

## *The American Jewish response to Christian clergy advocating for persecuted Jews and Christians in the Soviet Union, 1972-1976*

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### **ABSTRACT**

The proposed paper is a case study of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry (Task Force) established in 1971 by the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice (NCCIJ) and the American Jewish Committee. It sought Christian support for the effort to end the cultural and religious persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union. Sister Ann Gillen directed the Task Force from 1971 through 1988.

In advocating for Soviet Jews, Task Force leaders became aware of Christians (Catholics, Adventists, Baptists) being persecuted in the Soviet Union. The Task Force took up their struggle for religious freedom. This conflicted with the position held by mainstream American Jewish advocacy groups who followed the Israeli policy of focusing exclusively on Soviet Jews. Israel's Liaison Bureau tried not to be anti-Soviet. They demanded that the Soviet Union give its Jews their religious and cultural rights or allow them to emigrate. In contrast, persecuted Christians often overlapping with 'captive nation' groups favored regime change.

The paper analyzes the response of the AJC, the major American Jewish advocacy groups and the Israelis to the Task Force, taking up the cause of persecuted Christians. Eventually, many in the advocacy movement supported the Task Force's wider concerns with Christians as well as Jews. A major factor influencing many parties was the Helsinki Final Accords (1975), which put the issue of human rights on the agenda of East-West relations.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is a case study of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry (Task Force) established in 1972 by the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice (NCCIJ) and the American Jewish Committee.<sup>1</sup> It mobilized Christian Americans to support the advocacy of Soviet Jews. The Task Force lobbied Congress and the administration to pressure the Soviet Union to allow emigration of Soviet Jews and freedom of religion and culture to those that remained.

While their primary concern was Soviet Jewry, Task Force leaders urged American Christians to protest the discrimination against their co-religionists (Catholics, Adventists, Baptists) in the Soviet Union. This conflicted with the position held by some mainstream American Jewish advocacy groups who followed the Israeli policy of focusing exclusively on

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\* This article is dedicated to Carmen Belle Lazin

Soviet Jews.

The paper analyzes the response of Task Force activists, the AJC, the major American Jewish advocacy groups and the Israelis to the Task Force, taking up the cause of persecuted Christians. The focus is on the early years of the Task Force prior to the passage of the Helsinki Final Accords in August 1975.

The research is based on archival research and interviews with several of the key actors.<sup>2</sup> Secondary sources, including newspapers and scholarly articles, were also used.

### **BACKGROUND**

Following WWII, four factors contributed to the establishment of the Task Force in 1972. First, Vatican II created a revolution in Catholic Jewish relations.<sup>3</sup> In 1960 Pope John XXIII summoned the Ecumenical Council to help bring the Church into the modern world.<sup>4</sup>

The Council approved the "Declaration on the Jews" *Nostra Aetate, No. 4*, on October 28, 1965, by a vote of 2,221 in favor and 188 opposed.<sup>5</sup> It acknowledges Jewish roots of the church, repudiated the age-old idea that all Jews were eternally cursed for the crime of having killed Jesus, 'Stated that hatred of Jews should have no place in Church teachings and called for fraternal Christian-Jewish dialogue' (Sanua 2007:124). This opened a "new chapter (in Catholic-Jewish relations. This was "a genuine revolution" <sup>6</sup> It had a significant effect on the leaders of the American Catholic Church who had worked hard to enact *Nostra Aetate*. On return to the US, they encouraged extensive interaction and dialogues with American Jews. It would motivate some religious Catholics, including priests and nuns, to join the American struggle for Soviet Jewry.

Second, the revolution among American sisters' religious life led many sisters to leave their enclosures and isolated communities in search of more socially meaningful apostolates in the broader American society. Under the influence of Vatican II and a greater awareness of the failure of Church during the Holocaust, some sisters pursued apostolates dealing with Jews and the Jewish community. Sisters Ann Gillen and Margaret Traxler, for example, took up the cause of Soviet Jewry.

