Into the New Millennium
The State of Jewish-Christian Relations Today and Tomorrow:
A Christian Perspective

Thank you for inviting me. I greet you: "*Shalom Haverim*!" During this last year we have been deluged with the devastating news via TV, radio, newspaper reports, the web about the ethnic cleansing taking place in Kosovo and then the Kosavars revengefilled acts of violence and even death heaped upon the Serbs. Questions flooded my mind! Have we learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

Please do not misunderstand me; I am not making a comparison of the Kosovo cleansing with the Shoah when all 11 million Jews of Europe were destined for extermination by the Nazis simply because they were Jews. By 1945, 6 million Jews had been annihilated, only because they were Jews. Jews were not accepted anywhere; there was total abandonment as described so well by David Wyman in his book, *The Abandonment of the Jews*.

The fighting in the Serbia/Kosovo conflict is/was a civil war, an intra-ethnic and territorial conflict mainly between the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Serbian Army based on deep-seated resentments of past years.

Nevertheless, the scenes of hundreds of thousands of Kosovars being driven out of their country; the long interminable lines of refugees reminded viewers of the long lines of Jews being driven out of Germany, Austria, Poland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Greece, Hungary. The SS Saint Louis filled with 906

abandoned Jews was not allowed to embark on the shores of the United States. Or anywhere else. Jews had no way out: Jews had NO place to go. The entire World in the 20th century abandoned Jews.

My specific assignment is: "The State of Jewish-Christian Relations for Today and the Future- the Millennium : A Christian Perspective." However, it was the Holocaust-the slaughter of God's people, Jews-that awakened the Christian Churches to the realization of our false Christian teachings about Jews and Judaism given for 2000 yearss which in part led to the Holocaust. Some of the New Testament Scripture readings which we use in our liturgical services each Sunday and each weekday, if given withiout any explanation may seem very anti-Jewish. Many times parishioners accept this as church teachings.

During the season of Lent, especially the week before Easter, our liturgies deal with New Testament or Second Testament readings which treat of Jesus and his disciples and Apostles. Often these specific readings describe a negative relationship Jesus and his disciples had with some of the Pharisees and the Jewish people of that time. The Passion Gospels are also read and/or dramatized in many churches both Catholic and Protestant at this time of the liturgical year, beginning with Palm Sunday and finishing on Good Friday. The Passion Gospel, if read without any explanation by the celebrant, blames Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Almost every year I have promised myself that I would walk out of the church if no explanation prior to the reading of the Passion was given, noting the proper theological

understanding of the Passion narrative. I recall Good Friday of 1997 at Saint Raphael's Parish in Livingston. The church was packed, the reading of the Passion according to St. John was done in dramatic reading with the parishioners responding as "the Jews"- "Crucify him! Crucify him!" I was in the middle of the pew; I did not leave! It was good that I did not leave; Msgr. Thomas Burns, after the reading, gave the homily. I will ever remember his opening remarks, "What you just heard and read has been the cause of much pain, suffering and persecution of Jews for over 2,000 years!" He went on to explain the proper theological understanding, noting that Jesus chose to die to redeem us from our sins. It is not only important, but also necessary that we Christians acknowledge our part in the death of Jesus. Again last year and this last 1999 liturgical service at Saint Raphael's there **was** an explanation given before the reading of the Passion. The celebrant asked each of us to beat our own breasts asking forgiveness of our sins. When we hear the word "Jew" in the Evangelist's story of the Passion of Jesus, we do not blame Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus, we Christians must understand the proper theological stand. We blame ourselves. Indeed we need to admit that some of our teachings given prior to Vatican II were negative about Jews and Judaism and these teachings led to anti-Semitism-pograms, crusades, expulsion of Jews from Spain, Portugal-and the Holocaust.

September 1997, I had the privilege of participating in an international symposium in Rome, entitled, "Good and Evil After Auschwitz: Ethical Implications for Today." Speaker after speaker noted how the Holocaust changed modern thinking on good and evil. Joining the conference were about 300 participants from 25 different countries. The

four day conference convened at the Pontifical University in Rome was co-sponsored by the Pontifical University, the Sisters of Zion and the University of Rome. All of us had the opportunity to reflect on our past sorrow-filled history of our troubled brotherhood and sisterhood with Jews. All of this was done to prepare us for a re-newed relationship for the new millennium.

One of the main speakers from the Vatican, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, the Vatican official who oversees dialogue with Jews, pointed out that the tragedy of Auschwitz had opened peoples' eyes to the enormity of evil provoked when individual human dignity is denied. He said that, "it was sad to have to admit that much of the progress in Catholic-Jewish relations has come after Auschwitz and because of Auschwitz."

Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore has said: "To take the Holocaust seriously is to look back at the centuries of Christian misunderstandings both of Judaism and of the New Testament itself, and to replace them with a more accurate appreciations of both." This is the spirit what we hope and pray will characterize the new millennium in our relations with Jews and Judaism.

Indeed, I thank God for the Second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII, October 11, 1962. He knew of the unbelievable sufferings and massacre heaped on Jews during World War II. It was he, who as Archbishop Roncalli, issued baptismal certificates to Jews to help them escape the horrors of Nazism. This 80-year old Pontiff gently chided the prophets of doom within the Church and spoke of the world's need for the medicine of mercy. Thus, less than nine months before his death, Pope John XXIII set the tone

which not only dominated the Second Vatican Council deliberations but also continued thereafter.

Pope Paul VI opened the second session of the Council on September 29, 1963. From that Ecumenical Council came new teachings such as the documents on "The Church in the Modern World," "Ecumenism," "Religious Liberty," and "*Nostra Aetate*"—teachings which completely changed the life of the Catholic Church. I will deal with only a part of the document, *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Times) the declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions; Section #4 which treats of the Church's relationship to Jews and Judaism.

The teachings within this document changed forever the relationship of my Church to Jews; to Judaism. These **new** teachings set the stage for movements that will continue into the 21st century. These teachings have changed the way Catholics understand Jews and Judaism.

Thirty-five years ago, "October 28, 1965, with a mere fifteen Latin sentences, the impossible became possible and the possible became the act. Two thousand, two hundred and twenty one (2,221) Council fathers, by their approval, committed the Catholic Church to an irrevocable act," said Father Thomas Stransky. The promulgation of this conciliar document changed the Church's negative relationship to Jews and Judaism that had endured for 1,900 years to a positive one! "This conciliar act does not stir up pride in our efforts; rather it inspires humility before God's ways," comments Fr. Stransky. Let

me also tell you that this document **almost did not get passed because of the anti-Semitism within the Council of Cardinals**. So in some respects, it was "a watered-down document." What did it teach?

Nostra Aetate, (In Our Times) articulated basic truths, namely:

1) These new teachings recognized Christianity's rootedness in Judaism-mentioning the Patriarchs, prophets of the first Testament; Jesus, Mary and the Apostles of the second Testament.
2) It noted Christianity's membership in Judaism by adoption:
    a) By speaking of our commonalities of personhood; each person is created in God's image and likeness *which is the basis of one's religion*.
    b) *Both Jews and Christians* are a covenanted people.
    c) Both Jews and Christians await final Redemption.
3) The document *condemned anti-Semitism* in <u>every</u> shape and form.
4) The document **forever laid to rest** the "deicide" charge

Never again can we blame Jews for the death of Jesus.

5) The document recognized God's **enduring love and covenant with his people-Jews.**

This was a beginning with my Church. So again, I repeat, "Thank God for Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council." The teachings within this declaration are indeed being implemented within most of our Catholic institutions of higher learning; seminaries, ecumenical commissions, secondary and elementary schools. To ascertain this, I have done research in 1975 and in 1985; the results indicated that efforts are on-

going. It would take too long in the brief time allotted to me now to give you a complete report on this research. I would like to move forward to note other developments which have taken place.

In 1975, the Vatican issued another strong teaching, which helped implement the 1965 document called, "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing *Nostra Aetate*." It condemned, again, the sin of anti-Semitism, reiterating the teaching that Christians cannot place the blame for Jesus' death on Jews. Jesus chose to die for us. That is the one, the only correct theological stand to be had by Christians at the foot of the Cross. The U.S. Catholic Bishops' 1975 document on Christian-Jewish relations spoke of the State of Israel and asked Catholics to understand what Israel means to Jews and Judaism. It asked us to understand Jews as they understand themselves. How can Catholics do this? Only through study and dialogue. This led to the 1993 Vatican-Israel Diplomatic Relations. In 1982, the Vatican issued a document on "The Church and Racism in the Church" and pointed out clearly that when Catholics are anti-Zionist they are basically being anti-Semitic and this is sinful.

The 1985 document, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church," clearly indicated that teachers of religion **must respect Judaism** and **teach this** to their constituencies. With the Anti-Defamation League and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, we created a new document to accompany the Notes, namely, Within Context (Silver Burdett and Ginn, 1987).

