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“Under the Very Windows of the Pope”: Confronting Anti-Semitism in Catholic Theology after the Holocaust

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**“Under the Very Windows of the Pope”:
Confronting Anti-Semitism in Catholic Theology after the Holocaust**

An Honors Thesis
Presented by
Carolyn Wesnousky

To
The Department of History
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Honors in the Major Field

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Introduction:

“The relation of the Church with the Jewish people is a two thousand year old problem, as old as Christianity itself. It became much more acute, particularly in view of the ruthless policy of extermination inflicted upon millions of Jews by the Nazi regime in Germany. And so it has attracted the attention of the Second Vatican Council.”¹

-Cardinal Augustin Bea, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity

With these words addressed to the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Augustin Bea proposed a document whose passing would radically alter the Catholic conception of Judaism and change the way in which Jews were treated and perceived by ordinary Catholics. This document, the *Declaration on the Jews*, is often referred to as *Nostra Aetate*, for it was written within the folds of a larger declaration by that name. Written in the context of a great Church Council, meant to inaugurate a period of change and renewal for the Catholic Church, *Nostra Aetate* deserves a closer look as the product of a radical shift in Catholic theology that began in the wake of the Holocaust. It is also deserving of scrutiny as the foundation for the tentative beginnings of Catholic-Jewish dialogue after almost two millennia of a relationship grounded mainly in antagonism and persecution.

As *Nostra Aetate* represents such an important change in the relationship between Catholicism and Judaism, it is interesting to note how past historians have written about the document and from what stance they have considered it. A general overview of the historiography on this field reveals a number of emerging trends. Historians often use a variety of different themes in their analyses, such as a close examination of the popes of the War World II era and its aftermath, polemics of outrage and moral blame, in-depth looks at the inner workings of Vatican diplomacy, histories of antisemitism dating back to the crucifixion, detailed

¹ Cardinal Augustin Bea, S.J., *The Church and the Jewish People: A Commentary on the Second Vatican's Council's Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, Loretz, Philip, trans., (London: Geoffrey Chapman Limited, 1966), p. 7.

explanations of the events of Vatican II itself, or theological works commenting on the changing Catholic and Jewish faiths post-Holocaust. A quick review of these viewpoints will be useful before beginning to explain my own starting point.

A popular trend among historians has been to focus on the extent of blame that should be laid at the feet of the Vatican for the occurrence or continuation of the Holocaust. This is a widely researched topic with an astounding diversity of opinions that never fails to create controversy. The first real expression of the idea that the Vatican in some way ‘failed’ the Jewish people was put forth by the 1963 play “The Deputy” written by the German playwright Rolf Hochhuth.² The play focuses on the figure of Pope Pius XII, painting a picture of a cold, power-hungry diplomat whose silence led to the deaths of millions of Jews. This portrait, while expanded upon and nuanced, has in essence remained the core of the scholarship on the Vatican and the Holocaust ever since. With the release of documents from the Vatican Secret Archives dating from the reign of Pope Pius XII, first to certain scholars, and then to the public, this issue has become particularly heated. When combined with the focus set by Hochhuth, the opening of the archives have led to an over-examination of the figure of Pope Pius XII, with too much emphasis on analyses of his personality. The weight placed on the private life and personality of Pius XII tends to obscure the roles of other players within the Vatican and trends in theology and politics that influenced the Pope’s actions.

Many historians, such as John Cornwell, still focus exclusively on Pope Pius XII and his perceived ‘silence’ in not speaking out against the Nazi Regime. The title of his book, *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, gives a ready idea of his negative impression of Pius XII.³

² Rolf Hochhuth, *The Deputy*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston, (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1964).

³ John Cornwell, *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1999).

A summary of his views can be found in the preface to his book, which says that Eugenio Pacelli (Pius XII)

“was no monster; his case is far more complex, more tragic than that. The interest of his story depends on a fatal combination of high spiritual aspirations in conflict with soaring ambition for power and control. His is not a portrait of evil but of fatal moral dislocation- a separation of authority from Christian love. The consequences of that rupture were collusion with tyranny and, ultimately, violence.”⁴

Cornwell writes as though he is starting a new trend in historiography in adding complexity to the figure of Pius XII, but he ultimately still places blame on the pope’s moral failing of not acting during his papacy to protect the Jews. Cornwell sees this failure as stemming from not only a lack of human empathy but also a lack of Christian brotherly love, traits that in today’s world we generally consider as the most important qualities of a Catholic religious leader. One weakness of scholarship that is critical of the World War II popes is that it imposes our modern-day image of the Vatican back into the past. I will return to this issue in the next chapter, arguing that before the 1960s the Vatican had a more active role in politics and had more temporal power. Today we see popes as moral leaders, but before World War II they were also diplomats and political power brokers. Criticizing the Vatican for a role it had yet to assume amounts to a pat-on-the-back for our own moral progress.

The monarchical nature of the Vatican, which I will discuss in depth later on, means we must credit Pope Pius XII and his personality with the course of Vatican politics and diplomacy during the Holocaust to some extent. However, there are other angles to consider. What, for example, of the policies codified by his predecessor, Pope Pius XI? Due consideration should also be given to policies set by over a thousand years of papal rule that had to be taken into

⁴ Cornwell, *Hitler’s Pope*, pp. viii-ix.

account by current popes because of the dogma of papal infallibility defined by the First Vatican Council in 1870. These are subtleties that personality-based focuses, such as Cornwell's, tend to lose sight of.

Others are more willing to forgive the popes for their silence, such as Michael Phayer, who provides a dizzying array of reasons to soften the argument of Cornwell.⁵ These include the consideration that Pope Pius XII acted mainly in the role of a diplomat throughout WWII, staying silent out of fear of provoking Hitler's reaction, but did in fact save the lives of thousands of Jews across Europe through his diplomatic corps. Phayer also argues that Pius XII's preoccupation with communism and the Cold War directly after the end of WWII was the reason he did not immediately address the injustices done to the Jewish people.

Historians spend hundreds of pages explaining in depth that Pius XII was a cold-hearted emotionless man who genuinely held anti-Semitic beliefs. Historians who push this version of the pope, including Cornell, generally hold him accountable for Jewish deaths through not only his failure to act, but his personal knowledge and indifference towards the Jewish plight. Others like Phayer, reject this account, but make the same case in the example of Pope John XXIII, the architect of the Second Vatican Council, that it was his gregarious and affectionate personality that led him to seek reconciliation and proclaim his love for the Jewish people.

Often, this in-depth analysis of papal personalities and playing the blame game gives way to polemics and using the Holocaust as trump card in the international political arena. Recently, Daniel Goldhagen published a highly controversial book that in many ways represents the extreme end of finding the Vatican morally responsible for the tragedy of the Holocaust in

⁵ Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). See also: Anthony Rhodes. *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators (1922-1945)*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

modern scholarship.⁶ His argument rests on the case that not only was the Catholic Church complicit in the Holocaust, but that it now has, as an institution, an active duty today to promote the Jewish cause in the way of moral and material reparations. The problem with his argument, which I agree with to a certain point, is that while making much headway in analyzing the Vatican from a purely political point of view, he loses sight of the religious aspect. Goldhagen refuses to treat the state of the Vatican as in any way different from a modern political state, believing that in hiding behind its religious framework, the Vatican has in the past escaped criticism for its actions that the international community would surely bring down on any other country guilty of such misdeeds.⁷ This is a valid point. The Vatican could be accused of enjoying certain privileges of immunity against criticism because in being also the seat of a religion, the Pope can claim divine inspiration, adherence to creed, and promoting Catholic beliefs as explanations for particular policies. However, when Goldhagen includes in his argument a discussion of Vatican II, which he believes did not go far enough in repairing Catholic-Jewish relations, he loses sight of a critical point.⁸ Goldhagen insists that in order to completely expunge all traces of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism from its catechism and theology the Catholic Church must review its stance on salvation theology. He writes that the critical view that Jews cannot achieve salvation without embracing Jesus Christ promotes a worldview of Jews and Judaism “as inferior, false, and wayward”, even accrediting it as “a root cause, if not the root cause, of Christian antisemitism.”⁹ Here, Goldhagen is examining Christian theology from a political point of view. The problem with this outlook is that it refuses to acknowledge that the Catholic Church has the right, as a religion, to espouse whatever religious beliefs they choose. One of the keys to

⁶ Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

⁷ Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*, p. 188.

⁸ Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*, pp. 205-06.

⁹ Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*, p. 260.

understanding the history of the Vatican is its unique position of being both a political and religious body, a topic that I will explore in the next chapter. The issue at stake here is that in pursuing what is fundamentally a political critique of the Vatican, Goldhagen has failed to factor in the reality of Catholic theology. This is an aspect of Vatican II which is sadly neglected, glossed over, or marginalized by historians who study the post-Holocaust period.

In effect, while some of the scholarship does pay attention to the evolution in Catholic theology that followed the Holocaust, many neglect this aspect for the more controversial debate over how culpable the Vatican was in the deaths of the 8 million Jews killed in WWII and what that means for the Vatican in modern times. James Carroll is one of the few historians who do devote extensive time to the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰ His history follows the entire span of Catholic-Jewish relations from the Middle-Ages to the 1960s. He assigns a large portion of guilt to the Catholic Church for not speaking out against anti-Semitic beliefs, which he posits as a major cause of the Holocaust. It is an interesting point of view, because Carroll himself is an ex-Catholic priest who dropped out of the clergy after Vatican II made it clear that clerical celibacy was not going to be on the table for reform. Not only does Carroll clearly feel the full weight of Catholic responsibility for creating an atmosphere of anti-Semitism, but he takes it to the point of proposing a set of issues for a hypothetical Third Vatican Council. While he is one of the few historians who considers the Council as prominent in repairing Jewish-Catholic relations, he does not give it as much credit as it deserves. The work of the Council in creating dialogue between Christian and non-Christian religions (especially Judaism) should not be downplayed – it was a tremendous step within Catholicism that was without precedent.

¹⁰ James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001).

A much more complex argument is put forward by Frank J. Coppa, who notes that racially driven anti-Semitism and theologically driven anti-Judaism may seem similar, but represent very different modes of thought and motivate different actions.¹¹ While creating a distinction between the two of them seems to distance the Church from blame, it fails to take into account how intertwined these two aspects actually were. As I will explore in Chapter 2, the Catholic Church was not entirely free from racially motivated anti-Semitism and the idea of Jewish people being a ‘race’ different than Christians was commonly espoused by Catholic priests and theologians.

Another technique of historians in tackling Jewish-Catholic relations in the mid-1900s is to focus in on the Second Vatican Council specifically. A general trend in writing about the Second Vatican Council has been to largely focus on the debates and players, in essence, the politics and drama behind the council, rather than the ideological and theological forces driving and shaping events. The theological debate itself is an area that to me seems largely neglected. While historians who write about the relationship of the Vatican and the Jews focus on the diplomatic relations, they tend to overlook the theological motivations behind the Vatican’s actions. It should go without saying that any discussion of the effect of the Second Vatican Council on Jewish-Catholic relations should include a discussion of how changing theology would affect Catholicism itself. And yet, only a few scholars mention this topic. Michael B. McGarry’s short analysis of Vatican II breaks down the documents released by the council from a Jewish perspective, and offers insights into the changing Catholic-Jewish dialogue.¹² McGarry at least realizes that any change in the Catholic theological articulation of the relationship of the Church to Judaism would profoundly impact the foundations of Catholicism itself. But his

¹¹ Frank J. Coppa, *The Papacy, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

¹² Michael B. McGarry, *Christology After Auschwitz*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

discussion does not give any time or space to how these new interpretations of theology rose to such an accepted and integral level of the Catholic Church that they were promulgated by the Pope.

Many historical analyses, such as those by John Cornwell and Michael Phayer, focus almost exclusively on the role of papal personalities in shaping Vatican actions and give little or no attention to theology, instead viewing the Vatican as primarily a political unit. Thus they see Vatican II itself as a council of politicians with political aims and goals. While Phayer's account does touch upon the Second Vatican Council, it takes up a scant 14 out of over 200 pages. These pages contain mostly a blow-by-blow account of how the council came to be called and who the major players were, almost as if the Council occurred only in light of the Holocaust. Phayer seems to think it enough to say that Vatican II made a start to repairing Catholic-Jewish relations, without mentioning *why* the church felt it important or necessary to do so, other than that the Holocaust was a terrible tragedy that called for reparations. He writes that "we may view *Nostra Aetate* as the Catholic church's answer to Auschwitz", reducing the complexity of a complete theological transformation to a mere apology.¹³ In brief, these histories do not extend their arguments much past the reign of Pope Pius XII, and when they do make it to 1965, there is no full 'fleshing out' of the importance of the Second Vatican Council in the changes in Catholic theology that lay behind *Nostra Aetate*.

Other historians approach the problem by way of seeing the Holocaust as a culmination of 2,000 years of anti-Semitic thought and popular culture in Europe and explain the Council as an attempt by the Vatican to correct and root out this evil from Catholic thought by removing all

¹³ Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, p. 216.

traces of it from their theology. Coppa and Carroll both take this approach, along with others.¹⁴ This is helpful in that it grounds both the Holocaust and the Second Vatican Council in the 2,000 year history of the Catholic Church in Europe, unlike approaches that give the impression that the Council appeared magically in a vacuum. The flaw in this method is that it tends to oversimplify the factors leading up to both the Holocaust and to the Second Vatican Council. It also promotes a view of history as cumulative- that for instance, pogroms in the 15th and 16th centuries were just another link in a chain of anti-Semitic events that led to the Holocaust. The main issue that I found in the analyses of Carroll and Coppa is the tendency to focus on behind-the-scenes minutiae to the exclusion of the larger picture. They once again narrow down the reasoning of the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* to an apology for centuries of anti-Semitism.

Instead of focusing on the political maneuverings behind the scenes of the Second Vatican Council, time should be paid to the theologies that these debates produced, and connections made to the historical and political events that shaped the calling and ponderings of the Council. In what follows I will combine a elements of these approaches to studying the changing relationship between the Jews of Italy and the Vatican through the prism of the Second Vatican Council, paying special attention to the language and rhetoric used by Catholics that captures their vision of what 'Judaism' represents. I hope to create a narrative that explains the development of Jewish-Catholic relations as something that transcends a mere reaction to the Holocaust and has instead its greater origins in a newly burgeoning way of thinking within the Vatican about how it saw its place, both theologically and politically, in the modern world.

¹⁴ See also: David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against The Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism*, (New York: Knopf, Borozi Books, 2001).

In order to do so, I first of all weave together a background chapter which narrates events from the crucifixion up to the Second World War so as to create a vivid picture of what Catholic-Jewish relations looked like before and during the Holocaust. For this chapter I employ a variety of secondary sources, including histories of early Christianity, popes, medieval persecution of Jews, Italy, and the Roman ghetto. I also insert analyses of Catholic treaties and concordats, as well as papal bulls and edicts. From these I hope to produce a more textured understanding of the historic Catholic understanding of Judaism and how it informed papal policy towards Jewish populations in the Papal States.

For my second chapter I refer to a number of both primary and secondary sources, using the secondary ones to supplement and flesh out texts that dated from the World War II era, which included Vatican documents, diplomatic communiqués, theological texts, and texts published by religious councils. With this combination I strive to capture the turbulent time period, in which a number of nuanced attitudes were held by the Church towards Jews, as well as provide a violent picture of the Holocaust as it played out close to the heart of Rome, when around 1,000 Jews of Rome were rounded up by the Nazis and sent off to be killed. Framing the Roman *razzia* as the centerpiece of my thesis is meant to emphasize the great emotional impact it continued to hold within the collective memories of Catholics and Jews alike in the post-war era.

My third and fourth chapters are built almost entirely on insider accounts of the Second Vatican Council. It is hard to escape the obvious Catholic-bias which pervades these texts, but the trade off is that they are based on personal experiences and not unwarranted rumors of what went on within the highly secretive Council meetings. To offset this bias, I complement them with other primary sources such as histories of the Holocaust written during the 1960s, newspaper articles and reviews, and submissions to the Council written by both Catholic and

Jewish theologians. While researching this thesis I strove to track down the core body of primary sources that the majority of historians who have written on the topic utilized and rely on those texts themselves rather than a watered down version. When this, for reasons of language or inaccessibility was not feasible, I resorted instead to using parts of the texts which were quoted in whole rather than the analysis of the author. I hope this mixture of primary sources supplemented by secondary background has been woven together in a seamless narrative so as to provoke a new vision of the creation of Catholic-Jewish dialogue in the wake of the Holocaust.

As a side note, I find it fundamentally important to avoid any kinds of polemical dialogue. The Holocaust was a tragic and horrific event in human memory that historians still constantly grapple to place within the narrative of modern development. I believe the Holocaust should be discussed and laid bare for all to see, and I applaud historians who work tirelessly to bring new information to light so that we can more fully understand what took place. We must however, work to both remember the Holocaust and keep it in our past at the same time. Genocide should not be dug up for political purposes- it is too complex and overwhelming to be boiled down to merely feeling pity for victims. Nor should the Vatican be held continually responsible for events that occurred over 60 years ago. I find that too many of today's nations and cultures are stuck in the past, forever rehashing past wrongs and perpetuating cycles of violence. Let us lay aside blame and instead strive for greater understanding, which in turn will lead us to forgiveness. Through this work I hope to shed a small light of understanding on a complex subject and contribute to the efforts of others who have striven to call themselves historians.

Chapter 1: Living in a Christian World

Two Thousand Years of History

The end of World War II in 1945 marked the fall of the Nazi Party and the liberation of the few Jews who survived persecution under Nazi anti-Semitism. Twenty years later, the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council issued *Nostra Aetate*, a document that radically altered the conception of the Catholic Church in relation to other, non-Christian religions in the modern world. More specifically it was the first official decree on Jewish-Catholic relations ever issued by the Vatican. *Nostra Aetate* can be viewed as radical in a number of ways, in particular because it recognized the sanctity and truth in other religions, a complete turnabout from the Church tradition of superior revelation. The document also created a new theological basis for Jewish-Catholic relations. Obviously the Holocaust was a contributing factor in creating dialogue between the two religions, a wake-up call that their combined history was full of misunderstandings, violence, and oppression. But how much of a factor was the Holocaust in prompting Jewish-Catholic dialogue? For the Holocaust to have been an impetus to revising Catholic theology, we must assume that Catholic theology was in some way responsible for the deaths of over 7 million Jews across the European continent. The real question becomes: Did Catholic theology promote hatred of Jews? *Nostra Aetate* in itself answers this question in the affirmative. The Holocaust, though never mentioned explicitly by the name we recognize today, was continually cited by the leading Cardinals and theologians who crafted the document. Cardinal Augustin Bea, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, was charged by Pope John XXIII to draft a document titled “The Attitude of Catholics to non-Christians, especially the Jews.” This document, after countless drafts, eventually became *Nostra Aetate*. When presenting this document, Cardinal Bea addressed the Council with these words:

“But why is it so necessary precisely today to recall these things? The reason is this. Some decades ago anti-Semitism, as it is called, was prevalent in various regions and in a particularly violent and criminal form, especially in Germany under the rule of National Socialism, which through hatred for the Jews committed frightful crimes, extirpating several million of Jewish people.”¹⁵

The Holocaust made the issue of Catholic culpability in creating a culture of anti-Semitism or Jewish-hatred pressingly relevant to the members of the Second Vatican Council. From Bea’s words, it is clear that in the Catholic Church there was some sense of shared responsibility for the development of violent anti-Semitism, to at the very least, remember and address the event of the Holocaust during the Council’s work. Theologians such as Bea saw the Holocaust as a wake-up call to realizing that Old and New Testament texts were constantly misinterpreted to reflect anti-Jewish sentiments. Bea proclaimed that *Nostra Aetate* was important for “rooting out from the minds of Catholics any ideas which perhaps remain fixed there through the influence of that propaganda [i.e. Nazi/National Socialism]” which saturated Europe with anti-Semitic thought during the rule of the Nazi party.¹⁶

The Second Vatican Council, which was a near total reappraisal of Catholic dogma and practice, gave influential and respected theologians such as Bea an opening for discussing the Catholic stance on Judaism. The Council was a unique opportunity for the Church to emphatically clarify its beliefs towards the Jewish people and religion and to decide on official interpretations of biblical passages that had previously colored the Jewish-Catholic relationship. To understand the desperate need for rectification that the Church faced one need only look back 20 years and view the horrifying damage of the Holocaust on collective Judaism. While the Holocaust could be dismissed as a sort of ‘one-time’ event that did not reflect the real attitudes of

¹⁵ Augustin Cardinal Bea, S.J., “Relatio on the schema, November 1963”, *The Church and the Jewish People*, (Wimbledon: Geoffrey Chapman Limited, 1966), p. 157.

¹⁶ Bea, “Relatio on the schema, November 1963”, p. 157.

Europeans and was only the work of a few evil Nazis, even a quick look back into history shows that every country in Europe had its fair share of anti-Jewish violence and forceful oppression in the forms of pogroms, blood libels, persecutions, and ghettos.

To understand the origins and forms of Jewish-hatred that have sprung from Catholic theology it is necessary to look back across the entire span of Jewish-Catholic relations, seeing that the Holocaust was not the only horrific example of anti-Jewish violence and that an attitude of anti-Semitism was to a great extent, culturally acceptable, especially from the Middle Ages onwards. The real question is distinguishing between a theologically motivated hatred of the Jewish people as the killers of Christ and mortal enemies of all Christians and the more secular hatred of Jews that resulted from them being seen as a fundamentally ‘different’ group of people, marginalized by society and thus deserving of contempt. From the history that follows we can see how theological hatred of Jews often informed and excused the reasoning behind racial anti-Semitism. The difference between the two is important because it was *theological* and *religious* arguments against Judaism, and by reflection, its followers, that *Nostra Aetate* aimed to correct and combat.

Before *Nostra Aetate* recognized the importance and legitimacy of Jewish-Catholic dialogue, Jews and Christians had been interacting with each other for around 2,000 years.¹⁷ Since the Crucifixion of Christ, the relationship between Christians and Jews has been a complicated and touchy subject. One way to view their long history is to see it as an evolution of theological beliefs, a series of revelations and interpretations that built up over the centuries to create a long tradition of anti-Jewish polemic, which blossomed in the late Middle Ages into actual physical Christian-on-Jew violence.

¹⁷ Note here that I use the term ‘Christians’ to denote Catholic history before the Reformation, as the two terms did not acquire a separate meaning until Protestants broke from communion with the legacy of St. Peter and no longer recognized the authority of the Popes/Vatican.

