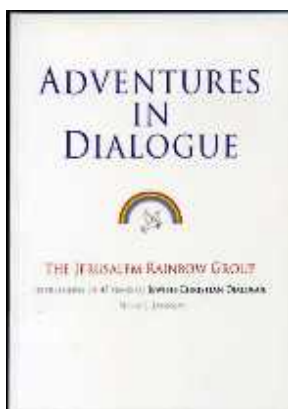


## Adventures in Dialogue. The Jerusalem Rainbow Group

31.08.2013 | Peter E. Janssen

*Impressions of 45 years of Jewish-Christian Dialogue. Exclusively on JCR: Preface by Rabbi Raphael Jospe and full chapter 2, "An Example of Dialogue"*



*The book "Adventures in Dialogue. The Jerusalem Rainbow Group" by Peter E. Janssen tells the story of the Rainbow Group for Jewish-Christian Dialogue in Jerusalem. Founded in 1965, the group meets monthly and brings together Jewish and Christian religious leaders and scholars who seek to overcome longstanding religious animosities and to create a positive framework for reconciliation. In today's world, rife with religious conflict and fanaticism, terror and suffering appear to be on the rise. The adventure of the Rainbow, however, proves that honest dialogue can bring respect for the faith of others, while regular, face-to-face meetings can increase mutual trust and can even lead to friendships that transcend the purely intellectual. Through the acknowledgement of one another's spiritual commitments, the members of the Rainbow have been inspired to work together in the spirit of faith and compassion to address some of the critical issues facing contemporary society.*

JCRelations is happy to present below the preface by Rabbi Raphael Jospe, the second chapter, and an excerpt of the ninth chapter of the book. Many thanks to Peter E. Janssen, Rabbi Jospe and the publishing house [Lee Achim Sefarim](#) for permission to do so!

All relevant bibliographical and order information could be found in the downloadable pdf-file at the end of the [page](#).

[Preface by Raphael Jospe](#)

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**[PREFACE](#)**

Peter Janssen has devoted several years of dedicated work to this history of the Jerusalem Rainbow Club. I was asked, together with my Rainbow colleagues Malcolm Lowe and Michael Krupp (both of whom were involved in Rainbow for several years before I became a member), to supervise the project and to assist Peter in any way possible. We all owe Peter a great debt of gratitude.

Although in books we generally preserve a certain degree of formality, I deliberately use Peter's first name here, because the informality and intimacy of personal friendship is part of the atmosphere which makes Rainbow special and successful. As Peter's study of the history of Rainbow shows, it was founded by a small group of Jewish and Christian intellectuals—academicians and religious figures in Jerusalem — as an unofficial and private club, with membership by invitation only. This was essential, certainly in the formative years, and still important today, in order to promote the mutual trust and openness which enable participants to share their beliefs and their differences honestly and frankly. In recent years many of the generation of founders and original members of Rainbow have died, and others are no longer able to participate on a regular basis. The younger generation of participants — most of whom are not so "young" themselves by any reasonable meaning of the term — have attempted to carry on in the same spirit and vision of the founders.

Nevertheless, and as also clearly documented in Peter's study, there have been changes in Rainbow, in response to different conditions or perceptions of the next generation. Two changes, in particular, should be noted, together with their implications for the group: a growth in membership, and less formality. The original group was quite small, and consisted of people who already knew each other well and were close to each other personally. Over the years, the group grew, although membership was always, and remains, by invitation. As a result, although within the group relations are certainly friendly, the group no longer consists only of the original small core of close personal friends. Another aspect of the group's growth discussed in Peter's study has to do with the fact that, despite this numerical growth, for much of Rainbow's history, participation by members of eastern Churches and by Palestinian Christians has regrettably been minimal. As for less formality, meetings used to be conducted according to a strict "ritual" in which minutes of the previous meeting were read, and sessions opened and closed with prayers or devotional readings. Over the past few years, given that all or virtually all members have access to email, the minutes are sent out to the membership, thus obviating the need to read them aloud for several minutes, and meetings are still opened, but not usually closed, with prayers. This gives more time for the lecture and discussion.

