

Jewish-Christian Ceasefire

Relations Never Better

A. James Rudin

In 1967 the American Christian community was criticized for its lack of support for Israel during those terrible weeks of dread when the publicly threatened Arab invasion of Israel drew closer with each passing day. But in 1973 it was different. This time there was no long period of escalating warlike actions coming from Israel's Arab neighbors. Instead, Egypt and Syria shattered the internationally sanctioned ceasefire by commencing full-scale armed hostilities on Judaism's holiest day, Yom Kippur. Almost immediately many American Christians reacted in shock and outrage. Dr. Robert Campbell, the general secretary of the American Baptist Churches, said: "The attack on Israel by Egypt and Syria as reported by our government and the United Nations observation group was a violation of international law and a threat to the right of Israel to exist as a state." Some Christians condemned the Arab attack as a "travesty," a "profanation" and a "criminal act of war."

Following the war's outbreak the American Jewish Committee received hundreds of statements from Christian representatives. The response was, as *Newsday* described it, a "groundswell of support for Israel." This groundswell came from mainline Protestant churches, Roman Catholic leaders, Evangelicals and black churchmen. Thus, the first real difference from 1967 is a quantitative one; the sheer number of public Christian statements is much greater. But there is a significant qualitative difference as well.

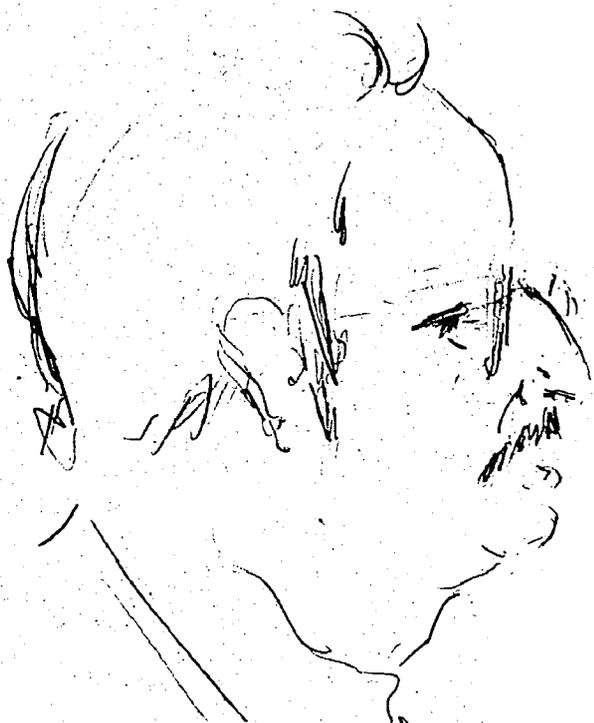
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In 1973 even those Christians who have long been critical of some aspects of Israeli policy publicly declared that Israel as a state must continue to exist, and that there can be no real Middle East peace settlement without this basic condition. A Toronto Christian statement whose signers included Father Edward A. Synan, President of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Father Gregory Baum, Professor at St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto, Alan T. Davies, professor at Victoria College of the University of Toronto, and the Reverend Herbert Richardson, also a professor at St. Michael's College, declared that "Israel can be criticized as any other nation can be criticized, but it is profoundly wrong to oppose Israel because of its Jewish foundations, and to seek to dismantle its Jewish character, as the anti-Zionists invariably desire."

Dr. Arnold T. Olson, President of the Evangelical Free Church of America, voiced another concern: "... this attack lends further credence to Israel's need for defensible borders." The United States Catholic bishops called for a "comprehensive political settlement" that would include "recognition of the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state with secure boundaries." The bishops also made reference to the Palestinians by calling for "recognition of the right of the Palestinian Arabs . . . inclusion of them as partners in any negotiations, acceptance of their right to a state and compensation for past losses . . . by Israel but also by other members of the international community."

A distinguished Christian leadership group, including many American denominational officials, placed an advertisement in the *New York Times* that called upon Egypt and Syria to exchange prisoners of war with Israel immediately. It was clear that American churchmen had learned from the Vietnam war how POWs can be used as pawns in peace talks.

