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The “*Nostra Aetate*” Generation

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(Translated by Murray Watson)

The turning-point that *Nostra Aetate* represents is one of the historic *cruxes* of Vatican II¹. It is not just recently, however, that reductionist efforts concerning the council have attempted astonishing intellectual gymnastics in an effort to limit the Council’s impact². As I have tried to show, this has been done in a variety of ways. The most successful method has involved emulating the model by which the first generations of Protestants denigrated the Council of Trent, arguing that it was perfectly in keeping with the past and its abuses. They radically polarized two dimensions, such as continuity and discontinuity, which are, on the contrary, the black and white of the portrait that historians create as they “photograph” the past³. Linked to this, there developed an approach according to which an intransigent culture argued for such a degree of agreement in the teachings of the popes that there was an avoidance of even speaking of “development”⁴—or, by interpreting John XXIII’s characterization [of the Council] as “pastoral,” a diminishment of the Council’s ability to express the truth of the faith through the power of the Spirit⁵.

But these constructs—whose inconsistencies can certainly be repudiated through the patient work of historical research⁶—are not even tenable when we consider the attitude toward the Jews that the Roman magisterium imposed and practiced a hundred years earlier, and that which *Nostra Aetate* solemnly defined⁷. A paradigm shift is also noticeable in other steps taken at

¹ A bibliographical survey:

F. IANNONE, *Una chiesa per gli altri. Il concilio Vaticano II e le religioni non cristiane* (Assisi, 2014), and the recent work of J. CONNELLY, *From Enemy to Brother The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012); on this, see the observations in “Forum Essay: From Enemy to Brothers, by John O’Connell,” in *Catholic Historical Review* 98 (2012), pp. 762-763. On the history of the Council more generally, see: S. SCATENA, “Vatican II, 1962-2012: The History after the History?” in *Cristianesimo nella storia* 34 (2013). See also the studies (from a few years ago) in: *Nostra Aetate - Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Catholic Relations* (edited by NEVILLE LAMDAN and ALBERTO MELLONI; Münster, 2007) and *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome* (edited by PHILIP A. CUNNINGHAM, N.J. HOFMANN and J. SIEVERS; Fordham, 2007).

² A. MELLONI, *Breve guida ai giudizi sul Vaticano II*, in *Chi ha paura del Vaticano II?* (edited by A. MELLONI and G. RUGGIERI; Roma, 2009), pp. 107-145.

³ A. MELLONI, *Il Vaticano II e la sua storia. Introduzione alla nuova edizione, 2012-2014*, in *Storia del concilio Vaticano II* (new edition edited by A. MELLONI), 1 (Bologna 2012), pp. IX-LVI.

⁴ For example, the studies of A. VON TEUFFENBACH, *Die Bedeutung des Subsistit in (LG 8). Zum Selbstverständnis der katholischen Kirche* (München, 2002).

⁵ G. RUGGIERI, *Ritrovare il concilio* (Torino, 2012).

⁶ A. MELLONI, *Il Vaticano II e la sua storia. Introduzione alla nuova edizione, 2012-2014*, in *Storia del concilio Vaticano II* (new edition, edited by A. MELLONI), 1 (Bologna, 2012), pp. IX-LVI.

⁷ See: *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*, mentioned above.

Vatican II (from *Mirari vos* to *Dignitatis Humanae*⁸, or from *Mortalium Animos* to *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the leap is no less obvious). What is more, however, is that there is in *Nostra Aetate* an intuition about the future that is remarkable. Actually, the decision to insert a reflection on Israel within a document on [all] religions (which was designed as a dilution, intended to make palatable to Arab Christians what would otherwise have put them in an awkward position⁹), on the contrary, opened up a path that would have great historical and theological significance. Because thinking about Israel within the context of Christian faith not only reveals the impasse of a missionary stance intended in terms of spiritual colonization, but raises the problem of all forms of otherness, both religious and non-religious, those that the Council Fathers could see, and those that were invisible to them then, and that only now—decades later—are in plain view¹⁰.

Nostra Aetate constitutes, therefore, a fitting gauge by which we can adequately measure the ground-breaking change for which the ecumenical council is infallibly given credit (at least this is the claim made by Catholic theology), with a view to providing a response to the challenges of that moment in time¹¹. This declaration, however, also constitutes a historic challenge of noteworthy proportions: because, more so than in other conciliar happenings, it is possible to recognize the way in which the “movers and shakers” of *Nostra Aetate* shared the same experiences, locations and historical events—at the centre of which stands the *Shoah*. I have not, therefore, dedicated these few pages to the pioneers¹², nor to the Righteous, nor to the anonymous “unrighteous” behind the anti-Semitic pamphlets that circulated so widely in Rome during the Council, nor to the alleged “*éminences grises*” to whom such a major role is attributed¹³. Instead, my sketch of the *Nostra Aetate* “generation” is devoted to several key figures on the outer fringes of that history, who had various roles in the Council (bishops, *periti*, diplomats, both Christians and Jews).

Jules Isaac

As scholars already know, the preeminent figure in the pre-history of *Nostra Aetate* was Jules Isaac (although his role would quickly be overtaken by the tide of events). Born in 1877, Isaac was moved by his meeting with Péguy, and his political convictions were turned upside-down by the Dreyfus Affair. A historian, he was the author of a history textbook series (“Malet—Isaac”) that the Hachette publishing house insisted be published under the names of both authors, so as not to lose its Catholic clientele. He was also a militant pacifist who, like so many soldiers of the

⁸ On this, see: S. SCATENA, *La fatica della libertà. L'elaborazione delle dichiarazioni «Dignitatis humanae» sulla libertà religiosa del Vaticano II* (Bologna, 2004).