What really makes Rainbow different from other groups, then, is that it remains a "club," with

membership by invitation, and with its programs closed to the public and open only to members and their invited guests (who are then introduced at the opening of every meeting). This restrictive policy is essential in order to preserve the spirit of openness and mutual trust essential for the honest dialogue we desire. Second, Rainbow has no headquarters of its own, and its programs are held, on a rotating basis, at various Jewish and Christian institutions in Jerusalem. Rainbow thus has no institutional identity or ideological agenda of its own. Third, the discussion is considered no less important – and in many respects more important – than the lectures, which are generally organized around an annual theme (as Peter’s charts document). Typically, following the lecture, there is a short break with refreshments, followed by open discussion. Finally, every attempt is made (not always completely successfully) to have the membership consist more or less equally of Jews and Christians. This is also reflected in the leadership. According to Rainbow’s unwritten rules of two-year terms of office, if the Chair is Jewish, the Vice-Chair who succeeds him or her after two years, must be Christian, and vice versa. The position of Executive Secretary is not restricted, nor is it limited to two years, and there have been devoted people who have served for much longer terms.

Let me now shift from Rainbow to the larger question of Jewish-Christian dialogue. This dialogue is sometimes mistakenly referred to as “ecumenical.” That term, of course, is appropriate for inter-Christian dialogue, and goes back to the ecumenical synods of early Christianity, with representatives from the entire oikoumene, the inhabited world as it was then known. The ecumenical movement, since the end of World War II, and the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948, and especially since Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) has promoted Christian understanding and the cause of Christian unity. The Jewish-Christian encounter, on the other hand, while certainly attempting to advance mutual understanding, explicitly does not aim at unity and a submerging of differences (a point also brought out in Peter Janssen’s interviews with Rainbow members). Rather, inter-religious dialogue seeks to enhance those differences, based on greater understanding of and respect for the other. Accepting each other as people, and relating to each other as friends, does not, and should not, depend on ideological agreement. And, as it turns out, in no small measure, the more we understand of the other, the more we come to understand ourselves.

The late Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchik (1903–1993), perhaps the outstanding leader of what is often called “modern” or “centrist” Jewish Orthodoxy (as opposed to “sectarian” or “ultra-Orthodoxy”) published in 1964 an essay, “Confrontation,” that has widely been understood by his followers as limiting Jewish-Christian relations to matters of practical cooperation and as opposing theological dialogue.<sup>[1]</sup> However, as at least one of his students involved in Jewish-Christian theological dialogue has testified, their teacher knew and approved of their activity. More important, his own seminal theological essay *The Lonely Man of Faith*<sup>[2]</sup> was originally delivered to a Roman Catholic audience at St. John’s Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts in 1964.<sup>[3]</sup>

In “Confrontation,” he laid down four conditions he considered essential for a democratic confrontation of religions that would preserve their equality and individuality. (1) Faith communities are totally independent. On the level of faith, they are incommensurable, and their inherent worth cannot be measured by external standards. (2) The “logos,” the word of religious experience, is unique and incomprehensible to those outside (and all too often even to those inside) the faith community. To use the other’s language is to lose one’s individuality and distinctiveness. (3) Faith communities must maintain a policy of non-interference with each other, and refrain from suggesting to the other changes in ritual or emendation of texts. (4) Finally, history has not authorized us to make revisions for the sake of our relations with others.

At roughly the same point in history, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972), who actively played an advisory role at Vatican II, published a very different approach to dialogue

in his famous essay, “No Religion is an Island,” originally delivered as the inaugural address at Union Theological Seminary in 1965.<sup>[4]</sup> The very titles of the two essays make amply clear the differences in the approach of these two rabbis to inter-religious dialogue—one cautious and reserved, the other enthusiastic.

Although Jews and Christians alike have come a very long way, separately and together, in the almost fifty years since “Confrontation” and “No Religion is an Island” were published, in my experience, the Jerusalem Rainbow Group respects the kinds of concerns voiced in the four conditions laid out in “Confrontation” for proper relations in the inter-religious encounter, while sharing an enthusiasm for the enterprise of meeting the other. Our communities, of course, are not only externally different from each other, but are also internally diverse within themselves, and at least in some cases external dialogue and pluralism with others may be easier to maintain than internal dialogue and pluralism within our own communities.

It is also interesting to observe that whereas, fifty years ago, many of the leading Jewish figures in inter-religious dialogue came from the liberal movements,<sup>[5]</sup> many of the Jews active today in inter-religious dialogue are personally Orthodox. On the Christian side, there is today a far greater openness to positive and respectful relations with Jews, and desire for dialogue, among Evangelical Christians.

Those who founded the Jerusalem Rainbow Club nearly five decades ago can be proud that the seed they planted has grown into a tree, and can be pleased that today there is a forest of similar trees planted by others. Peter Janssen’s study of the Jerusalem Rainbow Club will be important and useful not only to people interested in knowing about the history of one group of Jews and Christians who sought to engage each other in dialogue, but also for those seeking a paradigm for the ongoing Jewish-Christian encounter.