Pope John Paul II in 1994 gave an example that we Catholics must ever remember. On April 7, 1994, he invited survivors of the *Shoah* to the Vatican for *Yom Hashoah*- A Day of Holocaust Remembrance. Within the concert, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, directed by Gilbert Levine, in music and song, after 50 years, the Pope remembered that the "contempt teaching" of the past led to the *Shoah*-Holocaust. In the Vatican, the orchestra played, *Kol Nidre,* the prayer chanted in synagogues throughout the world on *Yom Kippur*- The Day of Atonement. To the world and to me this was an open plea for forgiveness, for reconciliation. During the ceremony, Pope John Paul asked all for a moment of silence that, "all might listen to the six million voices of our Jewish brothers and sisters who were slaughtered by the Nazis." I thank God that this plea for forgiveness/reconciliation was part of Pope John Paul's prayer.

In March 1996, the German bishops issued a public statement admitting their guilt in the Holocaust by the Church's "**contempt teaching**." The Polish Bishops also issued their own document noting their failure to speak out for the Jews during the Shoah.

However, the French Bishops' statement, published in Rome, September, 1997, as a "Declaration of Repentance" is the most honest declaration, stating " The Church of France **failed** in her mission as teacher of conscience in the face of the Nazi plan to exterminate Jews." The French Bishops did issue an apology; they did ask forgiveness. The document continued, "today we confess that silence was a mistake. We beg the pardon of God and we ask the Jewish people to hear **our record of repentance**. We beg

God's forgiveness and ask the Jewish people to hear our words of repentance." Only now can **true** healing begin.

But speakers pointed out in the Rome International Symposium there is still much work to be done. Father Johann B. Metz, a theologian from Germany, commented, "despite its monuments and memorials to the Holocaust, modern society is suffering from 'cultural amnesia' about the *Shoah*. The attempt to annhilate the Jewish people was in fact an unprecedented attack on the cultural memory of humanity as the murder of memory in the scale of millions." We must continually resist this form of amnesia.

We need to remember. We **must teach** this dark period of history. Christians must have the courage to care. This concern must be present today when the State of Israel is being pushed to give up more land; when Jews/Israelis are being slaughtered anew in suicide bomb attacks in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Emil Fackenheim asked the conference participants to speak out, to protest; in fact, he asked: "Where were you during those bus attacks? Where are we now when Israel is being pushed to give up her homeland/ to give up Jerusalem?"

It was Sister Dr. Maureena Fritz, a sister of Sion, who spoke with the greatest courage before the assembled body at the Rome Symposium. There is indeed work to be done; she had the fortitude to articulate this challenge.

Although the Church via the Vatican has condemned anti-Semitism in any shape or form and, although the Church via the Vatican has redefined its relationship with Judaism, Sister Maureena called for a public confession of the sins of anti-Jewishness committed these past two-thousand years by our contempt teachings and actions toward Jews and Judaism. Professor Fritz pointed out that the Church must be more explicit about the anti-Jewish polemic in the Second Testament texts which led to forced conversions and expulsions of Jews and the atrocities of the Holocaust. She was referring to the New Testament messages that disparage Jews, Judaism.

Looking to the future, she argued that the Church must adopt a more "Theocentric" and less "Christocentric" concept of Salvation. She asked, "**When will Christians consider Jews as having a true path to God as they do themselves?**" This is **the** question as we enter the new millennium.

Finally on March 12, 1998, Sister Maureena Fritz's request for the long awaited document, "We Remember: Reflections on the Shoah," was issued by the Vatican. All of us waited over eleven years. The last part of my presentation will deal with the document, because it too answers the question: What is the relationship today between Jews and Christians (Catholics)?

The document, "We Remember: Reflections on the Shoah," will forever be a lesson for Catholics. We in our Catholic grade schools, high schools, institutions of higher learning, seminaries and adult religion classes must teach this sad history of the Holocaust. We

read in the document, “the Church should become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Jesus and his teachings.” When we speak of ‘Church’ this includes all of us-those who served or serve as Pope/Cardinals/Archbishops et al, since Church is the people of God as was defined as the Second Vatican Council.

Indeed, the “*Shoah*” still concerns us today. We must never forget. Christians and Jews have a special relationship; “there is no future for us without memory.” Fr. Johann Metz at the Rome Symposium spoke those words, September 1997, as I mentioned earlier. Sometime we hear non-Jews say regarding the Holocaust, “Why can’t Jews forget?’ We must never forget! And since the publication of the Vatican document on the *Shoah*, all must “Remember.”

The Vatican document, “We Remember,” notes that the *Shoah* took place on a continent that used to call itself Christian. In Europe, Church and State are one. Does the most recent document carry any disappointments? Yes, for me there are omissions.