Since the early days of Christianity, the new religion defined itself in the metaphor of the New Testament- newer, therefore more accurate and current, in effect “superseding” the Jewish faith of the ‘Old’ Testament. There is a certain obviousness to the antagonism Christians and Jews felt towards each other in the first few centuries of development. Christians believed that Jesus was the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament. The origins of the idea of supersession can be seen in the writings of St. Paul, often quoted in medieval anti-Jewish polemics: “For Christ is the end of the law, that every-one who has faith may be justified”, meaning in essence that Jews who did not convert were seen as following empty laws that no longer needed to be fulfilled.¹⁸ From the beginning of the Christian religion, interpretations of the New Testament fueled antagonisms and misunderstandings between Christians and Jews. As James Carroll describes it “from a very early time, Jews were dismissed by Christians as custodians of a false Israel.”¹⁹

In the first four centuries after the death of Christ, when a mass of confusion and different sects, interpretations, and claims abounded throughout Middle-Eastern, North African, and European communities (which we can see traces of in St. Paul’s furious diatribes against false prophets in his New Testament letters), the dividing lines between Christian and Jew were not so clear. Many people attempted to bridge the two competing belief systems. There were Jewish Christians and Christian Jews, who adopted a middle-course and honored some customs and beliefs of each faith. These groups, such as the Nazarenes and the Ebionites, were constantly censured by Church leaders. Theologians especially disliked these so-called Judaizers, the Christians who maintained Jewish practices and laws.²⁰ Jerome, a 4th century priest renowned for

¹⁸ Romans 10:4

¹⁹ James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001) p. 58.

²⁰ Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p. 145.

his mastery of Greek and Latin biblical studies wrote of such groups, “But while they pretend to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither.”²¹ Eventually the polarization became too much to overcome, and these dynamic traditions that combined a mixture of Old and New Testament laws and customs disappeared. One could say this was the last vestige of real dialogue between Christians and Jews. From the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine (306-37) onward, when Christianity gained the upper hand in terms of popularity, power, and authoritarian backing, the tension between the two groups grew dangerously.

In 315, Constantine issued an edict forbidding Jews from proselytizing.²² This meant that Jews were not allowed to actively seek converts among Christians. In effect, they were limited to gaining membership exclusively from births within the existing Jewish community. Constantine intertwined religious beliefs and political authority in Europe to an almost inseparable extent. Until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century, the monarchs of Western Europe gained strength and legitimacy from the Catholic Church and the pope- whose crowning of kings and queens amounted to sanctioning their divine rule. Christianity was not so much a ‘state religion’ as the entire shared culture of Europe- from which Jews were by definition excluded. Constantine’s calling of the first Ecumenical Council of the Church, or the Council of Nicaea, in 325, was the beginning of a monolithic and increasingly regulated Catholic theology and culture. Suddenly the book was closed- wavering between belief systems was no longer tolerated but heretical. Heresy would in the Middle Ages become a marker of unacceptability in society- a clear-cut boundary that gave rise to what R.I. Moore terms a ‘persecuting society’.²³ The work of theologians such as St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine in the 4th and 5th centuries added Jews to the growing list of people who were seen as threats to a functioning Catholic society.

²¹ Samuel Krauss, “Nazarenes”, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, v. 14, (Funk and Wagnel, 1906), pp. 194-5.

²² Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, p. 185.

²³ R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987).

The Nicene Creed, a statement of fundamental Christian beliefs that was created by a series of councils in the 4th century, drew on the writings of St. Paul to emphasize the importance of salvation theology (the crucifixion and passion of Christ as the saving event for mankind), making it the main tenet of Christianity. This in turn created a strong justification for Jewish hatred, because it placed so much weight on the death of Christ; a death supposedly caused by Jewish hands. The works of St. Paul in the New Testament were the backbone of anti-Jewish theology built on by the Church Fathers to create a body of polemical speech that universally condemned Judaism and its followers.

One of the first most influential theologians who drew on St. Paul was St. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. An influential theologian in the late 4th century, St. Ambrose forged the link between intense devotion to the passion as proof of salvation through Christ, and hatred of Jews. He believed that the creation of a Christian empire was delayed by the “surviving agents” of Satan: Jews.²⁴ Thus the “Jew” became conceived of as an opposing force to Christianity, the ‘stumbling block’ to the conversion of the whole world. This gave way easily to the belief that if only all Jews were converted, then Christ would come again, and bring with Him salvation. This left Christians first confused, then angry, at the stubborn refusal of Jews to convert. Contempt of the Jewish faith as a leftover from pre-Christianity would soon lead to hatred of individual Jews themselves as nonbelievers. St. Ambrose whipped up violence and destruction of synagogues by calling them “a haunt of infidels, a home of the impious, a hiding place of madmen, under the damnation of God Himself”, making their destruction a righteous act.²⁵

On Easter day, 387, St. Ambrose baptized the man who would become one of the most important early Catholic theologians, whose writings are still considered central to the Catholic

²⁴ Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p. 201.

²⁵ Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p. 207.

faith today. Saint Augustine (354-430) was a defining figure in the conception of the Jewish faith and peoples in the minds of Catholics. Although he repudiated the idea that the Jews' existence was no longer justifiable, his reasoning left room for interpretations whose effects still reverberate today. For St. Augustine, Jews were essential for the self-identity and definition of Christians, as a constant reminder, or negative image of the positive proof of salvation and truth in Christ. Augustine wrote of the Jews that,

“By evidence of their own Scriptures they bear witness for us that we have not fabricated the prophecies about Christ. In fact, very many of the Jews, thinking over those prophecies both before his passion and more particularly after his resurrection, have come to believe in him.”²⁶

St. Augustine defined Jews as witnesses to the correctness of Christian theology, and therefore reasoned that they should be kept nearby as reminders. This definition of Jews was later used by centuries of popes who rushed to defend Jews from hordes of angry Christians, both militarily and vocally. The Jewish faith was seen by Augustine as a witness to the prophecies of the Old Testament, foretellers of Christ. They were to be scattered everywhere so their witness and confirmation of Christianity would be available to all nations, but not harmed; as Augustine wrote, “Do not slay them.”²⁷ However, they could not be seen to thrive either, since that would repudiate the theological proof that Christians, not Jews, were favored by God as holding the true religion

St. Augustine's interpretation was welded to Church teachings as Christianity formally gave 'permission' for the survival of the Jewish faith, but formulated in a way that Carroll defines as “Catholic ambivalence”. That is, Jews were defined as the negative 'other' to Christianity, whose continuing survival meant that Catholic authorities throughout history have had a duty to preach against violence towards Jews. Pope Gregory I (590-604) issued the first

²⁶ Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p. 217.

²⁷ Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p. 217

proclamation of *Sicut Judaeis*, reissued by dozens of later popes, as a statement of papal protection for Jews in Christian lands. Pope Gregory I condemned forced baptism, violence against Jews, and their unjust treatment by officials.²⁸ Yet at the same time, we have numerous records of such violence, and although forced baptisms were condemned, once performed, they were considered valid. The problem is that such a definition of Jews laid seeds of contempt in the minds of Catholics. And from such contempt came a refusal to recognize the dynamic quality of life within the Jewish tradition- the reality of a living, breathing religion rather than a dead, cast-off leftover.

Early theologians in Western Europe dealt however, with the question of Jews in an extremely abstract and theoretical manner. Their writings were pure rhetoric- in that they called for the marginalization and condemnation of Jews, but little evidence exists to support the idea that these ideas were popular with the common people or even listened to at all. There are certainly very few examples of mass eruptions of popular hatred against Jews before the first crusades. Indeed “prior to the year 1000, the Augustinian synthesis could be readily maintained in the Latin West, since there was little in the way of Jewish presence to raise innovative and disturbing questions or issues.”²⁹ The 11th century changed all that, for a growing Jewish population combined with an increasingly militant and persecutory medieval attitude to turn anti-Jewish rhetoric into bloody reality.

The First Crusade, begun in 1096 by Pope Urban II, lent a military urgency and fanatic adherence to the spread of Christendom. Crusader obsession with the infidel, in the form of Muslims occupying Jerusalem and the Holy Land, inevitably transferred to increased focus on

²⁸ Gotthard Deutsch and Joseph Jacobs, “The Popes”, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, v. 10, (Funk and Wagnel, 1906), pp. 125-129.

²⁹ Robert Chazan, *Jews of Medieval Western Christendom, 1000-1500*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 44.

Jews, bringing back the idea of stubborn Jews refusing to convert and bring about the fulfillment of Christ's salvation. A number of Jewish communities, French and German, mainly in the Rhineland, were subjected to outright massacres at the hands of marching crusaders. Jews were given a choice: convert or die. Records of the massacres indicate that the number of dead ranged from 11, in Speyer, when the local bishop managed to intervene; to over 800, in Worms, where members of the community committed suicide and killed each other rather than face conversion.³⁰

The first recorded case of the supposed 'blood libel' charge occurred in England in 1144, during the violence and bloodshed of the Second Crusade. These claims, that Jews had murdered young Christian boys and used their blood in mock rites that pervert the sacraments, sprung up across Europe during the centuries of Crusades, lasting well into the 20th century. The 12th century also gave rise to hysterical claims of Jews poisoning town wells. A crucial notion had entered the Catholic consciousness- that it was not only the Jewish faith that was dangerous, but individual Jewish persons as well. Building on the idea that the Jewish faith threatened the 'victory' of Christianity in Europe, fears grew that Jews themselves were dangerous and violently opposed to Christians, not just to their religion. Theologically this notion made a sort of sense, since scripturally Jews were conceived of as the killers of Christ, cursed by God. More generally, the medieval Christian attitude towards Jews was a reflection of their status in society as dangerous others.³¹ Child murder, pacts with the devil, sorcery, blood rituals, and desecration of the host (often for nefarious purposes) were all accusations leveled at Jews and Jewish communities from the 11th century onwards.

³⁰ Moore, *Persecuting Society*, pp. 29-31.

³¹ Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p. 276.

Fear and anger towards Jews, who were seen as the living embodiment of Christ-killers, peaked in the 13th century under Pope Innocent III. His calling of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 led to the renewal of older forms of discrimination against Jews, for the first time officially promulgated by a pope. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* gives us a sense of the general paradox under which Jews lived in Medieval Europe:

“The Roman Church does not claim any jurisdiction over persons who have not been baptized; therefore the relations of the popes, as the head of the Church, to the Jews have been limited to rue regarding the political, commercial, and social conditions under which Jews might reside in Christian states.”³²

While popes had no power over the souls of the Jewish people, in effect they exercised temporal power over their physical bodies if they chose to reside in a Catholic state. The Fourth Lateran Council thus reinforced the great feudal power of the papacy, which under Pope Innocent III reached new levels as he launched the Fourth Crusades and his Council to ensure greater unity in Latin Christendom, both politically and theologically.³³ The Jews were now required to dress differently, wearing “a distinctive sign on their garments”, barred from public office, and held up as examples warning Christians against the dangers of perfidy.³⁴ Yet two decades later, in 1233, Pope Gregory IX protected Jews against the fury of Crusaders with his papal bull “Etsi Judaeorum”, which demanded the same humane treatment for Jews as Christians expected in ‘heathen lands’.³⁵ This was a pattern repeated from the Middle Ages well into the 20th century. Jews were held in theological contempt for their perceived role in the death of Christ and the belief that they were cursed and rejected by God, yet the ecclesiastical authorities of the Church at the same time demanded that Jews not be subject to violence.

³² Deutsch and Jacobs, “The Popes”, p. 125.

³³ Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, p. 281.

³⁴ Deutsch and Jacobs, “The Popes”, p. 126.

³⁵ Deutsch and Jacobs, “The Popes”, p. 126.

The marginalization of Jews and formation of their identity as a definite ‘other’ in society made them perpetual victims and scapegoats in medieval Christendom. The conception of Jews as murderous/dangerous towards Christians, their slow and steady association with money-lending and the banking business (since Christians were prohibited from committing the sin of usury), and the special protections afforded them by kings and popes, who in numerous examples stepped in to stop violence against their financiers/bankers, made Jews an easily identifiable and especially vulnerable group. The formation of a Jewish stereotype colored how Jews were both perceived and treated by the rest of society. Jews were feared as economic rivals and as a dangerous unknown element, resented for their special protection and rise to wealth through money-lending. These elements of the Christian-invented Jewish identity coalesced during the 13th century, when the first drawings of Jews represented with a distinct physical stereotype began to circulate.³⁶

Certainly it seems that the 12th and 13th centuries brought on a particularly vengeful streak of anti-Jewish action and polemic. St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274) did not improve matters for the Jewish people. With the advent of reason and logic and their application to theology, St. Thomas overturned the idea that Jews had crucified Christ in their ignorance of his identity. Instead he believed and wrote that Jews killed Christ in full knowing of his status as the Messiah and did so deliberately and defiantly. The 13th century also saw a rash of hatred and anger on the part of Christians towards the Talmud, believed to be, as spoken by Pope Gregory IX, “the chief cause that holds the Jews obstinate in their perfidy.”³⁷

This brings us up to the story of Papal Inquisitions, which began in the 12th and 13th centuries as localized attempts to weed out heresies. When the Inquisition was reorganized in

³⁶ Moore, *Persecuting Society*, p. 45.

³⁷ Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, p. 307.

reached Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries, its investigations expanded to include the Jewish communities. The obsessive search of the Inquisition to root out heretical beliefs within Spain led theologians to focus on those who openly flouted Catholicism by their everyday presence. Jews were marginalized in society, kept out of professional sphere, and separated physically from the Catholic population. This mistreatment caused many Jews to consider conversion to Catholicism as a chance at a better life. However, the increased desire for a ‘purer’ Catholic faith that the Inquisition spawned led many to consider converted Jews (or *conversos* as they were called in Spain) as insincere and corrupting influences on other Catholics. The idea of “Jewish blood” persisted- that a Jew was always a Jew from birth and only paid lip service to the Christian faith in order to keep wealth and status. Queen Isabella of Spain used this reasoning in order to expel all Jews from Spain in 1492, writing that “the mingling of Jews with Christians leads to the worst evils. The Jews try their best to seduce the [New] Christians... persuading them to follow the Law of Moses. In consequence, our holy Catholic faith is debased and humbled.”³⁸ Thousands of Jews who did not want to leave home resorted to a quick conversion, which of course kept the Spanish Inquisition busier than ever persecuting ‘false Christians’.

The idea that the ‘mixing’ of Catholics and Jews led to the weakening of Christianity and was thus a danger to the faith and the state was crucial in the development of ghettos. The physical separation of Christians and Jews had begun in the 11th century, but sporadically, and often without a legal obligation to reside in the area set aside for the Jewish community.³⁹ By the 15th century however, the religious fervor and radical fear of heretics and Jews that the Spanish Inquisition sparked in Catholicism had carried over to the papacy. The popes began to use their powers to enforce the physical separation of Catholics and Jews, which included barring Jews

³⁸ Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, p. 361.

³⁹ Moore, *Persecuting Society*, p. 87.

from most professions (leaving them the sphere of financial transactions), making them wear different styles of dress, and segregating them from the local community. Pope Paul IV (1555-1559)⁴⁰, in 1555, went further by issuing a papal bull, *Cum Nimis Absurdum* which forbid Jews from owning real estate, increased their taxes, banned them from Christian universities and further, stated that God “has condemned [the Jews] to eternal slavery because of their guilt.”⁴¹ Paul IV’s bull also created the Roman ghetto, right on the banks of the Tiber River, which would last until destroyed by the forces of the Italian State in 1870.

For the next 300 years, the popes maintained their absolute supremacy over the bodies of the Jewish people, espousing theological beliefs that inspired contempt, hatred, and violence. The application of pressure to Jewish communities across Europe after the 15th century, often with the urging of the popes, was an intensification of the process that had begun as early as the 11th. Catholic theology required that a specific polemical attitude be held towards the Jewish faith, and over time, medieval society transformed this rhetoric into actual bodily persecution of Jewish people. The effects of papal policies against the Jews, discussed in depth in the next section, reveal that popes were motivated by a specific theological view of Judaism taken from the writings of Church fathers such as Augustine and Thomas of Aquinas. The end goal in the persecution of Jews was to free Catholics from any and all contact with the Jewish faith, thus keeping them safe and pure. To achieve this theological goal, practical policies of segregation, degradation, and attempted conversion were forced on the Jewish population, slowly squeezing it to the margins of society and putting it under acute and constant pressure. The result was centuries of systematic persecution and a slow decay of Jewish life and culture. In Rome, once a

⁴⁰ All dates following the names of popes indicate the terms of their papacy, not their lives, although in all cases the latter date is the same date as their death, owing to the fact that once elected, a pope serves until his death.

⁴¹ Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, p. 375.

protected enclave of Jewish renaissance and culture, the day of the closing of the ghetto gates on that first night signaled the end of any real flourishing of life.

Papal Policy and the Jews of Rome

Cum Nimis Absurdum was issued July 12th, 1555 by the newly elected Pope Paul IV, formerly known as Cardinal Carafa, who brought the Spanish Inquisition to Italy in the form of the Roman Inquisition. The bull begins with a scathing admonishment of the ungrateful Jews residing in the Papal States:

“Forasmuch as it is highly absurd and improper that the Jews, condemned by God to eternal slavery because of their guilt, should, on the pretext that they are cherished by Christian love and permitted to dwell in our midst, show such ingratitude to Christians as to insult them for their mercy and presume to mastery instead of the subjection that beseems them [...] we do therefore order the following measures...”⁴²

There is a tone of righteous indignation in Paul IV’s bull, which was directed against the Jews and their annoying tendency to prosper when they should have not. For if, as unbelievers, the Jews prospered over Christians, it would overthrow the entire construction of Catholic theological thought. As reasoned by St. Augustine and St. Thomas, Jew should be living examples of the effects of God’s curse on a people- scattered to the four winds to be forever oppressed in slavery and unfavored by divine grace, to exist only as an example to Christians who might waver in their faith.

The Protestant Reformation and subsequent Catholic Counter-Reformation had an unfortunate side effect on the Jewish population of Europe. The same Roman Inquisition that punished Galileo Galilei for his heresy in believing in a heliocentric universe also ordered a mass of book burnings across the Papal States, resulting in a 1553 bonfire in the center of the Campo

⁴² Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews in Italy*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), p. 294.

dei Fiori of confiscated copies of the Talmud and related works.⁴³ The Protestant Reformation forced the Catholic Church to maintain a hard-line theologically, thus creating an atmosphere of fervent dogmatic rigidity almost approaching fanaticism. Jews, unfortunately, were also subject to this ‘shoring up’ of the faith and Catholic attitudes towards them in the 1500s very much reflected the real fear of losing primacy in Europe. Although for centuries popes had been issuing bulls that looked fairly similar to *Cum Nimis Absurdum*, none were actually enforced to any great extent before this point. A ghetto had in fact been prescribed by the Third Lateran Council in 1179, forbidding Christians and Jews to live in proximity, so the idea itself was not new.⁴⁴ What was so completely radicalizing was the level to which popes now dedicatedly pursued the complete suppression of the Jewish people, religion, and culture. The ghetto in Rome, first suggested hundreds of years before, was finally put into place that same year.

The enforcement of this bull transformed completely the nature of papal-Jewish relations for the next 315 years. The Roman ghetto stood just a few miles away from the dome of St. Peters, right on the bank of the Tiber river. The physical space enclosed inside of the ghetto was a mere 3 square acres, and was officially allowed only one entrance/exit (although more were added later by subsequent popes). To walk around the original enclosure of the ghetto (for there was indeed a physical wall separating it from the outside) would take you a quick seven minutes.⁴⁵ Since expanding outwards was not an option, buildings shot upwards at a prodigious rate, and were often shoddily constructed and not built to withstand natural disasters such as earthquakes and fires. Since the bull also forbade the Jews to own property, the houses they lived in belonged to Catholic landowners and rents were set at a fixed price. Over time, the price of repairs was no longer justified by rents devalued by inflation and buildings fell into sordid

⁴³ Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy*, p. 292.

⁴⁴ Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy*, p. 296.

⁴⁵ Sam Waagenaar, *The Pope's Jews*, (La Salle: Open Court Publishers, 1974), p. 174.

disrepair, meaning that “the ghetto itself would never rise above the original depressed standard of its creation”.⁴⁶

In 1569 the following Pope, Pius V (1566-1572), issued another papal bull, *Hebraeorum Gens*, expelling all Jews from the Papal States excepting the communities of Rome and Ancona. Over 80 Jewish communities were liquidated under this process, and the majority of them found themselves squeezed into the already overcrowded ghetto in Rome.⁴⁷ Located right alongside the Tiber River, the ghetto was especially prone to flooding in years of high rainfall. In such an overcrowded and unhealthy environment, disease ran rampant. Poverty was also an unending and unalterable plight of those imprisoned within the Roman ghetto. The same bull that locked them in every night under pain of death shut Jews out of all professional careers such as medicine, law, and government. They could not even hire or service Catholic families with their business, meaning that the economy of the ghetto was effectively isolated. The ghetto was literally created with the intention of keeping the Jews of the Papal States in continual poverty, filth, and degradation.

Not content to oppress only the Jews under his direct control, Pius V wrote to other Italian rulers and encouraged them to follow his example; the result being that by the 17th century, the ghetto and all the depressing restrictions that accompanied it had spread to almost every city in Italy where Jews lived.⁴⁸

The changing nature of the papacy meant that every decade or so a new pope would apply his own fresh sense of either tolerance or rigid severity to the enforcement of ghetto laws. Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) for instance, restored the tradition of allowing Jews to function as moneylenders, lightening the strict economy of the ghetto and making way for a brief flourishing

⁴⁶ Waagenaar, *The Pope's Jews*, p. 176.

⁴⁷ Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy*, p. 307.

⁴⁸ Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy*, pp. 309, 328.

of Jewish culture, and allowed Jewish communities back into the Papal States. This lasted until his successor Clement VIII (1592-1605), reversed all his lenient policies in 1593, but kept the Jewish moneylenders to fund the Holy See's worsening finances.⁴⁹ The swinging pendulum of papal policy unfortunately went the other way as well. Pope Innocent XI (1676-1689) re-established the clause against usury in 1682, bringing a fresh wave of poverty into the ghetto. In 1775 Pius VI (1775-1799) issued the *Editto Sopra Gli Ebrei* (Edict over the Jews), which forbade Jews from spending the night outside the ghetto under pain of death, outlawed possession of the Talmud, and ordered all shops owned by Jews existing outside the ghetto to be closed.⁵⁰ Thus a new pope could either spell disaster or a breath of fresh air for the Jewish population of the Papal States. Completely dependent on the pope's good will for survival, they suffered more outrages than just being kept in a confined space and legally forbidden to prosper. The 16th and 17th centuries especially were a tumultuous and confusing time for the Jewish community of Rome. Each new pope's election spelt either fresh injustices or a brief respite, and they could never be sure of which side of the coin would face up.