Raphael Jospe

Jerusalem, Israel

Iyyar 5772 / May 2012

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## [Chapter Two](#)

### **An Example of Dialogue**

#### **2.1 The Jerusalem Rainbow Group**

The Jerusalem Rainbow Group is a group for dialogue in which Jewish and Christian scholars and religious leaders meet together. It started its activities in June 1965 in Jerusalem. The participants meet once a month for seven months of the academic year. At the time of writing, this group has met over 300 times and has gained much knowledge and experience regarding the process of dialogue. The group was established with seven members of each

faith community, hence the name “Rainbow Group”, and remains active to this day; hence it is one of the oldest and most active such groups for dialogue in the world.

The following chapters will focus in more detail on the beginnings of the Rainbow Group (hereafter “the Rainbow”), with extensive extracts from the interviews with its members. This chapter will discuss some generalities. To avoid confusion and to let the conversation run smoothly, the answers of the persons interviewed are in italic script and the questions and remarks made by the author are in perpendicular script. For the sake of clarity, the word “Author” is sometimes added to highlight who is speaking.

In March 2009, Malcolm Lowe (a Christian scholar in Jerusalem, specialised in Greek philosophy and the New Testament) described various aspects of the Rainbow Group.

*“Indeed the Rainbow Group has made a contribution to the dialogue in Israel. And actually also internationally, since we had so many guests. We tried to engage them by asking them to give a lecture or to be guests for a year, etc. There are unique features about the Rainbow Group. 1) We meet every time in a different institution, so we are not identified with one particular place or organisation and also the members of the institution are more apt to come and see what this Rainbow Group is all about. This is an outreach. 2) We have also always emphasised the discussions in the group. There are plenty of lectures and forums, etc., where knowledge moves in one direction: to the listener. We, however, want to discuss, to put to the test, to question, to be informed more closely, etc. We want not to be afraid of disagreement, but try to understand the reasons for the disagreement, go deeper into the presuppositions, etc., to get closer to one another. In our meetings, everybody could give a lecture and, because we know each other and we are engaged with each other, our questions are usually not informative like with a formal, public lecture, but they try to pry deeper.”*

(Author) “My observation of the Rainbow is that it is small, it is select, the friendship is stressed, you see each other every month, all this in order to facilitate the engagement of the real questions, the questions behind the obvious disagreements. You need an enclosure, you need safety, you need the warmth of companionship in order to get to the real business of the dialogue. Is this correct?”

*“Yes, that was and still is essentially the strength of the Rainbow. Every year we have a banquet, where the ladies, the spouses of the members, are also invited. Now in the eyes of some, who think that you need all your time to do dialogue, this is an exaggeration, but in fact it is very useful and gives an atmosphere of leisure where you might think that dialogue is always a dead serious business. There was a time when we even at the banquet had a presentation of a subject, but not anymore. Sometimes we do, but it is short and concerns aspects of the Rainbow itself.”*

“In the first twenty years no ladies were coming to the meetings?”

*“They corrected that later. Therefore they called the banquet a ‘ladies night’... We also have a formal way to start the meeting, often called ‘the liturgy’. But is a good way to start. Formerly, there used to be asked someone to end the meeting. When I was in the chair I used to look around if someone could do it. But now we do not always do it, it is a sort of an option. You could say we do*

*not have too many formalities; there are some, but it is not rigid."*

The group was established during the time of the Second Vatican Council, and there was an atmosphere of ecumenism in the air. From the historical viewpoint, however, the beginning of this dialogue group was quite exceptional. For it was an meeting of two faith communities who had lived for a long time side by side, but nevertheless in profound contradiction to each other, and enmity and distrust were common. It is of great significance that they were able to come together in dialogue and that they have kept on doing so.

Around the time that the Rainbow was set up, other dialogue groups were established, not only in Israel but in Europe, the United States and more widely. The next decades saw much activity in this new field. It led to the creation of several larger groups for consultation. Earlier than them all, however, is the International Council of Christians and Jews, founded in 1946.

## **2.2 Experience is the basis for this study in dialogue**

The long years of experience of those who have participated in the Rainbow are the basis for this research. This text is the result of listening to those who took part in those prolonged meetings: their experiences, discoveries, difficulties, friendships, spiritual recognition and much more. It draws conclusions and lessons from their experiences, and aims to inspire and help us to relate to our neighbours from other faiths. For our neighbours are just like us, just as rich, just as uncertain and yet just as full of possibilities.

Together shall we discover a new, fascinating horizon, where people of different faiths are thankful for their own vision of the wonder of the universe and the creative possibilities of humankind, and where they are no longer afraid of enmity or competition from other visions, but eager to enrich themselves through new encounters.

