

# Correspondence

## Catholic-Jewish Dialogue

To the Editors: Malachi Martin's article "Jewish-Christian Ceasefire: The Dialogue Is Over" (*Worldview*, January) is a misrepresentation of Catholic-Jewish relations.

In the first place, the Catholic movement, encouraged by Pope John, to purify the preaching of the Christian gospel from anti-Jewish trends was by no means completed with the work of Vatican II and the subsequent changes in Catholic religious education. On the contrary, the changes that were introduced made Christians more sensitive to the fact that the so-called teaching of contempt (Jules Isaac) is not an accidental addition to the Christian message that can easily be removed. The negation of Judaism is, alas, situated very deeply in the Church's life and closely connected with the proclamation of the gospel. Hence the movement recommended by Pope John still continues.

Is it inevitable that Christians express their faith by affirming themselves as the true Israel (and thereby negating the old Israel)? Is it necessary that Christians define their faith in opposition to the religion of Israel? If a religion that has achieved a cultural dominance such as Christianity attaches to its central

message the negation of Jewish existence, it is hard to see how this can fail to translate itself into social and political realities. Again, then, the movement continues.

Secondly, it is a misrepresentation to claim that the State of Israel, and with it the worldwide Jewish community, has undergone a radical change through the conflict and the victory of the Six-Day War. It is a misrepresentation to depict Israel as an imperialist power dominating the Middle East, bent on oppressing the Palestinian people. The situation of Israel has not changed substantially through the war. Israel remains the successful, but always endangered, resolution of a Jewish liberation movement with roots in Jewish religion and the Zionist reaction against European anti-Semitism. Israel remains the affirmation of a people that had been condemned to victimhood for two thousand years. While the victory of the Six-Day War has introduced Israel to many difficult political problems, problems for which the various parties in Israel propose different political solutions, it is unjust to present Israel, and with it the Jewish community, as oppressors, even if one disagrees with this or that policy of the party in power or certain hard-line groups in Israel. It is unjust to attribute to the Israeli government, which Jewish voices in Israel continue to criticize, some sort of imperialistic design. Where harsh policies are adopted, they are born out of fear and despair.

Surrounded by the vast Arab world; devoid of resources such as oil that make her attractive to the world; isolated from other nations, even from her former friends, because of the oil boycott; and supported only by American power, which may turn out to be unstable and which, in any case, compromises her own social ideals—Israel is more threatened than ever. While the gov-

ernment has had some military success, the problems created by these things remain enormous. No, the situation of the Jews and Judaism in the world has not changed much.

There is no foundation, therefore, in the suggestion that the Catholic Church and the Jewish community find themselves in such altered conditions that the interchange fostered by Pope John and accepted by many prominent members of the Jewish community has come to a stop.

What is true is that after the Six-Day War the Jewish community in North America lost a good deal of interest in dialogue with Christians. At a moment which they regarded as crucial for their survival, they had found themselves surrounded by few friends. After the Yom Kippur War and the oil boycott, I suppose that the Jews are anxious about the outcome of the conflict and frightened by the isolation in which they find themselves. Dialogue with Christians does not seem a very pressing issue at this time. The Jews want to survive and survive as Jews, faithful to the tradition of humaneness and moral ideals. Is dialogue possible to a group that is gravely threatened and must gather all its strength to survive physically and at the same time to retain its soul?

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## ... — Muslim Dialogue

To the Editors: Malachi Martin's cogent remarks concerning Jewish-Christian dialogue in your January, 1974, issue made eminent sense. If dialogue is to continue, or, rather, a new dialogue begin, which seeks to encounter the problem of belief in the modern age, I suggest that it be not a dialogue but a trialogue, i.e., Jewish, Christian and Muslim. As Mr. Martin so lucidly described in his book *The Encounter* (1969), all three faiths spring from the same Near Eastern Semitic culture and  
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ARTHUR GOLDBERG'S  
"THE ROAD TO PEACE IN  
THE MIDDLE EAST"

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the cause of new problems that must then be solved in turn. The Eternal Victim myth accords with no revolutionary ideology because it is, fundamentally, antipolitical. It reflects an attempt to flee from the problems of power to a place of untried "purity."