Third, AJC began advocating for the three million Jews of the Soviet Union; they opposed a presumed Soviet policy of cultural genocide. They urged their government to

intervene. In general, the AJC followed the lead of the Israeli government's Liaison Bureau, established in the early 1950s to coordinate efforts to bring the Jews of the Soviet Union to Israel (Lazin 2005).

Finally, during and after World War II, AJC worked to further interfaith relations between Jews and Christians in the US and overseas.<sup>7</sup> AJC's, Interreligious Affairs Department (IAD) conducted outreach to Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Evangelical Christians. A major project involved reviewing religious school textbooks for anti-Semitic content.<sup>8</sup> AJC's IAD played a major behind the scenes role in Vatican II's deliberations and decisions on the Jews.

### **SETTING UP THE TASK FORCE**

In 1971, a member of the staff of AJC's Chicago office read about the religious persecution of Soviet Jewry in an NCCIJ newsletter. This led to AJC inviting Sister Margaret Traxler, head of the NCCIJ, to lunch, which resulted in negotiations about an interreligious advocacy group for Soviet Jewry.<sup>9</sup> The Chicago AJC office had also discussed the idea with Andre LaCocque, a professor of theology at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS).<sup>10</sup>

AJC and NCCIJ sponsored a one-day conference for an advisory panel on Soviet Jewry with 15-20 leading Catholic and Protestant theologians at CTS on October 13, 1971.<sup>11</sup> The co-conveners were Sister Margaret Traxler, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum (IAD/AJC) and Andre LaCocque. The conference focused on Jews and other religious groups in the Soviet Union. AJC hoped that this would generate a larger and more far-reaching Christian programmatic effort on behalf of Soviet Jews. They envisioned a national Christian consultation and an ongoing functioning organization.<sup>12</sup> At the end, all present "unanimously agreed to form an Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry with Traxler and LaCocque as co-chairs and Graubart of AJC as Secretary." They decided to hold a Consultation in March 1972.<sup>13</sup>

In a January 1972 memo, AJC described the proposed Task Force as a national organization through which concerned Christians may act on behalf of the Soviet Jewish community. It would develop and implement interreligious programs at local and national levels and would be involved in consultations, publications, new monthly periodical, high-level interreligious missions to USSR and hold local level activities at churches and universities. It emphasized AJC's continuing efforts to "mobilize non-Jewish public opinion

to bring effective pressures on the Soviet Union to change" policies that deprive Jews of the right to "their own cultural and religious life and violating their human right of freedom to emigrate."<sup>14</sup>

The memo also mentioned a group within the Task Force consisting of about 20 prominent Christian theologians.<sup>15</sup> Sponsors of the Consultation may have intended this group to become a permanent institution that would set policy for the Task Force.

An AJC news release in February announced that the planned Consultation would "help obtain full human rights for Jews and other deprived groups in the Soviet Union." <sup>16</sup>

### THE CONSULTATION

The Consultation was held at the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Chicago on March 19 and 20, 1972. Rita Hauser, US Representative to the UN Human Rights Commission, gave the first keynote. She declared that the administration would continue, "pressing the Soviet government to let emigrate all those Jews who seek to leave (and by) resisting every attempt on the part of the Soviet's to argue that the treatment of Soviet Jews is of concern only to the Soviets."

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In the second keynote, Charles Evers, mayor of Fayette MI and older brother of slain civil rights activist Medgar Evers, urged President Nixon to tell the Soviets on his upcoming visit to "let the Jewish people go." He added, "I am proud to be a part of ending this oppression. I am also here because, as one who remembers the Jewish participation in the Mississippi civil rights struggle, I do not forget those who helped me."<sup>18</sup> In the final keynote, Mr. Shlomo Shoham, a Soviet Jewish émigré, emphasized the importance of Christian voices to speak out in favor of Soviet Jews.<sup>19</sup>