The memory of the Holocaust, the murder of six million Jews by Nazi Germany, is indelibly etched into the Jewish psyche, and this fact helps account for the intense Jewish commitment to Israel. Yet



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the Holocaust has deeply touched some Christians as well. Franklin Sherman, professor at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, said: "... the tragedies which the nations of the world have visited upon the Jews throughout the centuries must not be repeated in our time." And Father Andrew Greeley, Director of the Center for Studies of American Pluralism, declared: "... the war puts the Egyptian and Syrian governments in the same class as the Nazis ... men without any sense of decency, justice or reverence, who will engage in bloody killings for vague political purposes."

The American Christian response to the Yom Kippur war was especially strong among local and regional church bodies. Many councils of churches and their officers issued separate or joint statements supporting Israel's right to exist in peace, including groups in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Washington and southern California, as well as local bodies in Detroit, Portland (Oregon), Omaha, Cleveland, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Syracuse, Springfield (Massachusetts) and Long Island. Several Roman Catholic bishops publicly condemned the Arabs on Yom Kippur, and Episcopal and Methodist bishops also supported Israel. John Harris Burt, Episcopal Bishop of Cleveland, spoke at a mass rally in New York City at the height of the war.

While the local reaction was strong and unequivocal, some national and international Christian bodies failed to note any real moral difference between the Arab attackers and the Israeli defenders. These bodies avoided assessing blame for the Yom Kippur attack, and generally called for a "just and stable political settlement" in the Middle East.

The need for direct peace negotiations between the Arab states and Israel was another theme of the Christian response to the 1973 war. A statement endorsed by Catholic and Protestant leaders in Omaha, including Archbishop Daniel E. Sheehan, rejected the Arabs' "stubborn refusal to negotiate a peaceful settlement," and the Nebraska religious leaders urged "an immediate willingness of all parties to meet for an announcement of peace in the area."

In summary, the American Christian response was extraordinary in its immediate recognition that the very existence of the people and the State of Israel was at stake. That clear perception was especially acute on the local and regional level, where Christian leadership is close to the proverbial man or woman in the church pew. Indeed, a recent Harris poll reports that Americans support Israel in its defense against the Arabs by 68 per cent to 10 per cent. One is hopeful that local Christian leadership will make its feelings and concerns about Israel felt on both the national and international level of church life.

In a time of great peril and anxiety the Jewish people throughout the world welcome Christian support for Israel. The Reverend Otis Moss, Jr., a black Baptist minister from the Cincinnati area, put it most succinctly: "If Israel cannot exist in peace, then no human being is safe anywhere."

The Dialogue Is Over

Malachi B. Martin

The recent Middle East armed conflict has been a paramount occasion for many American Catholics and Jews to realize that their dialogue, begun in the early sixties, was at an end. That conflict did not end the dialogue; but the dialogue, such as it was envisaged by its initiators, had in fact ended sometime between the June, 1967, Six-Day War and the November, 1973, ceasefire.

The reasons for its end now appear obvious: the primary aims entertained by both Catholics and Jews were achieved; and, quite importantly, the chief participants in that dialogue—Catholics, their Church, American Jews and Israel—all had undergone an evolution. They are no longer what they were in 1960.

The dialogue in question began with the 1960 visit of Professor Jules Isaac to Pope John XXIII. Isaac's purpose was simple: to ask that the Ecumeni-

cal Council about to open in Rome should condemn two long-held Christian ideas: that the Jews as a race and as individuals were deicides—Christ-killers—and that the Jewish race bore a special curse for not having become Christian. As a result of this interview, a special subcommission was formed under Cardinal Bea's direction, with the task of preparing proposals for the Council to adopt.