The theological position of the Jews in Christendom also subjected them to a number of abusive policies specifically designed to continually remind them of their second-class status in society. Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585) was the first pope to require a specified number of ghetto residents to attend mandatory sermons in Catholic Churches. This meant that beginning in 1577, Jews who lived in the Roman ghetto were herded into a Catholic Church on a rotating basis and preached at of their own perfidy and told over and over that their beliefs were false and they should convert to save their own souls.⁵¹ This was probably the lowest point of Jewish-Catholic dialogue. Not dialogue at all, not even speaking, but a one-sided conversation that

⁴⁹ Richard Gottheil and Vittore Castiglione, "Italy", *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, v. 7, (Funk and Wagnel, 1906), p.7.

⁵⁰ Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy*, p. 415.

⁵¹ Gottheil and Castiglione, "Italy", p. 7.

consisted of Catholic priests (often converted ex-Jews) shouting down from the pulpit at Jews, insisting that they were stubborn and false in persisting in their faith and urging conversion. The inscription written (rather pointedly) in Hebrew above the doorframe of the Church of Sant'Angelo in Pescheria is a quote from Isaiah 65:2: "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts."⁵² This biblical verse was meant to be seen by the inhabitants of the Roman ghetto who lived right across the street- a daily admonishment that they way they lived was 'not good'.

More serious indignities visited on the Jewish population of Rome were the forced conversions and baptisms that plagued ghetto residents even into the 20th century. These occasional practices resulted from the theology laid down by medieval popes- that a baptism was a baptism no matter under what circumstances it occurred. The Council of Toledo in 1565 expressly established this, and it was confirmed again in the 18th century by Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758), who declared that "once baptized, even against the prescriptions of canon laws, a child was to be considered a Christian and brought up under Christian influence."⁵³ This meant that Jews who converted under duress was immediately a Catholic, and if they tried to return to their previous faith they could be tried by the Inquisition for the crime of apostasy. Even more seriously, a Jewish child who was baptized, even without his or her consent, or knowledge or consent from the parents, was immediately considered a Catholic child. Since a Catholic child could not for a second be left in the clutches of unbelievers who might corrupt the faith, all such children were to be removed from their parents and brought to the House of Catechumens. The Casa dei Convertite, located in Rome outside of the ghetto, established in tandem with the enclosing walls, had the expressed intention of converting Jews to Catholicism. The residents of

⁵² Waagenaar, *The Pope's Jews*, p. 194.

⁵³ Waagenaar, *The Pope's Jews*, p. 200, and Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy*, p. 379.

the ghetto paid for its upkeep and expenses, as well as any fees incurred by ex-Jewish converts who spent 40 days within the House in order to be instructed in the faith. This dogma led to a number of unfortunate affairs which were widely publicized and led to a great amount of public outrage, including a number of children being forcibly or secretly baptized and later seized from their parents to be raised as Catholics outside of the ghetto.

In spite of such incidents, the condition of Jewish communities in the Papal States did see an overall improvement in the 1800s, which was a century of massive upheaval for the cultural, religious, and social fabric of Western Europe. The French Revolution in particular, with its spreading ideals of equality for all men, intruded on Italian society in 1800 when Napoleon invaded with his massive armies and bit by bit took over the European continent. In 1809 Napoleon entered Rome and immediately abolished the rules and regulations of the ghetto. Jewish men were granted their emancipation and civil liberties, and all were freed from the confines of the Roman ghetto. Rome was in fact the last city to be entered by Napoleon's forces. The first Jewish communities of the Italian peninsula had gained their civil equality in 1802, allowing them to vote, hold public office, and even buy land. In 1806, Napoleon even convened an Assembly of Jewish Notables in Paris, which included sixteen representatives from the kingdom of Italy under Napoleon (which did not yet include Tuscany and the Papal States).⁵⁴ For the first time in Italy, Jewish people experienced a taste of participation in a society that did not deem them dangerous others. This moment of political and social equality was as brief as Napoleon's empire however, disappearing when he lost power in 1814.

While in a few kingdoms and duchies of Italy the civil equality afforded to Jews under the Napoleonic code outlasted his empire, the majority of the peninsula, including the Papal States, experienced an extreme reaction after its fall. Returning from his exile, Pope Pius VII

⁵⁴ Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy*, p. 442.

(1800-1823) shut the Jewish community back behind the walls of the Roman ghetto, ordered all businesses outside the ghetto closed, revived mandatory attendance at Catholic sermons, and ejected Jewish students from Italian universities and schools.⁵⁵ His successor, Pope Leo XII (1823-1829), revived in 1826 the *Editto Sopra Gli Ebrei* of 1775, returning to harsh enforcement of separation between Jews and Catholics. Not until the unification of the Kingdom of Italy did Jewish communities under Papal rule again taste the air outside the ghetto walls.

When the Risorgimento, the twenty or so year period of Italy's unification, did come in the second half of the 18th century, it was faced by the implacable Pope Pius IX (1846-1878). Elected in 1846, Pius IX remained in the Chair of St. Peter throughout the Risorgimento. At the beginning of his Papacy, Pius IX outlined a series of reforms that called for a program of slow and cautious modernization, granting him a liberal reputation and leaving many in the Jewish community hopeful for the future.⁵⁶ However, the initial revolutions of the Risorgimento in 1848-9 proved Pius IX to be anything but open to the growing liberal forces in Europe. Before then, Pius IX showed tolerance and deference to the plight of Jews living in the ghetto, allowing some families to move out into the adjacent district when overcrowding became extreme, closing the House of Catechumens, and even ending the policy of required attendance at conversionist sermons.⁵⁷ Even if he was not entirely prepared to grant them equal citizenship with their Catholic neighbors, Pope Pius IX was clearly open to bettering their living conditions and to stop halting the measures to harass the community into convertering.

However 1847-8 saw a growing call for emancipation of the Jews in Italy, emanating partly from the 1848 revolution in France, which sparked calls for modernization and liberal

⁵⁵ Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy*, p. 450.

⁵⁶ Frank J. Coppa, "Pio Nono and the Jews: From 'Reform' to 'Reaction'", *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 89, (2003), p. 671.

⁵⁷ Coppa, "Pio Nono and the Jews", p. 674.

revolutions across Europe. Massimo D'Azeglio's open letter to Pius entitled "On the Civil Emancipation of the Jews" and pamphlets by Father Luigi Crescoioli calling for an end to restrictions on the Jewish community were both confiscated and prohibited from circulating by the Holy See in 1847. Then in 1848, responding to a growing desire for liberalization and a unified Italy, the Kingdom of Piedmont issued a constitution which called for toleration of other religions besides Roman Catholicism. A week later, the new Constitution of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany followed, which gave Jews full political rights.⁵⁸ The Holy See watched these developments with increasing uneasiness, and Pius IX called for an ecclesiastical committee to discover if constitutionalism was theologically acceptable for the Church. When it was discovered that it was, the pope ordered a constitution for the Papal States drafted. However, the papal constitution of 1848 carried no such provisions for religious equality, and conservatives in the Church even denounced such liberal notions as detrimental to religion and a Jewish, anti-Christian scheme.⁵⁹

These two opposing forces came to a head on April 17th, 1848 when crowds of revolutionary-minded Catholics tore down the gates to the Roman ghetto. Further insults to the Pope's temporal authority, which included legislation recognizing the full civil rights of Jews and the outbreak of a liberating war in Austria, caused Pius to flee from Rome on November 24, 1848. Pius IX saw the secular forces at work, which would allow Jews and non-Catholics to vote and have the same legal rights as Catholics, as dangerous to the salvation of his subjects. Ultimately, "Rome continued to deem dangerous and unacceptable any association between

⁵⁸ Mario Rossi, "Emancipation of the Jews in Italy", *Jewish Social Studies*, 15 (1953), pp. 123-4.

⁵⁹ Coppa, "Pio Nono and the Jews", p. 679.

Catholics and non-Catholics, where the latter were able to exercise a moral influence over the former.”⁶⁰

Pius IX returned to Rome in 1849 when Rome fell to Austrian forces. Also restored were the walls of the Roman ghetto and all the oppressive measures that came with them. This reaction to the *Risorgimento* also provoked a wave of anti-Jewish acts in the Papal States, including a rash of forced baptisms which included the notorious Mortara affair.⁶¹ In 1858 a young boy of 11 years was discovered to have been secretly baptized by his young Christian nurse when as an 11-month old babe he contracted a brief illness and she feared for his life. Upon learning this, the local bishop immediately summoned the papal policemen, who stormed the Bologna ghetto and whisked the young boy off to the House of Catechumens in Rome, where he was miraculously declared converted and later became a Catholic priest. The boy’s parents never saw him again, despite multiple pleas to the Holy See.⁶²

Tragic incidents such as these show the extreme end to which a theological claim can motivate the actions of a religious power. The pope at the time of the Mortara affair, Pius IX, listened to the many appeals of Jewish communities and even other world leaders who protested the treatment of the boy, but found no other choice but to remove him from his parents. His conscience would not let him do otherwise because his faith dictated that the child was Catholic, and to let him remain with his Jewish parents would endanger the state of his salvation.⁶³ That even into the 19th century incidents such as this one played out in the public sphere illustrates how the papacy defined itself first and foremost not as a moral compass or guide for the rest of the world, but as the supreme head of the Catholic faith. In such a scenario, a pope who believed

⁶⁰ Coppa, “Pio Nono and the Jews”, p. 684.

⁶¹ Rossi, “Emancipation of the Jews in Italy”, p. 130.

⁶² Waagenaar, *The Pope’s Jews*, pp. 208-211.

⁶³ Coppa, “Pio Nono and the Jews” p. 687.

that it was his most sacred duty to save souls through the intervention of the Church, would have been remiss if he had let a baptized child remain with un-Catholic parents who would put his salvation in jeopardy by not raising him properly in the true faith. By the 19th century this kind of attitude no longer flew by as acceptable to the majority of the public. The unification of Italy and the democratization of its government meant that the Church had to contend with the opposition of secular powers. The *Risorgimento* was, for the Papacy, a threat to Catholic power both spiritually and politically, for it not only gave other religions a voice in government, it also, in creating a secular government, lessened the total control of the Vatican over the Italian head of state. The Catholic Church, for the first time, had to deal with competition for the loyalty of its adherents- would Italians seek guidance from the traditional and conservative authority of the papacy, or would they begin to look for change from the new secular state?

The Kingdom of Italy, and with it the emancipation of all Jewish citizens in its territory, was declared on March 17th 1861. The first Italian troops entered Rome on September 20th, 1870. The same day, Pius IX excommunicated by decree all those who took part in the invasion and occupied papal territories. The walls of the Roman ghetto, the last to remain standing, were torn down October 13th of that same year when King Victor Emmanuel II afforded the city of Rome the same rights as the rest of Italy.⁶⁴ His temporal powers effectively gone and his territory seized by the Italian State, the pope had no other choice but to retreat within the walls of the Vatican itself. No pope set foot outside the closed gates of the Vatican grounds until relations with the Italian State were renegotiated in the concordat of 1929. Ironically, “for centuries the Vatican had kept the Jews shut up behind a wall, and now that the Jewish wall was gone, the Pope retreated behind a wall of his own.”⁶⁵ Angry at the modern and liberal forces that had

⁶⁴ Rossi, “Emancipation of the Jews in Italy”, p. 133.

⁶⁵ Waagenaar, *The Pope's Jews*, p. 279.

diminished its power, the Papacy literally withdrew from Italy and its new secular government, leaving Jews to the control of the Italian State.

The Holy See and the Italian State 1870-1945

The concern in the papacy was that the mixing of secular and religious authorities would leave the Holy See in a compromising situation, possibly even beholden to a secular power or concern. This was not an unjustified concern, for from 1865 to 1866, the Italian parliament had passed a number of laws concerning the regulation of religious orders within Italy. Upset and disturbed by this interference, the Apostolic Penitentiary, one of the legal tribunals of the Roman Curia, issued in 1868 the proclamation *Non Expedit*, declaring that Catholics should abstain from voting in parliamentary elections. Realizing that the oaths of elected Catholics to the Italian parliament could be construed as approval for the desecration of the Holy See, the decree also demanded that Catholics not run for election in parliamentary offices.⁶⁶ Before a single soldier had even set foot in Rome, the papacy had already issued a strong statement signaling distrust and disapproval of the Italian Parliament.

Thus it should not have been so great a shock when Rome was occupied in 1870, Pius IX declared himself as a “prisoner” of the state and declared his intention to excommunicate all those who participated in the invasion of Rome. He even insisted that Italy’s neighboring Catholic monarchs refuse to visit the Italian royal family.⁶⁷ Suspecting that his situation as a religious leader was compromised by secular forces, Pius IX suspended indefinitely the progress of an ongoing ecumenical council (Vatican I) which had begun in 1868.

⁶⁶ Umberto Benigni, “Non Expedit”, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), 14 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11098a.htm>>.

⁶⁷ S. William Halperin, *Italy and the Vatican at War: A Study of their Relations from the Outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War to the Death of Pius IX*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 68.

From the unification of Italy in 1870 until the Lateran Pacts of 1929, the Holy See was first and foremost concerned with the issue of its sovereignty, which it considered to be essential to its ability to freely practice the leadership and management of a world religion. Two months after the annexation of Rome into the now unified Italy, Pius IX issued the encyclical *Rescriptio ea omnis*, terming the actions of the Italian state as the “seizure of Our ecclesiastical sovereignty” and asked with fervent zeal, “Could We refuse to protect the freedom of the Apostolic See which is so closely joined with the freedom and welfare of the whole Church?” The encyclical declared that in having his temporal powers and land usurped, the pope was “unable to exercise [his] supreme pastoral authority safely, expediently, and freely”.⁶⁸ The Italian government, faced with an all-out declaration of violated sanctity from the pope, was forced to respond with some sort of guarantee that the secular government would in no way interfere with the religious freedom of the Church. Called the Law of Guarantees, this offering was given to the Holy See on May 13th, 1871, and was met with complete rejection only two days later. While the law provided for the absolute inviolability of the person of the pope, promised religious freedom, and gave the pope the use of the Vatican and Lateran palaces, it did not restore to the pope any territory taken by the state.⁶⁹ Pius IX declared that he would not accept anything less than the complete return of his total sovereignty over his traditional territories; “For if the Roman Pontiff were subject to the sway of another ruler, but no longer possessed civil power, neither his position nor the acts of the Apostolic ministry would be exempt from the authority of the other ruler. This ruler could be either a heretic or a persecutor of the Church or constantly at war with

⁶⁸ Pius IX, Encyclical Letter, *Rescriptio ea omnis*. 1 Nov 1870, 10 Feb 2012, <<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9respic.htm>>.

⁶⁹ Umberto Benigni, "Law of Guarantees," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 10 Feb. 2012 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07048a.htm>>.

other rulers.”⁷⁰ In any case, the pope refused the Law of Guarantees for a much more basic reason- Pius IX did not accept that the Italian State had a right to legislate on matters concerning the Holy See.⁷¹

As the Vatican turned its back on Italy for its perceived influence and interjection into its affairs and violation of its sacred territories, the question of the Vatican’s status grew to utmost importance. Known as the “Roman Question”, the tensions between the Vatican and the Italian government really boiled down to the nature of the power of the Holy See as both temporal and spiritual. The Holy See maintained that pope could not exercise true spiritual freedom without having complete political control over its own territory. The Italian parliament, of course, was unwilling to grant the Holy See back any of the territory that it had won. Since no compromise was reached, the Italian parliament in effect held to the Law of Guarantees when dealing with the papacy, while the Holy See withdrew itself from all relations with Italy.

This stalemate continued unabated until 1905, when Pope Pius X (1903-1914) modified the *Non Expedit* decree. Concerned with the growing power of the socialist movement, Pius X issued an Italian encyclical specifically addressed to the cause of Catholic Action, declaring his support for the Italian Catholic political movement and praising its efforts. To combat the socialists, Pius X called for a suspension of the rules against Catholic politicians to be made when there was a ‘subversive candidate’ that needed to be defeated, but only in local elections.⁷² In other words, the Church finally decided that it was more effective to participate in the system in order to achieve its goals than to boycott Italian parliament in protest. Pius X’s successor, Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) relaxed the strict prohibitions even further, allowing for

⁷⁰ Pius IX, Encyclical Letter, *Ubi nos*, 15 May 1871, 10 Feb 2012, <<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ubinos.htm>>.

⁷¹ Benigni, “Law of Guarantees”.

⁷² Benigni, “Non Expedit”.

participation of Catholics in national elections. This led to the widespread growth of Catholic participation in national politics and the birth of the Catholic-based Partito Popolare Italiano, or the Italian People's Party, which grew to become the second largest political party in Italy until it was declared illegal by the Fascist regime in 1925.⁷³

Once relations between Italy and the Holy See had begun to thaw, there was finally a chance for a real compromise to take place. Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) and Mussolini both came to power in 1922. Pius XI began talks with Mussolini through the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri a year later, after signaling his approval of Mussolini's new Fascist Party, which the pope saw as a necessary bulwark against socialist power.⁷⁴ Believing that Catholic Action alone could not combat socialism, Pius XI turned to the Fascist party in hopes of creating a new alliance. Il Duce (or Duke, Mussolini's Italian nickname) was praised by leading members of the Roman Curia as early as 1923, and in June Pius XI ordered the leader of the Partito Popolare, Luigi Sturzo, to resign and disband his coalition.⁷⁵ The Holy See thus signaled its approval for Mussolini's party and removed one of the last serious challenges to the Fascist party's hold over the Italian government. Mussolini continued to harass priests and lay members of the Catholic Action movement until it was finally outlawed, at which point, in 1926, the first official negotiations for the Lateran Pacts began. On December 20th of the same year, Pius XI declared to the world that "Mussolini is the man sent by Providence" in order to combat the evils of socialism.⁷⁶

On February 11th, 1929, the final draft of the Lateran Pacts was signed and made into law. The Pacts contained three separate agreements between Church and State. One, the so-

⁷³ Avro Manhattan, *The Vatican in World Politics*, (New York: Gaer Associates, 1949), pp. 110-11.

⁷⁴ Manhattan, *Vatican in World Politics*, pp. 111-12.

⁷⁵ Manhattan, *Vatican in World Politics*, pp. 112-113.

⁷⁶ Manhattan, *Vatican in World Politics*, p. 115.

called Lateran Treaty, solved the issue of the “Roman Question” and restored sovereign power to the Holy See. The second was a financial agreement giving the Church a large sum of money in compensation for the wrong done it by the Italian government. The third and final was a Concordat establishing a basis for relations between the Italian government and the Italian Catholic Church (as opposed to the supranational Holy See).

The Lateran Treaty detailed in 27 succinct articles the exact powers and privileges of the Holy See, and Supreme Pontiff as its absolute leader, and defined the status of the Vatican within Italy. The purpose of the treaty was stated as “assuring to the Holy See absolute and visible independence and of guaranteeing to it indisputable sovereignty also in the field of international relations”.⁷⁷ In the treaty, Italy conceded to the Holy See that its full sovereignty was linked to the recognition of its temporal power, and granted it the land of the Vatican City, thus creating an entirely new and independent state within Italy itself. Italian police, by the terms of the treaty, might enter Vatican City, but not cross beyond the steps of St. Peter’s Basilica. In addition, Italy pledged to provide in perpetuity adequate water, transportation, and communication within the Vatican and connect it to the outside world. In a sense then, the Vatican was so closely nestled within the state of Italy that it became remarkably difficult to pinpoint the exact moment one had crossed the border between the two. The true difference lay in the fact that all those who retained a fixed residence within Vatican City were “subject to the sovereignty of the Holy See” and the Catholic Church became “exempt from all interference on the part of the Italian State.”⁷⁸

The status of the Vatican as both physically within Italy and spiritually unbound by any national boundaries made it a complex and unique institution, a point which the treaty itself makes clear. The Holy See was granted by the treaty the right to maintain diplomatic relations

⁷⁷ James Brown Scott, “Treaty between the Vatican and Italy”, *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 23, (1929) p. 187.

⁷⁸ Scott, “Treaty between the Vatican and Italy”, pp. 189-90.

with all countries regardless of whether or not the country in question had relations with the Italian State. The Treaty allowed for “free correspondence from all nations, including belligerents”, which meant that enemies of the Italian State, even during wartime, could have free access to Vatican City.⁷⁹ In addition the Holy See also declared within the treaty its desire to “be considered neutral and inviolable territory” and to “remain extraneous to all temporal disputes between nations.”⁸⁰ These clauses allowed church diplomats and officials free rights of access by both the Axis and Allied forces throughout the war, and the Vatican was able to maintain its diplomatic relations with all parties.⁸¹

The Lateran Treaty also created a clear distinction between the pope’s two roles: that of an independent political leader of the Vatican city-state and that of the supreme head of the universal Catholic faith. The Vatican was both a religious and political power, and the popes thus had to take control of both aspects and keep them both in mind when dealing with foreign powers. On the one hand, the fear that political dependence on Italy would corrupt the pope’s independence to act as a religious leader meant that the Papacy regarded holding land as necessary for recognition as a state by other governments. On the other, its role as the head of a supranational organization, the Holy See needed to act with the assurance that it would not be compromised by the secular concerns of any one nation in particular. The declaration of sovereignty and neutrality assured the Vatican that no nation could accuse the pope of being an Italian puppet or of furthering Italian diplomatic aims. To further underline this, treaties signed between the pope’s representatives and other nations were seen as being with the spiritual leader of the universal Church, not the Vatican State. The fact that the Holy See maintained diplomatic relations with dozens of countries throughout War World II was not the result of importance of

⁷⁹ “Treaty between the Vatican and Italy”, p. 191.

⁸⁰ “Treaty between the Vatican and Italy”, p. 194.

⁸¹ Francis X. Murphy, “Vatican Politics: Structure and Function”, *World Politics*, (1974), p. 544.

the tiny state of the Vatican, but the importance of the Pope “as the spiritual ruler of over three hundred million subjects.”⁸²

The financial convention of the Lateran Pacts was meant to both alleviate the financial condition of the Holy See and serve as compensation for “the loss of the patrimony of S. Peter constituted by the ancient Pontifical State”, or repayment for all the land Italy took from the Holy See.⁸³ The amount, declared by the Treaty to be “the barest necessity”, was 750,000,000 lire in cash and 1,000,000 lire in bonds, but it probably helped sweeten the deal for the Vatican, which was, according to the Treaty at least, a bit strapped for cash.

The Concordat detailed “the conditions of religion and the Church in Italy”, and replaced the Law of Guarantees.⁸⁴ It again assured the religious freedom and sovereignty of the Catholic Church to spread within Italy without government interference, and also exempted priests from military service and jury duty. The main bulk of the Concordat established the rights of the Catholic Church within Italy, including the establishment of Feast-days and the right to appoint Bishops and Archbishops and create new religious orders as desired. More importantly it secured for the Church the role of religious instruction in primary and secondary education, so that Catholicism was assured to be the dominant and official religion of Italy, favored and promoted by the state.⁸⁵

The Lateran Pacts resolved the Roman Question to the mutual benefit of both the Holy See and the Fascist Party. With the tacit approval of the Catholic Church, Mussolini was able to consolidate his power and quash down public opposition. In return, the Catholic Church was

⁸² D.A. Binchy, “The Vatican and International Diplomacy”, *International Affairs*, vol. 22, (1946), p. 48.

