



# Walking God's Paths



## 1. A New Future: Building Shalom Between Catholics and Jews

### SCREENPLAY

[See the Information Sheet for further details about items in **red letters**.]

## THE PAST

### **Narrator**

As we look over the checkered history of Jewish-Christian relations, we see mostly darkness pierced by a few glimmers of light. For much of their history Christians and Jews have been estranged from one another.

### **Rabbi Sandmel**

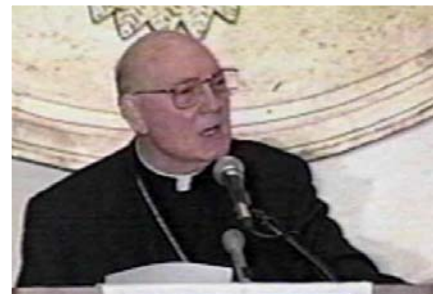
Christian teaching about Jews has been characterized as a "**teaching of contempt**." And it arose out of the competition between Judaism and Christianity in the early centuries and specifically out of the fact that the Jewish community did not accept the Christian message.

### **Narrator**

The teaching of contempt has been acknowledged and formally repudiated by Catholic officials, such as Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy.

### **Cardinal Cassidy**

There can be no denial of the fact that from the time of the Emperor Constantine on, Jews were isolated and discriminated against in the Christian world. There were expulsions and forced conversions. Literature propagated stereotypes, preaching accused the Jews of every age of deicide; the ghetto which came into being in 1555 with a papal bull became in Nazi Germany the antechamber of the extermination.



## **Narrator**

Although "Christendom" was notably contemptuous of Jews, Christians and Jews at various times and places interacted positively. European culture was thereby enriched. Nevertheless, the habitual relegation of Jews to the margins of Christian society left them vulnerable scapegoats in times of crisis.

## **Fr. Pawlikowski**

The teaching of contempt, I'm convinced, would never by itself have led to what Hitler did. Hitler's ideology of racial purification represents a quantum leap from traditional Christian antisemitism. Christian antisemitism, I think, wanted to make the Jews miserable and marginal and sometimes this led to actual death for the Jews. But it was not, it did not envision a systematic annihilation of the Jewish community.

# **THE PRESENT**

## **Narrator**

The horrors of the Nazi genocide of Jews during the Second World War caused many Christian churches to examine their traditional attitudes and teachings about Jews. In the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John XXIII convened a Second Vatican Council which issued in 1965 a revolutionary declaration on the Church's relationship to the Jewish people, *Nostra Aetate*.

## **Rabbi Sandmel**



I think there are three specific aspects that are revolutionary: one is that it affirms the ongoing covenant between God and the Jewish people. The second is that it condemns antisemitism. And the third is that, without mentioning the word specifically, but it speaks to the issue of deicide and says that one cannot blame all Jews either at the time of Jesus or at any other point in history for the death of Jesus. For the Roman Catholic Church to come forth with a statement like that really did change the entire scene of interfaith dialogue, Jewish-Christian dialogue.

## **Fr. Pawlikowski**

It's revolutionary in terms of the Catholic-Jewish relationship . . . because for centuries a major way of articulating Christian self-identity was over against the Jews; we replaced the Jews in the Covenant.

## **Rabbi Sandmel**

After 1965 the floodgates were open and on all different levels – from the institutional level, hierarchical level, down to the local parish level – there seemed to be a great interest and thirst for meeting Jews, learning about Jews, having Jews learn about Roman Catholicism, that simply hadn't existed before. It opened doors."

## **Narrator**

While extraordinary joint activities were beginning to occur among Christians and Jews locally, the papacy of John Paul II has witnessed unprecedented efforts to heal the rift between Jews and Christians. Perhaps the climax of his efforts was when he prayed at the site of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

## **Rabbi Sandmel**

The **Pope approached the Western Wall** and prayed, and then did something that is a very traditional Jewish thing to do. He placed a note in the wall, a *kvitle*, which contained a prayer . . .



## **Narrator**

God of our fathers,  
you chose Abraham and his descendants  
to bring Your name to the nations:  
we are deeply saddened  
by the behavior of those  
who in the course of history  
have caused these children of Yours to  
suffer  
and asking Your forgiveness  
we wish to commit ourselves  
to genuine brotherhood  
with the people of the Covenant

## **Rabbi Sandmel**

This is I think one of the most moving and powerful images that reflects the changes and the progress that have taken place in relationship between the Jewish community and the Roman Catholic Church.

## **Narrator**

**These developments in the Catholic Church**, and similar statements from other Christian churches, have prompted a variety of responses in the Jewish world.