It is no accident that these contradictions of the Berrigan ideology, concealed toward Asians and blacks, come out in the open where Israel is concerned. For the central archetype of this ideology is nothing else

but the crucified Messiah as Jew, which, for two thousand years, the Church has sought to raise up at the expense of the historical reality of the Jewish people. What Berrigan means essentially when he claims to be a Jew, and even the "true Jew," is that he is Christ, the suffering Messiah, in whose name all actual, finite Jews must be judged apostate.

And so, it seems, we are right back at the beginning, back to that messianic appropriation of Jewish

identity which must ever raise up anti-Judaism as its left hand. It is not surprising, then, that every Jew with a memory, reading the Berrigan speech, must feel himself back at the very font of anti-Semitism, while Christians will remain largely mystified and incomprehending of this charge. Damn Jews! Why don't they ever lie down long enough to be our prime candidates for the Crucified Messiah! With philo-Semites like these, who needs anti-Semites?

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possess the same basic structure of myth and belief, yet each proclaiming itself the one true path to salvation though equally unable to confront the new demands on the spirit posed by twentieth-century technological society.

If there has been a reversal by the Church of its officially sanctioned anti-Jewish prejudice, yet undone is to break down the wall of officially sanctioned ignorance toward Islam ("Mohammedanism" as it is usually erroneously referred to by Christian writers). Rabbi James Rudin ("Relations Never Better") tends to judge the health and quality of interfaith dialogue on the amount of support for the State of Israel; something he would not be so inclined to do if he were addressing himself also to Muslims. On the other hand Jews and Muslims should have something to say to each other, for despite the current Arab/Israeli conflict they have had more fruitful relations in the past than either had with Christianity (see *Jews and Arabs, Their Contacts Through the Ages*, by S.D. Goitein). While Muslims are excluded from the religious establishment here in the United States and are a tiny minority, we should remember that in Asia and Africa they far outnumber the Christians. Islam has been successful in this country in converting Third World-oriented blacks. It may be useful for Christians to understand themselves as members of a group claimed to be an older, "superseded"

form of revelation, as they have claimed the Jews to be.

I do not propose any sort of synthesis between the three great monotheistic faiths. I would hope such a dialogue could bring about a deeper understanding, not only of each other, but of ourselves. Perhaps it would dispel the lack of seriousness of some of our theologians, such as J. A. T. Robinson and Harvey Cox, referred to elsewhere in the January issue [in George W. Forell's review of their most recent books—Ed.]. Perhaps though we may not reach any accord on the Middle East conflict, the reaching out to each other, the attempt to define and assert the Spirit among men as carried through a common Semitic origin, could strike a spark to kindle the spirit of peace in the Middle East, the all-Holy One sending his mercy on the land of the Holy.

Shalom, Salaam, and Pax.

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## Christian Opinion: The Mideast War

To the Editors: The short article by David Hunter ("Jewish-Christian Ceasefire: Weighing Alternatives," *Worldview*, January) explaining the "institutional response" of the National Council of Churches to the recent Middle Eastern war is interesting, not so much as a defense of the NCC position (personally, I feel that NCC has no compulsive reason to take any stand at all, and I would hope that in future it and my local church would emulate

B'nai B'rith on Vietnam and take no "position"), but as an example of NCC's political and spiritual failings.

Hunter, a high official of NCC, does not even mention the two most common categories of Christian opinion, sometimes overlapping, which make up the larger part of the heavily pro-Israeli response which is exposed by every public opinion survey. He mentions the inheritance from Christian missionaries to Arab countries (certainly minute in terms of the numbers of American Christians affected), the New Left syndrome (which can't possibly affect more than 5 or 10 per cent of American Christians, even though it may be important to twice that percentage of the clergy), the direct influence of American Jews on American Christians (probably substantial, but to some extent self-canceling, since many Christians doubtless respond negatively to Jewish concerns, and many influential Jews are not Zionists), and a fourth strange category of those "concerned" with international affairs. I can't for the life of me place that group, and assume Mr. Hunter must be referring to people who agree with him and with his colleagues at NCC.

Leaving aside the mysterious elect group of the "concerned" and going back to us reprehensible characters who don't carry a conscious burden of "concern" over the Middle East, there are two additional categories of American Christian opinion, either of which is of much greater significance than any of the first three categories listed by Mr. Hunter. One is composed of the very numerous

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