⁸³ “Italy | Lateran Concordat (1929): Text”, *Concordat Watch*, Trans. Graeme A. Hunter. 2008, Web. 11 Feb. 2012, <<http://www.concordatwatch.eu/topic-39251.843>>.

⁸⁴ “Italy | Lateran Concordat (1929): Text”.

⁸⁵ “Italy | Lateran Concordat (1929): Text”.

restored to temporal and political power within Italy and solidified its international position as an independent diplomatic body.

The downside for the Church was that for all the Vatican's claims of political independence from Italy, the Holy See was still incredibly influenced by its internal position inside the Italian state. Many historians speak of the "Italianate" nature of the Vatican, which points to the fact that the majority of Cardinals and Curia members were of Italian birth, there had not been a non-Italian pope since 1523, and the spoken language inside the Vatican was Italian.⁸⁶ On a more basic level, being physically nested within Italy meant that the members of the Curia and the pope himself depended on the goodwill of the Italian government for their continued survival. Electricity, water, food, and supplies could not enter the Vatican without the cooperation of the Italian government.⁸⁷ However unlikely a blockade of the Vatican might have been, it is a consideration that the pope must have taken into account when conducting foreign affairs. During WWII for instance, many of the diplomats to the Holy See whose nations had declared war against Italy were moved from their normal quarters in Rome (the square footage of Vatican City itself being too small to accommodate them in times of peace) inside the Vatican itself to protect them.⁸⁸

This small example gives an idea of the huge problem that war presented to the Vatican, the Papacy, and the Catholic Church in general. As a spiritual body whose members were scattered across almost every nation on the planet, war was a horrific possibility for the Church. War brought violence and chaos among members of the faith, the administration of the Vatican, and most terrifyingly, introduced divisions and hatred between believers. War threatened the unity of the Catholic Church and was to be avoided, stopped, or delayed at all costs: for a

⁸⁶ Rhodes, *Vatican in the Age of the Dictators*, p 335.

⁸⁷ Rhodes, *Vatican in the Age of the Dictators*, p 356.

⁸⁸ Binchy, "Vatican and International Diplomacy", p. 53.

“world-wide church, war, whether “just” or “unjust” was the supreme disaster, a disaster for which nothing could compensate.”⁸⁹

This scenario, led the Vatican to pursue a very different type of politics than one might have expected. During War World II Pius XI made political decisions that many did not see as fitting with his role of a moral leader. The Concordat with Germany, for instance, was (and still is) denounced by many as the Catholic Church legally endorsing Hitler’s Nazi government. Ratified in September of 1933, the Concordat between the Holy See and Hitler’s German Reich was designed to give the Catholic Church access to German schools to ensure more religious education and allow the free practice of Church organization, both of which would strengthen Church loyalty and participation in Germany.⁹⁰ However, these aims of the Holy See were offset in the Concordat by the wishes of the Nazi party to attain first claims of loyalty for itself from its members. Therefore the Vatican had to accede to some of the wishes of the party, including agreeing to the dissolution of all Catholic political parties in the state and forbidding priests to engage in any political activities.⁹¹ In one sense the Catholic Church allowed the Nazi party to continue uninhibited in Germany, but it did so with the thought that an alliance would gain Catholics the most spiritual support within Germany- and that to refuse a treaty with the government would be worse for Catholics than a tacit approval. Feeling threatened, the Church in a way grasped at a possibly dubious moral choice in order to maintain ties and influence with German Catholics.

The declared neutrality of the Vatican was in fact essential for the pope to be able to fulfill his spiritual duties during wartime. The Papacy needed to remain in contact with all of his

⁸⁹ Binchy, “Vatican and International Diplomacy”, p. 50.

⁹⁰ John Brown Mason, “The Concordat with the Third Reich”, *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 20 (1934), pp. 23-37.

⁹¹ Mason, “Concordat with the Third Reich”, p. 32.

spiritual subjects to retain the unity of the Church. To further this aim the Vatican “never [took] the initiative in breaking off relations: it never denounce[d] a Concordat, it never with[drew] its Nuncio.”⁹² To break off relations with Germany under Hitler, to denounce Hitler’s government, or to renounce the Concordat would have been putting German souls at risk at no gain other than to draw Hitler’s ire. It was in these cases of international relations during War World II where the Papacy pursued a decidedly theology-driven form of politics.

The same sort of reasoning applied to the continued support of the Vatican of Mussolini’s fascist ideology and policies, for a strong relationship between church and state was favorable to strengthening the influence of the Vatican on Italian politics and thus their application to Italian Catholics. In these questionable instances, which many today see as morally reprehensible, the Holy See’s pursuit of survival and domination in the quickly changing political landscape of 20th century Europe took the highest priority: “As Christ’s vicar, the pope felt authorized to secure from every country the greatest possible number of concessions and privileges for the Church.”⁹³

Another quirk of Vatican wartime politics was the Papacy’s ability to transcend political and national boundaries. Although politically the pope had to recognize and submit to other government’s political sovereignty and rights, as the spiritual leader of the church he “acknowledge[d] neither superior nor equal”.⁹⁴ The Holy See never hesitated to point out and protest when it felt as though its Concordats or the rights of its spiritual subjects were in any way violated. The Lateran Treaty declared that although neutral, the Vatican, “reserves the right in every case to exercise its moral and spiritual power.”⁹⁵ On numerous occasions during War World II the Vatican put this power into action, often speaking up and denouncing specific acts

⁹² Binchy, “Vatican and International Diplomacy”, p. 50.

⁹³ Murphy, “Vatican Politics”, p. 550.

⁹⁴ Gordon Ireland, “The State of the City of the Vatican”, *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 27, (1933), p. 288.

⁹⁵ *Treaty between the Vatican and Italy*, p. 194.

of the German government which violated the terms of the Concordat. The Vatican at times also criticized Mussolini, one of the most notable occasions being the strong condemnation included in the encyclical *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* in July of 1931 against treatment of Catholic political parties by the fascist regime.⁹⁶ As evidenced by the fearlessly worded protest, the Holy See had no compunction against speaking out when it felt that Catholic rights were being abused.

This study of Vatican politics and diplomatic practices is crucial to placing in context the actions of the Vatican in respect to the treatment of its Jewish neighbors during the War and its changing relationship to Judaism afterwards. Without delving too deeply into controversial issues of blame, we can at least appreciate the framework from which the Vatican acted politically. Declared neutrality, a wish to above all not lose communication with the international community of Catholics, and the practical necessity of balancing justice with the overall needs of a Universal Church all influenced and shaped the actions of the Holy See throughout World War II. It hardly needs to be explained that as the supreme leader of the Catholic Church, the pope placed the utmost importance first and foremost to advancing the causes of his spiritual subjects across Europe during the war. This could only have seemed morally right and proper to him. Only after the war, when the consequences of these priorities were made clear by the body count did the Vatican and the entire Church body, begin to re-evaluate them.

⁹⁶ John F. Pollard, *The Vatican & Italian Fascism, 1929-32: A Study in Conflict*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 157-161.

Chapter 2: The Holocaust Comes to Rome

Although declared a neutral party, the Vatican nonetheless was deeply enmeshed in the politics of the Second World War. Given its location within the Italian capital of Rome, the Holy See could not help but be intimately tied to Italy's fate throughout the war. At no time was this clearer than during the fall and winter of 1943, when outside events drew the Roman Curia into a furious political crisis in which the pope's physical safety itself was put in the balance. After having discharged, arrested, and replaced Mussolini and his fascist government in July of 1943, King Victor Emmanuel II secretly signed an armistice of unconditional surrender to the Allied forces on September 8th. One day later, the German military initiated an aggressive invasion onto Italian soil. By the 10th of September, they had occupied Rome and re-instated Mussolini as the head of a puppet government.⁹⁷ The Vatican was now in the precarious position of being in German hands.

In December of 1942, Pope Pius XII had made it clear that he considered relations between the Third Reich and the Church to be deteriorating. We can view this through the worrying reports sent back to Berlin by diplomats in the German embassy to the Holy See, who feared that papal protests would incite propaganda against the Nazi Party. A telegram from February 1942 written by the German Ambassador Carl-Ludwig Diego von Bergen stated that "It is known here that strong forces from various camps are constantly working to induce the Pope to make an ostentatious demonstration against us in the manner of his predecessor, explicitly naming Germany, the object being to expose and brand the alleged persecution of the Church in Germany".⁹⁸ The same telegram also spoke of the "deep disquiet" of the pope towards

⁹⁷ Owen Chadwick, "Weizsäcker, the Vatican, and the Jews of Rome", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 28, (1977), p. 180.

⁹⁸ Letter from Bergen to Berlin, Feb. 21, 1942, as found in Saul Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, trans. Charles Fullman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1966) p. 156.

rumors of “a general offensive against the Church” once the war was over and Pius’s “incessant lamentation about the situation of the Church in Germany”.⁹⁹ It was this worry of enemy propaganda and fears of papal protests which compelled the new German Ambassador, Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker, on orders from Berlin, to prompt the Holy See to release a statement denying the rumors that Germany was in any way breaching the neutrality of the Vatican with its presence in Rome in 1943. In pursuit of this goal, Weizsäcker met with Pius XII in an audience on October 9th, during which the pope “unhesitatingly agreed in principle with the statement I made, as instructed.” Ten days later Vatican Radio broadcast the following statement: “To put an end to the rumors, especially abroad, regarding the conduct of German troops towards the Vatican City, the German Ambassador to the Holy See, on behalf of his government, has declared that Germany, in accordance with her policy so far of respecting the offices and integrity of the Roman curia, as well as the sovereign rights of the Vatican City, is resolved to respect them in the future.”¹⁰⁰

It is clear from these back and forth communiqués that the Nazi Party in Berlin was very concerned with the outward appearance of its relationship with the Holy See and anxious not to allow Allied propaganda to tarnish it. From this angle, the events of October seem to have been taken up with the German occupation of Rome and the maneuverings of the embassy in Rome to ensure the cooperation of the Vatican. October, however, was also taken up by a much darker series of events that occurred almost simultaneously with the confirmation of the Vatican’s integrity in German-occupied Rome.

From the very beginning of the German occupation of Rome, the German diplomatic core assigned to the Holy See was concerned about what would happen to Italian Jews. First and

⁹⁹ Letter from Bergen to Berlin, Feb. 21, 1942, as found in Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 157

¹⁰⁰ *Keesing’s Contemporary Archives*, London, 1943, p. 6166, as found in Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 203.

foremost, they worried about the reaction of the pope and allied propaganda if a deportation took place. As early as September 11th of 1943, the matter was discussed between Weizsäcker and his closest aide, the Embassy Secretary Albrecht von Kessel, as to how to warn the Jews of their imminent danger. According to Kessel, “it was our conviction ... that the worst was to be expected”, alluding to the fact that both men were assured that the deportation was unavoidable.¹⁰¹ Fearing that the Italians were not to be trusted, Weizsäcker relayed the message to the Jewish community that they were to flee or go into hiding through a trusted Swiss friend in Rome working for the League of Nations.¹⁰² Weizsäcker and Kessel were two examples of those within the Nazi government who did not entirely toe the party line. After the war Weizsäcker later was arrested for his high government position, tried at Nuremberg, and convicted for crimes against humanity as a participant in the deportation of French Jews to Auschwitz. However, many saw him as a supporter of the anti-Nazi resistance movement and a moderating force within the diplomatic core, and after one year in prison he was granted complete amnesty. His co-worker, Kessel, testified that all his missives to Berlin were carefully constructed lies, meant to pacify the Nazis and keep them from acting against the pope. The historical portrayal of Weizsäcker is of a man who did his best in the position he was in to minimize damage, and is fairly positive as to the results of his efforts, which seem to have had some effect in saving the lives of many Jews.¹⁰³

On the 26th of September, prominent members of the Jewish community were summoned by the SS Major Herbert Kappler, who was serving as the Chief of the Police and Secret Security Forces in Rome, to provide 50 kilograms of gold in exchange for not deporting 200 Jews to the

¹⁰¹ Robert Katz, *Black Sabbath*, (Toronto: The Macmillian Company, 1969), p. 26.

¹⁰² Katz, *Black Sabbath*, p. 27.

¹⁰³ Leonidas E. Hill, “The Vatican Embassy of Ernst von Weizsacker, 1943-1945”, *The Journal of Modern History*, 39, (1967), pp. 154-59.

Russian front.¹⁰⁴ The Vatican offered to give the Jewish community a loan to be later repaid if the money could not be raised in so short a time as the 36 hour window given by Kappler. Such an offer (which was rendered unnecessary by the Jews raising upwards of 80 kg) clearly shows that the Vatican was more than aware of the dangers facing the Jewish community of Rome. The bribe demanded by the SS had the unfortunate effect of luring Roman Jews into a false sense of security- having paid off Kappler, they now believed themselves to be safe. Kessel again implored his Swiss friend to “Do everything you can to get the Jews out of Rome.”¹⁰⁵

On October 6th and 7th telegrams went back and forth between Berlin and Rome discussing the following message: “Obersturmbannführer Kappler has been instructed by Berlin to seize the eight thousand Jews living in Rome and to take them to Upper Italy where they are to be liquidated.”¹⁰⁶ The communiqués back and forth first came to the attention of the Vatican on October 11th, when a member of the Secretariat staff brought word of an SS action that would be carried out on the 18th.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, the report was off by two days.

At 5:30 on Saturday, October 16th of 1943 German SS squads began banging on Jewish doors. By 2pm of the same day they had rounded up and arrested 1,259 Jews in the raid known infamously as the *razzia*. Around 250 of these people were later released because they had been taken by mistake - being non-Jews or spouses and offspring of mixed marriages. Some 1,050 Jews were deported by train on October 18th, bound for Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.¹⁰⁸ A vast majority of them were women and children. Of the Roman Jews who were deported on that fateful day, only fifteen survived the concentration camps.

¹⁰⁴ Chadwick, “Weizsäcker, the Vatican, and the Jews of Rome”, p. 187.

¹⁰⁵ Chadwick, “Weizsäcker, the Vatican, and the Jews of Rome”, p. 188.

¹⁰⁶ Telegram from Moellhausen to Ribbentrop, Oct. 6, 1943, as found in Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁷ Chadwick, “Weizsäcker, the Vatican, and the Jews of Rome”, p. 190.

¹⁰⁸ Estimates of this number vary: 1,023 (Susan Zuccotti, *Under his Very Windows*, [New York: Yale University Press, 2000] p. 155); 1,041 (Katz, *Black Sabbath*, pp. 211-12.), and 1,127 (Leonidas E. Hill, “The Vatican Embassy

Pope Pius XII apparently first became aware of the turbulence in his backyard when the Italian princess, Enza Pignatelli Aragona Cortes was awoken by a telephone informing her of the *razzia* and rushed over to the Vatican, demanding an audience with the pope. Pius XII's Secretary of State, Cardinal Maglione, asked Weizsäcker to come to the Vatican and explain. During the interview Cardinal Maglione apparently said that "It is a grief to the pope, a grief, especially grievous that in Rome, under the eyes of the Holy Father, so many people suffer solely because they belong to a particular race."¹⁰⁹ In response Weizsäcker asked what the pope intended to do, and encouraged him not to lodge any sort of protest, for "I ask myself whether, at a time when the ship is almost in harbor, it is sensible to endanger everything. I am thinking about the consequences such a protest could provoke."¹¹⁰ He then promised to do everything he could in order to help the Jews. There is evidence to suggest that Weizsäcker and Kessel were the ones who persuaded Bishop Alois Hudal, the rector of the German Catholic Church in Rome, to write a letter of protest. The letter emphasized the importance of good Vatican-German relations and asked for "an order to the effect in Rome and surrounding districts that these arrests be discontinued forthwith" because "otherwise the Pope will openly oppose it, thus providing anti-German propagandists with a weapon to use against us."¹¹¹ The response of the papacy can also be viewed from the German side, from the telegram that Weizsäcker sent to Berlin the day following the roundup. Weizsäcker wrote, "The Curia is dumbfounded, particularly as the action took place under the very windows of the Pope, as it were", and warned of the dangers of a papal protest, making basically the same points as Hudal in pointing out the reasons why it would be

of Ernst von Weizsacker, 1943-1945", *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 39, [1967], p. 151) are a few examples given by historians.

¹⁰⁹ Chadwick, "Weizsäcker, the Vatican, and the Jews of Rome", p. 191.

¹¹⁰ Chadwick, "Weizsäcker, the Vatican, and the Jews of Rome", p. 191.

¹¹¹ Hill, "The Vatican Embassy of Ernst von Weizsacker", p. 148.

better to refrain from any further actions against Jews in Rome.¹¹² Clearly both Weizsäcker and Hudal felt that the threat of the pope speaking out against the Nazis would be the best argument for ending the deportations. It also must have worked to some extent, for other than a few additional isolated incidents, the great majority of Roman Jews survived the Holocaust.

Yet the pope did not speak out. Weizsäcker wrote to Berlin on October 28th confirming that fact. His letter does mention a newspaper article in *L'Osservatore Romano* of October 25/26 which stated that “With the accumulation of so much suffering, universal and paternal succor by the Pope has increased; it knows no bounds of nationality, religion or *race* [underlined in the text].”¹¹³ So while Pius XII did not in fact lodge a formal public protest against the events of October 16th, he did make subtle references indicating his awareness and displeasure.

Weizsäcker apparently felt these references to be strong enough to warrant him downplaying them to Berlin so as to ease tensions.¹¹⁴ When Maglione told Weizsäcker, “The Holy See would not want to be forced to protest”, he indicated that such a protest would have enormous weight and severe consequences for German-Vatican relations.¹¹⁵ Why was such a threat used only to stop further arrests, and not to release the ones whose lives were currently in danger?

In hindsight Weizsäcker gave certain explanations, among them the fear that the Vatican or the pope himself could be in danger if Hitler was provoked (a threat based on certain statements that Hitler had made when agitated) and the belief among those in the German Embassy and the Secretariat that such a provocation might have had disastrous effects on the Jews remaining in Rome. The lives of some 1,000 were thus sacrificed for the safety and security of the rest. It was the lack of any real and determined public protest that angered and confused

¹¹² Telegram from Weizsäcker to Berlin, Oct. 17, 1943, as seen in Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 206.

¹¹³ “The Charitable Activity of the Holy Father”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 25/26, 1943, no. 250.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Weizsäcker to Berlin, Oct. 28, 1943, as seen in Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 207.

¹¹⁵ Chadwick, “Weizsäcker, the Vatican, and the Jews of Rome”, p. 191.

the international community when it was catapulted into the spotlight with the 1963 success of a German play entitled *The Deputy*, the full scope of which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

When members of the Curia did protest Nazi persecution of Jews, their language is particularly revealing of their position. Pius XII's emphasis in his *L'Osservatore Romano* statement was placed on the word race, not religion. Maglione noted that the pope was grieved that people were suffering because of their race. In his Christmas Message of 1942, Pius XII lamented the tragedies of the war and gave a veiled reference to its Jewish victims, saying "Humanity owes this vow to hundreds of thousands of people, who, through no fault of their own and solely because of their nation or their race, have been condemned to death or progressive extinction."¹¹⁶ When SS Major Kappler demanded bribes from the Jewish community he stated "I don't distinguish between Jew and Jew... anyone who carries a drop of Jewish blood, it doesn't matter to me. They are all enemies."¹¹⁷ To both the Nazis and the Holy See, Jews were persecuted because of their Jewish blood, not their religious beliefs. That was why spouses of Jews were freed after being arrested in the Roman roundup: they were not of Jewish descent. From the way Pius XII referred to the Holocaust, it seems as though he believed that Jews were suffering only because they belonged to a different race. The pope was clearly sickened by this sort of discrimination, but he just as clearly believed that Jews did in fact belong to a different race - otherwise why would he not object to the premise of the discrimination itself?

In 1938, the previous pope, Pius XI (who died in 1939), had given a short speech following a private Mass to a group of Belgium pilgrims. It seems that he did not believe that the Jewish faith was worthy of Christian polemics or violence. He was quoted in a Belgian newspaper as having said that "Anti-Semitism is not compatible with the sublime thought and

¹¹⁶ As quoted in Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 131.

¹¹⁷ Chadwick, "Weizsäcker, the Vatican, and the Jews of Rome", p. 188.

reality evoked in this text [meaning the Holy Bible]. Anti-Semitism is a hateful movement, with which we Christians must have nothing to do... Through Christ and in Christ we are the spiritual descendents of Abraham. [...] Spiritually, we are all Semites.”¹¹⁸ Within the Catholic clergy, indeed at the highest levels of theological influence, the commonality and relatedness between Catholicism and Judaism was clearly recognized. Pius XI’s sentiment and logic became popular enough in the Catholic theological community in the 1950s and 60s to provide the foundation for *Nostra Aetate*. It was a sentiment that had not ever before issued out of a papal mouth. Yet it had not been considered important or pressing enough of an idea for Pius XI to expand upon in a papal encyclical or to call for a papal commission to further explore the relationship between Christians and Jews. How was it possible that in the midst of horrific anti-Semitic legislation and practices which later evolved into the slaughter of millions of Jews by Christian hands that neither Pius XI nor Pius XII resoundingly promoted the values of Christian morality to favor persecuted Jews?

It is of course impossible to say what Pius XII believed on the same score - he was never recorded speaking on the subject. The only logical explanation that leaves room for humanity within the hearts of either pope is that they did not believe Nazi Anti-Semitism was in any way connected with the Catholic Church. The language of Pius XII when he raised opposition to Nazi persecution of Jews clearly emphasized that he believed it to be a racial issue. In support of this is a report from the French Ambassador to the Holy See. The report is a summary of Vatican attitudes towards the Jews, in response to an inquiry from the French Rabbi Jacob Kaplan, who wanted some sort of demonstration from the Vatican against the anti-Jewish legislation which had just been passed in France in July of 1941. The report tries to explain the Vatican’s ambivalent stance towards Jews and the question of their race:

¹¹⁸ Susan Zuccotti, *Under his Very Windows*, (New York: Yale University Press, 2000) p. 44.

“It does not consider at all that the Jews constitute a simple “spiritual family,” like those formed among us, for example, by Catholics and “reformed” Christians. It recognizes that among the distinctive traits of the Israelite community there are peculiarities which are not *racial* but *ethnic*. This it has long since realized and has always taken into account.”¹¹⁹

While the report made a distinction between racial and ethnic qualities, it still contented that Jews were a people apart from Catholics. Perhaps this difference could not be seen in physical features, but it was easily recognizable, or ‘distinctive’. From what source within the Vatican the French Ambassador Léon Bérard had acquired this information is unclear, but it seems that there was a prevalent view at the time within Catholicism that Jews were not merely a religious group, but bounded together by a shared cultural, historical, and religious past so as to make them completely alien to the Christian community. The report also gave a quick summary of the writings of St. Thomas of Aquinas on the Jews, suggesting that the Vatican had indicated they were still the current and accepted beliefs of the Church, that “tolerance should be shown to the Jews in the exercise of their religion”, yet “it would be contrary to reason to allow them to exercise the powers of government in a Christian state”¹²⁰ Whether or not these were the actual views of the papacy during the war, it points to the attitude that the general public and international diplomats believed the papacy held. That a foreign diplomat was able to pass off the letter as authoritative spoke to the believability of its contents.