At lunch on the 20<sup>th</sup>, US Representative, Jesuit priest and law professor Robert Drinan urged President Nixon to champion the cause of Soviet Jewry. He charged that the Soviet government "...during the years 1939 to 1967 carried out the destruction of Jewish cultural life." He argued that any large-scale future emigration "depends upon the continuing pressure of world opinion on Moscow as well as the quality of the absorption and adjustment of Russian immigrants in Israel." He claimed that pressure on US and Soviet officials led to an easing of visa regulations in Russia so that in 1972 some 40, 000 Russian Jews will arrive in Israel.<sup>20</sup>

Drinan noted that Christians in Europe and the US had not provided enough assistance in past generations "hardly an encouraging demonstration of the solidarity which should exist between all of those who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He closed, "I have the hope that American Christians will be aroused at the injustices being inflicted on persons of the Jewish faith in Russia. I also hope that Christians in America will as never before recognize and act upon the acute and profound problems which confront Israel because by its very nature, it is an ongoing ingathering of exiles and refugees". He quoted Reinhold Niebuhr, "Who told us that no one can be a good Christian until first, he is a good Jew."

The high point of the Consultation was the Interreligious Assembly in the auditorium of Holy Name Cathedral.<sup>21</sup> Bishop Sheen asked: "May the God of love inspire our President to plead for all persecuted people in Russia even as we raise our voices against the persecution of the Russian Jews and other religious groups."<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum demanded that Nixon put the issue of Soviet Jews on his agenda for discussions with the Soviets.<sup>23</sup> Dr. W. L. Wilson said it was fitting for "a member of America's largest minority" to voice concern for the plight of Jews in the Soviet Union." Dr. Cynthia C. Wedel stated that Protestants should have a special feeling for the subject of the persecution of Soviet Jews. "We must remember our Jewish forefathers. The Lord we serve lived and died a Jew. We can never see a Jew suffer without saying 'this is our brother.'"<sup>24</sup>

At the end, the 700 persons in attendance rose and accepted the "Statement of Conscience").<sup>25</sup> It called on "conscience of mankind to make known its profound concern about the continued denial of the free exercise of religion, the violation of the right to emigrate, and other human rights of the three million Jewish people of the Soviet Union and other deprived groups and nationalities." It argued that discrimination against Jews of the Soviet Union give all of us reason to believe that "under the pretext of being anti-Zionist, it is the very contribution of the Jews to humanity which is under attack. . the Jewish testimony in the world that man's identity and freedom are not granted primarily by any state or constitution but are found in the nature of man himself. That is why each human being is threatened in his fundamental right to freedom of conscience when the Jews are persecuted."

The document urged the Soviets to grant religious rights to Russian Jewry to establish religious educational and cultural institutions, to lift the ban on publishing religious books and the

Bible and religious articles and for the right to train rabbis and teachers and to establish ties with overseas Jewish groups. "Let them live as Jews or let them leave to be Jews."

They protested the continued imprisonment of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners of conscience and urged their release. The statement pledged to continue the struggle for freedom of Soviet Jews, "all Christians and intellectuals... Our national interreligious consultation of Protestants, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Jews... appeal to President Nixon to convey in "clear and forthright terms to Soviet authorities" when in Moscow that American people "Christians and Jews, black and white, liberal and conservative—that these discriminations and denials of Soviet Jewry and others be stopped now and that fundamental human rights be granted—now."

The Statement of Conscience of the interreligious consultation focused on the plight of Soviet Jewry. Nevertheless, it referred time and again to the plight of other persecuted religious groups in the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup>

### **SISTER ANN GILLEN**

Sister Ann Gillen led a workshop at the Consultation. She also met with Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of IAD about the position of Task Force director.<sup>27</sup>

She was born in Texas and attended Catholic parochial schools.<sup>28</sup> She studied at Rosemont College near Philadelphia, which was operated by the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ). She took her vows with SHCC. She did graduate work at Dropsie College in comparative religion, Jewish history, and biblical literature.<sup>29</sup> She became very aware of the unhappy historical relations of Christians and Jews. She decided that her future apostolate work would entail a broad type of education with special emphasis on Jewish Christian concerns.