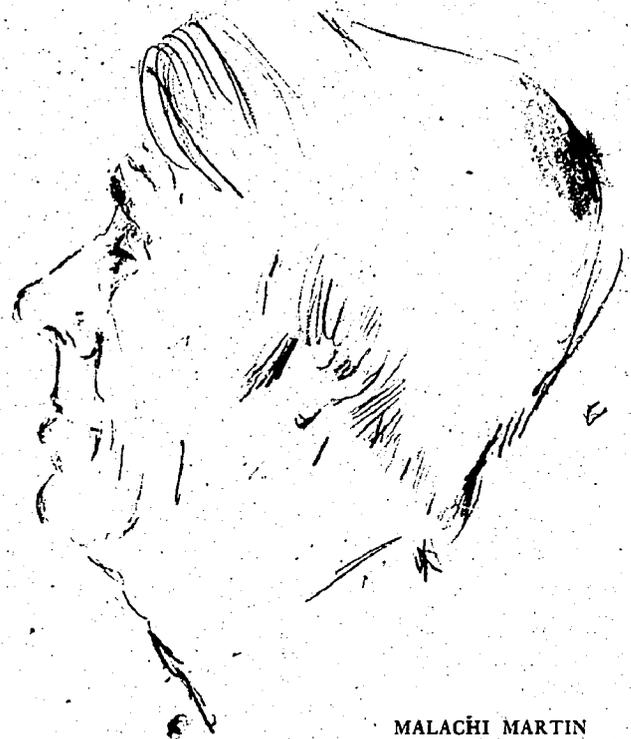
In the early 1960's (when the Council opened) the parties most concerned in this dialogue had, each in its own way, particular interests. Many Catholics—both lay and clerical—had profound guilt feelings about past anti-Semitism and its excesses in the Church. Most American Jews felt that the Roman Catholic Church, as the preponderant part of Christianity, should not only officially condemn its own anti-Semitism, but should also give an example to other Christians and all men. Israeli authorities felt that such an action on the part of the Vatican, as John and Isaac were opening the possibility for the first time in two thousand years, would not only help their national cause, but that it could lead to Vatican *de jure* recognition of Israel—an inestimable plus in Israeli eyes during the 1960's.

American Catholics took the dialogue as part of their continuing Americanization, as part of the homogenizing of their Catholic identity into the pluralistic character of the USA as a nation. A tiny group of Catholics and Jews nourished for a few precious moments the hope that the dialogue heralded the burst of a new unheard-of dawn, a fresh light in which Jews and Christians would discover or rediscover a mutual identity lost somewhere in the clouds and storms and contentions of the first Christian centuries. But, very early on in the dialogue, that hope died stillborn.

However, between 1962 and 1965 the Council did legislate for all Roman Catholics in Isaac's sense. And much more resulted. Due to the Council decisions, an entire process was initiated in Catholic dioceses, parishes and universities throughout the world. Catholic-Jewish organizations were formed. Catechisms and theology manuals were purged. Sermons and lectures took up the theme of the Council's stand on anti-Semitism. Discussion groups were formed. Articles and books were published. Christian ecumenism was broadened to include Christian-Jewish relations.

The dialogue was a vast educational effort that achieved something hopeful and new in terms of outlook on Jews by Roman Catholics. Some Catholics, mindful of those parts of the Talmud and Mishna virulently defamatory of Jesus, would have regarded it all as more truly a dialogue if Jews had been willing to renounce such references as Catholics re-

nounced their own mistaken ideas, writings and actions about Jews. But, all in all, the final results were good. Although no one maintains that all anti-Semitism had been liquidated (it has many different roots), all official and religious basis for anti-Semitism had been removed. Pogroms, Good Friday massacres, dispossession, exile, social discrimination, hate-sermons and all the traits of past official Christian and Catholic anti-Semitism, all these are now impossible. The primary aims of the dialogue, therefore (not all the special interests, however), were achieved.



MALACHI MARTIN

Since then, radical changes have affected all the participants. Israel's position, first of all. Between 1967 and 1973 Israel came into possession of an extra 25,000 square miles of Arab territory together with 1.5 million Muslim Palestinians. As she became more secure militarily, she ceased to need or to want Vatican recognition. As she became increasingly independent in her punitive actions, the opposition to her grew more intense among the 2.5 million Palestinians throughout the Middle East and throughout the Arab nations that played host to Palestinians.

Israel's efflorescence after the victories of the Six-Day War embosomed a new and justified pride in Israel for Jews everywhere. But, at the same time, it reflected the necessary irredentism of Israel's position. She felt more secure, pumped oil and mined ores in Sinai, undertook massive Jewish colonization of Old Jerusalem, created fresh enclaves of security by eliminating a whole series of ancient Muslim towns and villages, and in general benefited from the acquisition of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights as sources of revenue and manpower.