It seems highly likely that Pius XI was fairly alone in his lack of ambivalence in expressing himself on the matter of the Jewish race. However, his belief that Judaism and Christianity were spiritually connected through Christ was not unshared by other theologians. The French Rabbi whose protest sparked the letter in question apparently connected Judaism and

¹¹⁹ As seen in: Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 94.

¹²⁰ As seen in: Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 94.

Christianity in a similar vein: by pointing out that Jesus was Jewish he intimated that the two religions shared spiritual roots. In emphasizing the spiritual relationship of Christianity and Judaism, Kaplan hoped that he could paint anti-Jewish legislation as being against Christian morality.¹²¹

Nazi persecution of Jews both before and during the war can thus be argued to have at some level provoked a theological response that appealed for a re-consideration of Christianity's relationship with Judaism. That response, however, did not suggest to anyone that the Catholic religion, in changing said relationship, could in any way inhibit Jewish persecution. Pius XI may not have seen it as necessary to properly explain his own views on the Jewish religion because he believed Nazi Anti-Semitism to be based on a sense of racial, not religious superiority. Most likely the sentiment expressed by Pius XI was a private feeling not widely shared within the Roman Curia or other important members of the clergy. He might have felt that the time was not right yet for sharing or expounding on acceptance of Jews as fellow descendents of Abraham. After all, such a belief would have radically altered traditional Catholic thinking towards Jews. It also would have been seen as a sign of disapproval towards the Nazi regime, which would have harmed German-Vatican relations and threatened the status of the Vatican's professed neutrality.¹²² After all, if the Germans were so intensely worried about a papal protest against the deportation of Jews from Rome, think how they would have responded to a papal declaration that someone who discriminated against or persecuted Jews was un-Christian. The fear of German reprisals certainly sheds light on why no pope ever openly discussed the matter within a Vatican setting where it would have been reported publically in *L'Osservatore Romano*. It remains

¹²¹ Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, p. 92.

¹²² See discussion of why the pope could not openly condemn Nazi actions without violating its neutrality: George O. Kent "Pope Pius XII and Germany: Some Aspects of German-Vatican Relations, 1933-1943, *The American Historical Review*, 70, (1964), p. 72.

unclear however, whether or not such a belief even existed within the Holy See outside of Pius XI. Certainly there were no indications that Pius XII shared his predecessor's open attitude towards the Jews. If such views existed, they remained underground waiting for a climate more open to their reception. As it was, neither pope ever made an effort to reshape or recast Catholic perceptions towards Jews. It took time for Catholic theologians to realize the implications of their attitudes towards Jews in light of the Holocaust, especially since it took almost 20 years for the Holocaust to become a topic of public discussion and academic scholarship.

The Jewish theological reaction to the Holocaust was much more immediate. Even during the war, the French historian Jules Isaac began writing an exploration of the Christian roots of anti-Semitism. Isaac held the highest office in the field of education in France, being the Inspector General of Education until Germany invaded in 1940. In 1943 his wife, two children, son-in-law, and several other family members were all seized and deported to Auschwitz where all but his youngest son died. Isaac survived the Holocaust by hiding at the homes of his Christian friends and neighbors - often priests or ministers. His seminal book on the subject of Christian anti-Semitism was finished a year after the war ended and published in 1948 under the French title *Jésus et Israël*.¹²³

Jesus and Israel contained 21 basic 'propositions' which sought to lay a new foundation for a peaceful and tolerant relationship between Christians and Jews. These propositions focused on interpretations of the New Testament which had traditionally cast Jews as evil persecutors. Isaac's propositions instead focused on the Jewish character of Jesus and reinterpreted his life, teachings, and death in a manner that did not castigate all Jews, living and dead, as the perpetrators of deicide. For Isaac, this was no scholarly, abstract consideration. In his preface to the 1948 edition, Isaac wrote of his book: that "it was born of persecution. [...] It is the cry of an

¹²³ The English translation, entitled *Jesus and Israel*, did not reach the United States until 1971.

outraged conscience, of a lacerated heart. It is addressed to men's consciences and hearts. I sorrow over those who will refuse to hear it."¹²⁴ The book is dedicated with a short poem written by Isaac, "To my wife and my daughter/ Martyrs/ Killed by Hitler's Nazis/ Killed/ Simply because their name was/ ISAAC".¹²⁵

Jesus and Israel represented a brand new method of biblical interpretation, which had been ushered into Catholic theological circles by Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943. The encyclical promoted an increased emphasis on biblical studies done in light of modern literary techniques and new advances in the study of Hebrew and Greek. In the encyclical, Pius XII extorted that,

"being thoroughly prepared by the knowledge of the ancient languages and by the aids afforded by the art of criticism, let the Catholic exegete undertake the task, of all those imposed on him the greatest, that namely of discovering and expounding on the genuine meaning of the Sacred Books."¹²⁶

The pope also declared that a biblical interpreter "must, as it were, go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East" and employ "the aid of history, archeology, ethnology and other sciences."¹²⁷ Pius XII was essentially promoting a form of biblical interpretation that took into account the historical context of when scripture was written, and by whom, in order to determine its meaning and message for the Church. This new method of biblical interpretation was what allowed Jules Isaac to heavily emphasize the Jewish roots of Christianity and cast doubt on the claim that Jews were solely responsible for the death of Jesus. The Catholic theologian John M. Oesterreicher, whose role in Vatican II will later be discussed in great detail, called the encyclical "a first impetus to the realization of the genuine bond

¹²⁴ Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, trans. Sally Gran, 2nd ed, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), p. xxiii.

¹²⁵ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, In Memoriam.

¹²⁶ Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 30 September 1943.

¹²⁷ Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

between the old and the new children of Israel” because it acknowledged “the genius of the Jewish people”.¹²⁸ Incidentally, the encyclical had been commissioned by Pius XII from Cardinal Augustin Bea, who was later to be called on by Pope John XXIII to craft the *Declaration of the Church’s Relation to Non-Christian Religions*. The recognition in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* that the original Hebrew text of the Bible was the most accurate source of Holy Scripture was indeed something of a turning point in that regard. For in doing so it implicitly conceded that the first people to receive God’s divine revelation were Jews.

Isaac’s book was doubly important because it relied heavily, in fact almost entirely, on biblical quotations in order to make its points. Isaac flipped Christian thought on its head by taking the same scriptural passages usually used to castigate Jews by anti-Semitic polemics, and re-interpreting them so as to cast doubt and create holes in anti-Semitic arguments. For instance, one of Isaac’s propositions, number 14, called into dispute the declaration that the Jewish people rejected Christ as the Messiah, or Savior. Isaac points to numerous quotations from the gospels of Mathew, Mark, and Luke which revealed that Jesus, up to the point of his crucifixion, kept his status as the Messiah a closely guarded secret. Therefore Isaac points out that the Jews “did not know him as Messiah-Son of God for the good reason that Jesus not only never presented himself to them as such but even forbade that these signal titles be bestowed on him.”¹²⁹

A seminal topic for Isaac was the so-called ‘deicide’ charge laid upon the Jewish population for all eternity, for he believed that “no accusation could be more pernicious- and in fact none has caused more innocent blood to be shed.”¹³⁰ Isaac described the accusation as being

¹²⁸ John M. Oesterriecher, “Paving the Way”, *The New Encounter Between Christians and Jews*, (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1986), p. 51.

¹²⁹ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 151.

¹³⁰ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 233.

linked to the supposed Jewish curse which justified and moralized all Jewish woes. Of such a curse Isaac wrote:

“In such wise that by an ingenious technique of alternation learned arguments and popular passions, God is made responsible for acts which, seen in human terms, are surely the doing of man’s incurable vileness, of that perversity, variously but skillfully exploited from century to century, from generation to generation, which culminated in Auschwitz, in the gas chambers and crematory ovens of Nazi Germany.”¹³¹

Jules Isaac was one of the very first Jewish theologians to draw the line between the historical Christian hatred of Jews and the events of the Holocaust. He found it especially heinous that even after the Holocaust, some Catholic clergy disregarded the suffering of Jews in the name of their past crime, which “was bound to make them odious and mark them for the hostility of the world” and try to diffuse guilt by noting that “in Egypt in the thirteenth century before Christ, in Persia in the fifth, there were already pogroms.”¹³² Isaac skillfully dismissed the charge of deicide by noting that the killers of Jesus were a select group of Jews, specifically named as such in the Bible, and not *all Jews*, which was a fact recognized even by Jesus in the gospels of Luke and Mark. In addition - he called for renewed attention to be given to the fact that it was a Roman death sentence which crucified Jesus. To conclude his work, Isaac wrote his 21st and last proposition:

“Whatever the sins of the people of Israel may be, they are innocent, totally innocent of the crimes of which Christian tradition accuses them: They did not reject Jesus, they did not crucify him. And Jesus did not reject Israel, did not curse it [...] May Christians come to realize this at least- may they realize and redress their crying injustices. At this moment, when a curse seems to weigh upon

¹³¹ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 234.

¹³² Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 234.

the whole human race, it is the urgent duty to which they are called by the memory of Auschwitz.”¹³³

Isaac’s propositions began by identifying and elucidating the many ways in which Christianity was born out of and connected to Judaism in its early days and ended with declaring the Jews innocent of the crimes of which Christians had time and time again accused them. The crimes of the Holocaust were thus painted by Isaac to be doubly heinous, since they were perpetrated by the Jews’ spiritual brethren and justified by false accusations. Isaac called for a “critical honesty” to be applied to the Gospels, echoing the words of Pius XII and pleading that textual criticism be applied to the sacred scripture.¹³⁴ In his concluding paragraphs, Isaac called forcefully on Christians to “recognize their initial responsibility” for anti-Judaism and to expunge such beliefs from their hearts and minds and engage in a “strenuous examination of conscience”.¹³⁵ He encouraged Jews and Christians to work together in accomplishing this task and then explained why it was so urgent: “the glow of the Auschwitz crematorium is the beacon that lights, that guides all my thoughts.”¹³⁶ Isaac, in his use of biblical quotations, his urgent message of reform, and reminder of the horrors of the Holocaust, set the tone for further calls to theological renovation. His book was instrumental in both demanding that changes be made in Christian doctrine, as well as providing a foundation for how to go about it.

Isaac included in the appendix a list of eighteen points of clarification needed in Christian doctrine. These eighteen points showed up again in 1947 when the first ever meeting of the International Council of Christians and Jews was convened in Seelisberg, Switzerland. The Council was a newly formed umbrella organization meant to unite scholars and theologians of different religions and had the declared purpose of seeking Christian-Jewish reconciliation. The

¹³³ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 385.

¹³⁴ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, pp. 390-91.

¹³⁵ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 400.

¹³⁶ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, p. 400.

Seelisberg Conference took place from July 30th to August 5th and included over 70 participants from 17 different countries, who were roughly half Jewish and half Christian - both Catholic and Protestant. The conference produced a document entitled “An Address to the Churches,” which professed a measure of guilt for the Holocaust because of a lack of “vigilant willingness” and sought to “avoid any presentation and conception of the Christian message which would support antisemitism under whatever form.”¹³⁷ The document was produced by the Christian participants of the conference under advisement from the Jewish members, and was meant to resonate across all Christian denominations in “the firm hope that they will be concerned to show their members how to prevent any animosity towards the Jews which might arise from false, inadequate or mistaken presentations or conceptions of the teaching and preaching of the Christian doctrine.”¹³⁸ From this statement, it is clear that the members of this Council were firm in their belief that any reading of the Bible which prompted hatred towards Jews was false; in essence they felt that the Bible did not theologically support anti-Judaism. It is also clear that in linking of the memory of the Holocaust to pervasive Christian ideas of anti-Semitism, the Christian delegates themselves were implying that Christian anti-Semitism was partly responsible for the Holocaust.

The so called “Ten Points” which the address contained were based on the 18 points of *Jesus and Israel*, Jules Isaac being present at the council himself. The points demanded recognition of Jesus’ Jewish roots, obviously an important acknowledgement for the members since they put variations of this concept in points one through four. To further emphasize this, the last demand was: “Avoid speaking of the Jews as if the first members of the Church had not

¹³⁷ “An Address to the Churches”, International Council of Christians and Jews, 31 July 1947, <http://www.jcrelations.net/An_Address_to_the_Churches_Seelisberg_Switzerland_1947.2370.0.html?id=720&L=3&searchText=An+Address+to+the+Churches&searchFilter=%2A>.

¹³⁸ “An Address to the Churches”.

been Jews”.¹³⁹ All of these pronouncements had a specific and obvious goal: to humanize Jews and bring them within the Christian world of comprehension. Isaac and the Seelisberg Address sought to radically alter the Christian conception of Jews - from deceitful, betraying stranger to spiritual, innocent, and victimized kin. The goal of the Isaac’s work was to raise awareness of the violence that lurked behind anti-Semitic beliefs. Eliminating Christian justifications for anti-Semitism could go a long way towards preventing another Holocaust.

A year later another international religious council made a similar and equally heartfelt proclamation. The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Amsterdam from August 22nd to September 4th in 1948. The council was one of the many offshoots of the growing ecumenical movement taking place within Christianity, bringing together multiple denominations in order to find common ground and promote peaceful unity. Notably, the Catholic Church was not (and is still not) a member of the WCC. But the objectives of the council, which included addressing Judaism, speak to the growth of the ideas of Jules Isaac and the growing conviction among Christians that it was a topic needing urgent attention. The declaration of the council included an omission of guilt: “the churches in the past have helped to foster an image of the Jews as the sole enemies of Christ, which has contributed to anti-semitism in the secular world.”¹⁴⁰ It also included a message of hope and determination: “We call upon all the churches we represent to denounce anti-semitism, no matter what its origin, as absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith”.¹⁴¹ The rhetoric of Christian guilt was growing among Christian theologians and regularly linked to an urgent need to repair the damage of anti-Semitism by correcting Christian teachings.

¹³⁹ “An Address to the Churches”.

¹⁴⁰ “The Christian Approach to the Jews” The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 5 September 1948, <<http://www.jcrelations.net/The+Christian+Approach+to+the+Jews.2584.0.html?L=3>>

¹⁴¹ “The Christian Approach to the Jews”.

For all the apparent urgency, very little of this growing momentum reached the upper strata of the Roman Curia in the 1940s. In 1949, Pius XII held a papal audience with Jules Isaac, who wished to discuss his re-translation of the Good Friday prayer for Jews, known as *pro perfidies judaeis*.¹⁴² The Good Friday prayer invoked during Holy Week was an intercession on behalf of all those outside the fold of the Church, including Jews. The prayer, conducted in Latin, had numerous English translations, especially for the word ‘perfidia’ mentioned several times in the text. The word was commonly translated as ‘perfidious’ which carried connotations of malicious unbelief - or the idea that the Jews willfully rejected the teachings of Jesus Christ.¹⁴³ Jules Isaac petitioned to have the meaning of ‘perfidia’ be recognized as merely ‘unbelieving’ or ‘unfaithful’. His petition was supported by the work of Catholic theologians such as Oesterreicher, who wrote in 1947 a scholarly article that made the same assertions as Isaac and asked that the Church “modify the expression *perfidia Judaica* and restore the ancient order for the Good Friday prayer”.¹⁴⁴ Pius XII assented to changing the vernacular translation to a less pejorative meaning, but he did not go so far as to accede to Isaac’s request that the word be struck out of the prayer altogether.¹⁴⁵

In 1950, when Pius XII invited people to Rome for the celebration of the Holy Year, he welcomed Christian pilgrims and also “those who sincerely but vainly await His coming and worship Him as one promised by the prophets and still to come.”¹⁴⁶ The pope was very clearly referring to Jews, and doing so in language that more or less urged their conversion, since they were ‘vainly’ awaiting for a messiah that had already come. Yet one could also view this language as something of a small step in a more welcoming direction - for not only did Pius XII

¹⁴² Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 10.

¹⁴³ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁴ John M. Oesterreicher, “Pro Perfidis Judaeis”, *Cahiers Sioniens*, 1947, pp. 85-101.

¹⁴⁵ Isaac, *Teaching of Contempt*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁶ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 52.

include Jews as those ‘welcome’ in Rome, he also praised the sincerity of their worship. Five years later, Pius XII reinstated the ancient Christian tradition of kneeling in prayer for Jews on Good Friday, another step towards establishing bonds of respect and tolerance.¹⁴⁷

There was no impetus however, for the Vatican to take the matter of Christian anti-semitism as seriously as the theologians of the Seelisberg Conference or the World Council of Churches did. The tragedy of the Holocaust was not yet conceived of as being in any way a specifically “Catholic” problem. The message so far was that it was a matter of consideration for all Christian churches and peoples. The actions of the Catholic Church during the Holocaust had not been singled out for any specific consideration. The guilt for the Holocaust, rather, was laid down universally at the feet of all Christians. The controversy over Pius XII’s actions during the Roman *razzia* and the Holocaust had not yet materialized in the public discourse. The pope’s main concern during the post-War period was the containment of communism and the rebuilding of Europe. He had little attention or reason to address the Holocaust in specifically Catholic terms. A new pope and subsequent events changed all that.

¹⁴⁷ Isaac, *Teaching of Contempt*, p. 11

Chapter Three: Preparing the Ground for Change

The Influence of Pope John XXIII

Pope John XXIII was elected on November 4th, 1958 after the death of Pius XII on October 9th. The election of Pope John XXIII coincided with a number of other important developments in Catholic theology and the outside world to make the time right for the reconsideration of the Catholic-Jewish relationship.

Adding to the favorable climate was the person of Pope John XXIII himself. In 1935, John XXIII, then Bishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, was appointed Apostolic Delegate to Turkey and Greece, where he witnessed the destruction of the Nazi occupying forces firsthand. During his time in Turkey he saved the lives of thousands of Jews by preventing deportations from Slovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria. He also apparently insisted on always being personally informed of the situation of Jews across the Nazi-occupied lands.¹⁴⁸ Later, in 1944 he served as Apostolic Nuncio to France where in 1953 he was raised to the rank of Cardinal in a ceremony presided over by the President of France.

Less than three months after taking office, John XXIII signaled his intention to open an Ecumenical Council that would address issues of the relationship of the Catholic Church and the modern world. The second such council to be held in the Vatican (the first being under Pius IX from 1868-70), it was named the Second Vatican Council and preparations began for its opening in 1962. It was in this context that the issue of the Catholic consideration of Jews would be addressed. Without the opportunity of the Council to openly foster and encourage changes within Catholic theology, it is doubtful whether the debate on Judaism would have gained as much traction as it did. The radical changes that Vatican II introduced to Catholicism opened many

¹⁴⁸ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, pp. 111-3.

doors for less popular changes to gain a footing in the debates. In the words of one Council member,

“At the beginning of the Vatican Council, no one knew which way the Church would renew herself. But by the end of the Third Session last winter, we realized that it was not going to be a superficial adjustment but a radical one. It meant a fundamental reappraisal of Catholicism. By then this was not only the view of a progressive minority, but it had captured the center of the Council.”¹⁴⁹

As is often said, when it rains it pours. A deep and meaningful rethinking of traditional Catholic beliefs provided a context for the Church to seriously reconsider its stance towards Judaism, and ensured that any new declarations would be taken seriously. The full weight of the Council would stand behind any new agreement, which could turn the passionate beliefs of a few into the official dogma of the Vatican. It was a rare and almost unprecedented opportunity – this was only the second of such a council to be called in Rome, and almost a century had lapsed since the previous one in 1870.

The first signs of John XXIII’s openness to changing Catholic teaching came in 1959 when he ordered the words ‘*perfidia Judaica*’ to be struck from that year’s Good Friday prayer. The Jews were instead referred to as “those to whom God spoke to first” or “the first hearers of the word of God” which not only elevated them to a position of respect, but also did away with any hint of condemning them for being unbelievers.¹⁵⁰

In June of 1960, Jules Isaac succeeded in getting another papal audience, this time with the openly receptive and welcoming John XXIII. Accounts of this meeting exist in the introduction to Isaac’s later book *The Teaching of Contempt*, and Oesterreicher’s book on the creation of *Nostra Aetate*. In both accounts the meeting was friendly and productive, with both

¹⁴⁹ Xavier Rynne, *The Fourth Session: The Debates and Decrees of Vatican Council II, September 14 to December 8, 1965*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965) p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 53.

Isaac and John XXIII willing and eager to address the issue of Catholic-Jewish dialogue and the correction of Catholic teachings. Isaac purportedly pointed out “that although there had been a reversal of attitude on the part of many individual Catholics, both during and after the war, nothing conclusive had yet been done. There was a crying need for the head of the Church to be heard.”¹⁵¹ The pope apparently agreed in some measure, telling Isaac “you have reason for more than a little hope” that his wishes would be fulfilled.¹⁵² It was clear from these instances that from the beginning of his papacy, John XXIII was open to reexamining the relationship between Catholicism and Judaism in a way that Pius XII was not.

Oesterreicher’s book certainly promotes the image of John XXIII as a man uniquely suited to the situation of addressing the changing relationship between Christians and Jews. Oesterreicher combines descriptions of the pope’s personality, which was often described as gracious and welcoming, with his experiences in Eastern Europe to portray a man who was particularly touched by the Jewish plight and felt personally involved in it. John XXIII’s work was thus in one sense the Church’s response to Auschwitz, because the atrocities he witnessed as an Apostolic Delegate in the East, where Jewish persecution was particularly intense, were deeply rooted in his heart and being. Oesterreicher placed great emphasis on this as the reason John XIII commissioned a declaration on the relationship of the Church to the Jews, writing that “the action of Jules Isaac and other earlier or later interventions were of secondary importance”.¹⁵³

However, it must be noted that quite a few voices had spoken about the need for a new consideration of Jews within the Catholic faith before John XXIII officially declared the creation of a commission to explore the very subject. One development that coincided with John XXIII’s

¹⁵¹ Isaac, *Teaching of Contempt*, pp. 13-4.

¹⁵² Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 108.