⁹ CONNELLY, *From Enemy to Brothers* (see above), pp. 1-10, and A. MELLONI, *Nostra aetate and the discovery of the sacrament of otherness*, in *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People* (see above), pp. 129-150.

¹⁰ A. MELLONI, *Nostra aetate 1965-2005 - A foreword*, in *Nostra Aetate - Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Catholic Relations* (see above), pp. 9-20.

¹¹ J. ÖSTERREICHER, *Erklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zu den nicht-christlichen Religionen. Kommentierende Einleitung*, in *L Th K. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, II* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1967); a new and improved edition can be found in J.M. ÖSTERREICHER, *The New Encounter between Christians and Jews* (New York, 1985). He is the central figure in CONNELLY, *From Enemy to Brothers* (see above), pp. 227-265

¹² See, for example: *Hommage aux pionniers du dialogue judéo-chrétien*, SIDIC 30 (1997), #2.

¹³ See, for example: J. GOLAN, *La terra promessa: La nascita dello stato di Israele nel racconto di un protagonista*, edited by D. SCALISE (Torino, 1997), pp. 203-245; a private conversation that was said to have taken place with the founder of *Pro Deo*, Fr. Felix Morlion, who was involved in many political events.

Great War¹⁴, was supportive of the friendship between France and Germany. Nazism, and the Occupation, would overturn his vision of things, would destroy his family, and would oblige him to finish his research into the religious roots of anti-Semitism, which he identified in the religious teaching of deicide, against which, even as an old man, he would undertake a campaign of study and awareness-raising, as is already well known¹⁵. It was Isaac who decided to raise the issue of anti-Semitism (which he had already sketched out in several points, composed together with Rabbi Kaplan), not only to the participants of the conference he promoted in Seelisberg in the summer of 1947¹⁶, but to the Pope himself (or, perhaps more accurately, to the papacy). Each of the individual details of that decision raises questions: why the Pope in particular? It was Christianity as a whole that, in the face of the Shoah, had shown itself unable to rise above the level of individual acts of heroism, and, whatever judgements or disappointed expectations one might have concerning the Catholic Church, the Pope was certainly not able to speak for—or speak to—all Christians. Furthermore, the Roman Pope was evaluating the Shoah on several different levels: as a diplomat who was familiar with political happenings in Germany, and who had been Secretary of State during the rise of Nazism, Pius XII headed a vast diplomatic network. He was also the head of the Church's government, the shepherd of Catholics, and the bishop of Rome. On each of those levels, his approach showed fluctuations, changes and dilemmas. To which of these "Piuses" did Isaac intend to address himself?

And yet, in his actions, from Seelisberg to his first audience with Pius XII in 1955 (during which he was not addressing someone like a Rödel¹⁷, for example!), Isaac did not consider it paramount to draw distinctions between the theological foundations of contempt, and its "racialization"; he thought that what he should ask the Pope to do was to remove the seeds of that centuries-old contempt from "Catholic speech"—from preaching, catechesis, and even doctrine. Isaac called that contempt "anti-Semitism," without introducing the (historically anachronistic) distinction between racial anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. While that distinction might have greater descriptive power, it raises questions when it is used as a tool to obscure the close relationship between the two approaches, or if it conceals the attempt to make anti-Judaism a dogmatic necessity or a Christian virtue.

Angelo G. Roncalli

Isaac's attempt to approach Pacelli was a disaster. During an audience arranged by friends in his French and Roman entourage¹⁸, all he could do was to express his hopes, which ended up

¹⁴ J. ISAAC, *Un historien dans la Grande Guerre - Lettres et Carnets 1914-1917* (Paris, 2004).

¹⁵ On the genesis of *Jésus et Israël* (Paris, 1948, published by Albin Michel), see M. MORSELLI's introduction to the Italian translation (Genoa, 2001).

¹⁶ In Switzerland, Pastor Paul Vogt had already, in 1945, promoted a conference about "German-ness and Judaism" (one of the many signs that were multiplying throughout the Protestant world; in France, it was the Pastor Roland de Pury who was its spokesperson). It was as a result of that conference that the *Christlich-jüdische Arbeitsgemeinschaft in der Schweiz* was born.

¹⁷ Born in 1891, Franz Rödel was ordained a priest in 1918, and in 1922 he became part of the *Verein zur Abendwehr des Antisemitismus in Deutschland*, collecting the anti-Semitic pamphlets which would become the nucleus for the *Institutum Judaologicum Catholicum*, founded in 1959 in Jetzendorf. As part of his preparation for this, he wrote a memorandum to the Pope, asking for a document on the Jews. See also the journal *Wahrheit und Liebe*.

¹⁸ See his correspondence, which appeared between 1999 and 2005 in *Sens*, the journal of the Amitié judéo-chrétienne (###240, 260, 270, 280 and 303), and O. ROTA, "Jules Isaac, Paul Démann, Charles de Provençères: Le

accomplishing nothing. But that did not prevent him from trying again, when the position [of Pope] was held by someone else, whose story he knew: in terms of Judaism, Angelo G. Roncalli was not the unexpected small-town peasant who would wear the papal tiara. Born in 1881 in Sotto il Monte, he was a bishop who had grown up in the slightly-modified culture of contempt that Italian Catholicism had adopted, but, most importantly, he was also a bishop who had encountered Judaism during his lifetime. The years he had spent in Sofia, from 1925 to 1934, had brought him into contact with a city whose civic life had been shaped by the fact of Christians (of various denominations) living alongside Muslims, and alongside a Jewish community that was so large and so well-integrated that, at the time of the deportations, the Orthodox Patriarch Stjepan stood side-by-side with them, and lay down on the railroad tracks, to prevent the departure of the boxcars filled with deportees. Above all, his years in Istanbul (1935-1945) had put Roncalli, as Apostolic Delegate, in a close relationship with what was, at the time, the largest Mediterranean Jewish community. In this way, he became, almost naturally, the one to whom requests for assistance, aid and support during the war were directed by that community and, later on, by the Jewish Agency, for whom Istanbul became an “exit door” for thousands of Jews. It was a type of activity that falls under—but also exceeds—the “assistance to victims” practiced by the central organs of the Holy See. People could speak to Roncalli as a friend (a friend who could invite, and welcome, the Chief Rabbi to the cathedral, to celebrate the change of pontificates in 1939), and his actions were those of a friend, about which Rome received only what were, understandably, discreet updates.