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A corresponding development affected American Jewry. American Judaism got a new coloration: a consciousness of Jewish nationalism embodied in, and somehow palpably shared with, Israel. There was a fresh politicization of Judaism in many Jews. Nothing that good organizing could do was left undone in the USA by an intelligent, immensely well-off, generous, efficiently organized and dedicated Jewry to ensure the pro-Israeli policy of the American Administration and popular sympathy with the position of Israel. No one can with impunity attack or criticize Israel in the media or object to any bill in Congress introduced on Israel's behalf.

Israel, after the Six-Day War, was pitted not as a weakling nation with constricted borders against crushing odds of Arabs, but as an occupying power against one nation (the Palestinians) supported by other (Arab) nations. American Jewry's efforts had to be organized in support of Israel's new position. But this was no longer one of threatened weakness. Israel dominated Middle East skies; her commandos landed where they chose, taking toll of life and property as they chose; relations with black Africa and Europe flourished; tourism abounded. To be critical of Israel's policies was taken by American Jews as a sure sign of anti-Semitism. But obviously this "anti-Semitism" was a far cry from that which the Ecumenical Council had excoriated. There had been a new and rather subtle development. Not only the American Jew's sense of his Jewishness, but the Catholic-Jewish dialogue itself, had been politicized.

Neither Catholics in their bulk nor the Vatican as a chancellery would accept that politicization. The Vatican felt no imperative to take sides in a territorial dispute between nations; Catholics had been interested originally only in the eradication of religious anti-Semitism. Among American Catholic activists there was born, as part of their radicalization over Vietnam and Pakistan, a sympathy for the Palestinians as part of the Third World fighting for economic and political liberation. And American Jewry never made the distinction between the misfortune of Jews because of their Jewish faith and the difficulties of Israel due to her politicoeconomic posture or her exploitation of the lands she occupied militarily.

Third World opposition to Israel was not the only factor which politicized the dialogue. There was and is the "energy crisis" and the continuing power struggle of the USA and the USSR into which Israel, as the Middle East seesaw, is inevitably drawn. Europe and Japan stand in absolute need of Middle East oil. Americans are by all odds going to have a similarly absolute need in the short term of the next ten years. The crisis reaches into American homes and industry. The Arab use of oil as a weapon to modify Israel's stance is only beginning. With all the issues fading into new perspectives in the press and the media, it now seems that a majority of Americans—

including Catholics—are coming to realize that the present Middle East situation has nothing to do with anti-Semitism; but that, as an economic and social and political question with international ramifications, it has everything to do with cooking, lighting, warmth, travel, production, the stock market and many convenience goods produced by the petrochemical industry.

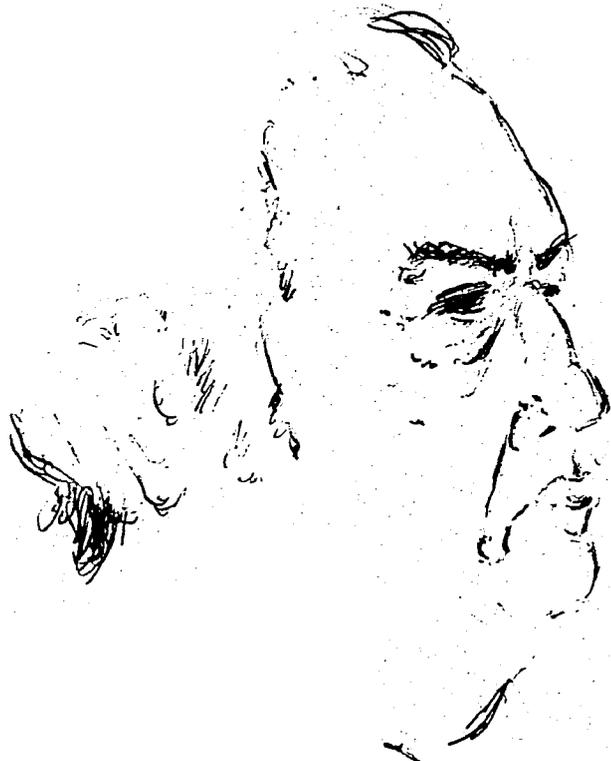
Catholics can find little in their own practical experience to parallel the new Jewish dilemma. For Catholics have ceased for at least a hundred years to have their faith inextricably bound up with a purely political situation (the last time was the Piedmontese seizure of the Papal States in 1870) or their national allegiance complicated by a religious affiliation which involves a second national allegiance. Meanwhile, Israel must face the responsibilities incurred by past successes and an irreversible trend in world affairs today which dictates that Middle East oil is necessary for world peace and prosperity.

