



## How I Became a Jewish Historian

31/03/2018 | Frederick M. Schweitzer

**I have toiled nearly a half century in the Lord's vineyard of Christian/Catholic-Jewish relations. It has been a productive and satisfying life commitment, decisively inspired by the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* ("In our day"), the Church's declaration on its relation to Judaism and other non-Christian religions.**

To my surprise and disappointment, initially, very few individuals, institutions or journals took note of the document's fiftieth anniversary, October 28, 2015. In fifteen or so lines in Latin, *Nostra Aetate*, §4 speaks of the Jews and Judaism affirmatively and solemnly for the first time in the history of the Church, and does it in a magisterial document that is binding on the faithful. But I was not really surprised at what I thought the failure to mark the occasion. Over the years, I've never heard a sermon on *Nostra Aetate* and never learned from anyone that he or she had, either; this, despite the American bishops' imperative in their "Guidelines" for implementing *Nostra Aetate*: "The pulpit should also be used for expounding the [new] teachings...."<sup>[2]</sup> I remember my students telling me repeatedly in the 1980s that in attending Catholic high schools they never heard anything about the Jews, either good or bad; this was better than the traditional antipathy and prejudice, and thus a measure of some progress. Fortunately, a great deal of interest was generated as of December 10, 2015, when the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews issued "'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (no. 4)," although it may not affect Jewish-Catholic relations in any notably positive way. A generation ago the great German-born Israeli historian Gershom Scholem, commenting on the rarity of Christian-Jewish friendship and dialogue, understanding, and acceptance, identified a category to which I want to believe I belong: "Only a miracle could bring forth such persons," he wrote, "a miracle that has not often happened, if ever—namely, a Jewish non-Jew."<sup>[3]</sup> *Nostra Aetate*—the handwriting on the wall for my career—prompts me in this bit of autobiography.

### Prelude: Uncertain Anticipations

My mother, Matilde Emilie Schweitzer, and my father, Johann Georg Christian Eisele, came from Kemnat and Ruit, villages close to each other near Stuttgart in southwest Germany. I was sired in Germany, floated happily in my mother's womb on the good ship *Milwaukee* crossing the Atlantic, and was born Frederick Max Schweitzer, June 24, 1930, in a hospital in Manhattan, in time to be an American citizen and then devoured by the Great Depression. Life in the United States during the Depression was very tough and in 1935 my mother returned with me to Hitler's "new Germany." For several months I attended a German school with "We were born to die for Germany" inscribed above the main door, wore a brown uniform trimmed with black as a *Jungschar*, marched on hikes singing ribald songs attacking Jews and Christianity as well as parents and school, and was exposed to much else that would have proved nefarious.

In January 1936 my father committed suicide at the age of fifty-seven. I knew nothing of this until many years later and my efforts to trace legal records or public reports of his death have been unavailing, except that he used a pistol, a definite indication that it was likely suicide. I never saw Eisele, who was indifferent to me, and it was only many years later after my mother's death that I learned from family letters traced by my cousin Maria Maier Palazzo, the family's amateur

genealogist, that he had raped my mother—had “threatened to shoot her”—and that I was born of his crime.

In March of that fateful 1936, Hitler occupied the Rhineland. German violation of the peace treaty so frightened my mother that she was convinced war would break out very soon and, remembering the fear and privation she had suffered as a child during World War I, returned to New York despite the pleas of parents and siblings. I still remember the shouting grandfather and the crying grandmother, but my mother’s courage and determination prevailed. In retrospect she showed a better understanding of the threat that Hitler posed than did most statesmen of the time.

Back in New York, it was the depths of the Depression and life continued to be a struggle, but as she was to boast, my mother was never without a job. She worked in the laundry at Caroline Rest, a home for poor, unmarried mothers in Hartsdale. I have only the vaguest memories of my mother in those years except of her day off, when she took me with her to Yorkville, the German section of Manhattan. She met acquaintances for lunch at Café Geiger, watched German films, and bought German clothes and toys for me at Armbruster’s.

My mother was able to keep me with her for only a short time. When she was allowed just a small room, there could be no accommodation for me. But she created a solution. Armbruster’s owners bought eggs from a German farmer, who delivered them once a week from their poultry farm in northern New Jersey. Robert and Olga Albrecht had recently lost their only child, a son who was killed when he got off the school bus and was crossing the highway. The emptiness of their lives was alleviated when my mother made arrangements for me to live with them for a very modest monthly fee. At about the same time they formally adopted another boy, Everett, as their son. And so I grew up with Everett, who was a year older, on the Albrechts’ farm.

Mother visited me one weekend a month, coming out on Saturday on the egg truck and returning by train Sunday afternoon. I remember getting dressed up in anticipation of her arrival and the sweets she unfailingly brought from Café Geiger; my keenest impression of her visits, though, is her exhaustion, which caused her to spend much of her stay dozing off in the easy chair on the sun porch. On the whole I have happy memories of my youth, for I was never lonely on the farm and made friends with children who were also of German descent.

It is to the Albrechts’ credit that, although I was never legally adopted, I was accepted and treated as a member of the family. In honor of this relationship, I called Mrs. Albrecht my “Country Mom,” as I took on her outlook and character; in later years she became my “Alma Mater.” The Albrecht family thoroughly Americanized me: their religion was FDR and the New Deal. They had come from Germany before 1914, and when they returned in the early 1920s to visit relatives and friends, they were dismayed by the rabid antisemitic hatred pervading the country. With such an enlightened perspective, they played a big part in shaping my mind and disposition to accept and admire Jews and come to their defense. They had several Jewish friends, and they characteristically protested “What has *that* got to do with it?” when anyone ascribed people’s supposedly bad behavior to their being Jewish. A refrain I often heard from them was, “Jews are human beings like the rest of us.” They were vigorously anti-Hitler and anti-German, especially Uncle Joe (as I called her second husband, when she became Mrs. Joseph Weigand), and in their determined ethics broke with their many acquaintances harboring Nazi sympathies and enthusiasms.

Although I learned of it only years later, there was a time when my mother was ready to give up and return to Germany—but Country Mom saved the day by dissuading her from making what could only have been a calamitous odyssey. My mother was a simple country girl who had no more than a sixth-grade education, while Country Mom was a sophisticated Berliner, had gone further in school, and benefited from the educational and cultural programs of the Social Democratic party before leaving Germany. She was remarkably well read and often recited verses from Heine,

Goethe, and Schiller, or sang snatches from her favorite operas; she also told of how she had once attended a lecture in Berlin given by no less than Leon Trotsky. And though my mother had precious little of it, she believed in education and sacrificed greatly to support my aspirations; she told me—or more probably she told Country Mom, who told me—that she would never marry because of her fear that a stepfather would ill treat me.

I went through all the grades at the local public school and graduated from Roxbury High in 1948. Next for me was Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, intending to be an engineer. But all freshman engineers had to take a year-long course in the history of Western civilization, which I loved so much that I switched my major to history—to both my moms' chagrin—concentrating on British and Western European history and literature while zealously avoiding all things German. Another switch occurred then.

Though my background was Lutheran, I had not been baptized and never attended church services or Sunday school; this left me spiritually hungry. That need was stimulated by my reading of G. K. Chesterton (only later would I discover his crude antisemitic journalism), and then more powerfully by a famous book of the time, Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* and by the discussions of it with my English professor. To me, Merton's pursuit of a fulfilling spiritual life—his journey from an indifferent secular upbringing (just like mine, it seemed) through conversion to Catholicism—was profoundly moving, an inspiration for a scholarly life both active and contemplative. On the Jews or Judaism, as I review the book now, Merton revealed an unvoiced aversion that was commonplace in those pre-Vatican II years: "Who would want to be a Jew?" he asked. For him, it was a matter of race rather than religion; on Protestantism he was even less ecumenical, less accepting of the "other." (By the 1960s he had grown and felt himself to be "spiritually a Semite" and "a true Jew under my Catholic skin.")[\[4\]](#)

It was the fifties, and with the Korean War raging, I got notice before the end of my junior year that I was liable to be drafted into the army. I dodged that by enlisting in the air force and entered training at Connolly Air Force Base near Waco, Texas, to be a radar operator-navigator on an interceptor. For a time I expected to be sent overseas, but was discharged in 1953 in the aftermath of the Panmunjom truce. While stationed at Connolly, I took night courses in Latin American and Mexican history at Baylor University. With my honorable discharge and discharge bonus, I thought that if I did not go to Mexico then, I never would, and so away I went for two weeks. In Mexico City, I met an official in the Foreign Office Department for Cultural Relations whose responsibilities included providing guides for official visitors. I was quite unofficial, but he arranged for his assistant to shepherd me around the capital. I met and fell in love with Esperanza Cabrera Bustillos, proposed to her on the last night before my flight home, and promised to correspond with her over the coming year. She agreed—tentatively—to come to the United States and marry me. Now on the GI Bill, I returned to Lehigh for my senior year and happened to take a course in comparative religion with Roy Eckardt, a pioneer in the study of Christian responsibility for the Holocaust.