When Pius XII (who must have been at least somewhat aware of this Roncallian activism) transferred him to Paris, Roncalli once again found himself in a direct relationship with the Jewish community—both the French community, and those who were represented by the Jewish Agency, which sought out children who, in French convents, had survived the extermination of their parents. As he had in Istanbul, Roncalli did not act as a subverter of Vatican practice, but neither does he simplistically follow the job description of a nuncio, or the instructions he received (including those that forbade returning baptized Jewish children to anyone, and which did not recognize the jurisdiction of Jewish organizations over children who had been saved. These instructions, issued by the Holy Office in March of 1946, were forwarded to Paris—thoughtfully delayed—by Archbishop Tardini only in October, and summarized for the bishops in a memorandum that the nuncio would only transmit to Lyon in the spring of 1947, did not stand in the way of a responsible course of action which avoided a proliferation of cases like the Finaly affair.

Having been deeply immersed in the entire Shoah—from its first portents to its consequences—Pope Roncalli took only a few initiatives: during his first Lent, he suppressed the term *perfidis* from the Good Friday General Intercessions (for which the genuflection had already been restored¹⁹); while he was out for a drive, he stopped to bless the Jews who, after the war, had returned to the Great Synagogue—conferring his blessing with a sign of the cross that, coming from anyone else, would have been perceived as ambiguous or offensive. And so, when Isaac

redressement de l’enseignement catéchétique concernant Israël dans les années cinquante,” in *Sens*, December 2008, pp. 673-682.

¹⁹ M. PAIANO, “Il dibattito sui riflessi dell’antisemitismo nella liturgia cattolica,” in *Studi Storici* 41 (2000) 3, pp. 647-710.

arrived²⁰, [Roncalli] understood that there was a window of opportunity here, and he quickly seized it. He entrusted the matter to the newly-created Secretariat for Christian Unity, which thus found itself also responsible for reflecting on the Jewish-Christian relationship²¹. The decision to depend on this body was dictated by circumstances: when the Council was announced in 1959, it was the only preparatory structure that did not belong to a dicastery—and (unless one wished to have the Holy Office discussing the Jews, which would have been disastrous) it was the only one that could ensure a conversation with the current of Catholic theology that the Roman school of thought disparagingly called “trans-Alpine”. However, it was also a choice (like many choices connected to *Nostra Aetate*) which, although dictated by necessity, would come to take on a further meaning. The topic was certainly not one that the Catholic Church could choose to avoid; on the contrary, it was a moment for which the Catholic Church could take on a new responsibility. And so the issue was passed on from Isaac, the pioneer (who died on September 5, 1963²²) to Augustin Bea.

Augustin Bea

Cardinal Bea’s secretary has written a fine biographical sketch of him²³, but it leaves still unaddressed major questions about this enormous personality of twentieth-century Catholicism. A renowned Biblical scholar, Bea, by the exegetical path he followed, signalled a violent rupture with Catholic euhology: his “Neo-Vulgate” translation of the Psalter, from Hebrew into Latin, brought about a reappraisal of one of the convictions of Catholic apologetics which, from the time of Jerome onward, had translated the Psalms into Latin from the Septuagint, since it was said that in it were preserved traces of Christological prophecies, which the “perfidious” Jews were said to have purged from the Masoretic Text. I believe I am right in saying that, of all the forms of anti-Judaism shown by Christians that related to the Psalter was perhaps the least widespread, but it is no less true to say that Father Bea was fully aware of the impact of his choice. Father Bea was, however, also a German, born in 1891 in Riedböhringen, having studied in Holland and Berlin, and taught in Tokyo and, from 1930 onward, in Rome on a permanent basis. He was confessor to Pius XII, and was made a cardinal by John XXIII. A friend of the bishop of Paderborn, Bishop Jaeger, Bea succeeded in having the bishop propose to John XXIII the creation of a non-Curial office for ecumenical relations. The Pope accepted the proposal and entrusted the office to Bea, almost making him a secretary responsible for complex issues—

²⁰ See the summary given in J. ISAAC, *Combat pour la vérité: Pages choisies et textes inédites* (Paris, 1970), pp. 265-270; regarding the role of Maria Vingiani, see (and look beyond the startling title!) M. RONCALLI, “La donna che fece incontrare il papa e l’ebreo,” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, June 14-15, 2010.

²¹ K. SCHELKENS, “From Superno Dei Nutu to Regimini Ecclesiae: The Secretariat for Christian Unity and the 1968 Reform of the Curia,” in *Suavis Laborum Memoria: Chiesa, Papato e Curia Romana tra storia e teologia / Church, Papacy, Roman Curia between History and Theology: Scritti in onore di Marcel Chappin SJ per il suo 70° compleanno / Essays in honour of Marcel Chappin SJ on His 70th Birthday*, edited by P. VAN GEEST and R. REGOLI (Rome, 2013), pp. 167-181.