For the greater part, these experiences have been made in the Rainbow. For the sake of comparison, the author has also conducted a number of interviews outside the Rainbow with other Jewish and Christian theologians engaged in dialogue in Israel, and with prominent members of dialogue groups in Europe.

## **2.3 Documents**

The material for this study is based on three sets of documents:

1. The minutes of the meetings of the Rainbow from 1965 to 2009. These were painstakingly kept. An inventory of these minutes was made in 2009 and can be consulted in the Appendix.
2. Interviews with members of the Rainbow, made from 1992 to 2003, focused around the main question: "How was your experience?"
3. Interviews with members of the Rainbow conducted in 2009 and focusing on historical questions.

Lists of the names of the people interviewed in both periods are also included in the Appendix.

The first group of interviews was undertaken by the author between 1992 and 2003 with the support of Dr. Bernard Resnikoff of the American Jewish Committee in Jerusalem. Together with Rev. Åke Skoog of the Swedish Theological Institute, Dr. Resnikoff helped to formulate a

definition, a reflection on dialogue and a list of questions concerning the members' experiences within the dialogue. There were five questions (with several sub-questions) concerning: motives, language, attitude, faith and action. The materials from this first group of interviews provide valuable evaluations from the members concerning the meaning of the dialogue at a personal level.

The second group of interviews was conducted in the spring of 2009. The questions served a more historical purpose and were formulated by Prof. Raphael Jospe and the author. The questions focused on the aims of the dialogue sessions and whether they were kept up over the years; on topics and contributions; on who participated and who didn't (and why or why not); and related issues. The outline of this study is determined by the order of those questions.

The first group of interviews involved 14 interviewees (8 Jews and 6 Christians, all members of the Rainbow). The answers reflect the interviewees' experiences over the early years of the Rainbow. The second group of interviews involved 9 interviewees (5 Jews and 4 Christians). These interviews provide an impression of the later years in the Rainbow. All the interviews taken together provide an overview of this well-known dialogue group over several decades.

All the interviews posed the set questions over a period of an hour or more, and all the interviewees participated enthusiastically. As seen in the results, a dialogue group changes over the years, but with regard to the experiences shared there was a steady growth of friendship and trust without any dramatic changes.

## **2.4 Limitations in the use of the material**

There are two limitations relating to the use of this material. Firstly, these documents, the inventory of the archives and the interviews, provide only a limited view of the history of the Rainbow. Nevertheless, the interviews form the basis for the study and conclusions of this project. For this reason, long citations from the interviews have been provided in the text, to enable the reader to verify the arguments and conclusions drawn. Since this represents only a small fragment of all the experiences made, one might regard this small research as a pilot project, an indicator. Not more, but not less either. For the experiences are real, they cover often a long period and they have several important things to bring to us.

A second limitation lies in the special character of a dialogue group. In this case, the dialogue concerns religious matters and consists of group meetings and person-to-person conversations, in which the participants discuss their religious convictions and in which they seek to understand the convictions of someone from a different religious faith.

The meetings of the Rainbow always include a lecture on a chosen subject, followed by a discussion. It is repeatedly recorded in past minutes that the discussion was lively and sometimes controversial. However, there are almost no records of this discussion itself, or of the differing opinions. Even though the lectures are important, the accent lies on the discussion, on this meeting of people with different convictions, who seek to bridge the divisions between religious confessions. So, in fact, this discussion is the core business of the dialogue group.

It would be only natural that no records would be kept of this ongoing event. That would hinder the freedom of the discussion to run its course. It means, however, at the same time that one cannot write a full history of this core business of the dialogue group. And so it must be. For dialogue, certainly on matters of faith, is a delicate undertaking and cannot admit observers to pry into the innermost feelings of its participants. When people have the courage to open their hearts to other people, we enter "holy territory", you have "to take off your

shoes” and tread carefully.

Malcolm Lowe tells me, however, that he is unaware of any conscious decision to preserve secrecy in the failure to record the details of the discussion. Rather, it would have been an immense task to write down all the twists and turns of the discussion. Moreover, it was the custom to read the minutes at the beginning of the next meeting, so detailed minutes would have taken up too much time. In recent years, when the minutes were not read but simply sent by email to everyone, there were some who tried to record the discussions at greater length. They found that it was a very time-consuming task, and the practice did not establish itself.