Esperanza and I kept our promises: despite the misgivings of her family, she came in spring 1954 to Lehigh and we were married in April in civil and Catholic ceremonies. Esperanza was quite beautiful and very charming. Though without much higher education, she was remarkably perceptive in her response to art and music, and thoroughly enjoyed attending several of my classes. She loved to recite Spanish lyric poetry—the religious poems of Sor Juana Inéz being her favorite—and she regaled me with comic songs from Spanish *zarzuelas*. Esperanza attended my honors BA graduation and enjoyed the reception in my honor at the home of my favorite professor, the nearest possible approximation to Socrates, Carl Ferdinand Strauch.

Esperanza and I spent the summer on the farm in New Jersey with Country Mom and Uncle Joe until we moved in the fall to New York City, where I began graduate work at Columbia University. It was a busy and literally productive time—I was awarded an MA in British history in June 1955 and our son, Manfred, was born that August. I then embarked on my doctorate, on the creation of the

English system of publicly provided education. This took me to 1972—a long haul owing to the usual suspects: the responsibilities of family life and heavy teaching loads.

Initially, I earned some income as a clerk in Butler Library, until fellow student James Murphy asked me to take his place mid-year at Seton Hall University in New Jersey when he got a better position elsewhere. So my teaching career began at Seton Hall and went on for two years until 1958, when a fellow student in Garrett Mattingly's class on Tudor England at Columbia, Harold Hazelton, told me there was an opening at Manhattan College in the history department, and that I should apply. Manhattan is a Catholic college of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the teaching order founded in France in the seventeenth century by St. John Baptist de La Salle. I duly went—though I was perplexed indeed in getting there when the subway suddenly crossed the Harlem River, causing me to wonder how Manhattan College could be in the Bronx. Once arrived, I was interviewed for no more than half an hour by Brother Casimer Gabriel, FSC (whom we affectionately called "Cas Gabe"), chair of the department and dean of the college, and was hired part time (eight hours per semester) to teach medieval history—which I had never studied. But as my other credentials were up to par, I plunged in, keeping a few pages ahead of my students. Mastering medieval history as I went along, I came to value it as the foundation of later history and fundamental for Jewish history. In 1960, I became full time at the college (sixteen hours per semester), and taught ancient history—which I *had* studied.

It was the golden age of the college's celebrated Arts Program and I had splendid students in those years: they were able, serious, determined, disciplined, and intellectually hungry; many of them could have gone to Harvard, Columbia, or Princeton, as some of them did for graduate or law school. The great majority of them were commuters and the first generation of their families to attend college. We were very formal: in those pre-coed times I addressed my students as Mister, they reciprocated with Sir, and we all wore dress jackets, white shirts, and ties. Requirements regarding absence and tardiness and all such housekeeping matters were stringent. We had high standards: I once had 104 students in medieval history, out of which I awarded four A's. Reading assignments were heavy: in ancient history, all of Herodotus, all of Thucydides, a scattering of Plutarch's *Lives* to link them, and a textbook for Greece; for Rome, all of Livy on the war with Hannibal, all of Tacitus, several more of Plutarch's *Lives*, and a textbook for the overall picture. I began the medieval course with the first volume of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. Because it was on the Index of Prohibited Books and locked away in the college library, I had to get special permission (quite a feat in those pre-Vatican II days) to assign the "great history" by scrapping the "very bad history," chapter fifteen that denigrates both Judaism and Christianity. Mostly we read original sources, such as Joinville's *Life of King Saint Louis IX*, whom I and my students rather admired; in our unecumenical frame of mind, we were neither surprised nor troubled over the royal saint's command that "only learned clerics can debate with the rabbis, but a layman, when he hears the Christian law mis-said by a Jew, will plunge his sword into the mis-sayer's abdomen as far as it will enter."

We were also thoroughly Catholic: I began each class with prayers invoking the founder of the institute, St. John Baptist de La Salle, participated with my students in an annual spiritual retreat, and paused at noon for silent prayers as the Angelus bell tolled over the quadrangle. Christian Brothers in their seventeenth-century garb were numerous on campus. My lay colleagues were close friends—to some we were "the history gang": we were all about the same age, had served in the military, and were graduate students at Columbia. But there was also genuine camaraderie with the Christian Brothers in the department: like ours, their vocation was teaching and scholarship.

My experience as a faculty member at Manhattan confirmed me in my spiritual quest, although it was in deference to my wife Esperanza's wishes that I took the formal step in 1962 to be baptized a Roman Catholic. This was a natural step. My interest had long been in Catholic ethics and the culture of the Church. In addition, I was much influenced by humanists like Erasmus (to my

chagrin, also an antisemite). As a humanist, I keenly admired Pope John XXIII, who had summoned the Second Vatican Council—as he pronounced famously at the opening session—“to throw open the windows of the Church so that we can see out and the people can see in.” My admiration deepened when I learned that as apostolic delegate to Turkey and Greece during World War II, he had helped Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust.

## New Directions, New Difficulties

I had followed Vatican Council II's proceedings pretty much from its inception in 1962 as reported in the press, generally welcomed its decisions and promulgations, and regarded the Council's achievements as the posthumous gift of Pope Saint John XXIII, who was canonized on April 27, 2014. Immersed in research on British history for the years 1870 to 1910, I had little concern about the aftermath of the Council, except to chat with Cas Gabe about the impact the Council might have on the Brothers as a community and teaching order, and to colloquy with my colleagues about changing interpretations of the Counter Reformation. I certainly had no inkling that Vatican II had issued my marching orders. A few years later, probably 1968, I was called in by my department head, Brother Patrick McGarry, FSC, a fellow Columbian who had already obtained his doctorate, and asked to write a sixty-page booklet on Jewish history in the Christian era. I said softly that I was straining to finish my dissertation—but did not refuse the task.

Together, the Anti-Defamation League and the New York Archdiocese had agreed to cooperate in implementing *Nostra Aetate*, §4 and the American bishops' "Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations" (1967). "Guidelines" is couched in the same spirit and letter as *Nostra Aetate* but goes well beyond it in providing a strong program of initiatives and imperatives to be acted upon at all levels; for instance, it calls for particular care to avoid age-old stereotypes. In Catholic-Jewish encounters, it warns that "proselytizing is to be carefully avoided." For me, the key provision was the "strong repudiation of anti-Semitism" and the call for "a frank and honest treatment of the history of Christian anti-Semitism in our history books, courses, and curricula" (Recommended Programs, 10c). Above all, it was an acknowledgement that Catholics were lamentably ignorant of Jewish history in the Christian era, an ignorance that powered anti-Jewish prejudice and persecution.

Monsignor James F. Rigney chaired the Education Committee at the archdiocese and was one of the principals in the discussions with the Anti-Defamation League on implementing *Nostra Aetate*. Perhaps because he was a 1942 graduate of Manhattan, he called the head of the history department at his alma mater, and Br. Patrick chose me to write sixty pages to fill those blankest of blank pages in history's annals. I had written quite a number of brief articles for a dictionary of the Renaissance, some of which were about Jews, though otherwise I certainly did not have the proper qualifications, but neither did anyone else in the department. So summoned, I plunged in. I soon realized, however, that sixty pages would do more harm than good—that Jewish history had long been a casualty of omission, brevity, and distortion—and thus the project blossomed into a three-hundred page work, *A History of the Jews since the First Century A.D.*<sup>[5]</sup> The book may have had a certain importance in that its scope and chronology are post-biblical, at a time when it was still quite possible to assume that *Nostra Aetate*'s positive estimate of Judaism applied only to pre-Christian times—"the Jews [are] most dear for the sake of their Fathers" but seemingly not for themselves—so that in the post-biblical era traditional anti-Judaism or antisemitism could possibly be felt to be as valid as ever it might have been in Church teaching. In any event, my book was widely reviewed, including a distinctly favorable one in *The New York Times*<sup>[6]</sup>, but a distinctly unfavorable one by a rabbi in *America*, the Jesuit magazine. In a scorching "Author Fights Back," I rebutted every assertion the rabbi made, and was abetted in this by the redoubtable Sister Rose Thering, O.P., the author of a pioneering dissertation on the presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic textbooks (1953) that had served in drafting *Nostra Aetate*; she resolutely endorsed my book and chastised the rabbi, "This book makes the true story of Catholic-Jewish relations for



study in all Catholic institutions of learning, and does so for the first time. This alone is an important contribution.”<sup>[7]</sup> Well, I thought, I’ve done my duty by Jewish history, and would resume my other studies. I was wrong.