²² After his death, the Amicizia Ebraico-Cristiana di Firenze (which was born in 1950 and founded by Giorgio La Pira, Raffaello del Re, Giacomo Devoto, Aldo Neppi Modona, Lina Trigona, Ines Zilli Gay, Angelo Orvieto, Arrigo Levasti, and Raffaele Ciampini) held a special meeting in his memory; on this, see the *Bollettino (dell’Amicizia Ebraico-Cristiana)*.

²³ ST. SCHMIDT, *Agostino Bea il cardinale dell’unità* (Rome, 1987; the German edition is better). An overview of other studies can be found in the contribution of S. MAROTTA in the proceedings of the *Historicizing Ecumenism* conference (Bose, 2014).

which ecumenism and relations with Judaism were. Bea tackled the topic twice: once in 1961, which led to a page-long declaration, *De Judæis*, which would be defeated in the Central Commission, and a second time in 1962, when the topic would become the object of a new draft which dealt with Judaism and other religions. More than anyone else, however, he was clear that the heart of that schema was the relationship between Israel and the church, because that would determine and cast light upon every relationship with every other type of “other-ness”. And he was very clear that the key issue of “deicide” was of burning importance in a world in which the growing extent of historic crimes, committed precisely by advanced industrial societies, necessarily casts the shadow of new collective crimes upon all groups (and his own German people, first of all). In order to launch this discussion in the direction desired by the Pope, Bea relied upon several scholars—Isaac himself provides these details—and, first and foremost, upon Johann Österreicher.

John M. Österreicher

Österreicher (a convert from Judaism) arrived at the Council in his capacity as the Director of the Institute for Judæo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. Österreicher had been born into a Jewish family Libau (Moravia) on February 2, 1904, and had only been an American for a few years. After converting to Catholicism, he became a priest—a member of the clergy of Vienna—in 1928. During the 1930s, he became, in the pages of the journal *Erfüllung*, a leading voice opposing Nazi anti-Semitism, and had been a supporter of the need to reconsider Christian attitudes toward Judaism²⁴. A fervent Zionism, he emigrated to Paris after the *Anschluß*, and from there he set out again in 1940 for the United States, where he was welcomed by Bishop John J. Dougherty. A prominent scholar in New York academic circles because of his work on the relationship between Jews and Christians, in 1953 he founded the Institute of Judæo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University in New Jersey, during the presidency of Monsignor John L. McNulty²⁵. While there, he launched the series *The Bridge*²⁶, whose stated intention (as outlined in the first volume) clearly explains why Bea thought of him as the drafter of a declaration *De Judæis*. As Österreicher wrote:

A Bridge links two shores, spans an abyss, opens a road for communication; it is thus an instrument of peace ☒ Never can the Church forget that the Rock on which she stands is embedded in the revealed wisdom of patriarchs and prophets and in the mighty events which dominate the history of the children of Israel. For her the past is not dead but lives on, as it ought to live in the mind of every Christian; hence the marvels of the Ancient Dispensation will be spoken of repeatedly in these pages. The Bridge speaks also of Christians and Jews of today, and speaks to them. What we wish, then, is that our work will help Christians to a deeper understanding of their treasures, and no less that it will serve the dialogue between Christians and Jews.

²⁴ H. HÜRTEIN, *Deutsche Katholiken 1918-1945* (Paderborn-München-Wien-Zürich, 1992), p. 429.

²⁵ Österreicher was the author of *Walls Are Crumbling: Seven Jewish Philosophers Discover Christ* (New York, 1952).

²⁶ *The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judæo-Christian Studies*, I. Maritain, Raissa “Abraham and the Ascent of Conscience,” pp. 23-53 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955); *The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judæo-Christian Studies*, II (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956); *The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judæo-Christian Studies*, III (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958); *The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judæo-Christian Studies*, IV (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962); *Brothers in Hope: The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judæo-Christian Studies*, V (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

It would be all too easy to read these lines in the light of the steps taken subsequently in the dialogue. But these are the points that he, Dougherty and 13 other signatories listed in their 1960 letter to Cardinal Bea, in which they pleaded with him to address the subject of reconciliation between Jews and Christians during the Council. Even more so than its results (in February 1961, Österreicher was named as a consultant to the Secretariat), the powerful impact made by this petition has yet to be studied, in terms of the roots of its readings and its contacts²⁷: certainly, some of its positions were capable of stirring up violent reactions, such as those (which lived on long after *Nostra Aetate*) which blamed the new era in Jewish-Christian relations on a plot centred on two “Marranos”: Österreicher himself, and Gregory Baum, who was no less hated²⁸.

Gregory Baum

Gregory Baum, an Augustinian priest, was also a convert. Born in 1923, he had grown up in an “affluent Jewish” family in Berlin, in the post-war years, during the Depression and the rise of Nazism, and his parents had sent him, as a teenager, to study in England. With the events of 1939, as a young student, he became an enemy immigrant, and was interned in Canada, where a Catholic family offered him their assistance. It was at that juncture that he read the *Confessions* [of St. Augustine] (just as Edith Stein’s journey had involved reading the *Autobiography* of Thérèse of Lisieux), and decided to be baptized into the Catholic Church. He entered the Augustinian novitiate, and returned to Europe for his theological studies, which he completed in Fribourg before his ordination as a priest in 1956 (in 1976, he would receive excommunication, and was reduced to the lay state). In Fribourg, Baum had attended the gatherings of *Pax Romana*, and probably met Journet who (in addition to his reputation as an ecclesialologist) was also known to have briefly been in Seelisberg during the summer week in which Isaac would issue his 18 points.

How Baum joined the Secretariat, and in which capacity, is still an open question. But he was the only one of those who worked on *De Judaëis* who could be called a well-rounded theologian. Those who were pursuing a more spiritual or practical vision were, however, no less important. All of this created something of a split between reflection on ecumenical questions, and reflection on the Jewish-Christian nexus.