She worked first in educational institutions of SHCJ. Later, in Houston Texas, she established 'Project Awareness' in cooperation with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) and Catholic Commission on Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs. She also participated in an ecumenical committee that surveyed how Christian religious, educational texts dealt with Jews and Judaism. She ran a project with a group of Christians concerned about Israel and Soviet Jewry. Following a summer seminar

series at St. Thomas University, she worked to bridge the knowledge gap in Jewish Christian dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

In May 1972, she commented on how during the Holocaust and Six Days War, "many Christians have indeed been silent and inactive, if not actually opposed to the concerns of Jews and Judaism." In recent years, she argued the two communities have come closer together "... to collaborate in areas of common concern." Some admit "that the concern of one community is their concern; what hurts or threatens the Jew also hurts and threatens the Christian. ... "We recognize our common brotherhood and sisterhood, our common humanity."<sup>31</sup> She closed, "I intend to dedicate my efforts "to this goal that by the year 2000, there will be an end to the vicious thing called anti-Semitism. I believe that we are called to express the truth together and that in this truth and in our collaboration to know and share the truth, we will together redeem the times."<sup>32</sup>

AJC hired Ann as the full-time director of the NITFSJ by early October.<sup>33</sup> She arrived in Chicago on October 19 and began working in an office located within the offices of the NCCIJ.<sup>34</sup> She referred to her office as the Secretariat for Soviet Jewry.<sup>35</sup> The same day Sister Margaret Traxler and Prof. Andre LaCocque introduced Ann Gillen at a press conference in Chicago.

As originally envisioned, the Task Force was to have an interfaith group of twenty theologians to deal with the issues affecting Soviet Jewry. Although names appeared on a document, the group never functioned. At best, a few theologians, most notably Father John Pawlikowski and Andre LaCocque, were active in Task Force activities.

A similar fate happened to the honorary sponsors and the honorary chair of the Task Force. The honorary sponsors included well-known persons from government, civil rights, the arts, and sports.<sup>36</sup> In the early years, some attended formal events, but most were inactive.<sup>37</sup> The chairman of the advisory board Sargent Shriver served in name only. He frequently could not attend major Task Force events. His sending a message was considered an important achievement. However, the use of his name and the names of members of sponsors helped the organization gain publicity and influence. Other members of the Task Force, notably Father John Pawlikowski, Prof. Andre LaCocque, Prof Tom Bird and Rev John Steinbruck, remained active. They sometimes spoke for the Task Force, participated in Task Force conferences and

events and worked in their own institutions to further the goals of the Task Force. By the early 1980s, if not before, the Task Force had become an organization of one person Sister Ann Gillen.

As director Ann spoke at temples, churches, parochial schools, Jewish Community Center's, Community Relations Councils forums and on campus from coast to coast during the first decade and through the early 1980s. She appeared at various secular, religious and political seminars and conferences. She lobbied Congress, the State Department and the White House, spoke at countless demonstrations in major cities, appeared on TV and radio and gave hundreds of newspaper interviews. She worked to establish local task forces in cities around the country. She recruited lawyers and organized the Interreligious Task Force on Human Rights in the Soviet Union, which prepared a brief in support of Andre Sakharov. She initiated programs that brought together Jews and Christians, churches and synagogues to co-adopt children of refuseniks, refuseniks, Christian and Jewish prisoners of conscience. She travelled to the Soviet Union, where she met with refuseniks and dissidents. Her presence inspired many activists, including Ida Nudel. Many of her activities in the US and abroad received wide media coverage. A nun fighting for Soviet Jewry attracted attention. Several Congressmen took notice of the sister demanding action for her Soviet Jewish brothers and sisters. Her efforts and those of the Task force mobilized Christians and helped to create a public perception that Christians, too, were concerned about Soviet Jews.