Instead, for the next several years I traveled all over the country—from Portland to Portland, Minneapolis to San Antonio, conducting teacher workshops and giving lectures at Catholic, Protestant, private, public, and religious colleges and universities on why and how to incorporate Jewish history—variously, the Holocaust, Israel reborn, antisemitism, the historical Jesus—into their courses and curricula. At Manhattan I inaugurated a course on the Holocaust, which has the distinction of being one of the first such courses to be offered at a Catholic institution. So that students could do adequate research for term papers and reports, I persuaded the college librarian to muster additional funds to build up the Jewish history collection, which was quite sparse and out of date. Before long I was writing articles, editorials, letters to the editor, and book reviews on these themes for newspapers, religious magazines, and academic journals, and was a frequent guest speaker at churches and synagogues. An early sign of recognition was the invitation by the distinguished rabbi, Dr. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, to join him in teaching a class on Jewish-Christian relations at the City College of New York.

To incorporate a more positive note into the often mournful Jewish history, I cited St. Augustine’s theory of the “Witness People,” which he invoked at least twenty times, a concept that he did not originate but most fully developed; it was shared by other medieval theologians, although some contradicted it. According to St Augustine, as the “Witness People,” the Jews, by their scripture that prophesies the coming of Jesus and by the tribulations and ignominy inflicted on them in punishment for rejecting Christ, “testify” to the truth of Christianity. Paradoxically, these two conceptions served to put a limit to the persecution Jews were exposed to and explain why the Jews survived the Middle Ages, when they were small, isolated, and defenseless communities. St. Augustine’s stipulation that the Jews must not be murdered, but be preserved in their suffering as witnesses until their conversion or the end of time and the reign of Heaven, placed a brake on their persecutors for eight hundred years—though violated countless times—until the hostile racial ideology supplanted it and closed off avenues of escape, such as conversion. Unfortunately, the issue of race can also be traced to the Church Fathers. Though it is far from paramount in their writings, it is clearly so in the texts written in later centuries by clerics (mostly) that justified the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions.

My work was far from static free: numerous caustic notes found their way under my office door from anonymous colleagues and students. I never failed to issue a public rejoinder. In an article in *View Point* (an in-house vehicle addressed to the college community) on St. John Chrysostom, the great fourth-century Father of the Church, I had written that he was “an anti-Semitic volcano”; that virtually every form of antisemitism appears in his *Eight Orations against the Jews*; and that in St. John’s words, “their odious assassination of Christ” required there be vengeance without end—“no expiation, no indulgence, no pardon.” I concluded that in the light of *Nostra Aetate* we must face up to the fact that “these accusations and calumniation are false and without foundation.”<sup>[8]</sup> This caused an uproar and complaints about “scandal.” I invited my critics to a public colloquy (no takers), and responded to the “scandal” by quoting another Father of the Church, Pope Gregory the Great: “Though scandal be taken at truth, it is better to permit the scandal than to abandon the truth”—by then my motto. I went on writing for *View Point* whenever my turn came round. It is gratifying that as Vatican II’s teachings took hold, I experienced less rebuke.

## Complications and Obstacles

Meanwhile, Esperanza and I ran into difficulties as our many unforeseen differences began to emerge, although initially all was smoothed over in our pride and happiness in our son. We spent summers in Mexico, where Esperanza got reacquainted with family and friends, Manfred became

bilingual and bicultural, and I worked on my dissertation and spoke from time to time on Jewish-Catholic relations. Though not without some opposition from colleagues and despite complaints from alumni that I was undermining the Church, in 1972 I was promoted to associate professor at Manhattan, and then and throughout my career enjoyed the unstinting support and encouragement of the college administration in promoting Catholic-Jewish understanding.

Esperanza supported me in all this, and was especially proud when Cardinal Terence Cooke honored me with a felicitous welcome and reception at the New York Archdiocese, sanctioning my 1971 book, *A History of the Jews since the First Century A.D.*, for use in the archdiocesan schools and colleges. But when she actually started to read the book, she became incensed. The explosion came when she read the apology to Jewish readers in my introduction, which explained that I used the terms *BC* and *AD* because I was addressing Catholic students, but regretted employing terminology that conveyed beliefs and assumptions that Jews could not accept.

Esperanza seemed to think that the purpose of all this effort, and in particular of my book, was the conversion of the Jews! In her traditional conversionist beliefs, she not only turned angrily against me but also condemned Vatican II as anathema, accusing the Council of having strayed into “infernal ecumenism” as the result of satanic forces bent on the destruction of “the true Church.” Her piety descended into fanaticism and psychosis. The nightmare continued when she came to the college to embarrass me in the presence of my students and colleagues: calling me “Jew lover”; proclaiming that my middle name was Moses, not Max; and that I was a “heretic,” guilty of “treason to the traditions and beliefs of the Church.” One day she seized a book I treasured, Gershom Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, ripped pages from it and threw it all in the trash, exclaiming, “This is a Catholic house and it will not be desecrated by the presence of Jewish propaganda!” When I was succeeded as chair of the history department by “a Jew,” she upbraided my colleagues, informing them “that to have a Jew as chairman of a department in a Catholic College is immoral and unjust.” She became a devoted follower of the antisemitic and schismatic Cardinal Marcel Lefebvre of France, whose views she repeated in numerous letters to, among others, Cardinal Cooke and Pope John Paul II, writing that “prior to Vatican II the Church had a tradition for over 2000 years, and whoever works to destroy that tradition works to destroy Jesus as well,” and condemned Manhattan College for its part in the “ruination of the Church by Catholic liberals.” All the while she plagued my superiors with equally irate letters; fortunately, these had no effect, as the administration valued my work, and amid and despite all the tumult promoted me to full professor.

My marriage to Esperanza became intolerable and ultimately led to separation and divorce, largely because she had made life miserable for our son, blaming him for my “heresies” and misdeeds. But her vitriolic rants only strengthened my resolve to pursue the course, and undeterred—indeed, undeterrable—I marched on, faithful to my spiritual mission and scholarly commitments. Casting off my antipathy for it, I immersed myself in German history, essential if I were to deal adequately with the Holocaust, antisemitism, and World War II. I also taught another essential subject, military history, and—Anglophile that I remain—went right on with my concentration on British history and literature, to which I added a popular course on Irish history. My Irish students dubbed me “Professor O’Schweitzer,” and together we formed a discussion group to celebrate St. Columbanus, the most learned of the saints and scholars of ancient Ireland—he knew Latin and had a working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, rare accomplishments in that age. One of my students, Kevin, who underwent the “cure” of his homegrown antisemitism in my course on the Holocaust, wrote a prize-winning essay on Robert Briscoe, tracing Briscoe’s career from his time as a Jewish-Irish insurgent and participant in the 1916 Rising through the civil war of the 1920s. Based in part on some of my students’ research and to counter a stereotype, I wrote a paper on Ireland’s nonviolent tradition.<sup>[9]</sup>

Early on I attended the “interdisciplinary, international, interdenominational” Annual Scholars Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches. Those sessions were profoundly stimulating for

me, as I participated in debate and discussion with many leading scholars (including my former professor Roy Eckhardt), and presented my own research papers, several of which became essays on diverse subjects, from the Hitler Youth to the demonization of the Jews as the most lethal form of antisemitism and on Holocaust denial. Whatever my particular topics and those of my fellow speakers, as a chorus we were saying that the Holocaust must be studied and researched, must be taught and learned, must become an essential part of education and enter into our general understanding of the past. Recalling those years, I have a certain satisfaction that—despite shortcomings and failures—awareness and comprehension have been attained. I invited several scholars, many of them renowned, whose acquaintance I had made at these gatherings to speak at the college as part of sessions that were increasingly attended by members of the community beyond the college itself. Books, articles, reviews, speeches, conferences, and research carried me further and more deeply into the vast domain that is Jewish history. Through these endeavors, I came to understand that Jewish history is a central element of general history—that, for example, whether one specialized in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the French Revolution, or modern national histories, the historian also had to master the Jewish aspects of that subject; otherwise, her or his understanding and grasp of the discipline would be incomplete and likely distorted.