Bruno Hussar

Father Bruno Hussar was one of the “spiritual” group. Born in Cairo in 1911, he would die in Jerusalem in 1996, and would become well-known as one of the founders, in the 1960s, of the village of *Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salaam*. His parents were Jews; his father was Hungarian and his mother was French, who became naturalized Italian citizens after the First World War. He

²⁷ The contents of Österreicher’s library can be found at: <http://academic.shu.edu/findingaids/mss0053.html>. In 1951, Österreicher took part in the Apeldoorn meeting that was promoted by Ramselaar, together with Fr. Rudloff, Fr. Cantera Burgos, Paul Démann (of the Fathers of Zion), Karl Thieme and Gertrud Lückner from Freiburg (who in 1948 had founded *Freiburg Rundbrief: Beiträge zur christlich-jüdischen Verständigung*), and Irene Marinoff of the *Dames de Zion* (see *SIDIC* 30 (1997)/2, p. 3).

²⁸ “The two convert (Marranos) Jews, Msgr. John Österreicher of Seton Hall University; and, Fr. Gregory Baum; Fr. Edvard H. Flannery; bishop Walter Kempe from Germany; bishop Sergio Mendez Arceo from Mexico”. www.holywar.org

completed his studies in Cairo, and then moved to Paris in 1929, where he became an engineer at the École Centrale and practiced his profession, even after embracing the Catholic faith in 1935. Afflicted with a longstanding illness from 1942 to 1945, he decided to enter the Dominicans, and he was ordained a priest of that religious order in 1950. In 1953, he moved to Jerusalem, to establish a Dominican centre there for Jewish studies²⁹—St. Isaiah House—and it was there that he experienced how the wartime anti-Semitism was taking on new forms, which touched on the meaning and existence of the State of Israel (of which he became a citizen in 1966, and on behalf of which he would serve as a diplomatic advisor during the U.N. mission after the Six Days' War). His activity during the Council took the form of his work as a *peritus*—but a *peritus* who, more than many others, was aware of the need to ensure at that time a steady stream of requests and information, and it was out of this need that SIDIC was born³⁰.

Leo Rudloff

Father Leo Rudloff was not, perhaps, one of the “spiritual” group, and he certainly was not a speculative theologian. Born to Baron Otto von Rudloff in Düren in 1902, the name he was given at baptism was Alfred Felix (he was “Fred” to everyone). He grew up, first in Bromberg and then in Münster, and it was there that his monastic vocation matured. In his 20s, he decided to enter the Benedictines—not in Maria Laach, the thriving monastery at the heart of the great intellectual and spiritual centre of the Liturgical Movement, but in the serenity of the abbey of Gerleve. Sent to Rome to study there, Father Leo went to Sant’Anselmo, where Father Lambert Beauduin was teaching. Father Beauduin, the founder of the ecumenical monastery of Amay (which later established itself at Chevetogne), was a central figure for the entire Catholic renewal movement in the early 1900s. Fascism was beginning to unsettle Rome, and among Beauduin’s associates in the city were Father Lemerrier (the founder of Nuestra Señora de la Resurrección in Cuernavaca), Father Winzen (the founder of Mount Savior in Elmira, New York), and Leo (the abbot of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, and of Weston Priority in New York).

After returning to Gerleve in 1928 to teach, Leo, together with his confrère Donatello, was sent to the United States, at a time when the order (whose monasteries were feeling the pressure of Nazi aggression) was considering the possibility of seeking safety overseas. It was an exile that was thought (at the time) to be permanent (Leo would become an American citizen), but which instead ended with the end of the war, when Leo returned to Gerleve to re-establish monastic life there. However, the German Benedictines had more to deal with than simply domestic problems: they had at their disposal a convent on Mount Zion, which had been founded on a piece of land that the Emperor Wilhelm II had acquired from Abdul Hamid during his journey to the Middle East in 1898, and which had been given to the Benedictine monks who, from 1906 onward, had been headquartered there, on the site of the Byzantine basilica of the Dormition, which had been destroyed.

Led by Father Maurus Kaufman (who had come from Maria Laach), the community had grown to have 40 members, but it had effectively been scattered when, during the 1948 war, the site

²⁹ His autobiography is *Quand la nuée se levait...* (Paris, 1983) (The Italian edition is: *Quando la nube si alzava...* [Casale Monferrato, 1983]). The book has also been translated into English and German.

³⁰ During two meetings, held between November 13 and 15, 1965, Bishops Holland and Elchinger, and *periti* Bruno Hussar, Cornelius Rijk and René Laurentin, proposed the idea, and this is considered to be the beginning of that experiment.

became an Israeli military post. In 1949, the Beuron Benedictines thus found themselves obliged to make a decision about the apparently unusable monastery: given the obvious impossibility of transplanting a German community in Israel, the abbots were ready to sell the site. The abbot of Gerleve, however, suggested sending his “American” monk, Leo Rudloff, as a visitor. He reorganized the ownership agreement (with help from Prince Frans Salm-Reifferscheid), found backing in Rome (from Cardinal Tisserant), obtained support from the Abbot Primate to create an international community, and negotiated with the Israeli government (that is, with Minister for Religious Affairs Herzog) the conditions of entry, which included the containment of Father Willbrod, and an end to German entries. On Ash Wednesday, 1951, Leo Rudloff returned, now as Prior of the Dormition community, and began to concern himself with the relationship between Jews and Christians, beginning with that most classic and dramatic of situations: the conversion of the soldier Joshua Blum...³¹