Despite her continued dependence on the AJC for finances and the need to clear many policy and program decisions with the IAD, Ann became director of an autonomous organization. Her freedom increased in time as she learned to navigate among the many organizations of the Soviet Jewry Advocacy movement and the American Jewish community. As Task Force director, she worked well with the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ) and with the Union of Councils, and she made close friends and supporters within AJC.<sup>38</sup> She cultivated ties with members of Congress, the State Department and with religious leaders. She became a valuable resource for all concerned with Soviet Jewry.<sup>39</sup>

### **CONFLICT WITH MAINSTREAM JEWISH ADVOCACY GROUPS FOR SOVIET JEWRY**

Importantly, from the founding Consultation in March 1972, Task Force leaders expressed concern about persecuted Christians in the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> While Soviet Jewry remained the central



concern of the Task Force, it continued to take up the plight of persecuted Christians in the Soviet Union. In doing so, the Taskforce focused on religious persecution; It avoided cooperation with 'captive nations' groups who opposed Soviet (Russian) occupation of their homelands.

The interest of Ann and the Taskforce in persecuted Christians met opposition from some mainstream Jewish advocacy groups for Soviet Jewry. For example, when the Interreligious Council for Soviet Jewry in Louisville requested that Jewish organizations "help a Catholic sister gain her freedom from behind the Iron Curtain," Jerry Goodman of NCSJ objected.<sup>41</sup> He argued that based on human compassion individuals and Jewish organizations should do whatever they can to help the Sister, but "I question the wisdom of a group like the Louisville Interreligious Council on Soviet Jewry to undertake this activity. It seems to me that all sorts of unrelated problems are raised and crisscrossing of lines will be confusing."<sup>42</sup>

Abe Bayer of National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC) opposed Task Force involvement with Soviet Christians.<sup>43</sup> Bayer wanted the Task Force to limit its concerns to Soviet Jews. Jerry Goodman disagreed but urged a name change to "National Interreligious Task Force Against Religious Oppression in the Soviet Union." Rabbi Rudin opposed both and argued that "we have enlisted more Christians in the cause of Soviet Jewry when we broaden the Task Force's appeal to include Soviet Christians as well." Abe said that as a staff member of NJCRAC he would "no longer be recommending Sr. Ann" to speak in the various communities because she spoke not just about Soviet Jewry but also about Soviet Baptists.<sup>44</sup>

### **WHY A PROBLEM?**

The concern for persecuted Christians by the Task Force (and IAD) clashed with Liaison Bureau policy, which favored an exclusive focus on Soviet Jews. They urged advocates for Soviet Jewry to shun the cause of persecuted Christians, dissidents, and captive nations.

The Israelis argued that advocates for Soviet Jewry were not opposed to the regime or Communism; they were fighting for religious and cultural rights for Jewish citizens guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution. They demanded: give them their rights or let them leave for their homeland (Israel). In contrast, advocates for other religious minorities, dissidents, and captive nations wanted regime change and end to Soviet (Russian) dominance

of their homelands.<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, not everyone advocating for Soviet Jewry followed Israeli policy. Within AJC some supported the Israeli position in the early 1970s, but the IAD almost always mentioned persecuted Christians when discussing Soviet Jewry. The executive head of the AJC allowed for diversity within the organization. Even the position taken by Jerry Goodman of NCSJ, who coordinated everything with the Liaison Bureau, was more tolerant toward Ann than Abraham Bayer. But Bayer too later backed down.

The issue was complicated by the position of the Israelis that the support of Ann Gillen and Christian Americans was vital to the success of the American Advocacy movement for Soviet Jewry. A movement supported only by Jews was bound to fail.

The Liaison Bureau chose to work with Ann and the Task Force even it opposed some of their alliances and concerns. They believed that her organization helped to mobilize Christian and general American support for the advocacy of Soviet Jewry. For example, the Task Force helped to recruit Christian clergy and laypersons to participate in the annual Solidarity Sunday programs for Soviet Jewry held throughout the country. The Liaison Bureau clearly supported her central role in the Second Brussel's Conference in 1976, which brought together Soviet Jewry advocacy advocates from all over the world. One of the highlights was a public meeting between Sister Ann and former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. Both women embraced. Ann apologized for Golda's alleged ill-treatment during her private audience with Pope Paul.<sup>46</sup> Ann added: "...you have won respect, admiration, and affection in the USA...all over the world by your heroic leadership. Your personal concern for Soviet Jews has deep roots that were implanted when you were Israeli Ambassador to the USSR, and in a sense, it is because of that concern that we are all here in Brussels. We are here to pledge to you our commitment to this human rights, cause, and ... may I present to you a copy of this 'Call to Christian Conscience'..."<sup>47</sup>