In any case, when we want to learn something about dialogue from this particular dialogue group, the Rainbow, we have little more than the minutes, pieces of correspondence, a number of lectures, and the interviews, which provide a window onto the personal experience of some of the members. The archives provide formal information about the lecturers, the papers, the guests and the dates, along with letters discussing the general working of the group. The papers delivered over the years, in all about 300, were sometimes found in journals. Copies of others were in the archives, but sadly many have been lost.

In the series of minutes, all the records of papers include the title and lecturer. The lectures were naturally given prior to the discussion, which was the moment that the real dialogue started. Therefore, the impressions related in the interviews are our best source for understanding what the dialogue was about, how it was conducted, and how it affected the participants. Whilst there is not a lot of material, this is real material, it is lived experience and over the years these discussions have had a real impact on the development of the participants. They may not always have agreed amongst one another, but the dialogue itself remained for them an imperative. This fact came over strongly in all of the interviews.

## **2.5 Terminology, definition and method**

In this section, we briefly survey the method used in the interviews. This requires a definition of terms, including the term “dialogue” itself.

### **2.5.1 The use of the term “dialogue”**

The term “dialogue” does not always find approval, and the author finds this rightly so. It can suggest that the partners have already committed themselves to talking about their faith and its intimacies. When members of a group meet, they do not always know in advance where they are going, and they can be cautious about exploring the road that they are travelling. It is only later that they open up and engage themselves further. At that point, one may perhaps speak of dialogue. Hence dialogue is a slow process, and the exact “nature” of dialogue can be debated.

Nevertheless, the term “dialogue” has won universal recognition, in particular for the meeting of religions, and the author considers it confusing to introduce another term. With due respect for its actual limitations, as cited above, the term is used within this book.

Prof. Marcel Dubois (Dominican priest, professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and one of the co-founders of the Rainbow) commented on this subject:

*“About the word ‘dialogue’ itself I have my doubts. You can have a dialogue of deaf persons; you can have a dialogue of people who are not well informed about the subject matter they discuss. Furthermore, you have to keep an eye on an important detail: there is a human, universal, brotherly dialogue with people you admire, like Greenberg (Prof. Dr. Moshe Greenberg) and J.*

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*Cohen, (Rabbi Dr. Jack Cohen). They are people you meet in the name of their Jewish identity. But the dialogue is much more than a confrontation of points of view concerning a certain matter. One does not expect from the dialogue a change in attitude. It is not a Platonic dialogue, which hopes to get somewhere. Such dialogues which aim at converting the partner are doomed to fail from the beginning. Dialogue is the listening or hearing of two people upon the Eternal One (in the original French: Eternité), the same Book, and sometimes even in the difference of understanding the same terminology you can discover a truth. For example, in our colloquium about the Sanctification of the Name: for the Jew, it is foremost 'martyrdom', but not exclusively so, for keeping the commandments is also the Sanctification of the Name. But now the simple fact is that this expression, which by Jews is usually reserved for 'martyrdom' from what I have heard and understood, doesn't hinder me from keeping on looking for different meanings in my commentary. It makes me more careful in speaking about Judaism, but this tension itself is revealing. They are like two voices which each have a different tone, and there are more examples like this. The words of faith accompany Jews and Christians each in their own history and receive certain accents and meaning, which differ from earlier times. Language is not mathematics, but something alive, and that appears well in the dialogue, where the same words have received for the one a different meaning than for the other."*

(Author) "So in the dialogue there is a motor which drives, a dynamic which causes the meeting to go further than the original reasons for its beginning?"

*"Yes, but that presupposes indeed that the intention (of the partners) has the same object, the same Word of God, and that this intention has an attitude towards the partner, which wants to open itself. So that you are ready to criticise yourself, your faith and, even better, its forms, and that you dare to let these forms of your faith be questioned. Such dialogue is on an official level very rare. The official authorities do not follow this line. They propose a sociological reform or a diplomatic rapprochement or something like that. The good, simple believers, Jews and Christians, who value and respect each other, who invite each other, they are the true partners of dialogue, they understand what it is all about. It is not a dialogue, not a confrontation, but a kind of hymn, music, which is respected and which the one sings for the other and which exists in the hearing of the other one's hymn."*

### 2.5.2 Definition of terms

The interviews were conducted with the help of a **questionnaire**. This began with a **definition of terms**, which stated:

"A dialogue takes place when over a certain period of time, in a strict formal and in a more informal manner, two or more different persons, with different think- and faith-systems, with about the same level of education, meet and seek to understand and learn from each other, without wanting in any way, conscious or subconscious, to change the faith or views of the other, in order to extradite fear, conduce security, and thus stimulate the creational forces in each to clarify divergent and convergent ideas."