¹⁵³ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 114.

election was an independent movement within Catholic clergy and theologians to push for a reconsideration of Judaism and recognition of the perils of anti-Semitism. Jesuits from the Biblical Institute of Rome submitted a proposal in August of 1960 to the Council's Central Preparatory Commission which included a section entitled *De antisemitismo vitando*, or "On shunning Jew-hatred". Coming from the Church's most prestigious school of biblical scholarship, the Biblical Institute's proposal must have carried great weight within the Vatican. Its section on anti-Semitism affirmed the connection between Christian and Jews through their spiritual ancestry and called for the erasing from sermons and prayers words that denigrated the Jewish lack of Christians faith and spoke of the "collective guilt" of the Jewish people. Addressed to the Second Vatican Council's preparatory commission, this proposal shows that at least a few respected Catholics felt that the time was ripe for a new consideration of Jews within religious language and that the upcoming Council was an opportune occasion for doing so.

Its positive aspects aside, the petition also referred to passages in Romans 11 which allude to the eventual conversion of all Jews to Christianity as a basis for countering prejudices against Judaism.¹⁵⁴ This argument was the first hint of a larger problem which the fragile Jewish-Catholic accord would soon run up against: the notion that anti-Semitism is not valid because all Jews will one day be Christians was just another form of the earlier supersessionist position which denigrated the validity of the Jewish religion because Christianity supposedly replaced it. That Oesterreicher included this part of the petition in his narrative and labeled it as "capable of effectively countering many of the prejudices that promote antagonism toward Jews" indicates that he, along with the Jesuits, had not entirely worked through the implications of their new position.¹⁵⁵ At this point, Catholics were tentatively searching for ways in which to connect to

¹⁵⁴ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, pp. 115-6. See Romans 11:15, 26.

¹⁵⁵ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 115.

the Jewish religion, find common ground, and overcome past stereotypes and prejudices. The Jesuits of the Biblical Institute did not feel that Catholics should engage in meaningful dialogue with the Jewish community in order to obtain new spiritual knowledge or insights. Their primary goal (in the beginning at least) was to address the problem of scriptural interpretations which promoted medieval perceptions of Judaism and influenced or added to anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Oesterreicher mentions several other groups who submitted proposals in June and August of 1960 that he considered important. One of them was a proposal that he himself helped author, along with other members of the Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University in the United States. The petition was addressed to Cardinal Bea and rested on indications given by previous popes that anti-Semitism was unacceptable within the Catholic Church (such as Pius XI's famous quote "Spiritually we are all Semites"). Oesterreicher presented his petition in full and wrote that it was "the first advance into an area that had lain neglected for so long, and indeed seemed to be unknown territory to most people."¹⁵⁶ The petition included a plea for "a liturgical renewal" and the changing of "misleading phrases" so as to reveal "the true teaching of the Church and her real attitude towards the Jews."¹⁵⁷ From such language one gathers that no one was quite sure exactly what the Church's real attitude towards the Jews was, but that many were anxious that such teachings be clearly stated and disseminated.

Another appeal was submitted from the Apeldoorn Working Group, which was dedicated to serving the cause of Jewish-Christian reconciliation. The Group was a small but dedicated taskforce of both priests and lay persons covering a diverse background of religious traditions who met in the 1960s to try and further their special cause. The members of the AWG represented periodicals, institutes, newspapers, and universities across Europe, all of whom had a

¹⁵⁶ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 119.

¹⁵⁷ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 119.

vested interest in raising awareness of Christian-Jewish dialogue. Oesterreicher gives the Apeldoorn group much credit for providing “a place in the Church, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and theologically, for the Conciliar Declaration.”¹⁵⁸ The suggestions of the group however, were much too long to find a place in the final text of the Declaration itself. Oesterreicher contends however, that the spirit of their work was incredibly influential, even though few members of the Council read it and even fewer Catholic laity. Perhaps this discrepancy was due to the fact that Oesterreicher himself was a member of the group which met in August of 1960 to draft the Memorandum, and he was appointed by Cardinal Bea later on to help draft the Declaration itself. The suggestions of the Apeldoorn group began with a familiar exhortation that “any attempt to present its imperfections or the unfaithfulness of the Jewish people in a way that engenders contempt or even mere dislike, is contrary to the spirit of the Church.”¹⁵⁹ It also denounced the idea that Judaism was a stagnant religion during Jesus’ time and denied that the whole of the Jewish community was and is perpetually responsible for Jesus’ death, holding that it is “of extreme importance to avoid [that] fatal error”.¹⁶⁰ The text cries out that misinterpretations of the Bible which lead to teachings of contempt for Jews needed urgently to be corrected because of the evil they had propagated.

The pope’s personal feelings did seem to have played a huge role in promoting a new image of Catholic-Jewish relations. Lined up as they were with the passionate beliefs of a select group of dedicated theologians, it seemed as though the pope would have enough support to enact real change within Catholic dogma. The pope’s dedication to the topic was evident. In an October 1960 audience with a group of American Jewish students passing through Rome on a study abroad trip to Israel, the pope spontaneously welcomed the group with the Italian words

¹⁵⁸ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, pp. 119-20.

¹⁵⁹ Memorandum of the Apeldoorn Working Group, Aug. 1960, as seen in Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 121.

¹⁶⁰ Memorandum of the Apeldoorn Working Group, as seen in Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 122.

“Son io, Guiseppe, il fratello vostro!”(I am Joseph, your brother!). He also addressed the group with his personal thoughts on the divisions between Christians and Jews, saying “These differences, however, do not extinguish the brotherhood that springs from a common origin. We are indeed all children of the same heavenly father.”¹⁶¹ This instance pointed to the very real and genuine belief of the pope that Christians and Jews shared a deep spiritual connection that tied their two religions and peoples together. One would guess however, that had the pope been alone in sharing this viewpoint, little tangible results of it would have been felt in the Catholic world. The Holocaust was such a radical point of rupture with the past status quo that it allowed or forced many theologians to take stock of their own interpretations of scripture and reformulate the Church’s stance on Judaism.

On September 18th, 1960, the pope commissioned the previously mentioned Cardinal Augustin Bea, who was serving as the President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, to prepare a declaration on the relationship between the Church and the Jews. Here was an official signal from the papacy that new dialogue between Catholics and Jews should begin to take place. The man whom the pope entrusted to this task was a German theologian, director of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, and the private confessor of the previous pope, Pius XII. As such, he had an enormous intellectual understanding of biblical scripture and great experience working within the highest reaches of the Vatican. Cardinal Bea had great respect for the Hebrew language and as such was incredibly sympathetic towards Jews.¹⁶² Commissioned with the task of creating a conciliar declaration (to be voted on at the Second Vatican Council) Cardinal Bea immediately created a Subcommittee on the Jewish Question within the Secretariat for Unity to begin work.

¹⁶¹ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 112.

¹⁶² Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 94.

The Second Vatican Council would not convene until October 11, 1962, almost three years after the pope's initial commission. It was to be held over a period of three years, during which four meetings, or sessions, of the Council were held. During these sessions, documents brought forward by specialized committees, such as the one presided over by Cardinal Bea, were voted on and officially approved by members of the Roman Curia who as a whole represented the international Church. The actual documents that were finalized in the Council sessions were the work of over two years of preparation, ever since the pope announced his intention to call the Council to meet. *Nostra Aetate*, the final text which Cardinal Bea and the members of the Secretariat for Unity produced, did not even come before the Council until the Fourth Session in 1965. The final document thus represents some five years of work, which is astounding considering its extremely short length. Every single word in the document must have been of great significance to the members of the Vatican Council, otherwise it would not have gone through five years of revision. The process of the creation of *Nostra Aetate* was not the work then, of merely the period of time known as the Second Vatican Council. It was the result a long and arduous process that began even before Pope John XXIII called for the creation of the Council. The pope gave the ongoing movement towards Christian and Jewish reconciliation an official pathway to express itself, and in doing so invited the Catholic world to fully embrace it.

Drafting Nostra Aetate

The period from 1960 to 1965 saw a large number of submissions and proposals to the group working under Cardinal Bea, and a great amount of political and media interest added competing claims and increased pressure on the purpose of the declaration. *Nostra Aetate* was an especially sensitive and tricky piece of work to be guided through the Council. The Subcommittee under Cardinal Bea spent five years drafting and rewriting the text which would

eventually be presented. As well as religious, there were political considerations to be taken into account. Adolf Eichmann's capture in 1960 and subsequent public trial in 1961 as a Nazi war criminal in Israel brought the matter of the Holocaust, as well as Israel's statehood, front and center of the world's attention. The Vatican, which had not yet (and in fact has still not) openly acknowledged Israel as a state, did not want the Church's declaration on the Jews to contain any hint of their approbation or approval of Israel's statehood. The document had to avoid any hint of political affiliations, a difficult feat in an extremely charged political context. The increased public awareness of the Holocaust added extra pressure to the drafters of the document. The declaration could not seem to be an apology for the Church's participation in the Holocaust, because firstly, its participation had not really been acknowledged, and secondly, how could any apology compensate for the tragedy of the Holocaust? Thirdly, there was the consideration, probably among more conservative Catholics, that Church dogma should not be dictated by non-Catholic concerns or politics. Yet the document had to effectively combat the accusations of anti-Semitic attitudes within the clergy who were seen both to have failed in the past to sufficiently help Jews during the Holocaust and to acknowledge the tragedy in the aftermath. These accusations, most notably in the form of Hochhuth's play, *The Deputy*, brought a great deal of public scrutiny to the Church's actions and put a great deal of pressure on the declaration to be a miracle solution to these problems. All of these obstacles combined to make the document the subject of much public debate and speculation and add a sense of urgency to its publication. It became increasingly necessary that this document be a complete and perfect reflection of the Church's true voice on the matter of the Jewish faith, not something to be rushed or unduly influenced by outside events.

One of the first efforts made by Cardinal Bea to begin drafting was to assign his appointed advisor, Fr. Gregory Baum, the task of writing a short summary or thesis that was to be the foundation for the declaration. One of the most interesting aspects of *Nostra Aetate* was the composition of the Subcommittee which was charged with drafting it. According to Oesterreicher, the original Subcommittee consisted of himself as consultor, Cardinal Bea as President, Gregory Baum, and Abbot Leo Rudloff. These men were the constants throughout the long revision process, although more people were added later on when the Declaration came under attack between Council Sessions. Of the four men, John Oesterreicher and Gregory Baum were both born Jewish and later converted to Catholicism. Abbot Rudloff was the founder of a Benedictine monastery in Virginia who had lived through War World II in Europe and was a close personal friend of the Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Cardinal Bea choose a team of men deeply invested in reconciling Catholicism to Judaism, men who were uniquely sensitive to the past relationship between the two religions.

For Baum and Oesterreicher, there was certainly an added dimension to their desire to end Catholic anit-Semitism. Part of the respective passions of these men for Catholic reconciliation with Judaism was their profound respect for the Jewish faith from which they came, as well as abhorrence for the kind of thinking that led to the Spanish Inquisition: that baptism cannot entirely wash a Jew of his roots. In other words, these were men determined to purge Catholic teaching of any hint of racism left over from the propaganda of the Nazi era. Baum's thesis, reproduced by Oesterreicher, confirms his commitment to interpreting the Bible and historic Catholic teaching in a light that firmly denies supercessionist theories that invalidated Judaism as a religion worthy in its own light. The contributions of converts such as Baum and Oesterreicher were incredibly important for the realization of Jewish-Catholic dialogue, because

they tended to emphasize respect and appreciation for the Jewish religion, adding depth to a conversation that had previously constrained itself to correcting denigrating language and liturgy that referred to Jews, rather than admitting the validity of Judaism itself.

Baum's thesis held three major points to be articulated in full to the Council. The first argument held that, "it should be shown that the New Covenant confirmed, renewed, and transcended the Old, and that the New Testament fulfilled the Old, without, however, invalidating it".¹⁶³ The second point dealt with the supposed rejection of the Jewish people by God, in that "it should be stated firmly that a holy remnant of the Jewish people acclaimed and accepted Him as Savior of all" and any claim of a curse are "unjust". The third point spoke of the Church's never-ending hope that one day all Jews would convert and become Catholics, and in that spirit of hope, "the Church must declare again and again that the attitude of Christians toward their Jewish neighbors must be one of love and respect."¹⁶⁴ The declaration had a double audience: although it was primarily directed towards Catholics so as to teach them the proper attitudes towards Jews, it was also a reassurance to the Jewish Community that they were no longer to be a target of hatred and contempt from within the Catholic community. The remarkable nature of Baum's arguments was that they were based on very recent developments in Catholic thought, more or less on comments made by the last three popes- Pius XI, Pius XII, and John XXIII - who had "made it clear by word and deed that the Christian bond to the Jewish people was a theological one, but that certain patristic and medieval conceptions about Jews could no longer be held."¹⁶⁵ Baum was almost saying that these 'truths' had lain for centuries beneath misinterpretations and false teaching, waiting to be uncovered and corrected. The progression of three popes in a row who gave indications that they favored a new conception of

¹⁶³ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 129.

¹⁶⁴ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 129.

¹⁶⁵ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 129.

Judaism lent Baum a legitimate basis of authority to stand behind his thesis. One or two popes could have easily been dismissed in hindsight, but three in a row was a serious indication that new thinking had taken root.

How could three popes reverse 1500 years of Catholic teaching? Baum could not come out openly and say the Church had been teaching false doctrines for a thousand years, for that would call into question the entire structure of Church teaching on infallibility, which is “the supernatural prerogative by which the Church of Christ is, by a special Divine assistance, preserved from liability to error in her definitive dogmatic teaching regarding matters of faith and morals.”¹⁶⁶ If Catholic theologians had, in the past, said or written things now declared false or misleading, it was because they themselves had been misled and were not being ‘true’ to the message of the Church. In this way, the Catholic Church is always preserved as the mouthpiece of truth and is never incorrect or mistaken: a few misguided members might have been, but they can be corrected.

One of the issues surrounding the document was the appearance of influence or involvement of Jewish organizations and communities, who held a vested interest in the outcome of the Declaration. Remarkably, these groups all responded in almost entirely positive terms to the news of the coming document. The American Jewish Committee in particular sent in a number of memorandums for the attention of Cardinal Bea, in the hope that their views would be taken under consideration. On July 13th of 1961, the Committee submitted to Cardinal Bea a memorandum entitled “The Image of the Jews in Catholic Teaching”. In November of the same year, the President of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), Louis Caplan, wrote to Cardinal Bea thanking him for agreeing to meet with a number of the Committee members to discuss an

¹⁶⁶ Patrick Toner, "Infallibility," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910, 12 Mar. 2012 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07790a.htm>>.

enclosed memorandum, “Anti-Jewish Elements in Catholic Liturgy”, which was meant to be a supplement to the previous one. In his letter, Caplan also wrote that he was prepared to “make available our resources of additional scholarship, research, and other services that you may regard as helpful both prior to and subsequent to the convening of the Ecumenical Council.”¹⁶⁷ Caplan alluded to another letter written to Pope John XXIII in the same vein, and spoke of the “serious and comprehensive re-examination of Catholic teachings about the Jews” as a “historic turning point in the relationships between our two great historic peoples and traditions.”¹⁶⁸ From this letter, and the enclosed memorandums, it was clear that the American Jewish Committee hoped to be closely involved in and kept aware of the work of Cardinal Bea. Caplan and the Committee also seemed to view the upcoming Council optimistically and with the hope that the Catholic image of Jews would change to reflect the growing scholarship supporting it. A third memorandum, submitted to Cardinal Bea by the Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel, reiterated the earlier themes of the AJC with his work, “On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations” in May of 1962. His memorandum spoke of “improving mutually fruitful relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish community” and hoped that the Church’s recent and determined repudiations of anti-Semitism would soon be “accompanied by an authoritative clarification of religious teachings which lend themselves to anti-Jewish interpretations.”¹⁶⁹ Heschel and the AJC looked for more than just corrections to Catholic teachings, which they viewed as an urgent and primary goal for Jewish-Catholic relations. For ‘mutually fruitful relations’ to begin, the Roman Catholic Church needed also (according to

¹⁶⁷ Louis Caplan, *Letter to His Eminence Agostino Cardinal Bea*, The American Jewish Committee, November 17, 1961.

¹⁶⁸ Caplan, *Letter to Cardinal Bea*.

¹⁶⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations”, New York: American Jewish Committee, 22 May 1962, pp. 1-4.

Heschel) to “acknowledge the integrity and permanent preciousness of Jews and Judaism.”¹⁷⁰

Heschel saw the Ecumenical Council as an opportunity to further Catholic-Jewish understanding as well as promote Catholic respect for the Jewish faith. He wanted above all for Catholics everywhere to recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish religion, to reverse the thinking perpetuated by the charge that Jews were responsible for Christ’s crucifixion that Judaism was outdated, false, evil, or rejected by God.

In his personal account of how *Nostra Aetate* came to be, John Oesterreicher, appointed consultor to Cardinal Bea during the drafting of the document, gave detailed descriptions of these memorandums, but then dismissed their influence entirely. Oesterreicher contended that “Jewish organizations and individuals also deserve mention, even though they were made at a later stage, and had no influence to speak of on the discussion of the Conciliar Declaration or the shaping of its text.”¹⁷¹ It is hard to understand why Oesterreicher considered it necessary to mention Jewish organizations/individuals in his section entitled “The Origins” on *Nostra Aetate* if he saw them as having had absolutely no influence on it. According to Oesterreicher, these documents “presupposed a mentality which the Conciliar Declaration had yet to create.”¹⁷² In other words, these memorandums had little influence because they were far ahead of Catholic thinking, both in attempting to facilitate mutually respectful dialogue and by taking for granted that such measures were compatible with Catholic teaching. After all, the Catholic Church had not yet officially ruled in favor of the suggestions of Baum, Isaac, Heschel, and interfaith councils like the World Assembly of Churches that anti-Semitism did not belong in Catholic teachings. Cardinal Bea was commissioned to officially formulate and announce this claim, so it was not yet widely accepted or recognized in Catholicism – that was the entire purpose of the

¹⁷⁰ Heschel, “On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations”, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 126.

¹⁷² Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 128.

Declaration. The AJC was a few steps ahead of the Vatican Council by wanting to build and foster Jewish-Catholic dialogue on the assumption of mutual respect. Oesterreicher and the other members of Cardinal Bea's subcommittee also wanted to avoid being seen as having 'bowed' to Jewish pressure. The declaration they would come to draft must be viewed as a true reflection of the Church's teaching, based only on scripture and papal precedent. One of the tricky aspects for Cardinal Bea was to offer reconciliation to Jewish communities while at the same time retaining his independence and the favor of the hugely conservative Roman Curia.

Pressure on Cardinal Bea's small subcommittee came from many different directions, the majority of it due to the sensitive nature of the Declaration. The nature of anti-Semitism and persistent questions of how and why the Holocaust had happened became a common topic of popular debate and academic scholarship in the 1960s. In every discussion of anti-Semitism, the question of its role in causing the Holocaust was bound to surface. The questions on everyone's lips were: Did anti-Semitic thought cause anti-Jewish violence and if so, how do we correct it? And then underneath those pressing questions was one even more urgent: Who was responsible for spreading it in the first place? One of the answers was religious intolerance, specifically the atmosphere of Christian hatred for Jews that many popular Christian beliefs propagated. In December of 1961, The World Council of Churches passed a resolution on anti-Semitism at its third assembly in New Delhi that recalled its earlier words on the subject from the First Assembly in 1948. The reason for this repetition was the view of the assembly that "situations continue[d] to exist in which Jews [were] subject to discrimination and even persecution" and therefore "The Assembly urge[d] its member churches to do all their power to resist every form of anti-semitism."¹⁷³ Jules Isaac also wrote another book that reiterated and streamlined his ideas

¹⁷³"A Resolution on Antisemitism", *The New Delhi Report*, The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961, (New York, Association Press, 1962) p. 148.

from his earlier work *Jesus and Israel*. Published first in France in 1962 and then in the United States in 1964, *The Teaching of Contempt* was a marker of Isaac's continuing dedication to Jewish-Christian understanding. Isaac wrote in his forward that the teaching of contempt was deeply linked to the teaching of respect, and one was not possible without the other. It was his firm belief that "truth cannot be built upon error", so that for Christians and Jews to respect each other, they must first fully understand one another.¹⁷⁴ Isaac wrote unequivocally that "A true Christian cannot be an anti-Semite; he simply has no right to be one" and then went on to reveal that anti-Semitism, whether conscious or subconscious continued to thrive within Christianity, and it was this anti-Semitism which formed a basis for Nazi ideology.¹⁷⁵ Isaac's book drew further attention to the danger of teaching contempt for Jews to the general population: that was how the Holocaust went on without protest in full view of so many millions. It was a relevant topic at the time, for the capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1960/2, and Hannah Arendt's subsequent book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, brought a lot of public attention to the idea of who was guilty and responsible for the Holocaust.

The work of the subcommittee also came to the attention of the Arab states which were in the midst of a political struggle with Israel. They objected strenuously to the implication that the Declaration was a tacit endorsement for Israel's statehood and that any friendly relations between Catholics and Jews was the first step towards diplomatic relations of the Vatican with the State of Israel. In this light, the document was a political, not a theological statement. Oesterreicher described the situation as one of complete misunderstanding, for "the anxiety and annoyance of Arab leaders bore no relations to the facts."¹⁷⁶ Oesterreicher even contended that Arab leaders "tried every conceivable avenue to suppress such a Conciliar declaration," for they

¹⁷⁴ Isaac, *Teaching of Contempt*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁵ Isaac, *Teaching of Contempt*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁶ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 130.

were “unable to forget for a single second the political tensions in the Near East”.¹⁷⁷ What these ‘Arab leaders’ feared was a Vatican statement endorsing the state of Israel, which coming from the pope would have great weight within the public sphere. The attempts of Arab governments to stonewall the development of a favorable statement to the Jews caused much consternation within the Vatican. Oesterreicher contended that before the Second Vatican Council, and its many reforms, the Roman Curia still achieved the majority of its goals through diplomatic endeavors. The failure of the Curia to quiet and pacify the fears of Arabs as to the political nature of the document in turn raised anxieties within the Curia: “Accordingly, a certain amount of insecurity often hampered the Secretariat’s work during the preparatory period and during the Council itself.”¹⁷⁸ Because the Roman Curia continued to operate in the diplomatic sphere, the Church was unable to merely appeal to public opinion and the media to make its case for the document not having a political agenda. The Church had a difficult time convincing the Arab leaders (as well as Jewish ones who wanted to be ‘let in’ the conversation) that the “Declaration was a measure necessary for the inner life of the Church, that she could not renounce it.”¹⁷⁹ In other words, the Catholic Church had no intentions of bowing to any outside pressure or influence because it considered this affair to be strictly internal business.

Other fears that racked the subcommittee during the preparatory years before the Council included the worry that the time was not yet ripe for an announcement on the Jews. Those in the Jewish community were of the opinion that any declaration of the Church on the Jews came much too late. The Holocaust was over: an announcement by the pope in defense of Judaism would have been much more useful and judicious when it could have saved lives twenty years earlier. To others, including the more conservative element within the Vatican, it was too soon to

¹⁷⁷ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 130.

¹⁷⁸ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 131.