## **Fr. Pawlikowski**

The Jewish reaction has been mixed. There are still some great suspicions around and one often surfaces: that is just a new way of doing proselytizing. *Dabru Emet*, **the recent Jewish document on Christianity**, I think illustrates that at least a significant number of Jewish scholars and rabbis feel that there is a need for a positive response to the more than thirty years now of Catholic initiatives in this area.

## **Narrator**

Prepared by a team of Jewish scholars under the auspices of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore, *Dabru Emet*, meaning "Speak the Truth," was published in 2000 as an invitation to the Jewish community to learn about the changes in attitudes toward Jews occurring in major branches of Christianity.



Peter Ochs, David Novak, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, and Michael Signer composed *Dabru Emet*.

## **Rabbi Sandmel**

*Dabru Emet* is a statement that was written by four Jewish theologians representing a very wide spectrum of the Jewish community, endorsed by over 200 rabbis and Jewish academics, suggesting that in the light of some of the changes that have gone on, it's time for the Jewish community to reassess its relationship to Christianity.

## **Rabbi Signer**

I have felt that it was important for us as members of the Jewish community to make some kind of a systematic response to the changes that have come about in Christianity.

## **Narrator**

However, the search for new ways of relating to one another has not been easy. Old stereotypes and the long shadow of the Holocaust generate recurrent controversies. What did Catholic leaders do or not do during the Second World War? What knowledge can be gained from documents stored in the Vatican archives? Should the Catholic Church be honoring with sainthood certain persons victimized by the Nazis?

## **Rabbi Sandmel**

My personal perspective is that the trend has been in a positive direction and that, while there are real issues, the ability of the communities to keep talking, even while these issues are very much alive and being argued, points to the fact that we have built a foundation that allows us to have these disagreements and to work through these disagreements without the relationship crumbling.

## **Fr. Pawlikowski**

It's better to light one candle than curse the darkness. So, I mean, I do think we have to continue to interact with each other. And I find that we have probably built, now, with the interaction, a pretty solid foundation. There have been a number of crisis moments, and we worked through them. We didn't walk away from each other as difficult as they were and as potentially destructive as they were.

# THE FUTURE

## **Narrator**

In numerous dialogues around the world, Jews and Christians in local congregations, as well as those conversing on official levels, have discovered impediments to mutual understanding - impediments that both sides need to appreciate in order to overcome them.

## **Fr. Pawlikowski**

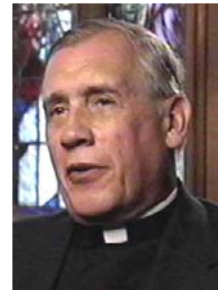
If you assert, as *Nostra Aetate* has, that Jews are now in the Covenant, what does this say, ultimately, about the role of Christ? How does this impact Christian self-identity? I think Jews have to understand that it's not going to be easy for Christians to deal with these questions because they're not peripheral questions. They're at the very heart of Christian faith identity.

## **Rabbi Sandmel**

Certainly when I read Vatican documents, I need a commentary because I'm not just schooled in the language of, and I'm going to say this without a pejorative, but in the language of Vatican-speak. This is an organization that has an old and venerable history and tradition; there are references to doctrines and documents only the initiated understand.

## **Fr. Pawlikowski**

I think sometimes the two groups go in with different expectations. As the late Fr. Flannery said, "the pages of Christian history that Jews knew the best are the ones that have often been torn out of Christian textbooks." And so many Christians simply don't know this history. They really feel that they can learn something positive from the Jewish tradition and find quickly that perhaps Jews aren't that very much interested in learning anything from the Christian tradition.



## **Narrator**

Despite these difficulties, leaders in the modern renewal of Jewish-Christian relations stress the importance of greater mutual understanding among Jewish and Christian communities everywhere.

## **Rabbi Sandmel**

Not only can we learn about the other, but in talking to the other, we can learn about ourselves in a new and deeper way. This is something that is an imperative. This is something that we need to do: not only to work out a relationship between ourselves, but also so that we can come together to work together on those broader issues that concern us – the issues of poverty, injustice, and ecological degradation - that we share concerns as religious people that affect all of us in the world.

**Fr. Pawlikowski**

I think for many people it's also shown that barriers that seemed impenetrable for centuries have suddenly become penetrable and this gives hopes, I think, to all interreligious conflict, as difficult as they appear at times. If Christians and Jews can turn their situation around as dramatically as they have, then it bodes well for other situations on conflict, both political and interreligious.

**Narrator**

Pope John Paul II invites Jews and Christians to build a new future of shalom with these words: "As Christians and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing for the world. This is the common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, to be first a blessing to one another."

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