### Life Renewed and Course Confirmed

Thus I was in full career when Jacqueline Gartner, the new secretary for the Humanities in Room 405 of Manhattan Hall, came into my life on May 2, 1983. As the secretary to the Humanities faculty, Jackie, as she was soon known to everyone, did a lot of typing for me. As a Jew, she was impressed by an early piece—a blistering attack on Arnold Toynbee's intolerably prejudiced interpretation of Jewish history that was published in *Toynbee: Reappraisals*—less for the dismissal of the famous historian than my empathy for Jewish history.<sup>[10]</sup> Jackie was well read and had a keen sense of language, and did not hesitate to criticize and correct my grammar and syntax. She rapidly became my prized copyeditor and collaborator.

And she brought me something equally as precious: Jackie straightaway recognized my defense of Jews and Judaism, proclaiming to me, “Oh Professor Schweitzer, you have a Jewish heart.” That observation was confirmed when she took my course on the Holocaust, and cemented when we brainstormed together on a project conceived with my colleague in Education, Estelle Fryburg, on “A Tribute to the Children of the Holocaust: Terezin Camp,” a musical docudrama that tells the camp's tragic story through historical narrative, songs, drawings, and poems as performed to piano accompaniment by a soprano, young singers, and chorus. It went through a series of successful performances at the college, and for a few years was presented on tape by several organizations and congregations to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day.

By the end of 1983 and the Christmas party at the college, our mutual love had become the central fact of our lives. We were both imprisoned in unbearable marriages, but now, in loving friendship and mutual support, we resolved to renew our lives by divorcing our spouses and making a new home. We could finally realize this event in a joyous celebration well-attended by family, friends, and colleagues, April 20, 1991—though we had been legally living together since January 1986.

In sharp contrast to the abuse and scorn—I dismissed all such opposition as “static”—Esperanza heaped upon me, Jackie heartily applauded my efforts at interfaith understanding. In March 1984, at Jackie's suggestion to the Men's Club, I was the guest lecturer at Riverdale Temple, speaking on parallels and contrasts in Jewish and Irish history. The talk gave rise to much hilarity about the Irish as “one of the lost tribes” (part of medieval lore) and led to a discussion of Robert Briscoe, the first Jewish Lord Mayor of Dublin. He served three terms, declaring that his Jewishness fortified his Irishness, and as a Zionist played his part in Israel's rebirth in the later 1940s. It was a welcome exchange on a well-known and admired public figure, and a link to the essay on Briscoe my former student Kevin had written under my direction.



Jackie loved to travel—and this affinity also fueled my scholarship and work in Catholic-Jewish relations. Almost every summer we went abroad, beginning that June 1984 to London, combining vacations with participation at scholarly conferences. In 1985 we were in Scandinavia, exploring the history of the region's miniscule Jewish communities; in Copenhagen we retraced large parts of the 1943 exodus of Danish Jews to safety in Sweden. Before returning to New York, we attended the 1985 conference in Arnoldshain, Germany, of the International Council of Christians and Jews, to which I had been invited to give the keynote address: "The Relationship of Jewish to General History." My presentation stirred up a hornets' nest for many participants in the conference, who were either German and/or Christian. But in the question period I held my own, with reinforcement from, among others, Eugene Fisher, the executive secretary of the secretariat for Catholic-Jewish relations of the National Conference of [American] Catholic Bishops. Jewish scholars, especially the contingent from Israel, welcomed me with open arms.

Jackie was sure that, given my knowledge and conviction, it was hard for anyone to get the better of me in argument. Her confidence in me was inspiring, and over the following three days discussions proceeded less contentiously from the original skepticism. I may have had some advantage in that, as a non-Jew, my interpretation of Jewish history could be seen as more objective than a Jew's would have been; on the other hand, I was sometimes perceived, incongruously, as "the house Jew" or "a pet Jew." In the last day or so, those who still disagreed with me tended to be silent, and the discussion fell essentially within the parameters I had originally suggested. Together we consolidated various drafts into one overall set of guidelines for teachers, "The Structure of Jewish History in Relation to World History," which ran from antiquity to the Holocaust and Israel's rebirth, and was published by the ICCJ. Jackie and I made many friends at the conference, especially with the Israelis; we redeemed our vow to visit them "soon" in 1995.

## The Course Confirmed

Back home, I turned with renewed resolve to continue to bring my message to the lecture circuit, speaking principally at colleges and universities, but also publicly and occasionally at high schools. Some audience members responded with suspicion and skepticism—and not a few with prejudice—when I cited the revolution in Catholic-Jewish relations. Catholics said that *Nostra Aetate* went too far—though there were always those who said we were only at the beginning; Jews asserted that it didn't go far enough—but there were always some who applauded and encouraged. While *Nostra Aetate*, §4 had set a high standard for the present and far into the future—after all, it is the Magna Carta of Catholic-Jewish dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation—it is not a flawless document and had been whittled down substantially from earlier drafts. Subsequent Vatican documents and actions, however, compensated in large measure for *Nostra Aetate*'s limitations and, as "'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, §4," acknowledges, it had imparted "a new stimulus for the future." I readily acknowledged *Nostra Aetate*'s insufficiencies: though it contains some expression of gratitude and an understanding that without its Jewish foundations the Church could not stand. Rather than condemn antisemitism outright as a sin, *Nostra Aetate* just "deplores" it, along with "hatred [and] persecutions . . . directed against the Jews at any time and from any source." In addition, it mitigates rather than annuls the historically malevolent accusation of deicide, stating that the crucifixion "cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today." There is no recognition of Christian guilt for religious antisemitism or anti-Judaism and its baleful effects over the centuries. But with the proclamation in 1985 of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews' "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church," a great milestone was reached.

"Notes" is a much more determined, uncompromising, and emphatic document than *Nostra Aetate*

in several profound ways: It goes to the root of historical antisemitism in Christian misinterpretation and misapplication of the New Testament beginning in the second century; it affects teaching from Sunday school and daily mass to the seminaries for training priests; it accepts much of the New Testament scholarship of the last half century and more; it interprets the crucifixion as essentially a Roman affair (No. 2, §22) ; and it depicts the Judaism of the first century as a vital religion, not trapped in legalism, materialism, or other ancient stereotypes (§§12-14). For my public presentations, the most crucial points made in “Notes” are that (a) much though not all the anti-Jewish feeling and thought in the New Testament were not part of Jesus’ teaching and conduct, but were imported into it from a later age, when the Gospels were written and redacted, and (b) that the anti-Judaism reflected in the Gospels was a response to the conflict—well after the time of Jesus—between the nascent church and its Jewish parentage (No. 2, §21).

A significant further step came in 1998 with the issuance of the Vatican Commission’s “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.” The document expresses repentance for the past and hope for the future, directs Catholics to wrestle with the immense evil of the Holocaust, and urges them to come to an understanding of its history and ponder how crimes on such a scale could be possible in Christian civilization. It also calls for Catholic education to incorporate the Holocaust into its programs and curricula. Nevertheless, as I soon experienced, “We Remember” met with sharp criticism from Catholics and Jews alike. Forgetting how often and with what ease it has mutated into antisemitism, “We Remember” separates historic Christian anti-Judaism from Nazi racial antisemitism as two radically different, unconnected phenomena; most historians deny that proposition and conclude that the traditional Christian teaching of contempt served as the seedbed for all forms of modern antisemitism, including Nazism. “We Remember” sets the Church apart as a sacred and blameless institution from its members at all levels, many of whom bear responsibility for the sin of antisemitism. This traditional distinction in Catholic theology ignores the fact that contempt for Jews and Judaism was woven into the Church’s teaching and preaching from the Church Fathers on. “We Remember” passes over in silence the Christian perpetrators, virtually all of whom, whether the planners of genocide or the actual murderers, had been baptized, and limits itself to blaming the bystanders who did nothing and to praising the heroic few who helped. Its decidedly positive presentation of Pope Pius XII (note 17) generated the most faultfinding: historians differ widely in their assessment of his wartime role—that he was not “silent” but said little and quite late: that he excommunicated no fascist or Nazi *qua* fascist or Nazi, but excommunicated communists *en masse*. Until the wartime archives are open, the best working judgment of Pius appears to be that he was a deeply spiritual man,<sup>[11]</sup> but not the right man for the times.