### 2.5.3 Analysis of the dialogue

Then there followed a brief, formal **analysis** of what happens in the dialogue:

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“Dialogue is complex. The experience is determined by two relations: one with the own faith community, the other with your partner and his faith community. This means you represent and you present. This brings matters such as loyalty, apologetics and the experience of seeing yourself through the eyes of your partner into play. The result may be the recognition of wrong ideas about your partner’s faith, and the recognition of having mutual tenets of faith and spirituality, before hidden to you. Important for this dynamic process of dialogue is the reason why you engaged yourself in it. In the dialogue between Jews and Christians there is generally speaking a marked asymmetry of necessity. This has its bearing on the objective you set yourself. But the dialogue is also a process which has its own dynamics, where a new spiritual dimension, a new loyalty of partners of different faith, a new vision may come into view and new things are being said.”

#### 2.5.4 Method

A short word has to be said about the **method** employed in these interviews. A heuristic approach has been taken. The word “heuristic” is of Greek origin, and stems from the verb *heuriskein*. *The New International Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language* (1995) defines this word as a “teaching method which encourages the pupil to proceed by his own investigation”; it is also used to designate “the creation of models as a working hypothesis of a goal or solution”. The word “heuristic” is also used as an adjective, meaning “useful for discovering knowledge”.

For the interviews covered in this text, the author chose to leave the interviewees free to answer in their own way. This has led to a large diversity in the answers, but often also provides unexpected and new angles to the questions. Although the large diversity of answers makes it more difficult to systematise these and draw general conclusions, a positive outcome is that the process reaps richer fruits.

#### 2.6 Constraints and possibilities

The analysis highlights both the constraints and the possibilities of dialogue. In the following chapters, we shall discover more about the reality of such an undertaking, as we “listen to” some very down-to-earth experiences.

There are many **constraints**. For example, linguistically it takes a long time to learn the real meaning of the language of your partner. You may use the same words, but they may have a different meaning altogether. Important is the fact that you are not really able to enter into the heart of the other faith community, simply because you have given your heart already away, so to speak, to another faith.

Another constraint is theological. You are bound to the confession of your faith community, which may not be able to follow your conclusions in your dialogue effort. This confession is based on the acceptance by the faith community of normative documents and their generally accepted interpretation. The process by which it was formed usually took a certain period of time in which also historic circumstances played an important role.

In the case of Judaism and Christianity, which are historically and theologically closely linked, it is generally accepted that the period in which their basic identities, their “orthodoxy”, was determined was in the first four centuries of the Common Era. The basic documents were, for Judaism, Tenach and the oral Torah, and for the Christians, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Of course, “Tenach” for Jews refers to the same collection of books as does “the Old Testament” for Protestants (whereas Catholics and Orthodox include extra books), but the difference of names reflects a different approach to and understanding of that collection.

For many centuries, that early period determined the basic character of both Judaism and Christianity. Important circumstances were, for Judaism: the loss of Temple and Land and hence the danger of losing Jewish identity; political dependency on the Roman authorities; and the growing controversy with the Church. For the Christian Church, there were also many problems: a lack of recognition by the Romans as a legitimate religion; controversy with the Jewish community, the Synagogue; internal deviations and differing traditions in conflict with each other; and a lack of organisational tradition.

Those, briefly stated, were the structural reasons for the characters of Judaism and Christianity or, perhaps more accurately, those were the kinds of reasons that that the Jewish and Christian communities themselves traditionally cited. More recently, however, scientific research by both Jewish and Christian scholars (individually and together) has focused on the complex history of the first centuries in general and “on the parting of the ways of Judaism and Christianity”, as it is often termed, in particular. It is certain that both faith communities made important decisions regarding the borderline of their faith. For example, for Jews the final authority on religious decisions lay with the Beth Midrash, chosen from a number of generally accepted authoritative rabbis. For Christians, the final authority was with the local bishop and later with the Synod of Bishops. Rulings by these bodies, and others linked to these, were regarded as the orthodox confession of Judaism and Christianity.

There are also **possibilities**. Dialogue involves human contact and the engagement of two or more people, which often produces more than the sum of their opinions. There are different levels in this meeting. Dialogue is often conceived of as an intellectual exercise. People exchange ideas, concepts and contents of confessions; they compare them and question them. It is a whole process. At a psychological level, attitudes, feeling safe and being appreciated play an important role.

Yet another effective method of dialogue is doing things together, for example: caring for needy people, or fundraising for a project of the other faith community. This brings people together in an unambiguous way, which is often compelling to everyone. There is also the element of daring to share your religious service and ritual, not for conversion's sake, but for better understanding and for expressing sincerity.