¹⁷⁹ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 130.

deliberate on a theological question which had hardly begun to be considered by the Church. Other theological matters, such as the divinity of Christ or the question of the Eucharist had been debated and deliberated over for centuries before an official pronouncement was made. There was not yet a historical foundation of arguments on the issue – any debate or agreement would be too rushed, too hurried. Oesterreicher, along with Cardinal Bea, believed it was a perfect moment for addressing Judaism. The reasons Oesterreicher gave show how committed he was to the renewal of Catholic thought and were a quick rebuttal to all the arguments against the subcommittee. Oesterreicher cited a revival of biblical study and rediscovery of Hebrew, the necessity of the Church to deal with non-believers in the modern world, a refusal to capitulate to opposition and fears of dissension, a need to create an atmosphere of friendship between Christians and Jews and ask forgiveness for Christian injustices, and a strong belief that salvation theology required healing the breach between the Church and the Jews as arguments in favor of it being an opportune time to make a statement on the Jews. He made the case in a speech to the Subcommittee in April of 1961, which was met with applause and general approval.¹⁸⁰ His speech introduced the preliminary study on the Jewish question which Pope John XXIII had asked Cardinal Bea to prepare in October of 1960. The sentiment deeply felt by John Oesterreicher, and the other members of the Subcommittee, which the study was meant to express, was that “hatred of Jews has a special quality of evil. It violates truth, justice, and love; over and above that, it deals a blow to faith.”¹⁸¹ The preliminary study was then submitted to the Fathers of the Council, along with a number of requests which spoke to the hopes of the Subcommittee that their proposals be taken under due consideration. One of the most interesting requests was that the Council Fathers “proclaim the dignity of every human being as an image of

¹⁸⁰ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 134.

¹⁸¹ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 140.

the Creator, and condemn racism in all its forms.”¹⁸² Racism and its lingering influence within Catholic theology was a special concern of the Subcommittee, who believed that it unjustly prejudiced Catholics against Jews. Since two out of the four main Subcommittee members were Catholic converts, they had a deep personal attachment to the belief that baptism made all Catholics equal in the eyes of the Church. Any suggestion that a Jew, once baptized, still retained some element of Judaism, was a racial statement that flew in the face of Catholic equality. Under Nazi laws which ended after War World II, 15 years previously, a Jew was always a Jew, regardless of his professed religion: Judaism was a matter of blood, not faith. Oesterreicher and Baum, born to Jewish families and converted to Catholicism later in life, wanted to purge the Church of the influences of Nazi propaganda and reinstate the Biblically-based equality of all Christians under Christ.

The submission of the preliminary study and its attached requests were discussed in a number of plenary sessions throughout the spring and summer of 1961. One of the topics under discussion was the commonly used expression “the Jews”, which referenced the common prejudice that the whole community of Judaism could be represented or understood through the actions of one individual. It tended to give credence to the belief that the small group of Jews who stood before Pontus Pilot’s palace in Jerusalem and called for Christ’s crucifixion were representative of all Jews. These small grammatical points of clarification, seemingly trivial, were of the utmost importance to the Subcommittee, because they were fully aware that language plays a fundamental role in imparting beliefs. The minute and particular differences between one word or one phrase and another were important because they held within them shifts in the Church’s attitude. They felt that there was a world of difference, for example, in calling Jews “unfaithful” versus “unbelieving”. Unfaithful suggests that the Jews had broken their covenant

¹⁸² Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 145.

with Abraham and refused to hold proper faith. Unbelieving has a less negative connotation; it suggests that Jews simply did not believe in the same things that Christians did. Being a nonbeliever is a less horrific crime than being unfaithful: for one implies that the Jews were supposed to have faith and they failed to do so and the other makes no such claim. These small changes to the lexicon of Catholic preachers meant a great deal to the Subcommittee, for they were indicative of or would lead to larger changes within Catholic teaching.

Another plenary session took place in the fall of 1961, in which the goals of the declaration were discussed in more practical terms. It was decided that the preliminary study and its requests were much too long to be articulated with the Declaration, and that the Declaration itself should only be concerned with Church teachings, and its practical applications be worked out after the Council itself. A second decision was to not undertake a history of Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism, but rather “delineate the duties of Christians and their correct relationship with Jews”, and in doing so “affirm before the whole world the rights of the Jewish people.”¹⁸³ These decisions reveal that the members of the Subcommittee were worried about the length of the document, and wanted it to be on the shorter side rather than the longer- it was meant to be a summary of the Church’s views rather than a long and complicated theological exposition of them. Another concern of the Subcommittee was the many questions that the Church had yet to answer, and if they should be addressed within the Declaration. For instance, what place did Jews hold in God’s present plan? What was the attitude of the Church to be towards them? There was a certain amount of unease with using the word tolerance, and indeed the Council later abandoned all references to it altogether because it assumed a type of condescension and superior righteousness which was not in accord with the definition of religious freedom that the Council

¹⁸³ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 153.

proclaimed.¹⁸⁴ The meeting concluded with two decisions voted on affirmatively: that a draft concerning the Jews should be written and that all further proposals should be forwarded to another Subcommittee of the Secretariat, On Tolerance and Religious Freedom. The anxieties of Secretariat members, according to Oesterreicher, came not out of a reluctance to engage in the subject or political maneuverings that held no real emotional warmth, but rather from a sincere and heartfelt desire to do this job correctly. The Subcommittee's agreement to forward their work to the Subcommittee On Tolerance and Religious Freedom gives credence to his account: they were concerned enough about their work to submit it to another preparatory subcommittee for review.

The first draft of the Declaration on the Jews, entitled *Decretum de Iudaeis*, was written during a Subcommittee session from November 27 to December 2 of 1961. For the occasion, which required extra work to be done quickly, a number of new members were added to the Subcommittee, almost doubling its small size. The new members included Bishop Émile de Smedt, who introduced the Declaration on Religious Liberty to the Council, Cardinal Jan Willebrands, who later took over Bea's role as President of the Secretariat, and Francis Davis. Given the important roles these men played in the Council and Bea's co-option of them for contributing to the Declaration, we can consider that they too, felt strongly about the Subcommittee's work. The work of the expanded Subcommittee was a short four paragraph document explaining the nature of the Church and why it must protest all forms of Jew-hatred, quickly submitted to the Central Preparatory Commission so that it might be brought before the Second Session of the Vatican Council. An incident occurred however, to delay that event. As mentioned before, there was a great deal of Jewish and Arab pressure surrounding the contents of the Declaration. Any hint of political interference was sure to bring the work on the Declaration

¹⁸⁴ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 154.

to a grinding halt, which happened in the late fall of 1961 when the World Jewish Congress appointed a representative to serve in Rome and report as an advisor on Christian affairs concerning Jews. The world press reported this appointment as an attempt by the World Jewish Congress to send an observer to the Vatican Council, which offended a number of Curia officials, since such observers are never appointed without express approval and invitation by the Vatican. The representative in question was also an Israeli official who worked in the Ministry of Religious Affairs. His assumed participation in the Council was trumpeted by Arab governments as blatant preferential treatment towards Jews. The minor misunderstanding blew up any attempts of the Subcommittee to have their draft fairly evaluated without concerns of political interference, and in their last meeting in 1962, they voted to remove the draft from the agenda of the Second Session. In hearing of this, the Chief Rabbi of Rome addressed a message to the Council Fathers expressing his hope that the issue would not be set aside, for “Jews are fully conscious of the great significance of this Council and of the effects that it will have on the spiritual and political life of many nations.”¹⁸⁵ Many others also felt that this topic was too important to be set aside for temporal political considerations. Cardinal Bea himself passionately appealed to Pope John XXIII in a memorandum outlining their work and the current situation, arguing that “the incredible and appalling crimes of National Socialism against six million Jews—atrocities for which the ground had been prepared by an extensive propaganda machine – require a purification of spirit and conscience.”¹⁸⁶ Cardinal Bea himself was motivated by the memories of his work as a nuncio in the Near East, believing that “there is a real need for inner renewal” in the Church, which the Holocaust unveiled.¹⁸⁷ Bea also cited the work of the World Council of Churches in 1948 and 1961, suggesting that he agreed with their decisive sentiment and was

¹⁸⁵ Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Dec. 12, 1962; reprinted in Herder Korrespondenz 17, 92.

¹⁸⁶ Cardinal Bea, *Memorandum to Pope John XXIII*, as quoted in: Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 163.

¹⁸⁷ Cardinal Bea, *Memorandum to Pope John XXIII*.

influenced by their firm statements on the un-Christianness of anti-Semitism. Bea considered it to be a danger to the renewal of the Church that the Council endeavored to undertake if the Jewish question was ignored. Pope John XXIII answered his letter on December 13, 1962, with a short note: “We have read Cardinal Bea’s memorandum with care and entirely share his opinion that a profound responsibility requires our intervention.”¹⁸⁸

With Pope John XXIII firmly on the side of Cardinal Bea and his Subcommittee, it was assured that the Jewish question would be neither ignored nor forgotten. In some sense, the efforts of the Arab press to torpedo the Declaration instead gave them strength, for they ensured that the topic stayed in the news and was continually discussed in the public sphere. The sheer amount of press on the political importance of the Declaration to Arab states lent it weight on the world stage. Oesterreicher cited a large amount of media attention paid to the Declaration as being both helpful and damaging, for it was often sensational and not always factually accurate. The secretive nature of the Council’s work meant that it was not clearly understood by either the press or the general public and liable to misinterpretation (as seen in the 1961 fiasco with the World Jewish Congress). In any case, the press attention, as well as the avid support of Pope John XXIII, meant that the Church did not bow to the political pressure of Arab governments and a new draft was written. This time, the draft was added as a short chapter of a longer declaration, to become Chapter IV of the Decree on Ecumenism, and given to the Council in November of 1963, two months after the Second Session opened.

Unfortunately, Pope John XXIII did not live to see the completion of the work he had begun when he called for the opening of the Second Vatican Council. He died on June 3, 1963 after only 4 years on the papal throne. His successor, Paul VI, who was elected a few weeks later, on June 21st, announced the continuation of the Council (which was technically suspended

¹⁸⁸ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 164.

upon the death of John XXIII). The Council, which was resumed again in September, opened with a speech by Paul VI, in which he declared his four main goals for the council: to define the nature of the Church more fully, to renew the Church, to restore greater Christian unity, and to start dialogue with the modern world. In the words of the new pope, the Council's purpose was "to open up new horizons in the Church, and to tap the fresh spring water of the doctrine and grace of Christ our Lord and let it flow over the earth".¹⁸⁹ All of these goals boded well for the continuation of *Nostra Aetate*, for when it was moved to become a part of the Decree on Ecumenism, it became a part of the greater movement for the Church to connect and resolve differences with other religions and to begin to take part in modern discourse and politics.

The Image of the Deputy

The reception of *Nostra Aetate* at the Council was further endangered by the premiere of Rolf Hochhuth's play, *The Deputy* in West Berlin on February 20, 1963. *The Deputy* was a historical drama that follows a young priest, Father Riccardo Fontana, as he tries to bring attention to the plight of the Jews in Europe and begs the Vatican to issue protests. Hochhuth based Riccardo's character on the true story of a German priest, Bernhard Lichtenberg, who asked to share the fate of the Jews and was sent to his death at Dachau.¹⁹⁰ The play had a strong historical element which stayed true to the chronology of the war and references a great many infamous characters of the Holocaust, including Adolf Eichmann and an Auschwitz doctor clearly modeled on Josef Mengele. All of the truly horrific aspects of the Holocaust were included in the play, including the bizarre Nazi scientific experiments on Jewish children, vivid descriptions of gas chamber death scenes, ghetto roundups, forced sterilizations of the mentally insane, and killings of pregnant Jewish women and infants. These cruel acts are contrasted with

¹⁸⁹ Xavier Rynne, *The Second Session: The Debates and Decrees of the Vatican Council II, September 29 to December 4, 1963*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Company, 1963, p. xi.

¹⁹⁰ Rolf Hochhuth, *The Deputy*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), p. 14.

the barbarity and casual affectations of Nazi officers, who play cards, bowl, flirt with women, drink, and make jokes. Throughout, Father Riccardo acts as the voice of moral reason and outrage, who lays bare all of the evil acts of the Nazis and exposes the hypocrisy within the Catholic Church. The most controversial aspect of the play, was of course, that Hochhuth created it as a ‘Christian tragedy’. One of the pivotal moments in the play is when Father Riccardo finally makes it before Pope Pius XII to plead for a papal intervention when Roman Jews are rounded up ‘under the pope’s very windows’. Hochhuth displays Pope Pius’s refusal to act as heartless, purely political, and flying in the face of true Christian brotherhood. Each of the pope’s carefully reasoned arguments as to why he will not lodge a protest are exposed as superficial – weighed against the tragedy of the Jewish plight they are meaningless. Riccardo strongly condemns Pius XII for not acting:

“A deputy of Christ who sees these things and nonetheless permits reasons of state to seal his lips- who wastes even one day in thought, hesitates even for an hour to lift his anguished voice in one anathema to chill the blood of every last man on earth- that Pope is... a criminal.”¹⁹¹

Through the voice of Riccardo, Hochhuth makes the argument that Pius XII’s silence was utterly indefensible and that the burden of guilt for the Holocaust should be laid firmly upon his shoulders, as well as on all Catholics who did not act. Riccardo pleads to his father: “you must see that the silence of the Pope in favor of the murders imposes a guilt upon the Church for which we must atone”.¹⁹² The play further contended that the Vatican had knowledge of a multitude of Nazi actions against the Jews for many months, had known also about the deportations scheduled for Rome, but did not act because of political concerns of neutrality. Hochhuth clearly implied that the pope could have saved the lives of thousands of Jews if he had chosen to intervene, and portrayed Pius XII as cold, unfeeling, calculating, and political – along

¹⁹¹ Hochhuth, *The Deputy*, p. 102.

¹⁹² Hochhuth, *The Deputy*, p. 156.

with other members of the Curia, who openly display anti-Semitic attitudes, hinting that the Jews are getting what they deserve, because “The Jews have long provoked the Germans, you know.”¹⁹³

The overwhelmingly negative and condemnatory nature of the play sparked a veritable firestorm of media attention, described by one playwright and critic as “the largest storm ever raised by a play in the whole history of drama.”¹⁹⁴ One of the consequences of the play’s popularity was to increase the amount of scholarly debate and public awareness of the Holocaust. One New York Post editorial warned that “to avoid the subject would make our generation guilty of the same kind of silence of which Hochhuth accuses Pope Pius XII.”¹⁹⁵ Hochhuth’s play certainly instigated a huge number of researched articles either defending or attacking Pope Pius XII’s actions and supposed ‘silence’. Many of these articles begin by referencing the play itself and then going on to nuance Hochhuth’s portrayal of the pope¹⁹⁶. In a larger sense however, *The Deputy* raised questions about guilt and responsibility. One journalist commenting on the play pointed out that “There has never been a full assessment in the West of the blame of the Allied leaders who, when asked to do things that might have saved many Jewish lives, asserted the higher urgencies of war diplomacy and strategy.”¹⁹⁷ Many writers of course, vigorously took up the defense of Pope Pius XII’s character, denouncing the play and pointing out its historical inaccuracies and that it was merely a work of drama, mostly fiction. What *The Deputy* did not instigate was apathy: issues and complexities of the Holocaust which had lain dormant for almost two decades rose into the public view to be debated and discussed.

¹⁹³ Hochhuth, *The Deputy*, p. 117.

¹⁹⁴ Eric Bentley, ed., *The Storm over the Deputy*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ Bentley, *Storm over the Deputy*, p. 36.

¹⁹⁶ See for example John S. Conway, “The Silence of Pope Pius XII”, *The Review of Politics*, 27 (Jan., 1965) pp. 105-131.

¹⁹⁷ Bentley, *Storm over the Deputy*, p. 37.

The play's debut came at an awkward time for the members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. It significantly raised the level of public scrutiny aimed at their work just as a draft of their declaration was scheduled to appear before the Second Vatican Council. *The Deputy* also reshaped and refocused attention on the issue of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism had long been discussed by interfaith groups and councils as a problem found in all Christian religions. Hochhuth showcased anti-Semitism as particularly present and active within Catholicism, perhaps even found within the highest levels of the Roman Curia. The stakes for the reception of Cardinal Bea's draft were raised considerably.

Chapter Four: *Nostra Aetate* before the Second Vatican Council

The debate on Ecumenism, over which Cardinal Bea presided as the leader of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, took place during the last two weeks of the Council's second session, from November 18th to December 2nd, 1963. On the second day of the debate, Cardinal Bea personally introduced Chapter IV, the draft regarding Jews that he had spent two years preparing. The announcement was met with applause, which was something of a rarity at Council proceedings. Indeed, "nothing the Council had discussed so far generated so much warmth of feeling," according to the 4-volume inside account of Vatican II written by an attending observer under the pseudonym Xavier Rynne.¹⁹⁸ Bea's speech to the Council began with a direct plea to get right to the heart of the material and not linger over political questions, for "there is no national nor political question here. Especially there is no question of acknowledging the State of Israel on the part of the Holy See". Instead, Bea was quick to emphasize that "There is only treatment of a purely religious question."¹⁹⁹ The purpose of this 'brief decree' was simply

"to call to the attention of Christ's faithful these truths concerning the Jews proposed by the Apostle [St. Paul] and contained in the deposit of faith and to do this so clearly that in dealing with the children of that people the faithful will act in no other way than did Christ the Lord and his Apostles, Peter and Paul."²⁰⁰

Cardinal Bea carefully emphasized the purpose of *Nostra Aetate* was to renew the teachings of Christ as found in the Bible regarding Jews, to 'return' to those truths and reiterate them clearly. This was necessary, Bea believed, specifically because of the crimes of German National Socialism committed in the name of anti-Semitism. Bea called on the Council to remember the

¹⁹⁸ Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 217. Rynne's true identity, although the subject of much speculation, was never revealed.

¹⁹⁹ Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 218.

²⁰⁰ Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 220.

deaths of “several millions of Jewish people” when considering this new decree, a strong emotional appeal which was hard to distance against. A communiqué on Cardinal Bea’s speech was released by the Council to the press, the purpose of which was to assure the world at large, and in particular, Jewish communities, of the good will of the Church on this matter. According to Rynne, the release “received widespread approval” among everyone who read it.²⁰¹ Cardinal Bea’s speech was immediately followed by an address from the Bishop de Smedt, one of the ‘extra’ members of the Subcommittee, on religious liberty, a question which would greatly influence the ideas behind *Nostra Aetate*. Smedt spoke of the two questions facing the Catholic Church which the Decree on Ecumenism would try to answer: “1) can each man claim for himself religious liberty as a sacred right given to him by God? 2) is there, and to what extent is there, a duty on the part of others to recognize the aforesaid religious liberty?”²⁰² At stake within these questions was the freedom of other religions to practice and hold faith without being labeled as ‘unbelievers’ or ‘heretics’. The answers given by the Council would radically alter the way the Catholic Church viewed the several billion other humans on this planet who were not members. Answered positively, the recognition of religious liberty for all humans would give Jews implicit freedom from the hundreds of small injustices previously committed by the Church, such as forced sermons and baptisms. As strongly stated by Bishop de Smedt, “The greatest injury is to prevent a man from worshiping God and obeying God according to the dictate of his own conscience.”²⁰³ Within this statement was the belief that since God is so mysterious, unknowable, and larger than the institution of the Catholic Church could possibly contain, the Church cannot and must not claim to be the only receiver of divine wisdom or truth on Earth. Other religions might also be party to a small portion of divine wisdom, so the

²⁰¹ Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 223.

²⁰² Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 225.

²⁰³ Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 226.

Catholic Church cannot in good conscience ignore or disdain their beliefs, but instead should accept that their beliefs might hold grains of truth which deserve respect and attention. For Judaism, this meant that Jews should no longer be held to the false stereotype of stubbornly hanging onto a dead religion. The recognition of other religions' right to exist and be professed by men and women as divine truth created a whole new vocabulary for Catholics. Were missions of conversion still legitimate? Were all unbelievers still damned to hell? The Council session dealt with these questions and many more which arose following the end of the Bishop's speech.

To Cardinal Bea's proposal, a few objections were raised. The strongest among them was the objection of singling out Jews for special treatment within the larger context of Ecumenism, which was meant to address Protestants and other Christians. One Cardinal asked why the text should not also address other religions, and why singly the Jews. Another member stated that "If we are to discuss the Jews, then we should likewise take up the question of Moslems"²⁰⁴ Anxieties were raised over the lack of practical advice within the decree, which did not specifically address how dialogue was to be formed. The Archbishop of Tokyo wanted it to be "brought out more clearly that the church respected truth wherever it was found, among non-Christian religions as well."²⁰⁵ More conservative elements demanded that the schema on Ecumenism be dropped entirely because it was the right only of the Catholic Church to evangelize.

Clearly, opening the way for recognizing religious liberty also opened a lot of other theological doors, many of which the Council members were unwilling to walk through. According to Rynne, "while a majority of the council was clearly in its favor, the tenor of the remarks on the floor, amply reported to the world press, could give the impression that things

²⁰⁴ Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 239.

²⁰⁵ Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 238.

were worse than they really were.”²⁰⁶ Because of the controversy especially surrounding Chapters 4 and 5, it was agreed that they be voted upon separately, and later on in the Council. The second session closed on 4 December without a vote on either chapter, relegating them to the next session. To many Church Fathers, the issue of the Jews was minor and relatively unimportant compared to the decrees on Christian ecumenism. To the world at large however, it was equally as, if not more important, because of the media attention and Jewish anticipation of the document. The heightened tension surrounding the document sprang in no little way from the level of attention that the play *The Deputy* had brought to both the Holocaust and the Vatican. One of the reasons that Chapter IV on the Jewish question was moved back from the Council’s agenda was Pope Paul’s upcoming pilgrimage to Jerusalem in January, which he did not want jeopardized by the controversy that was sure to surround a Council vote on the Jewish issue. However, he neither publically announced his reasoning nor gave assurances that the matter would be taken up again in the 3rd session, prompting fears that it would fall through the cracks and be soon forgotten.

Between the 2nd and 3rd sessions of the council, the draft went through an extraordinary number of re-writes, which included re-naming the document “On the Jews and Non-Christians” and relegating it to the appendix of the Declaration on Ecumenism. This draft was introduced by Cardinal Bea to the Third Session of the Council on September 14, 1964, after which it was debated vigorously from the 28th to the 30th. Cardinal Bea urged the Council to accept this draft for a vote, since it held no political connotations and was strongly reminiscent of the earlier draft presented in the previous session. The text began by referencing the ancient shared past of Christianity and Judaism, and then rejected the spread of teachings that “expose[d] the Jewish people as a rejected nation” or “impute[d] to the Jews of our time that which was perpetrated in

²⁰⁶ Rynne, *Second Session*, p. 243.

the Passion of Christ.”²⁰⁷ The text further entreated against “any discrimination or vexation of human beings on grounds of their race, color, social status or religion” and asked Christians to “behave seemly among gentiles” and “maintain peace with all men”.²⁰⁸ Of the writing of this document, Xavier Rynne noted that “no other conciliar document probably has been subject to so many influences and counterinfluences,”²⁰⁹ in reference to the extreme political pressures put upon the Vatican by both Jewish and Arab protests. What was lost through this pressure was the stronger language of the 1963 version which specifically rejected the Jewish crime of deicide. In addition, there was now a marked reference to the “Christian hope” of the eventual conversion of all Jews to Catholicism, which Rynne described as “presented in such a way as to suggest that this was to be the dominant note governing Catholic-Jewish relations.”²¹⁰ Reports circulated throughout the media that the document had been ‘watered down’ and ‘muted’ to a considerable degree, causing consternation among Jewish communities.