Despite searching criticism and objections, Catholic-Jewish dialogue has become more convergence than divergence; joint conferences and Holocaust centers promote goodwill and better understanding of historical and theological issues. In this spirit, Pope Saint John Paul II visited Auschwitz-Birkenau; inaugurated diplomatic relations with Israel; made the first ever papal visit to a synagogue; and beatified Fr. Bernhard Lichtenberg, who was martyred by the Nazis following his public prayers for the well-being of the Jews. Also momentous was John Paul’s action in opening the archives of the Inquisition, and particularly his decision granting scholars access to the archives of Pope Pius XI’s pontificate (1922-39). One document that came to light in the archives illustrates the great difficulty historians have in interpreting the papal stance vis-à-vis Nazi Germany. It is a letter to Pius XI from Edith Stein, a convert from Judaism and a Carmelite nun who was murdered in Auschwitz in 1942 and canonized by John Paul in 1987. Writing in 1933, shortly after the Concordat, the treaty that constituted the first diplomatic recognition of the Nazi government, Stein urged that instead of such negotiations, the Holy See should vigorously oppose the regime whose leaders had long shown “total contempt for justice and humanity,” were engaged in a “war of extermination against Jewish blood,” and would “systematically” turn on Catholicism. Presciently, she warned that “the image and standing of the Church would suffer everywhere if this silence is persisted in.”<sup>[12]</sup> A year later, the German Jesuit priest Friedrich Muckermann, an anti-Nazi and anti-communist activist who spent most of the Nazi period in exile,

wrote that Nazism and communism were equally evil and dangerous; he wondered, “Why does the Church not go into battle against Nazism with the same energy that it finds in confronting Bolshevism and socialism?”<sup>[13]</sup> John Paul was committed to opening the archives for the pontificate of Pius XII (1939-58), but for various reasons that has been delayed. Opening sealed doors in this as in other troubling matters and after some setbacks to Catholic-Jewish relations, Pope Francis has stated that once legal issues pertaining to the 1929 Lateran treaties between the Vatican and Italy are resolved, he will order the World War II secret archives opened for scholarly research, and thus eliminate what has long been a source of contention.

As its title indicates, the Vatican Commission’s 2015 “‘The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (no. 4),” (hereafter G&C) is dedicated to the theological meaning of biblical texts. While I would have preferred history to have a more central place in the document, G&C is rightly imbued with “the awareness that Christians and Jews are irrevocably interdependent, and that the [theological] dialogue between the two is not a matter of choice but of duty” (§13). Because G&C is concerned with dialogue in its biblical rather than post-biblical or later historical settings, it offers less direction for my work except insofar as it promotes—as it clearly does—combatting racial discrimination and antisemitism, and urges joint participation in the quest for social justice, peace, reconciliation, and preservation of the planet (§§46-47), and it warns against “a narrowly understood claim to truth and a corresponding intolerance” (§46).

G&C begins with a substantial summation of *Nostra Aetate*’s influence since 1965, addresses the great subjects of Catholic-Jewish theological dialogue, and culminates with the “Church’s mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism” (Section 6). Given the tremendous advance in Catholic-Jewish relations since Vatican II, had I been asked to write of *Nostra Aetate*’s impact, I could not have concluded with a justification of missionizing. It is a striking irony that both *Nostra Aetate* and G&C hinge on the famous passage of St. Paul (Rom 11:29). In the light of Vatican documents of the last half century, some of which are quoted above, the mandate appears to be a *non sequitur*.

Sections 2 through 5 of G&C address a series of crucial theological and exegetical issues that can be enumerated as follows: the inadmissibility of replacement or supersessionist theology; revelation and the divine promises through the Torah to the Jews as the people of God, and through them to the gentiles who, as Christians, become the new people of God; whether there are two covenants or one; whether there are two paths to salvation or one; and what the relationship of the New Testament to the Hebrew Bible is. Not a new idea, but one given prominence in G&C is the concept that, rather than a mother-daughter relationship, Judaism and Christianity are sister religions, daughters of the same mother, the Judaism of Hebrew scripture and the Temple worship. By this reckoning, Judaism radically transformed itself following the Romans’ destruction of the Temple to form rabbinical Judaism at the time that the nascent Church was forming (§§15, 30).<sup>[14]</sup> Such concerns are at the heart of what one commentator characterizes as “A thoroughly Catholic text expressed in a Catholic manner” and “formulated from a Catholic perspective” (in deliberations in which Jewish dialogue partners had little part).<sup>[15]</sup> Thus, for example, having acknowledged in very much the manner of *Nostra Aetate* that “the Abrahamic covenant is so essentially constitutive of the Christian faith that the Church without Israel would be in danger of losing its locus in the history of salvation,” G&C goes on in very much the manner of pre-*Nostra Aetate* exegesis and theology, “Jews could with regard to the Abrahamic covenant arrive at the insight that Israel without the Church would be in danger of remaining too particularist and of failing to grasp the universality of its experience of God” (§33). The same misgivings come to mind with the statement, “That the Jews are participants in God’s salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery” (§36). Mystery serves to escape the dilemma whether salvation for Jews depends upon Christ (as the authors of G&C seem to want) or not (which challenges the belief in Christ as

the universal source of salvation). Those of us engaged in dialogue are left stalled at the doorway with the ancient god Janus, who simultaneously gazes in and out towards past and future.

However, the mandate to evangelize casts off the Janus paralysis, for it is made to follow from the propositions that have preceded it in G&C. The imperative to missionize probably reflects the turn toward a more traditionalist theology under Pope Benedict XVI, although the composition of G&C was under Pope Francis. G&C acknowledges the stress that the mandate must entail for Jews; but it specifies that the intention is not an institutionally organized mission targeting Jews (such as the medieval Church mounted and that persisted in various forms, such as the Sisters of Sion, until Vatican II), but instead is based on the example of individuals testifying to their faith by word and deed (§40). Nevertheless, G&C raises profound misgivings because the very word conversion has dire connotations as a form of attempted annihilation; as such it is unspeakably repugnant to the great majority of Jews who regard it as violating the “Eleventh Commandment” that the Jewish people must live and not perish. The assertion that “Christian mission and witness, in personal life and in proclamation, belong together” (§42) is problematic and should be unmistakably qualified by a stipulation that Christians bearing witness to their faith in dialogue with Jews is not a cover for proselytizing. Abraham Joshua Heschel famously said he would go to Auschwitz before he would convert. These and other counter-considerations are so compelling that the authors of G&C should have desisted from incorporating the mandate into the document.

More a consolidation of theological positions, with its warning that *Nostra Aetate* “is not infrequently over-interpreted” (§39), G&C is not a major breakthrough in Catholic-Jewish relations. It lacks the human warmth that the thought of Pope Saint John XXIII brings to mind, for example, when he set the tone perfectly for Catholic-Jewish reconciliation and friendship in welcoming a delegation of Jewish visitors with the greeting, “I am your brother Joseph” (Gn 45:4). I believe it will take three hundred years to fully rectify Catholic-Jewish relations and attain mutual acceptance, dispelling historical ignorance and removing the theological tares. The truly revolutionary developments of the past half century are a beginning and, I pray, irreversible despite occasional pauses or setbacks. I was dumbfounded and deeply saddened when Benedict XVI reintroduced Good Friday prayers for the conversion of the Jews, reversing the action taken by John XXIII. There are, perhaps inevitably, occasional thunderbolts, such as the restoration to the Church in 2009 of four priests, who had strenuously condemned Vatican II and been excommunicated in 1988 for accepting ordination as bishops from the schismatic Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. One of the four is the anti-modernist theologian Richard Williamson, an antisemite who promotes as truth the fabricated *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, and who is also a Holocaust denier—for which he was arrested and fined in Germany—and an admirer of the notorious Ernst Zündel. Williamson was again excommunicated in 2015 for flouting canon law.

G&C “is intended to be a starting point for further theological thought with a view to enriching and intensifying the theological dimension of Jewish–Catholic dialogue” (Preface). I hope that will happen, but the mandate to evangelize stands as an obstacle and explains why Jews have not welcomed G&C with any enthusiasm. Much depends on the sequel, as these same issues continue to be studied in dialogue and responses are reformulated in documents to be published on future anniversaries of *Nostra Aetate*.