In the following chapters we try to recount aspects of the life of the Rainbow, the discoveries made and the problems encountered. These issues become clear from the analysis of the archives and other materials.

## 2.7 How did the Jerusalem Rainbow Group start?

Around 1965, there was growing international concern around the relationship between the State of Israel and their Arab neighbours. From the point of view of the United Nations and the United States, there was an attitude of “wait and see”. At that time, the whole world appeared to be seized by anxiety, stress and fear for the Cold War, with the very real threat of an atomic holocaust (remember to the Cuban missile crisis), and the Middle East nations were caught in this fever. These were the years before the Six Days War, when the Arab neighbours armed themselves and Israeli did the same.

Both sides sought to buy the best planes and arms available. When it was clear that the Arab nations together had an enormous army and outnumbered the Israeli Defence Forces by far, this knowledge had heavy repercussions for the social mood in Israel. Everybody and every organisation and service was in some way or other made ready for the eventuality of war. For the Israeli people, it was an anxious time. They were concerned that they could not prevail over against such a strong and large enemy attacking from all sides, especially since many enterprises and organisations were only just being established and were still working towards

a better future.

On the other hand, that was the time of the Second Vatican Council, when the Catholic Church issued the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which promised the opening of a hopeful new chapter in the history of relations between Christians and Jews. Indeed, one of the co-founders of the Rainbow was Father Bruno Hussar, who worked assiduously behind the scenes to ensure that the text of *Nostra Aetate* would be satisfactory. Years later, he would write about those efforts in *Holy Land* magazine, published by the Franciscan Custody in Jerusalem (and not to be confused with other publications bearing a similar name).

It was in those strenuous circumstances that the seeds of the Rainbow were sown. Whatever criticisms and doubts one might find about the initiative, it was in itself a statement of firm faith. Whilst all were readying themselves for an uncertain and probably dangerous future, there were those who thought in a new direction: to seek out and meet with people of a different faith, one with which they had been in disaccord for so many centuries. Formerly, the people of this other faith had been focused on their own theological certainties, but after people's recent experiences in Europe, certainty had turned to despair. People did not show it, did not always know it, but they sensed it. People who had come to Israel to help and to be of assistance were taking a completely different look at the Jewish faith.

A significant example of such assistance in the early 1960s was the creation of Nes Ammim in Galilee, a Christian kibbutz. Here volunteers from Europe came to work for and learn from Israel. Where people came to Israel and met Jewish people in a new way and with new interest, a small flame of dialogue was kindled. People asked: "Would it not be possible to talk to each other, to get to know each other, to speak about our differences, and what we saw as wrong and dangerous in the other faith?" Then, with faith and love, they started to talk and discuss.

So, amidst the terrible horizons of war and conflict, and under the dark cloud of fear of the insufficiency to stand up and save the new nation from disaster and annihilation, another horizon became visible. Amidst it all there was light and clarity, small, but it was definitely there. It was indeed a Rainbow of possible promises.

This Rainbow is still there. After more than forty-five years it continues to be a forum for dialogue, a circle of friends in which Jews and Christians have formed bonds. There have been ups and downs, but it continues. Its academic standard remains high and demanding; it is an enterprise full of hope and a future. For where people of faith meet and where questions, some of them painful, are asked, one can be faced with surprises and new outlooks.

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## [Chapter Nine](#)

### **The Strength of the Dialogue (Excerpt)**

#### **9.5 The strength of dialogue**

[...]

In interfaith dialogue you meet and slowly discover another world that you did not know before, and this discovery does something to you. You remain the same, but at the same time

you change your opinion, a bit here and a bit there. That change is not likely to have occurred outside the dialogue.

From where does the strength of dialogue originate? It lies in the act of connecting to this other world. You do not notice this strength or this peculiar attraction right away. It is a slow process, in which there are obstacles to be overcome. Not everybody is able to continue. But there are also those who can never quit. For some people, an unavoidable fascination for this meeting of that other world has taken hold of them.

In the case of the Rainbow, some of the older members whom the author had the privilege to meet were very down to earth about their attachment to the Rainbow, but nevertheless felt that it had been important to them. This process, in which you go out of your own world and enter into another world, be it only for a moment, contains a certain strength in itself. Quite apart from your own world of faith, you experience this strength as something new and helpful, sometimes difficult and disappointing, but mostly as a rewarding adventure; remarkably, it is very close. It is in fact as close as the neighbour of a different faith.