The complex situation of Weston Abbey did not prevent Rudloff from playing an important—although fruitless—role: in 1958, he was already taking steps in Rome to ask the Holy See to take a different approach to Israel, which was threatened by its neighbours. “In those final months of Pius XII, he found little support³²,” even if the climate would change soon enough: during the meeting of Benedictine abbots in September 1959, Rudloff was severely scolded for having signed a petition asking the Holy See to defend the State of Israel (and it was perhaps for this reason that he lost out on the possibility of becoming the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem). In a private audience, John XXIII endorsed Rudloff’s intention, hoping for a reconciliation between Jews and Christians, which would be facilitated by the presence of the Benedictines in that land³³. That meeting did not remain without an impact: Rudloff saw in the October 1960 papal audience with the United Jewish Appeal (during which Roncalli used the phrase “*ego sum Joseph, frater vester*”) a sign that a new climate had now actually come to pass, and he saw his nomination (on January 21, 1961) to the Secretariat for Christian Unity (with a role on the Commission on Relations with the Jews) as a summons to take on responsibility³⁴. On the one hand, Rudloff welcomed leading rabbis (Solomon Goldberg, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Arthur Gilbert) as his teachers and guests; on the other hand, he publicly upheld a more prudent position, favouring an “indirect apostolate³⁵,” aimed at Jews as well. The series *Joseph Your Brother*, which he began issuing in Jerusalem at Easter of 1962, reflected that searching spirit which found a kind of educational stimulus in Rome, in Bea’s pre-conciliar and conciliar commissions, and which gave him access to the hotbed of ideas which was [Cardinal] Bea’s Secretariat.

Interlude

It was in offices on the Via dell’Erba that these, and other, individuals who would play a decisive role in the history of *Nostra Aetate* came into contact with people on other paths, with other interests, which nevertheless provided an undeniable source of enrichment ... and yet that history is certainly more than merely the sum total of individual journeys. I believe that it is not

³¹ HAMMOND, *A Benedictine Legacy of Peace* (see above), pp. 69-70.

³² HAMMOND, *A Benedictine Legacy of Peace* (see above), p. 129.

³³ This was the Beauduin method, which he had used in Bulgaria; see HAMMOND, p. 145.

³⁴ HAMMOND, p. 158.

³⁵ HAMMOND, p. 162.

too risky to hypothesize that, if *Nostra Aetate* has had “ecumenical” significance—such that it marked a change in direction that the Catholic Church undertook (in a certain way) on behalf of all the churches, even beyond itself—then this is due to the sensitivities and competence that theologians like Yves Congar and Charles Moeller brought to the work of the *De Judaeis* sub-commission. It seems to me even less risky to underscore, furthermore, how the Secretariat offered to the discussion on Christians and Jews not only Bea’s multiple competencies—as a Biblical scholar, as a Jesuit and also as a German, who knew very well how to weigh the dangers of the category of collective guilt—but also the stubborn determination of two decisive figures: Bishop Emiel-Jozef De Smedt³⁶, and then-Monsignor Johannes Willebrands.

Both of them were born in 1909, and they had been priests for several years when the Nazi occupation took place. They were eyewitnesses of the Dutch bishops’ decision to publicly speak out to condemn the deportation of Jews for extermination, of that lack of results from that condemnation (often cited as a counter-argument which explained and justified the silence of Pius XII), and of the behaviour of Christians in that extreme situation. One of them (De Smedt) in the Council hall, and the other (Willebrands) in Paul VI’s apartment: both knew how to persuade, to blunt or to defuse the many difficulties that arose on the path to a document that even someone with a pinch of realism would have given up as a lost cause when Paul VI undertook his visit to the Holy Land, without ever pronouncing the word “Israel” ... a document which, nonetheless, obtained formal approval just 22 months later.

Willebrands’ role in particular opens up a very interesting chapter concerning the history of Dutch Catholicism. There was, in fact, a Dutch connection, embodied in Antonius C. Ramselaar (1899-1981) who, at the start of the 50s had already raised the issue of the link between ecumenism and Judaism³⁷. This was perhaps a result of contacts (which to date have never been studied) that he made during his time in Rome with Father Anton van Asseldonk, the Procurator for the Canons of the Holy Cross³⁸. Between 1926 and 1928, van Asseldonk was, together with a Dutch woman, Sophie van Leer (who had been born a Jew in 1892 and had converted to Christianity in 1939) the inspiration for the *Amici Israel* association. Ramselaar had had the support of someone else—Willebrands—when he had created the *Katholieke Raad voor Israel* (1951) and, in addition to publishing the magazine *Raad, Christus en Israël*, had promoted a Catholic conference in the seminary in Apeldoorn where he was rector, at the suggestion of Ottilie Schwarz, an Austrian woman whose father was Jewish, but who had been baptized as a child into the Reformed Church. For many years, she served as secretary to Bishop Willebrands³⁹, and she perhaps played a more decisive role than one might imagine, by cooperating with the work of the Secretariat’s Number Two official, on a matter that, for the bishops, was unthinkable.

³⁶ Born in 1909, in Opwijk, in the Flemish part of the country, De Smedt became a priest in 1933. He was chosen as a bishop in 1950, given the titular see that had belonged to Prospero Lambertini, and consecrated by Cardinal van Roey. In 1952, he became the ordinary of Bruges, a seat he would hold until 1984 (Danneels is one of his priests; De Smedt would die in 1995).

³⁷ The theme had also been raised in the letters that Kurt Pordes (1922-1990), a Protestant pastor who had been born Jewish, had written, first to Pius XII and then to John XXIII; his ideas appeared in *Mitteilungsblatt*, the bulletin of the Austrian association *Aktion gegen den Antisemitismus in Österreich*.

