

International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations

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CONSTITUENT AGENCIES:
WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS
SYNAGOGUE COUNCIL OF AMERICA
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Rabbi Norman Lamm
131 West 86th Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Norman:

You have probably by now forgotten that you consented to serve on a study committee that I was constructing to deal with a comparable committee of the World Council of Churches. That effort, which was to have begun a year ago, ran into some difficulty internally within our own Jewish group. Our Christian friends have formulated the object of the study much more broadly than we were willing to agree to, involving us in theological issues that are of a kind that are beyond the purview of this organization. There has now been agreement by the constituent agencies of IJCIC on a position paper, which I am enclosing.

The comparable Christian committee is quite international and includes such distinguished figures as Stendahal of Harvard and Marquardt of Berlin.

It has now been agreed that there will be the first meeting of these two groups in Geneva between April 24 and 28. What is envisaged is that each of these groups meet separately for two days, and then that the two committees meet as one for two further days. The agenda is, essentially, to work out an agenda, that is, to agree on the topics to be covered and the approaches to be taken.

I am enclosing for your perusal the copy of our position paper. What would be helpful in addition is if each of our committee were to direct his thoughts to a preliminary outline, a kind of rough sketch of a paper, on one or the other of the topics which will be discussed. I therefore would like to know from you by return mail whether you intend to go to the meeting in Geneva so that I might then suggest some division of the work for your preliminary consideration.

I want to add that out-of-pocket expenses will be borne by the International Jewish Committee, including, of course, your travel to Geneva.

Looking forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience, I am,

Most cordially yours,

Arthur Hertzberg

Arthur Hertzberg
Chairman

P.S. It is most important that I know immediately whether you are going to Geneva, because if not, I will have to find a substitute for you.

Let me refresh your memory. The other men that are invited to the committee are Emil Fackenheim, Uri Tal and Moshe Greenberg.

MEMORANDUM REGARDING THE ORGANIZATION OF
STUDIES AND THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE NEXT
JEWISH-CHRISTIAN CONSULTATION

At the consultations in Lugano in the last days of October 1970, it was agreed that the World Council of Churches and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations engage in a joint study of the implications of the theme that was the subject of the plenary meeting, i.e. "The Quest for World Community: Jewish and Christian Perspectives."

The understanding of both the participating groups was that the next plenary meeting be held in the autumn of 1972 with the same theme as its subject, and would work towards the preparation of a position paper that will try to spell out the view of Jews and Christians on their relationship with each other and with men of other faiths. A second document, when approved, would be forwarded by the consulting bodies to their various constituencies.

All of the conferees at Lugano were aware that the issues before them are fraught with great difficulty, because of the wide variation of opinion and belief within their various constituencies, and that it is therefore necessary for sufficient time and effort to be invested, so that all of these views could be fairly represented and, to the degree to which that is humanly possible, be allowed to interact.

It was agreed that the kind of people to be appointed to engage in this study would, on both sides, represent, primarily, the academic and intellectual community, so that whatever document emerged would be solidly rooted in scholarship. It was envisaged that each of the groups would meet separately in the early fall of 1971, and that they would meet together for the first time before the end of the calendar year.

Without limiting either the Christian or the Jewish committee, or the two of them when they begin to act as the joint body, the following were the major questions which appeared at the discussion in Lugano as important for further study.

(These issues are here being described not as a report of the total discussion, but rather as they were presented there by the Jewish participants in terms of their self-understanding and as their way of interpreting their relationship to the Christian community.)

1. The Role of Religion in the Creation of a New Society

The primary area of concern was the exploration of the ways in which various religious groups can cooperate in the realization of their common objective of achieving a world community, which in its inter-personal as well as inter-group relationships will reflect the belief in the divinely-ordained dignity of man. The manifold ethical and social values which are rooted in the matrix of the religious notion that man bears the image of God are challenged in an unprecedented

manner by the militant secularism and materialism of our time. To face the common threat to all religion it becomes imperative to study the role of religion in the creation of a new social, economic and political order, and to examine the place that various faith communities should occupy in the society of the century to come. It was therefore resolved at Lugano to consider the contribution which various religious groups could make towards making the emerging world of the next century more humane and more just.

2. Individual Faith Communities and World Community

Historically, the relationship between the various individual faith communities, far from leading towards harmony and peace, have been marred by mutual distrust, antagonism and even outright hostility. This has been felt especially in the relationship between Jews and Christians because of the close association of these two communities, which have had such a long history of mutual interaction. Of late, the relationship between Jews and Islam has also been subjected to mounting tension over the creation of the State of Israel. It would therefore be important to study how various monotheistic religions can not only reduce conflicts between them, but how they could achieve a sense of community based upon their ultimate goal of establishing world order which will realize spiritual aspirations.

In the light of recent developments, special attention has to be paid also to society whose religions have not been molded by the Bible. There is little precedent in recent centuries for Jewish relationship to these religions, but the very absence from Asian religions of any history of antisemitism, either theoretical or practical, gives a dimension of openness, and of new discovery, to the encounter.

3. Universal and the Particular

Throughout its history, Judaism has understood the universal dimension of Biblical faith as exemplified in the particular light of the Jewish people. Universal imperatives are paradoxically seen as rooted in the specific experience of a particular people. From this perspective, individual peoples and nations are not merely tolerated; they are the very stuff of society. It would be important to explore the application of this tradition to the tensions created between emerging nationalisms and the quest for world community.

4. Joint Action

The study committees are not necessarily to be instructed to produce suggestions for joint action in the areas which they are to consider, but such a possibility was not ruled out. A set of recommendations as to what Jewish and Christian bodies could do together in the fields of social justice and the quest for peace is not outside the frame of reference for this endeavor.

Preliminary Nature of the Study

It is understood that upon completion, this study, or any part thereof, cannot be presented or publicized without prior authorization by the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.