II. “What we must remember”

This section of the document does not include any mention or remembrance of the Crusades; the Crusaders on their way to Jerusalem killed entire Jewish communities. Discrimination Laws were passed by the church authorities during the Middle Ages. Jews had to wear the yellow badges (star) and special hats as determined by Pope Paul IV in

1555-59; there were compulsory ghettos in Italy. It is with Part III of the Vatican document that I have even many more questions and disagreements.

Rightly, the document admits that we Christians have had a troubled brotherhood and sisterhood with Jews. This part does recall that the Jews who followed Jesus had difficulties with those who did not. Results of this conflict can be read in the New Testament.

The Vatican statement also seems to present an old stereotype that the followers of Christianity versus Jews who are devoted to the law. So I ask: Is this again a repetition of the old stereotype that the Gospel whose message is love versus the Hebrew Scriptures whose message is "wrath?" Or, the God of Love (for Christians) versus the God of Wrath (for Jews)? That is negative, false teaching; there also seems to be a complete denial of the fact that indeed there was a negative teaching about Jews and Judaism given by the Church. My doctoral research completed in 1961-an examination of the most widely used Catholic religion texts indicated that we did teach a false doctrine about Jews, Judaism. It would be too painful for me to recall these teachings now; let me just say that indeed, we taught that when Jesus came, the Covenant was no more with God's people, the Jews; it was abrogated! There was the "deicide" charge and furthermore these books I examined had a *Nihil obstat* (all has been examined) and an *imprimatur* (let it be printed). The church authorities had approved these false teachings.

Yes, thank God that the Vatican removed these false teachings in 1965. But sometime, the teaching of yesterday by which we were formed or informed continues to stay with us, even today.

True, perhaps the anti Judaism in the 19th century took on a more socio-political emphasis rather than religious. But, there was the religious underpinning that helped Christians believe and accept Hitler's racist ideology.

Indeed, the 20th century saw the rise of the National Socialism of Germany with the racial theory of the superior Nordic-Aryan race. There were a few Bishops of Germany who condemned the Nazi teaching, including Msgr. John M. Oesterreicher. There was Father Bernhard Lichtenberg of the Berlin Cathedral who courageously condemned the Nazis and dared use the word "Jew" in his homily asking parishioners to speak out against the persecution. He prayed for the persecuted Jews. Nazis, of his parish, reported him; he was beaten and killed at *Dachau*. Pope John Paul II canonized him last year.

Then, the Vatican document speaks of Pope Pius XII, the former Cardinal Pacelli, who in 1939 began his reign. Again there are omissions! For example, it was Cardinal Pacelli as Secretary of State who signed the Concordat with Hitler. We know Pope Pius XII was advised by many priests of the tragedy committed against Jews, but we have no record-yet-of what he did. The March 23, 1998 document states that Pius XII "saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives." I only wish that this be true, but we need the research that records this data. These Vatican documents need to be opened to scholars. Thank God

that now three Catholics and three Jewish scholars will study the Vatican documents of this period together.

To Part IV of the recent document, these are my responses:

1) I question if the *Shoah's* anti-Semitism had its roots "outside of Christianity." Indeed, the Nazi persecution of Jews was made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudice embedded in most Christian minds and hearts. The document carefully asks, " Did anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians make them less sensitive and even indifferent to the persecutions launched against the Jews by National Socialism when it reached power?" My response is: Yes! Yes! Yes!

But the Vatican statement offers these responses:

1) "People did not know!" (They did indeed!) People could smell burning flesh. Local peoples helped the Nazis *Einstazgrupen* round up Jews into trucks, etc. to take them to the woods, where they were told to undress, dig their ditches (graves) and then were shot!-7,000 were shot in one day! One million and ½ Jews were killed by shooting before the passage of the Final Solution in 1942. You cannot kill that many people and kept it a secret. People did know.
2) Another reason for non-action by Christians the Vatican document states is 'fear' for themselves and their families. This is true. But Jesus tells us "that which you do to the least of your brethren you do unto me." So, Christians can ask themselves: "What would we have done had we been in there?" Rose Thering, what would you have done?

3) The document asks, “Did Christians give every possible assistance to those being persecuted and in particular to persecuted Jews?” I would only hope that their response of “many” is correct. We know “some” Christians (non-Jews) did save Jews. (*Yad Vashem* research continues to this day).

a) The number is about 10,000 documented names- individuals who saved Jews.

b) Trees have been planted, each tree bears the name of non-Jews who saved Jews.

c) It is called “The Avenue of Righteous among the Nations.”

d) Mr. Paldiel indicates that behind every saved Jew-survivor-there was a non-Jew, since Jews had absolutely no way out of Hitler’s Final Solution.

e) He said that number could go as high as 100,000. If 100,000 Christians did help to save Jews, the figure still amounts to less than 1% of the Christian population in Europe.