³⁸ A. RAMAEKERS, “Anton van Asseldonk o.s. Crucis 1892-1973,” in *Clairlieu: Tijdschrift gewijd aans de geschiedenis van de kruissheren* 26 (1978), pp. 5-51.

³⁹ In the 1960 symposium, 11 points about preaching were drafted, which during the Council were occasionally confused with Isaac’s points.

In terms of the unforeseen outcome of the path that led to *Nostra Aetate*, an important role was also played by important Jewish figures—both from the Diaspora, and from the “Palestinian state” of Israel (as it was called at the end of the 50s), who followed in Isaac’s wake, with their own particular perspectives and goals.

Gerhard Riegner and Nahum Goldmann

Gerhard Riegner was the bearer of his own vision. He was one of those who, in 1942, were compelled to explain the Shoah while it was still underway: he had been informed, in a very audacious way, of the extermination plan, and of details about the use of prussic acid (one of the ingredients of Zyklon B). The tragic experience of that situation, and his relationship with the President of the *World Jewish Congress*, Nahum Goldmann, convinced Riegner that it was necessary for Jews to have a voice to speak out on an international level, particularly in terms of their relations to the churches, which were at the heart of many WJC initiatives in the postwar years. Riegner would be the driving force behind it⁴⁰: he asked Pius XII for an encyclical on the Jews, the sole suggestion that remained unaddressed after the WCC in 1948 condemned anti-Semitism, together with an appeal to conversion which froze relations between the ecumenical movement and the Jews, until the “Catholic” turning-point of 1960. Once Isaac had initiated the process, Riegner sought out every possible way to take part in the discussion on *De Judaeis*, without, however, managing to ever really grasp the agenda of Bea, who, for his part, had initially sought out Goldmann⁴¹.

Riegner’s relations, even with his own co-workers, were not always easy. He was harsh toward Österreicher, who he considered as distant and haughty, but instead established a close working relationship with Baum, even in the planning of a permanent body for “religious” dialogue with Judaism, which Bea had promised. Riegner remained disappointed by the inclusion of Jewish matters in Bea’s secretariat, and the lack of an *ad hoc* office—but it was only in retrospect that he understood that the WJC’s activism had caused alarm in the Roman Curia, within with there was resistance of a blatantly anti-Semitic kind, but also situations of openness and, in every case, of closeness (such as that that Riegner spoke of with Ottaviani). Above all, it opened up a conflict among the Israeli diplomatic corps, the AJC, the ADL and the WJC itself. This conflict—which blew up in the summer of 1962, when there was talk of the WJC naming an Israeli diplomatic official like Chaim Wardi to Vatican II; for Riegner, this person had to be an analyst, while he would be received as a non-Christian observer, with a whole series of reactions and conflicts which, in the end, laid the foundations for IJCIC. Riegner’s efforts took place behind the scenes, for reasons principally linked to Judaism’s internal balance⁴², but he had the paradoxical of “complicating” the bifurcation between religious action and political action which seemed to be the only path which could ensure the declaration’s passage.

Maurice Fisher and Nathan Ben Horin

⁴⁰ G. M. RIEGNER, *Ne jamais désespérer: Soixantes années au service du peuple juif et des droits de l’homme* (Paris, 1999).

⁴¹ N. GOLDMANN, *Staatsmann ohne Staat: Autobiographie* (Köln-Berlin, 1970).

⁴² Moses Rosen, the Chief Rabbi of Romania, would criticize the WJC over its silence regarding Communism in the 1990s.

A symmetrical problem fell to the Israeli diplomatic corps and its staff *en poste* in Rome, who were responsible for the patient work of persuasion that ultimately brought home to Golda Meir and the government in Jerusalem the significance of a passage in the Council documents, behind which (they suspected) were attempts at a facile self-absolution. The ambassador of Israel at the time was the extraordinary Maurice Fisher.

Born in France, Fisher took part in the Resistance, and in the battle for the birth of the State [of Israel]. As a member of the United Nations' Commission for Conciliation, it was Fisher who, on September 21, 1951, delivered the speech which laid out the Israeli position regarding the war. They say that Adenauer showed him the speech, full of contrition, which was delivered before the Bundestag in 1951⁴³. As ambassador, first in France⁴⁴ and then in Italy, Fisher found himself—against his will—responsible for managing the issue of relations with the Holy See. And, as I have shown in my earlier research, he was the one who chiefly needed to be persuaded of the relevance of what was taking place in the Vatican, who had to judge how far international Jewish organizations ought to intrude⁴⁵, and who would become the channel through whom Israel would understand the long-term scope of *Nostra Aetate*.

Fisher's activity would be incomprehensible, however, without the discreet and keen figure of Nathan Ben Horin. A member of the French Resistance, and then a fighter in Palestine, Ben Horin came to his diplomatic career by means of the *kibbutz* movement and his own studies in political science. He came from the same French-speaking Jewish culture that Isaac did⁴⁶, but with a more politically comprehensive view of the situation. He was a staff member of a representative organization which was accredited to the Quirinale, and so he ought only to have concerned himself with the Council in a marginal way. Instead, it was Ben Horin who pinpointed the decisive and most delicate key points in the passage from the Council. It is, of course, well known that, as regards the document, whether it was Bea speaking in the hall, or the *periti* discussing "modi" in the Secretariat, everyone was very careful about "avoiding" the possibility of passing statements of a theological sort which had political implications, such as the acknowledgement of the State of Israel. In some cases, the distinction between Judaism and the State was an attempt to conceal a latent Catholic anti-Semitism, which did not want to grant the Jews the political autonomy that only emancipation had restored, after centuries of subjection. In other cases, it involved a wholly political caution regarding the fate of Christians in Arab and Islamic countries. In still other cases, there was an attempt to distinguish a theology (even a Jewish theology) of Israel upon its land from a theology of the land itself, which would have ended up threatening the same faith in expectation. Several complicated assurances about the "purely religious" character of *Nostra Aetate* were neither false nor specious: and Ben Horin was aware of all of that. What set him apart from others—diplomats, ecclesiastical figures, activists—was his intuition that it would only be after the document had been passed that it would be possible to