The debate on the floor of the Council centered around these changes as well. The face of the conservative bloc within the Roman Curia, Cardinal Ruffini, took a position that not only should the term ‘deicide’ be rightfully dropped, but also that the document should support a more ‘quid pro quo’ relationship between Christians and Jews. He referred to the lives of Jews that Christians had saved from the Nazis and asked just as Christians were asked to love Jews, so Jews should be called upon to love Christians. Never mentioned in Rynne’s account, but included within the pages, is a copy of an anti-Semitic pamphlet that was distributed to the bishops on the floor the third session.²¹¹ The pamphlet, which warns against a conspiracy of Jews

²⁰⁷ Xavier Rynne, *The Third Session: The Debates and Decrees of Vatican Council II September 14 to November 21, 1964*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1964), p. 368.

²⁰⁸ Rynne, *Third Session*, p. 369.

²⁰⁹ Rynne, *Third Session*, p. 33.

²¹⁰ Rynne, *Third Session*, p. 33.

²¹¹ Rynne, *Third Session*, p. 32.

working to tilt the council in their favor, speaks to the reality that not all Church Fathers were as yet entirely on board with the new interpretations of scripture exhorting brotherly treatment of Jews. There was an active conservative element at Vatican II that did its best to prevent the passage of *Nostra Aetate*. The greater majority however, were warmly in favor of the document, and a great many more archbishops and bishops stood up the next day to urge that the previous text be restored, some asking for a further emphasis on the Christian relationship with Islam. One archbishop specifically urged that the document be used as a defense against the character attacks on Pius XII. Again the disagreements surrounding the text were shaped by outside pressures: how much should the Church take into account the volatile politics of the Middle-East and ‘placate’ Arab fears versus how much should the Church strive to apologize and make amends for previous wrongs done to Jews? Much in evidence however, was the sincere desire by a great many members of the Council to reach out and communicate with their Jewish brethren, especially motivated by the Holocaust. The Cardinal of Strasbourg spoke of “striving for a sincere dialogue with all people of this age” and that it was “demanded by our times that the Council promote especially the dialogue with the Jews.”²¹² Another speaker asked for “a speedy end to every kind of racial and religious hatred” and a need to keep “constantly before our eyes the positive value of the Jewish soul of our time”²¹³ The debate, which took three days and included speeches by some 34 separate individuals, ended with the consensus that the text be sent back to the Secretariat for further revision, again delaying a final vote.

After this decision to revise Cardinal Bea’s draft, there was a great deal of backroom political maneuvering by opponents of the document to table it completely. Appeals were made to the Pope to intervene directly. Rynne describes the Declaration on the Jews as being “treated

²¹² Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 205.

²¹³ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 209.

as a kind of theological football tossed back and forth behind the scenes, but never actually leaving the jurisdiction of the Secretariat.”²¹⁴ Instead of being thrown out, the declaration was expanded to include the concerns that had been present during the September debates. The Subcommittee on the Jewish Question was temporarily enlarged, and they entirely revised the draft so as to include the Church’s attitude towards all non-Christian religions. The new aim of the declaration was

“not to present in an exhaustive manner the world religions with their faults and weaknesses, but rather to point to the bonds between peoples and their religions that serve as a basis for dialogue and cooperation. Hence, it takes more notice of that which unites with one another.”²¹⁵

Within this new draft was a concerted effort to reach out to all other religions of the world, not merely those which had a special relationship with Christianity. Oesterreicher declared this version of the Declaration to be a sign of great hope and optimism, a signal that Catholics had begun to look beyond the righteousness of their own salvation and consider the grace present in other beliefs. The revised Declaration suddenly assumed a much greater importance that was originally envisioned, with a more universal message aimed at promoting peace and understanding. Included in the new text were sections on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and the general unity of humanity, which prefaced two sections on Judaism. It was renamed the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions and presented before the Council on November 18th. Two days later, the last day before the closing of the session, the Declaration was voted on for approval by 2,313 Church Fathers and passed by a resounding majority. This vote meant only that the text was ‘approved’ by the Council and would, at the next session, be voted on to see if it was to be promulgated, or officially advanced as the final word of the Council.

²¹⁴ Rynne, *Third Session*, p. 67.

²¹⁵ *Schema Declarationis de Ecclesiae Habitudine ad Religiones Non-Christiananas* (1965).

The Arab reaction was quite forceful. A semi-official Syrian radio broadcasted two days before the vote a forceful denunciation of the Declaration:

“Why did the Church not have the courage to display the same favorable attitude when millions of Jews were persecuted by the Nazis? Can the Church find no more favorable time to rehabilitate the Jews than when they are persecuting the Arabs?”²¹⁶

In addition, the Catholic community in Damascus sent a protest to the pope warning him that the Council’s decision would have real repercussions for Catholics living in the Middle East. From these protests, and many others, it was manifest to both the public and the Church Fathers that this was not a dead issue, to be discussed in scholarly leisure at a safe distance several hundred years removed from the violent event. The wounds of the Holocaust had not even begun to be fully understood by the public, let alone healed. Just like the actions of the Catholic Church during the Holocaust, its actions in the aftermath had consequences which reverberated across the world. In the months before the fourth and final session of Vatican II, it was often voiced among members of the Secretariat that “it was morally impossible to pass a Declaration which might result in tumult, killings, and misery.”²¹⁷ Many feared that the Declaration would heighten or dramatically escalate physical and mental oppression of Christians who lived in the Middle East. Yet, at stake if the Declaration was quietly pushed aside, was the moral credibility of the Church. The Bishop of Würzburg asked of the Secretariat, “Will the Church take the road of incorruptible truth and justice or that of tactics, of diplomacy, and of least resistance?”²¹⁸ Interestingly, his language reflects the very judgment which Hochhuth leveled against the Church. The members of the Secretariat, in whose hands Pope John XXIII had entrusted the creation of this message, were extremely aware of what it would mean if they failed to publish it.

²¹⁶ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 237.

²¹⁷ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 248.

²¹⁸ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 250.

It would be tantamount to passing by the same opportunity which had been offered to Pope Pius XII – the chance to speak up on the side of moral right, in the face of excruciating political pressure to stay silent and avoid the issue. As Oesterreicher remembered it, “The whole world knew that the Declaration had already been accepted by the Fathers, the whole world was waiting for its promulgation.”²¹⁹

The Declaration on the Jews, now folded within the larger Declaration on Relations with Non-Christians, was put before the Fourth Session for a vote on October 14th and 15th of 1965. Even though it was assured that a great majority of Council members would approve the text, it was a matter of anxiety if there would be enough ‘no’ votes to withhold the required unanimity a document needed to pass. A large number of pamphlets were distributed on the floor of the Council, hoping to sway opinions at the last moment. The contents of these pamphlets, more than anything else, revealed the true spirit of opposition to the Declaration on the Jews. A number of them were rabidly anti-Semitic and condemned the Declaration using the same medieval, polemical language that was commonly heard from most pulpits before the Holocaust. There was even a bomb threat made against the basilica where voting took place, threatening to blow all the Council members up if the Declaration passed. Notwithstanding these last ditch attempts, which if nothing else goes to show that there will always be people who hate, the Declaration on the Jews passed with 1,763 votes for, and only 250 against, assuring its promulgation.²²⁰ Those who were in favor of a stronger worded text, one which explicitly included the word ‘deicide’, largely voted in favor of the Declaration regardless, fearing that they might not get another chance to pass anything at all. Another ‘solemn vote’ was taken on October 28th, giving Council members a chance to change their votes and thus give greater unity to stand behind the Declaration. This

²¹⁹ Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p. 250.

²²⁰ Rynne, *Fourth Session*, p. 165.

time the vote stood at 2,221 for and only 88 against. Pope Paul VI addressed the crowd within St. Peter's on October 28th, the occasion of the promulgation of not just the Declaration on the Jews, but a number of other documents. In the close of his speech, filled with joy that “the Church is thinking, the Church is speaking, the Church is growing, the Church is building itself up”, Paul VI also spoke of “the followers of other religions and, among them, those whom one same relationship in Abraham unites, especially the Israelites, objects certainly not of reprobation or disgust, but of respect, love and hope.”²²¹

The final version of the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, begins with a statement of the Church's intent to promote “unity and love among men, indeed among nations.”²²² In pursuit of this goal, the declaration states its intention to explore the common ground between all men, one part of which is religion. The consideration of other religions is given within the context of a greater search for peace and unity for humanity, a sort of universal quest for truth which prompts the Church to profoundly respect divine revelations regardless of their source. Gone is the rhetoric of righteous superiority that proclaimed that Catholicism was the one, true religion and all others are damned. Instead, the language of *Nostra Aetate* is extremely humble and full of love and respect. Hinduism, for example, is praised for its search for “freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust.”²²³ There is also a strong declaration of “severe reverence” for “those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teaching which, though differing in many aspects from the ones [the Church] holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men”.²²⁴

²²¹ Rynne, *Fourth Session*, p. 296.

²²² Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Oct. 28, 1965.

²²³ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*.

²²⁴ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*.

During the Council, and indeed reflected in the final Declaration, there was enormous tension between this new respect and recognition of other religions and the need/aim of the Catholic Church to evangelize. It was asked if missions were even relevant anymore to Catholicism if people could indeed come to God outside of the Church. This tension, between the belief that the Catholic Church holds the true word of God, and the belief that all religions can ‘reflect a ray of that Truth’, was also much in evidence during the discussion on Judaism. In the New Testament, there are several scriptural passages that speak of the eventual conversion of all Jews to Christianity, which has always been one of the fundamental reasons for forced baptisms/conversions. Quite a few evangelical Christians believe that the Book of Revelation and the ‘end of days’ will only come to pass once all Jews have recognized Jesus as the Messiah, a strong motive for missionizing. How then, can the Church hold that Judaism is a legitimate religion and speaks at least part of the divine truth, if at the same time the Church speaks hopefully of the day when all Jews will convert? The first draft of *Nostra Aetate* did reference that idea of ‘Christian hope’, but the final has much less direct language. Chapter IV, which deals specifically with Judaism and the Jewish people, has a short section that refers to “that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice.”²²⁵ The scriptural foundation of Catholic belief is thus preserved, but not leveled directly at the Jews, which could have been construed as a continuation of the long-held belief that Christianity superseded Judaism, making it irrelevant. It is fairly surprising that the final text toned down the language at all, because the belief that at the end of the world all people will convert to the correct faith is a central tenet of Catholicism. After all, this is a Catholic document meant to be addressed to a Catholic audience. *Nostra Aetate* was in no way meant to be a letter of apology to Jewish, Muslim, or other religious communities. Even though it discusses non-Christians, the

²²⁵ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*.

document's purpose is not to reach out to them. Rather the text was meant to inform Catholics of how they should regard non-Christians and treat them in their daily lives.

One of the criticisms of *Nostra Aetate* made by some was that it was too based on Old Testament characterizations of Judaism. Little is said in the text of the current state of Judaism, instead the majority of Chapter IV references the ancient beginnings and patriarchs that Christianity and Judaism have in common. This is the foundation on which the Council recommends the fostering of “mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.”²²⁶ It is astonishing to realize how far the Church Fathers brought their reappraisal of Judaism. What started out as a desire to correct scriptural interpretations which fostered anti-Semitism blossomed into language of respecting all religions and hopes of mutual learning and conversation. The text ends with explicit reproofs against any type of discrimination, based on “race, color, condition of life, or religion” and calls instead for every Christian to follow Christ’s lead and “to live for their part in peace with all men.”²²⁷

Nostra Aetate, while reaching far beyond its original goal of Jewish tolerance, still kept its original purpose. The Declaration, even through all its drafts and rewrites, managed to retain strong language decrying anti-Semitic teachings, thought, and behavior, as well as rejecting traditional accusations of Jewish “crimes”. Specifically, it stated that “the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from Holy Scriptures.”²²⁸ The work that Jules Isaac had begun in the 1940’s to recast Christian perspectives of Jews using scriptural passages was still much in evidence. Although not all of his original 19 points are there, Chapter IV includes the recognition that many of the Christian Patriarchs including Moses and Abraham

²²⁶ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*.

²²⁷ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*.

²²⁸ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*

were Jewish, as was Jesus Christ himself and most of his early followers and Apostles. It confirms the bond of Christians and Jews through the Old Testament and Abraham's covenant with God, which Christians still today acknowledge. Most importantly, *Nostra Aetate* rejects the medieval accusations that Jews rejected God when he was made known to them, persisted in a stubborn belief, are today as a whole responsible for Christ's death, and as a result cursed by God. The Church strongly declared that all of these beliefs are no longer consistent with Catholic teachings and therefore anyone professing these beliefs is not a Catholic.

Even though this new interpretation of the Old and New Testaments that favored Jews in a positive light had been widely circulated amongst Catholic and Christian theologians of all denominations for around 20 years before being promulgated by the Catholic Church, it was still fairly new to the Catholic faithful. A year after *Nostra Aetate* became official Cardinal Bea published his own book, *The Church and the Jewish People*, as an address to the Catholic faithful. "The sole purpose of this book", Cardinal Bea wrote, "is to offer a succinct explanation of the document."²²⁹ Cardinal Bea realized that the entire purpose of the Declaration on the Jews would be lost unless it was properly understood and practiced by Catholics. The Declaration, which represents some 4 years of hard work and drafting, is extremely short and is supposed to reflect a series of radical changes within Catholicism which happened within a relatively short period of time. Considering that 1500 years worth of popes had directly spoken out against Jews and legalized restrictions on their economic and religious flourishing, it is astonishing to think of how fast the Catholic Church decided to completely overhaul its rhetoric. Cardinal Bea wanted to further explain and promote understanding of the historical tensions between Catholics and Jews so as to lead into why *Nostra Aetate* was so important and why it should be adhered to. His

²²⁹ Augustin Cardinal Bea, S.J., *The Church and the Jewish People: A Commentary on the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, trans. Philip Loretz, (London: Geoffrey Chapman Limited, 1966), p. 8.

book therefore, which is still fairly short, is the ‘long version’ of the Declaration on the Jews – and included all the reasoning and scriptural proof behind the stated beliefs which for practical purposes could not be fitted into the official text. It is admirable, that in his attempt to shed light on the problem of Christian anti-Semitism, he makes no move to excuse the actions of those who supported it. Instead he wrote, “Naturally, we do not pretend that such a concrete, historical interpretation will explain away every action or statement on the part of authoritative persons in the history of the Church which is contrary to the spirit and the letter of the new conciliar document.”²³⁰ This sentiment, I believe, represents the best spirit of Jewish-Catholic dialogue, which was the passionate, humble, and sincere beliefs of those involved in crafting *Nostra Aetate* to try to effect change within the Church without acting as though doing so made up for past mistakes.

While it was clear that all the way from John XXIII’s mandate to Cardinal Bea to the Fourth Session of the Council that the crimes of the Holocaust and Catholic participation in them were driving factors behind the work on the Declaration, such a purpose was never put into print. There was an animating spirit behind the Declaration, which began perhaps with Jules Isaac, the Apeldoorn Working Group, and the World Council of Churches, but there is little evidence of that within the final text. It is instead necessary, to do as I have attempted, and trace back the ideas within *Nostra Aetate* to their original sources. The Catholic Church reversed centuries of anti-Jewish polemic because it had recently gone through experiences and pressures which made such beliefs completely untenable in the modern world. *Nostra Aetate* was not an apology to Jews for the failures or complicity of the Church during the Holocaust. It was not a cave-in to pressure from Jewish communities or world media following the condemnation of Pope Pius XII. It was an outpouring of love and respect for a religion that had undergone not just one world war

²³⁰ Bea, *Church and the Jewish People*, p. 15.

full of atrocities, but two millennia of them. Most of all, the Catholic Declaration on the Jews was meant as a promise that such prejudice, hatred, and intolerance would not be condoned to continue any longer.

Conclusion

Looking back at the great time span of Catholic-Jewish relations, a birds-eye view leaves one with a cold shiver going up and down the spine. How can we not think of the Holocaust as almost inevitable when reviewing century upon century of denigration, enforced poverty, child-stealing, and violence which continually reinforced the inferiority and contemptibility of the Jewish people? Yet what could be more shocking than the collective failure of our greatest moral authorities, who are supposed to be the last remaining bulwark against evil, to stop such a horrendous monstrosity? There is substantial historical evidence to suggest that all of the major Allied powers knew, to a great extent, what was taking place in German-occupied countries. American bombers flew right over the train tracks which daily led thousands of Jews to their deaths at Auschwitz. Yet there was no government-backed or supported effort to change their fates. That the Vatican also, knew and did not act officially is also certain. The Holocaust invaded the heart of the Catholic religion itself when over a thousand Roman Jews were rounded up and deported from “under the pope’s very windows”, within viewing distance of St. Peter’s Basilica.

The Holocaust took place during a time of vast political struggle and turmoil, and as always during a war, there were military considerations that came first. No one was particularly keen to stick out their necks politically for a group of people whose historical image was cast as the ultimate ‘other’: those responsible for the Savior’s death and eternally cursed by God. Religious anti-Semitism, alive and well in the 20th century, was hopelessly mixed with racial ideologies promoted by National Socialism. Of course there were individuals who escaped its taint and did all in their personal power to resist Nazism, but by and large even Europe’s churches were sucked into the void. Mussolini and Hitler were both helped into power by the

power and influence of the Catholic Church, which suspended its own political activities in exchange for assurances of access to Europe's youth and education system. The Vatican was by and large mostly concerned with the health of its own organization and infringement on the rights of Catholic priests and converts. From the *Risorgimento* onwards, the Catholic Church had been engaged in a battle with Italy to retain sovereign rights, especially in the Papal States. Concern had been widespread during the *Risorgimento* about giving Jews the right to vote for fear they might exercise undue power over Catholics and the Catholic religion. The years leading up to the Second War World were spent by the Catholic Church negotiating its religious survival and independence in an increasingly secular Europe. During both War World I and II the Church positioned itself as a neutral arbitrator, keen on holding its status as an intermediary and hopeful that it could bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflicts. Working almost entirely as a diplomatic state, the Church constrained itself to protesting specific instances of Concordat violations rather than broad, sweeping denouncements of National Socialism. In holding so hard to its neutral status, the Church felt it could not outright oppose the Germans or condemn their policies- and besides, the Germans were keeping at bay the evil forces of Bolshevik Russia. In this uncertain and tenuous climate, as the Vatican balanced itself between the violent forces which made Europe their battleground, it was the Jewish people who slid through the cracks.

Who was looking out for them? While the Catholic Church vigorously defended and protected its own members, including converts, it did not pursue a policy designed to mobilize resources in assistance for Jews. Jews were different, not Christian- perhaps deserving of their fate. Not a single word was spoken by Pope Pius XI or Pius XII which explicitly condemned Nazi actions towards the Jews or expressed regret for their plight. This is exactly why it is so astonishing that 20 years later the highest authorities within the Vatican promulgated a document

which named anti-Semitism as un-Christian and the Jews as their spiritual brethren. Very little attention in the aftermath of the Holocaust was brought to the actions of the Vatican during the War in regards to the Jews (or for that matter, any organization or governments' actions regarding the Jews during the War). A few ecumenical and interfaith councils met and discussed the topic, but the movement to recognize the effects of religious anti-Semitism were both slow to begin and fairly outside of mainstream Catholicism.

The details and full knowledge of the Holocaust were (and are still) so far outside of human comprehension that when it first came to light it was like a shock to the system. Historical accounts and personal memoirs of the Holocaust began gathering international attention in the late 1950s and early 1960s, coinciding with high profile capture of one of the biggest Nazi criminals, Adolf Eichmann. This also happened to coincide with a dramatic inner rejuvenation of the Catholic Church which intended to sweep aside old traditions and attune itself more fully to modernity. Masses, which had been conducted in Latin since the very beginning, were translated into and performed in vernacular languages. What had once been cold, distant, mysterious, and somewhat outside of the lay understanding was put into reach. In this context, Catholic theologians began to come to terms with their own roles in the Holocaust. *The Deputy* painted a picture that few, if any, Catholics wished to recognize as themselves- and while it was certainly a fictionalized and oversimplified account of the Catholic Church's responsibility for the Holocaust, many saw an uncomfortable ring of truth in it. It could not be denied that Catholic priests were among the many who reiterated the vitriolic themes of Nazi ideology. Had the Catholic Church been tainted? *Nostra Aetate* became desperately important for many within the Vatican as a way of recognizing the errors of its own history. It was part of a greater renewal and cleansing spirit sweeping the Church, but it was also a passionate issue for many who had borne

personal witness to the Holocaust. It was spurred on by deepening relationships within the Catholic and Jewish communities, as both realized they had suffered by the perversion of what ought to have been a mutually beneficial association between the two religions. The pervading spirit was one of recognition and regret- that they should have so much in common and yet have gotten off on so wrong a track. It continues to be a source of amazement for me however, that *Nostra Aetate* managed to happen at all. Decades have yet to lessen the sting and complications of the Holocaust- it is still highly charged and confusing. Anti-semitism was deeply rooted in the historical fabric of Christian Europe and left no corner of society untouched. The 1960s were the very beginning of the debate- and there was plenty of opposition to a document that appeared to favor the state of Israel. There was at the time the very real threat of violence to the Christian minority living in the Middle East, and those bishops representing the region were among the Declaration's strongest opponents. In spite of this opposition, in spite of the constant media attention, in the face of accusations of moral failure, the Catholic Church presented in 1965 a face to the world which represented a huge victory for Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Sanctioned by the pope himself, the burgeoning movement was given room to grow both theologically and socially as it was fostered and protected by the Church. I think the wisdom of *Nostra Aetate* lies in its purpose to uncover the truth of the past and correct present-day injustices rather than demand blank slate forgiveness for all wrongs. This January 17th saw the celebration of an Italian Church holiday begun in 1990: Catholic-Jewish Dialogue Day, a sign that the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* remains firmly alive half a century later.

Appendix: Nostra Aetate, Chapter IV: The Declaration on the Jews

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

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

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

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation, nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading. Nevertheless,

God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle. In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).

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

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

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

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It

is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.²³¹

²³¹ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Oct. 28, 1965.

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