The Vatican Document rightly reminds us of lessons we should have learned from the massacre of the Armenians, the genocide of the Romanie’s (gypsies-one million) tragedies in Cambodia, Africa, the Balkans. The lesson is still unlearned by too many.

Part V of the Vatican Statement looks together to a common future. The document contains some beautiful statements and points out **why** we need to be concerned about our relations with Jews/Judaism. It states:

A. 1) Remember our roots are in Judaism.

2) We are grafted onto the Root of Judaism.

3) Jews are our elder brothers and sisters.

B. The Vatican document asks each of us:

1) To express deep sorrow for our past failures of every age vis-à-vis Jews and Judaism.

2) This means an act of repentance (*teshuva*) since as members of the Church we are linked to the sins as well as to the merits of all her children.

V. **Looking together to a common future, let me quote:**

"Looking to a future of relations between Jews and Christians, in the first place we appeal to our Catholic brothers and sisters to renew the awareness of the **Hebrew (Jewish)** roots of their faith.

We ask them to keep in mind that Jesus was a descendant of David; that the Virgin Mary and the apostles belonged to the Jewish people; that the Church draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree on to which have **been grated the wild olive branches of the Gentiles** (cf. Rom. 11:17-24); that the Jews are our dearly beloved brothers, indeed in a certain sense they are "our elder brothers."

The church approaches with deep respect and great compassion the experience of extermination, the Shoah, suffered by the Jewish people during World War II. It is not a matter of mere words, but indeed of binding commitment. "We would **risk causing** the

victims of the atrocious deaths to die again if we do not have an ardent desire for justice, if we do not commit ourselves to ensure that evil does not prevail over good as it did for millions of the children of the Jewish people…humanity cannot permit all that to happen again." Indeed, this new teaching although not perfect is a mandate to Catholics to ever remember so such horror never happens again.

We pray that our sorrow for the tragedy which the Jewish people have suffered in our Century will lead to a new relationship with the Jewish people.

We wish to turn awareness to past sins to a firm resolve to build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians, but rather a shared mutual respect, as befits those who adore the one Creator and Lord and have a common father in faith, Abraham.

Finally, we invite all men and women of good will to reflect deeply on the significance of the *Shoah*. The victims from their graves, and the survivors through vivid testimony of what they have suffered, have become a loud voice calling the attention of all of humanity.

C. To remember this terrible experience is to become fully conscious of the salutary warning it entails; the spoiled seed of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism must never again be allowed to take root in any human heart. For all these reasons we must be concerned about relations with Jews and Judaism.

Pope John Paul II has called the twentieth century the, "century of the *Shoah*." William Cardinal Keeler has called Catholics to, "sincere, contrite reflection and meditation on the Holocaust, especially with our Jewish sisters and brothers so this can embed our commemorations and lead to the turning of this new millennium into a realistic awareness of the nature of evil and impel us to stand together with Jewish People to witness to the one God who calls to us."

Tonight, in closing, I wish to reiterate what Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee said on November 7th, 1999. It is his message that must resonate in the hearts and souls of every Catholic/every Christian in this new millennium. These are his words, I make them my own as I address you tonight.

"Mindful of the admonition that only the victims can impart absolution, I feel a need publicly to ask God for forgiveness at the beginning of this jubilee year. I do so personally and in the name of the Roman Catholic community I represent.

I ask for forgiveness for all the hurtful and harmful statements by Catholics against the Jewish people throughout the centuries.

I ask for forgiveness for all the statements that implied that the Jewish people were no longer loved by God.

I ask for forgiveness for all the statements that reduced the Jewish people to “nonpeople,” that created contempt for them, that reduced their human dignity.

I ask for forgiveness for all the teaching and preaching in Catholic churches that may have led up to the Holocaust and that may have contributed to the horrors of that attempt at genocide.

I ask for forgiveness if I or others contributed in the past or in the present to those movements that denigrate Jews and threaten their well-being in our midst.

My prayer is that the one God who loves us all and in whose image we are all created keeps this spirit of unity among us alive and fruitful into the future. I pray for courage for all of us. I do so in the name of the God who loves us all equally, that God in whose image and likeness we are all created. I pray in God’s name. Amen.”

Archbishop Rembert Weakland/Jubilee Year
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