⁴³ T. SEGEV, *The Seventh Million*: "Many of the words had been dictated to him from Jerusalem. Adenauer first sent drafts of his declaration to Maurice Fischer in Paris, who in turn forwarded it to Nahum Goldmann, president of the World Jewish Congress. Like a teacher correcting a student's essay, Goldmann edited it in red ink, and sent it on to Jerusalem, where it was further amended and returned via Fischer to Adenauer".

⁴⁴ F. SCHILLO, *La France et la création de l'État d'Israël, 8 février 1947 - 11 mai 1949*.

⁴⁵ Regarding Bea's contacts with a variety of Jewish spokespersons, see SCHMIDT, pp. 466ff., pp. 568ff., pp. 612ff., and footnote 179.

⁴⁶ P. PIERRARD, *Juifs et catholiques français: D'Édouard Drumont à Jakob Kaplan 1886-1994* (Paris, 1997), pp. 327-374.

discuss politics, and the legitimacy of the State where the “seventh million” of the Jews—those who had fled the Shoah—had settled.

Conclusions

What do these individuals have in common? Not only the fact that they were key figures in a very brief and very hotly debated text like *Nostra Aetate*, much less the fact of having been “right”. Rather, it is that they belonged to a generation within which a minority⁴⁷ interpreted and reacted against a culture of contempt with partial initiatives, with limited viewpoints, without the kinds of distinctions that today seem indispensable to us. But it was the power of the experience of the Shoah which still has neither this nor any other obligatory name, and which demands the work of purification and reconciliation, and affects preaching, public speaking, and points of view⁴⁸.

I cannot *not* be struck by the fact that, between the summer of 1945 and the summer of 1947, the question of preaching had already been raised with great clarity, that between 1948 and 1951, the demand for a profound re-thinking had already made it around the world, and how, between 1955 and 1960, all of these expectations were already looking toward the papacy, and toward the Council.

If the anti-State of Israel attitude (which applied as much to the journalism of *The Christian Century* as it did to Vatican diplomacy concerning the new state’s entry into the U.N.) heralded the previously unthinkable “emancipation” of the Jews in their nation-state, then the issue of prejudice in preaching blew up immediately after the war. As Anna Foa recently explained in a talk given to SISSCO^{**}, this involved a discussion about the origins of Christianity itself, and about what role an inherited pagan anti-Semitism had played in the theological antagonism of Christians (which today we tend to call anti-Judaism, as if it were a virtue). Defining Nazism as a “neo-pagan” régime is, thus, an effort to provide a simple solution that solves every problem, without explaining, however, where Fascist or Croatian racism would fit in. But it also involves a discussion of what was going on in the churches, from a point-of-view that Hannah Arendt’s distinctions, made in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, fail to address.

This threshold also explains the new role taken on by several converted Jews and concerned Christians, who felt the weight of a cause-and-effect relationship that was still being named, appreciated and, finally, lamented, in a convergence of thought that united several generations between the end of the 1800s and the end of the Great War: those who were already old men when the war broke out; those who fought in it; those who felt, or suffered, its impact, and who, because of it, were forced to immigrate. For them, *Nostra Aetate* was “that era” which could not come to a close for them without some solemn act—which is what finally took place, on October 28, 1965. Connelly’s work, *From Enemy to Brother*, shows very clearly how the presence of converted Jews (a group that would, down through the history of Christian anti-Semitism, normally have been considered very dangerous) proved to be the tipping point: Baum,

⁴⁷ J. TOULAT, *Juifs mes frères* (Paris 1963)²; M.-T. HOCH - B. DUPUY, *Les Églises devant le Judaïsme: Documents officiels 1948-1978* (Paris, 1980); L. SESTIERI - G. CERETI, *Le Chiese cristiane e l’ebraismo (1947-1982)* (Casale Monferrato, 1983).

⁴⁸ A. MELLONI, *La lenta ricezione della Shoah, fra chiesa cattolica e ricerca storica*, in *La chiesa e gli altri*, edited by A. RICCARDI (Milan, 2008), pp. 97-127.

^{**} [Ed: SISSCO = Società italiana per lo studio della storia contemporanea; the Italian Society for the Study of Contemporary History]

Rudloff, Peterson, Jager, and obviously Msgr. Oesterreicher, who is at the heart of Connelly's research, and whose own intellectual network brought him into contact with Thieme and the Maritains—even if it did not develop in quite as mechanical a way as those who find “the” source of an editorial modification in an archive might be led to believe.

Finally, today's generation understands that the “religious” turnaround brought about by *Nostra Aetate* laid the foundation for a political openness: what Augustin Bea and Johannes Willebrands had denied was not the end of the story, but it laid the groundwork for the steps which had to take place. Those steps would be protected—even on a political level—not by changing of the principle of impartiality (which was inconceivable), but by a theological turnaround and its developments, as Vatican II continues to be more and more profoundly integrated⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ In terms of rejecting the analytical framework adopted in *Nostra Aetate* concerning the phenomenon of anti-Semitism (“manifestationes”), and the adoption of the questionable distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, see: A. MELLONI, “*Noi ricordiamo*’: Aspects et problèmes d’un document du Vatican sur la Shoah,” in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 87 (1999)/1, pp. 59-68.