Yet that neighbour seems to be far away in another world of beliefs, rituals, special objects and traditions, which you do not understand. When you get to know your neighbour and their family, and hear your neighbour explain why he or she does this and does not do that, or why not, it becomes very logical, and that brings you closer to one another. There is something else about this relationship: because you know your neighbour's life a little better, there is often a peculiar appreciation for each other, exactly because you are different and at the same time you are neighbours and perhaps even friends. Prof. Marcel Dubois spoke one time about this kind of living dialogue between people, who for generations lived together as Christians and Jews and Muslims, who respected each other and helped each other, and who in this way often formed a community full of wisdom and hospitality. In this community, the fundamental reality of each spirituality, be they Jewish, Christian or Muslim, was never put in doubt, but was accepted as belonging to the other person.

It is clear that interfaith encounter as an activity not only has a strong significance, but also a strength to do something in us. It kindles within us, amongst other things, a longing to continue to learn and discover, a feeling that the world in which we live is richer and more interesting than we thought it was. This world of religion seems to have an almost infinite variety. We can approach it with hesitancy and fear, but it is better to do so with expectancy and trust, for the general experience is that when you are open and ready to learn to understand, you will find that these other human beings are very much like yourself. The proof is that people of very different religions can fall in love with each other and start a family, in spite of the difficulties this may provoke at home.

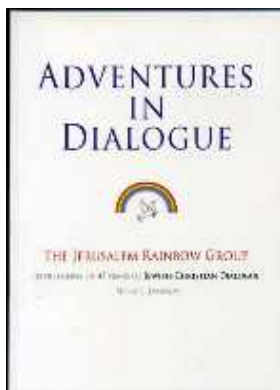
One may compare this encounter with the world of religion to diving at the Great Barrier Reef, where you can find an abundant variety of fish, corals and other life forms. This world is not chaotic but well organised and interdependent. Our world of human beings is in many ways like this wonderful undersea world. The varieties of human beings are immense; every one of them is unique and at the same we are all, in one way or another, organised and interdependent. It is not an exaggeration to say that in the dialogue itself we discover something fascinating and beautiful. We enter into a whole new type of education, a permanent education.

More important is the moral side of the dialogue. One may compare this with the diplomatic services of nations, which may have conflicting interests. Diplomacy is a special exercise with certain rules and requirements for training. Although usually behind closed doors, diplomats play an important role between nations to strengthen relationships and to solve conflicts.

Interfaith encounters have a similar role between religions. We know all too well that our religious differences have caused much suffering. Today the strife and conflict continues. It even expands in our globalised world, as discussed in the beginning of this study. The need and obligation to communicate better as religious organisations, to try to solve and take away prejudices and false ideas about each other, to make sure that the media do not propagate false ideas and stories, is in itself already an enormous task and can cover a vast territory.

It gives a good feeling to know that a group of dedicated people from different faiths is busy with the task of clearing away many of the obstacles, taking away the evil rumours and hearsay about religious minorities, and clarifying religious differences and making them understandable to the general public. Something is being done about it. Such a group is a powerful instrument for good. Just like the diplomatic service of a government, many churches have special groups of members who manage the relationship of the church with certain religions in their vicinity, in order to develop good relationships. Often members of these groups join in dialogue with representatives of other religions.

Therefore, interfaith encounter is a fundamental activity in which almost every religion engages in one way or another. Since the beginnings of the Ecumenical Movement at the end of the nineteenth century, interfaith encounter has expanded and grown, producing clear benefits.



[Peter E. Janssen](#)

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[1] Joseph Baer Soloveitchik, "Confrontation" in *Tradition* 6/2, Spring-Summer 1964), pp. 5–29.

[2] "The Lonely Man of Faith" in *Tradition* 7/2, Summer, 1965.

[3] See Reuven Kimmelman, "Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish-Christian Relations" in *The Edah Journal* 4/2, (2004), and Eugene Korn, "The Man of Faith and Religious Dialogue: Revisiting 'Confrontation,'" in *Modern Judaism* (October, 2005).

[4] A.J. Heschel, "No Religion is an Island" in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 21 (1966). The title, of course, is a play on John Donne, Meditation #17, "No man is an island" (in "For Whom the Bell Tolls").

[5] Heschel himself came from a Hasidic background, although for much of his career he taught at the (Conservative) Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

Peter E. Janssen (75), is a retired pastor of the United Protestant Church in Belgium, studied theology in Toronto, Brussels, Erlangen and Wuppertal, has a doctoral degree and is member of the Council for Jews and Christians in Belgium and of different Commissions for Jewish-Christian relations. He is married to Marijke Sajat. They live in Belgium and have five children and six grandchildren.

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