## On the March Together

Beginning in January 1986, sanctioned by our respective separation agreements, Jackie and I lived together in that blissful state of which we had dreamed and for which we had striven. In the summer, on a visit to Manfred and his family, we flew to Mexico City, where I lectured on the significance of *Nostra Aetate* for Jewish-Catholic/Christian relations and for Catholic education; we learned then and on subsequent visits that Latin American Catholicism was a more resistant medium to the new teachings. In 1987 came Ireland, which we toured by car, making our way

round the Republic's periphery (it was still too dangerous to enter Northern Ireland). To ensure that our gift of gab would never falter we drove on to Blarney Castle to kiss the Blarney Stone. We also visited a great many notable historical sites, such as Dublin Castle and the post office (where the famous 1916 Rising began), as well as many sites with literary associations. We saw John Keane's play *The Field* at the Abbey Theatre and took in as much of Daniel O'Connell's and W. B. Yeats' Dublin as we possibly could, as well as some Jewish sites, for there are indeed several notable locations in a city that boasted a famous Jewish Lord Mayor—Robert Briscoe.

We returned to England in 1988 for more London theater as well as a car trip through Wales. In our usual way we combined that trip with attendance in Oxford and London at the International Scholars Conference on the Holocaust, "Remembering for the Future." I chaired a lively panel, "The Challenge to the Christian Community, with Emphasis on Early Christianity and Overall Historical Considerations," where I presented my research as "The Tap-Root of Antisemitism: The Demonization of the Jews," and helped edit the proceedings of my panel for publication in the conference's transactions.[\[16\]](#)

Then came an eventful year: the 1989 Annual Scholars Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches—which we had begun attending together in 1985—saw us again in Philadelphia, at the Anne Frank Institute. We then traveled by train to Pittsburgh to help launch Seton Hill University's first Holocaust Conference with a speech entitled, "The Lethal Element in Antisemitism." It was an inspiring revelation to discover how open were Sister Noël and her colleagues, nuns and laywomen, to the new teachings and acknowledgement of Christian responsibility for the Holocaust. That summer we went to Poland for a conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls. I had participated in a seminar at New York University, and under the guidance of Professor Lawrence Schiffman wrote a paper, "The Teacher of Righteousness," which arose from my interest in messianism. Thanks to Larry, I was invited to present my research[\[17\]](#) at a branch meeting of the Polish Academy in Mogilany, a small town near Kraków. There I met and benefited from some of the luminaries in the field and tangled with others, in particular a German theologian who insisted on tracing Christian roots and the teachings of the New Testament to the Scrolls and the Qumran community—which I quickly recognized as the familiar antisemitic strategy of denying or co-opting creative Jewish achievements.

Though the Iron Curtain was then in the last stages of rusting away, we found ourselves amid a society still shadowed and not yet wholly free. For Jackie, our visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau was a searing experience, as the very idea of Poland and Auschwitz exposed her to existential dread and foreboding. Her birthday is almost the same date as Anne Frank's, and Jackie felt that had she been a young girl in Hitler's Europe, she would have had little chance to survive. We both knew about the death camps in the abstract, but our direct exposure at Auschwitz, in all its horrors and immense scale, made us weep. As we walked about in deep sorrow, I was not haunted by images of Hitler, Himmler, or Heydrich but of St. John Chrysostom, St. Vincent Ferrer, and Martin Luther preaching hatred and igniting massacres of Jews. On our way back to Warsaw for our flight home, we saw parts of Czechoslovakia (as it still was) and crossed into Hungary, thinking to find the *shtetl* from which Jackie's mother's family, the Bergers and Schlumchuks, hailed; alas, we could not locate it, and inquiries of officials and townspeople were neither helpful nor reassuring about their attitudes.

But 1989 was not over yet: Marvin Perry of Baruch College and I organized a conference, jointly sponsored by our two colleges, on Jewish-Christian relations; over three days the meeting featured twenty-six scholars, several of whom were my colleagues at Manhattan, most notably Donald P. Gray. In my invitation to the college and Riverdale communities, I wrote that "the conference represents one more step in carrying out *Nostra Aetate's* imperative to dispel the ignorance and remove the grounds for conflict between Catholics and Jews"; that its themes "range over the two millennia of Jewish-Christian relations, addressing theological and historical themes that are grim and crushing but also other elements that are hopeful and encouraging"; and that participants



included an equal number of Catholics, Jews, Protestants, and others (but not yet Muslims; among the eminent participants were Fr. Edward Flannery, Michael Marrus, Fr. John Pawlikowski, Lawrence Schiffman, and Fritz Stern). In retrospect, I have the satisfaction of having invited a very young Susannah Heschel to speak for the first time at a public conference: it was the first step to her present renown. The conference resulted in a book, *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries*, which Marvin and I edited and to which I contributed an essay on the Jews of medieval Europe.<sup>[18]</sup> For Marvin and me it was the beginning of many fruitful years' collaboration as co-authors and co-editors.

For many years I was an active member of Phi Alpha Theta, the national history honor society into which I had been initiated at Lehigh. I was the moderator of Manhattan's Delta Theta chapter, and served for a number of years on the national council and advisory board. When feasible, I employed these memberships—as well as contingents of Manhattan history majors, mostly my students, who presented their research papers at PAT's biennial conferences—to advance Jewish history and historiography in an organization for which it had long been *terra incognita*. In the 1990s Jackie and I also went to annual conferences marking the military turning points and anniversaries of World War II at Siena College in Albany, where I spoke on Holocaust themes that initially were not readily acceptable as part of the standard format, but I worked to make them so.

All through these years I remained fully engaged in Jewish research and writing, and almost every year in March Jackie and I attended the Annual Scholars Conference, at which invariably I presented a paper related to that year's theme. We traveled to the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1992, and to Humboldt University, Berlin, in 1994—the first of two major conferences there devoted to the theme “Remembering for the Future.” We also sandwiched in a sentimental journey to Lehigh for a reunion, and added participation in a conference, “The Other in Jewish Thought” sponsored by its newly founded Jewish Studies Center. On another front, a significant step was taken in 1991 when I and my department colleagues created a new course in world history, “Roots of the Modern Age-History,” for which we edited a text. By then I had made the case sufficiently strong so that it was beyond question for a substantial section to be devoted to the Holocaust. Initially, the book was published by a local house and its use was limited to our students, but in 1997 it was republished in an expanded edition by a major publisher,<sup>[19]</sup> and for the next dozen or so years I had the satisfaction of knowing that our anthology was being used fairly widely and was introducing the subject of the Holocaust to a large student audience.

A natural sequel to these activities was my initiative in founding (after previous failed efforts) the Holocaust Resource Center at Manhattan, one of the first such centers at a Catholic institution. With the inspiration and help of Holocaust survivor Martin Spett, it was formally launched in 1997—with Brother Thomas Scanlan, FSC, the president of Manhattan College, presiding—by Franklin Littell, the father of Holocaust Studies in the United States and cofounder of the Annual Scholars Conference. The center was run as a troika by me, Brother Peter Drake, FSC, an electrical engineer, and Rose Santos-Cunningham, a professor in Religious Studies. While the administration supported us vigorously, some of the faculty and alumni just as vigorously opposed the Holocaust Center, demanding a Catholic or Celtic center instead. But the center was so successful in attracting large audiences inside and outside the college, each semester presenting a distinguished historian (e.g., Raul Hilberg, Omer Bartov, Christopher Browning, John Weiss, Michael Marrus, Eugene Fisher, Susan Zuccotti, and Samuel Kassow, among many), and in holding collegial and effective teacher workshops that it became known as “one of the best things in Riverdale.” One indication of the trust and goodwill won by the center was when Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblatt, the distinguished leader of the Modern Orthodox community in Riverdale, spoke movingly of how this was the first time he and many of his congregants participated in such an event at a Catholic institution. Our opponents were shamed into silence or acquiescence. The center also sponsored art exhibits dedicated to the Holocaust, model Seders at Passover, and bus trips for students to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

After a few years, Br. Peter and I decided it was an opportune time to initiate a “dialogue” among the three Abrahamic religions. After all, *Nostra Aetate*, §3 addresses the Muslims, whom “the Church regards with esteem.... Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past [!] and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.” But it was too much too soon—i.e., to “forget the past”—and Br. Peter and I were made to realize that the center would come to grief if we went ahead with our proposal for the dialogue, forfeiting all the goodwill built up in the Riverdale community and beyond. It took nearly a decade before that mission was possible, and it was achieved by the present director, Dr. Mehnaz Afridi, who is a Muslim Pakistani woman. To be sure, there were vehement protests (including from a vociferous member of the City Council), but these were faced down. Today the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center, as it is now named, flourishes, enjoying widespread recognition and acceptance. However, I must also acknowledge that the recent political campaign and the presidency of Donald Trump have generated an atmosphere of fear and distrust, of intimidation and antipathy that make the work of the center more difficult and uncertain.