Golda responded: "I am anxious for the sake of our Jewish children to see that our often very cruel and dangerous dialogue with the non-Jewish world shall not be the only dialogue... There has never been a period of history when some non-Jews to stand by our side... I would ordinarily say "thank you," but I cannot say "thank you" about a cause of this kind. I know you are preoccupied with this problem because you have made it yours. I praise

God in these hours that we are not left alone. Just as we are found together today, so also somewhere, someplace may we meet again when we have won."<sup>48</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The Helsinki Final Accords, signed in 1975 by the USA, USSR and 33 other nations, were a major game changer for the various advocacy groups for Soviet Jews, Christians, dissidents and captive nations.<sup>49</sup> Basket III included a guarantee of human rights for citizens in the signatory nations, including exit visas for family reunification, religious and cultural rights, and contact with the outside world. It provided the legal basis for advocates to challenge the Soviet denial of basic human rights to Jews and others.<sup>50</sup> On the one hand, the Accords fostered resistance by Soviet Jews, Christians, and dissidents to the denial of their basic human rights while, on the other, they increased the activity by their respective advocates in the US and elsewhere.

Following the Helsinki Final Accords interest in persecuted Christians in the Soviet Union increased in the United States. Several Evangelical advocacy groups for Soviet Christians appeared on the scene.<sup>51</sup> Ann and the Task Force worked with them. Almost immediately, the Task Force charged the Soviet regime with "gross violations of the Helsinki Accord through a series of denials of human rights to Jews."<sup>52</sup>

A major change in the Task Force occurred in the late 1970s when Ann became more engaged with lawyers about human rights violations in the Soviet Union.<sup>53</sup> Ann helped to organize the National Interreligious Task Force on Human Rights.<sup>54</sup> While concerned with Soviet Jews, the Human Rights Task Force emphasized human rights violations, which could involve persons of any faith in the Soviet Union. One of their first projects was to file a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of Andre Sakharov.

In later years, when the Task Force focused more on persecuted Christians, two of its more active members Father John Pawlikoski and Andre LaCocque, favored a policy of exclusive concern with Soviet Jews. They argued that the purpose of the Task Force was to liberate Soviet Jews. In theological terms for LaCocque, the Jew represented all mankind; the universal was attained by pursuit of the particular. They were overruled by Ann Gillen and the IAD.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In 1934, Jesuit Father John LaFarge pulled together “a mixed-race group of about 800 Catholics in New York City to form the Catholic Interracial Council of New York. Its goals were to foster better race relations within the Church and to effect positive social change outside of it.” A meeting of Catholic Interracial Councils in Chicago in August 1958 produced the NCCIJ which was chartered in 1960 under the directorship of Matt Ahmann (Stossel 2004:121-140). In January 1963 NCCIJ brought together Jewish, Catholic and Protestant religious leaders for the National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago. Martin Luther King gave the keynote (Schultz (2011:179). The AJC was established in 1906 by German American Jews to deal with anti-Semitism in Russia and in the US. During the 1970s and 1980s it remained an elite organization with a national office in New York City (NYC) (Lazin 2005:16 n.2).

<sup>2</sup> The author used the archives of the American Jewish Committee, American Joint Distribution Committee and Combined Jewish Federations (CJF) in NYC and the Archives of the NITFSJ at Spertus College in Chicago.

<sup>3</sup> The Vatican's response to Hitler and the Holocaust served as a catalyst for Vatican II's dealing with the Jewish question. During the War, the Vatican failed to condemn the mass slaughter of the Jews. For Popes Pius XI and Pius XII Soviet Communism was the chief enemy of civilization (Feldman (2001:58)). The church's “dread of atheistic Communism dampened Pope Pius XII's zeal to move aggressively to oppose Hitler's war against the Jews” (Feldman (2001:52). For critics of Pius XII, “His silence in the face of mass extermination of Jews which took place at his very doorstep was deafening” (Feldman (2001:91ff).

