungary, where we met with the cardinals and other important elements of the Catholic hierarchy to discuss Jewish-Catholic relations. The message was clear. The Vatican was interested and the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people was undergoing a revolution.

I would be delinquent if I failed to mention the vital role that Cardinal O'Connor has played in this revolutionary process. As the Archbishop of the city that has the largest Jewish community in the world, he has been sensitive to Jewish thinking and, more than that, has been sympathetic to it and given it expression. Thus, to a gathering of Arab Ambassadors, Jewish representatives, of whom I was one, and Catholics, held at his residence in connection with the Catholic position paper on the Middle East, he stated that he believed that the Catholic Church ought to recognize Israel. At the same time he resorted to Catholic theology to express his sentiments about the Holocaust and Israel, and said that he regarded the Holocaust as the crucifixion of the Jewish people and the state of Israel as symbolizing the resurrection of the Jewish people. He conveyed the same sentiments to Rome and was an active figure in urging the recognition of Israel.

The same candor was evident in his remarks to Cardinal Glemp just prior to his return to Poland. In the presence of assembled Jews and Catholics, he said to Cardinal Glemp that American Catholics indeed regarded Auschwitz as a Jewish cemetery and urged him to seek the removal of the nuns. Moreover, he suggested that it would be very appropriate, given what had happened to the Jews of Poland and what Israel meant in Jewish life, if a Polish cardinal would urge a Polish pope to recognize Israel.

My involvement in a historic revolution of attitudes and relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people has certainly been a high point in my own life. But it would be idle to

pretend that that revolution has yet been achieved. It is in process and it may take three generations if it is to continue to bear its full fruit. The prospect has been greeted with skepticism by many Jews and has run counter to long held attitudes of many Catholics. But there is a possibility that it will help to change the world and substitute understanding for prejudice and friendship for hatred. And there is reason to hope that another generation will build upon the achievements of this generation and transform possibility into reality. It would be nice to believe that our greatest songs are still unsung.