Another danger of the center's detonation was my invitation to the distinguished historian and public intellectual, the late Tony Judt, to be the Holocaust Speaker for fall 2006, on the topic “Goodbye to All That? War and Genocide in European Memory Today.” During the summer, however, Judt had spoken on Israel at a neighboring high school, an action taken to be incendiary by most of the Riverdale rabbis. They threatened to organize protests on campus dressed in concentration camp garb if Judt spoke at the college. After much back and forth, in which I, my colleague and soon-to-be successor Jeff Horn, and the college administration—indeed, the college community as a whole—stood fast for intellectual freedom and against withdrawing our invitation, Judt pulled out of his own accord. To compound matters, somehow one of our deans got the wrongheaded idea—which the regional press took up—that I had dictated the subject of Judt's lecture or demanded his withdrawal! Yet far from forbidding him to speak on Israel, Judt had agreed at our invitation to conduct an informal in-house seminar, “Israel Today: Back to the Future?” for our history majors and any colleagues who wished to attend. The center was back on course, when, on short notice, the brilliant Debórah Dwork became our Holocaust Speaker. Everyone was reconciled except the dean, who—such is the nature of academic politics—became an enemy for life.

For spring 2007, I was induced to be the Holocaust Speaker. My lecture—a kind of first draft of this article—was entitled “A Scholar's Life: Confronting Antisemitism” and was billed as the center's final public event, a nice way to ease me into retirement after fifty years. But to my delight, President Scanlan announced that there would be an Annual Frederick Schweitzer Lecture on the Holocaust, which was initiated the following year. In introducing the first speaker, Samantha Power, I paid tribute to “my pals,” those who had supported my efforts as a Jewish historian and in founding the center. The tenth lecture in my honor was a splendid one given by Susannah Heschel in November 2017, for me a most pleasant reunion after more than a quarter century. Thus the center carries on its mission, and thanks to Dr. Afridi, enjoys national and international recognition.

In 1998 Jackie and I flew to Toronto, where I was to participate in litigation against Ernst Zündel, the notorious antisemite and Holocaust denier. I had been invited as an expert on antisemitism by the Canadian Human Rights Commission's attorney, Mark Freiman, for the third attempt (following those of Raul Hilberg and Christopher Browning, which were successful prosecutions but nullified on appeal) to put an end to Zündel's neo-Nazi provocations. I was on the witness stand for eight days. In essence, my testimony correlated antisemitic propaganda and ideological incitement with persecution and violence against Jews from 1100 to the present; demonstrated by plentiful quotations from Zündel's publications how exactly he reprised all nine (by my interpretation) lethal antisemitic stereotypes. I argued that because they caused harm and suffering to Jews in the past,

it was likely—though not inevitable—that Zündel’s reiterations of them would do so again. In prolonged cross-examination, the defense attorney tried to trip me up, but failed since I knew the sources and was not unnerved by his aggressive sarcasm.

It took until 2002 for the tribunal to hand down its decision. By its ruling, Zündel was barred from the internet (his principal medium)—but he had already fled (he and his counsel knowing that this time the decision would not be reversed on appeal) to the United States, where his wife’s green card and the First Amendment shielded his resumption of hate speech. Then, however, he violated his visa and was deported, first back to Canada and then to his native Germany, where he was convicted of Holocaust denial and inciting religious and ethnic hatred, sentenced to five years’ incarceration and released after three; he remained mercifully mute until his death in August 2017.[\[20\]](#)

Meanwhile, the stream issuing from my pen—and before long, a computer—of books, essays, reviews, speeches, panel discussions on the revolution in Catholic-Jewish relations, antisemitism, Holocaust denial, the Hitler Youth, the controversy over the rescue of Jews, the war criminal Julius Streicher, the German railways’ complicity in the Holocaust, the issue of Allied bombing of the extermination camps, Italian philosemitism and antisemitism, Mel Gibson’s notorious film *The Passion of the Christ* interpreted as “The Medieval Passion Play Revisited,” and so on, continued unabated. Jackie’s collaboration was vital for *our* article (as it can justifiably be called) entitled “Anti-Semitism,” in the *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*.[\[21\]](#) At the invitation of the editor of the *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law*, I also embarked on an article, “Antisemitism and Law.” It took years to complete, for while the history and nature of antisemitism are second nature to me, international law and national legal systems were not, and so I had to go to school with, among several authorities, William Schabas, a great scholar and a great friend. Alas, the editor and I fell out over length and detail, and he rejected my original submission in preference for one that I find short and shriveled. Still, “Antisemitism and Law” appeared at last, if a little incongruously, in an anthology entitled *Antisemitism in North America: New World, Old Hate*[\[22\]](#); in no less than seventy-five pages covering international law and national legal systems, it is sweet vindication. My essay is optimistic, concluding that while antisemitism will never be extinguished, it is and will be contained: “over time, amidst growing recognition of a global bill of human rights, the nexus of international, regional, national, nongovernmental and local organizations and institutions will grow more integrated as they learn to cooperate ever more closely in their work together in enforcing a comprehensive body of international humanitarian law that is set forth in nearly a hundred international and regional human rights treaties.” Unfortunately, given the recent recrudescence of nationalistic phobias and protectionism, and such developments as Brexit, the international network of human rights organizations is in danger of being seriously weakened, if not scrapped altogether.

Throughout our years together, Jackie was my collaborator *excellentissime*, an inspiring catalyst in mapping out interpretations of gender and Yiddishkeit as historical issues, keen reader whose perceptive judgments and suggestions always helped and encouraged me. The study of antisemitism and the Holocaust is debilitating to the spirit—in truth, often sickening—and there were times when I felt so cast down by such massive evil that I wanted to call a halt to my work. But Jackie would not let me. She never failed to urge upon me the necessity of telling the story of the Shoah as fully and accurately as possible, and to knock the Holocaust deniers and minimizers out of the scholarly and public arenas. Jackie played her part in two books that I wrote with Marvin Perry, *Antisemitism from Antiquity to the Present* and *Antisemitic Myths*.[\[23\]](#) At my retirement party, I told my faculty colleagues, “I owe a large measure of gratitude to Jackie, without whose camaraderie my list of accomplishments would be meager.”

Another very special year for us was 1996—our first trip to Paris, where I was invited by the Centre de Recherches sur les Juifs dans les pays Anglophones at the University of Paris X-Nanterre. The conference theme was the relations of the Jews with other communities in Britain, Canada, and the

United States. My presentation, “The Uniqueness of Anglo-Jewry,” emphasized that some elements of Continental antisemitism clearly had emerged in Britain but that it was more notable for contrasts than similarities with the Austrian, German, French, and Russian forms, and that Jews had succeeded in the professions and public life and found a home in British society. In discussions with Bill Rubinstein, a friend and fellow historian from Australia, we dealt with younger scholars, “the warts and all school” emerging at the time, who disagreed with us and emphasized that the processes of migration and integration after 1880 had been fraught with tensions and that age-old prejudices persisted. We concluded that the older historiography associated with Cecil Roth and his famed metaphor of “the alembic of English tolerance” operating in “this happy land” where Jews flourish as heirs to “two noble traditions” was not wrong but incomplete and warranted asking new questions—the basis of historical inquiry.[\[24\]](#)

Jackie and I returned to Paris and the Centre de Recherches in 2004 for a conference, “Benjamin Disraeli: Man of State and Man of Letters,” marking the bicentennial of his birth. My presentation appeared in the conference transactions as “Disraeli’s Ideas on Race, Religion, and Conspiracy: A Preliminary Report”; it was greatly expanded for publication as “Disraeli’s Boomerang Efforts to Combat Antisemitism.”[\[25\]](#) My thesis is that Disraeli—baptized an Anglican at age twelve rather than bar mitzvahed at thirteen, who devoted much of his life to defending the Jews and combating antisemitism—based his work on false racial criteria, dubious theology, and mythical history, which paved the way for generations of antisemites (including Hitler) to have been able to exploit his life and writings in support of every imaginable anti-Jewish prejudice and stereotype. Although I continue research on Dizzy and expect to publish a comprehensive study emphasizing his addiction to conspiracy, I am conscious more than ever of the necessity for great care and accuracy in interpreting sources so as not to fall into the same pitfalls and snares that vitiate his writings.