A fresh Catholic-Jewish dialogue is always possible and desirable. But it cannot be attempted or begun until a new realization on the part of some is more fully weighed by many: that the substantive basis for the former dialogue has evaporated. And such a fresh dialogue cannot concern the political fortunes of any power or equate those fortunes with the deepest concerns reflected in that fateful meeting of John XXIII and Jules Isaac. It can concern only the perennial bone of contention between these two ancient protagonists since the first century: What, if any, is the relation of Christian and Jew within the optic of a saving god, in a world to be redeemed, and as part of a mankind desperately in need of fresh insights into the moral why and wherefore of human behavior? For this underlies all our difficulties today.

Weighing Alternatives

David R. Hunter

The response on the part of Christians to the ongoing struggle in the Middle East between Israel and the Arab states is limited, restrained and varied. This should not have surprised anyone, for in general Christians do not differ from the great mass of those who make up our nation. We are a people quite generally uninformed about international affairs and not very quickly stirred up by happenings abroad. Some of us are moved by



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such things, but it takes a Pearl Harbor or a half-dozen years of rapidly accelerating U.S. aggression in Indochina to get a response from us. The average Jew has every reason to be concerned about the breaking of the peace in the Middle East. The average Christian, unfortunately, is no more likely to be moved by that than by a coup d'état in Chile or the gathering of troops on the Sino-Russian frontier. Such lack of involvement is not the result of his Christian faith or of anything that happens in his church, but is the result of his culture and of what doesn't happen in his church.

When Christians do respond to the Middle East crisis, they do so usually because they have been exposed directly or indirectly to missionary experience in Arab lands, to the New Left's Third World consciousness, to strong Jewish concerns about Israel or because they have an exercised concern about international affairs and the peace of the world.

The stimulus from missionary experience almost always provides a predisposition to side with the Arabs. One does not live very meaningfully as a missionary in a foreign country without becoming attached to the people of that country, becoming a part of its life and sharing its national destiny. This experience has produced a ready and continuing

tendency to support Arab aspirations in the Middle East.

A new force in this country among Christians and others, even including some Jews, has been the rejection of Israel, considering her an agent of imperialism. Israel has been identified with the United States and with U.S. foreign policy, which has worked to the detriment of Third World nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Christians who are closely related to Jews in their community are likely to be influenced by Jewish concerns, which are fairly solidly in support of Israel. Most Christians, however, are not close enough to Jews, geographically or socially or religiously, to have had this experience.

A fourth very small segment of our population, Christians included, acted out of a concern for, and at least fair knowledge of, international affairs and were the better able to deal with the charges and countercharges which have always obscured the Middle East scene.

Faced with this kind of diversity, the National Council of Churches made, in the best sense of the word, an institutional response. It had to moderate its position to fit the conscientious demands of its total constituency, or else say nothing at all. It chose to speak, and what it said was worth saying, although it pleased neither the Jews nor the Arabs. Jewish institutions also know the limitations of institutional response. B'nai B'rith went through agony dealing with demands to take a position on the Vietnam war, and it had to end by taking virtually no position at all.

The fundamental sin of Christian institutions is not so much that they are not able to speak out forthrightly on matters of controversy, but that they are so inadequate in preparing their individual members to become socially active and responsible in relation to international issues. Individuals are relatively free to represent their own individual conscience on controversial matters, and if they have the courage to do so, the price they must pay in this country is not nearly so great as in some other parts of the world. All they need is knowledge, some moral criteria and just a modicum of intestinal fortitude.

Enough individuals responded in relation to the Yom Kippur war to suggest to me that things are at least a little better now than they were in 1967. On neither occasion, however, was there reason to fear that the limitations characterizing Christian response were interfering with the developing Jewish-Christian dialogue. Such shortcomings and limitations provide stimulus for dialogue. They did so in 1967 and they are doing so today. Jews and Christians need each other, and we are not likely to let our disappointments lead to the fratricidal act of breaking relationship.

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