## Shadows

Jackie and I were steadfast in our participation at the Annual Scholars Conferences through 2012, when we went to Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York, making it a leisurely three-day drive of sightseeing and comfortable motels. Owing to the necessity to care for Jackie, a long-term diabetic, I was unable to prepare a paper for the conference, so we contented ourselves with discussing the presentations and chatting amiably with presenters, many of them friends and acquaintances of long standing. From Rochester in the glory of its spring lilac season, we drove to Kingston, Ontario, Canada, for research at the Disraeli Project of Queen’s University. I worked diligently and productively in the project archives, greatly assisted by the then director, and general editor of Disraeli’s letters, Michel Pharand, who treated us like family, a relationship that has since grown and enriched my life. On Sunday we toured the Thousand Islands on a delightful boat trip that Jackie had dreamed of since her school days. As I drove us back to New York, however, I knew our idyll was coming to an end. Jackie showed the first clear and inescapable signs of mental illness.

Our internist, Dr. Richard Morel, provided what proved the earliest and best diagnosis: Jackie’s condition of vascular dementia stemmed from the wreckage inflicted on her digestive tract, nervous system, and brain by nearly sixty years of type 1 diabetes and the attendant extreme swings in her blood sugar levels. Jackie’s acute short-term memory loss brought on much confusion and fear, and not rarely anger. I kept up—or tried to keep up—research and writing while Jackie’s illness became acute, and managed to review volume nine of Disraeli’s letters and the superb study by Robert O’Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*.

Throughout those years I had great difficulty accepting that things were as bad as they actually were, believing that Jackie—“my Jackie-in-the-Box”—would rebound once more and that all would be well—or well enough. Her long-term memory, reading, spelling, and speaking remained largely

unimpaired. And there were upswings when she recovered sufficiently to attend an opera, ballet, or theater, and even to contemplate attending a Jewish history conference in London in 2013. But, of course, the inexorable and inevitable came to pass: dementia tore away Jackie's personality and character although enough of them survived to the very end, when she died at home in her sleep, July 15, 2014, that I could still perceive my beloved Jackie as she was in 1983 and treasure her as the greatest gift and blessing of my life.

### L'envoi

In retrospect, the line of my life appears to have run as straight as an arrow—by chance, luck, and providence—from the moment my mother insisted on leaving Germany to the present, when I pursue research on Disraeli or jointly lead, with Rabbi Thomas Gardner, a weekly discussion of Holocaust readings at Riverdale Temple, or give an occasional guest lecture at the college, and participate in the programs sponsored by the college's Holocaust Center. Given the circumstances of my birth and growing up in a household where I didn't fit in by virtue of blood relationship or legal adoption, I was something of an outsider and may have been inclined to follow an unconventional or independent path. What is certain is that my career as a Jewish historian was shaped by three remarkable women—my "Country Mom"; negatively by Esperanza with her crazed antisemitism; and finally my beloved Jackie. I would have been badly obstructed midway, perhaps halted altogether, were it not for Jackie's coming into my life. In her memory I participate in medical experiments and research that seek to detect dementia—the cause of the cause—early enough to slow its progress and eventually prevent, halt, or even reverse its insidious course. The years fly by and my grief and loneliness persist, but friends, colleagues, former students, and family propel me into going to the opera, ballet, theater, chamber concerts, and religious services; to tour museums; to visit and stroll in parks; and to engage in tai chi, biking, boating, and the like—compelling me to the realization that life can still have its satisfactions and delights. In devotion and honor to her memory, I have resumed the research and writing on Jewish themes in which Jackie was so wonderful a partner.

The incidents and episodes strung together here make me realize that becoming a Jewish historian devoted to improving Christian/Catholic-Jewish relations was and is a life well spent, that I measure up to Scholem's call for "a Jewish non-Jew" to take up the herculean task, and that I have essentially established what to me is a truism: No Catholic or Christian can truly understand their religion until they confront its often poisoned, sometimes murderous relationship with Judaism. As I was completing this foray into autobiography, I received a call from Mark Freiman, the prosecuting attorney in the successful case against Ernst Zündel in the 1990s. He intends taking legal action against a group in Canada calling itself Yourwardnews.com, whose antisemitic vituperation derives from the same sources as Zündel's. The Canada Post Corporation has prohibited their use of the country's postal service and they are suing to compel its restoration. Mark has asked me to serve once again as his "expert on antisemitism." So it looks as though at the age of eighty-seven, my career as a Jewish historian and combatant in the unending fight against antisemitism—in which successes are often reprieves rather than definitive victories—will not end just yet.

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[1] For their help I warmly thank Mehnaz Afridi, Margery Dorne, Ceil Goldman, Jeff Horn, and Michel Pharand, very dear friends all.

[2] All Catholic documents are cited from the versions posted on "Dialogika: The English Language Supersite for Resources and Research in Christian-Jewish Relations," at [www.cjlr.us/dialogikaresources](http://www.cjlr.us/dialogikaresources). U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations," 1967, Recommended Programs, 4.

[3] Quoted in Steven E. Aschheim, *Scholem, Arendt, Klemperer: Intimate Chronicles in Turbulent Times* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 22.

[4] Quoted in William H. Shannon, "Thomas Merton and Judaism," in *America*, October 6, 1990, 218.

[5] Frederick M. Schweitzer, *A History of the Jews since the First Century A.D.* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).



[6] *The New York Times*, 9 January 1972, Book Review section, 5.

[7] *America*, November 13, 1971, 412-3; *America*, December 18, 1971, 525.

[8] For these and other excerpts, see Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, eds., *Antisemitic Myths: A Historical and Contemporary Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 7-9.

[9] Frederick M. Schweitzer, "Nonviolence in Irish History," in *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture*, 31/1 (Winter, 1996): 55-69.

[10] Frederick M. Schweitzer, "Toynbee and Jewish History," in *Toynbee: Reappraisals*, ed. C. T. McIntire and Marvin Perry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 195-226.

[11] Rather unremembered, his 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, sanctioning employment of the higher and lower criticism by biblical scholars in the study and translation of sacred texts, is the great charter of modern Catholic biblical scholarship.

[12] Marian Maskulak, ed., *Edith Stein: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 246; for greater accuracy I made slight modifications in the translation.

[13] Peter Popham, "This Europe," *The Independent*, Feb. 21, 2003, [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)

[14] This may well be a working thesis for historians, though likely to be theologically problematic.

[15] Philip A. Cunningham, "Gifts and Calling: Coming to Terms with Jews as Covenantal Partners," *SCJR* 12/1 (2017): 1, 18; I have changed capital letters to lower case.

[16] *Remembering for the Future: Jews and Christians during and after the Holocaust*, 2 vols. (New York: Pergamon, 1988).

[17] Frederick M. Schweitzer, "The Teacher of Righteousness," in *Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Zdzislaw J. Kapera (Kraków: Enigma Press, 1991), pt. 2, 53-97.

[18] Frederick M. Schweitzer, "Medieval Perceptions of Jews and Judaism," in *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue*, ed. Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

[19] George B. Kirsch, Frederick M. Schweitzer, Wolodymyr Stojko, and George L. Mahoney, eds., *The West in Global Context: A Documentary History 1500 to the Present* (New York: Whittier, 1992 [[Prentice Hall, 1997](#)]).

[20] Sewell Chan, "Ernst Zündel, 78, Promulgator of Holocaust Denial," *The New York Times*, August 8, 2017, B14.

[21] Frederick M. Schweitzer, "Anti-Semitism," in *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, ed. Dinah Shelton, 3 vols., (New York: Thomson Gale, 2005), 1: 40-47.

[22] Frederick M. Schweitzer, "Antisemitism and Law," in *Antisemitism in North America: New World, Old Hate*, ed. Steven K. Baum et al. (Boston: Brill, 2016), 225-300.

[23] Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, *Antisemitism from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, eds., *Antisemitic Myths: A Historical and Contemporary Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

[24] Frederick M. Schweitzer, "The Uniqueness of Anglo-Jewry," in *Parcours Judaïques IV*, ed. Danièle Frison (Nanterre: Université Paris-X at Nanterre, 1998), 87-109.

[25] Frederick M. Schweitzer, "Disraeli's Ideas on Race, Religion, and Conspiracy: A Preliminary Report," in *Parcours Judaïques VIII*, ed. Jean-François Moisan (Nanterre: Université Paris-X at Nanterre, 2006), 77-112; Frederick M. Schweitzer, "Disraeli's Boomerang Efforts to Combat Antisemitism: The Interplay of Ideas of Race, Religion, and Conspiracy," in *Maven in Blue Jeans: A Festschrift in Honor of Zev Garber*, ed. Steven Leonard Jacobs (West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2009), 362-87.

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