Following the War French Jewish sociologist Jules Isaac concluded that Christianity had provided a fertile environment for the Final Solution. In a series of books, he traced “the roots of Jew hatred, ..., ... to Christian teaching.” In an audience with Pope John XXIII in June 1960, he urged the Pope to appoint a commission to study the issue of Christian anti-Semitism within the planned Vatican Council.

<sup>4</sup> The Pope convened the Council in September 1962 and only attended first meetings before his death in 1963. As Angelo Cardinal Roncalli, he made available Church documents to rescue thousands of Jews during the War. In 1959 he ordered the removal of the phrase “unbelieving Jews” in the Good Friday service both in Latin and vernacular (Sanua (2007:127).

<sup>5</sup> Feldman (2001: 116, 117). *Nostra Aetate 4* is a declaration on the relations of the Church to non-Christian religions but mostly refers to the Jews.

<sup>6</sup> According to Feldman “*Nostra Aetate, No.4* represented “a blueprint for a radical transformation of the Catholic relationship to the Jews.” Vatican II also pass *Sacrosantum Concilium* on reform of liturgy “repudiating “and “deploring” all “hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any sources.” The “... Council's work altered, perhaps irrevocably, the relationship of Christians and Jews.”

<sup>7</sup> In the 1930s they had sought religious allies in efforts to pressure the US government to protest Hitler's treatment of German Jews. See Lazin “The Response of the American Jewish Committee to the Crisis of German Jewry, 1933-1939,” *American Jewish History* (formerly *AJHQ*) LXVIII, No.3 (March, 1979):283-304.

<sup>8</sup> Some of the early activists in the Task Force had worked on this project.

<sup>9</sup> Memo, Judah Graubart to James Rudin, re: Christian Conference on Soviet Jewry, August 9, 1971 (Box 210, folder 5). (Interview, Eugene DuBow, NYC, January 14, 2010). He referred to Sister Margaret as “Mighty Trax”.

<sup>10</sup> LaCocque had checked contents of Christian text books for AJC (Letter, Judah Graubart to Andre LaCocque, September 7, 1971 (Box 210, folder 5).

<sup>11</sup> Memo, Eugene DuBow to David Geller re Interfaith Task Force on Soviet Jewry (Box 175). Attendees included Dr. Thomas Campbell President of CTS; Eugene DuBow, regional director of AJC; Father Edward Flannery, Secretariat for Catholic Jewish Relations, Seton Hall; Monsignor John Gorman of Mundelein College; Judah Graubart assistant area director of AJC; Sister Adrian Marie Hofstetter, chair, Sisters Uniting of Memphis TN; Dr. Andre LaCocque CTS; Richard Levin chair AJC Chicago; Dr. Clyde Manschreck CTS; Sister Suzanne Noffke, President Siena Center, Racine WI; Father John Pawlikowski, Dean of Students Catholic Theological Union (CTU); Dr. Joseph Sittler UC School of Divinity; Gerald Strober IAD; Sister Margaret Traxler, NCCIJ; and Dr. Mikhail Zand, Bar Ilan University.

<sup>12</sup> Memo, Thomas Van Straaten, chair, to members of interreligious affairs committee of AJC Chicago chapter, October 1, 1971 (Box 175). Graubart noted: that we “are attempting to maintain as minimal a profile as possible in order to keep the Christian visibility at a maximum” (Memo, Judah Graubart to Mr. Joel J. Sprayregen (Box 210, folder 5).

<sup>13</sup> Memo, Graubart to Father Flannery, October 22, 1971 (Box 175).

<sup>14</sup> AJC memo, January 21, 1972 (Box 175).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Appendix A. It included all the participants from the one-day conference (n.11 above) plus Dr. Jerome Brauer, University of Chicago School of Divinity (UCSD). A later list dropped Dr. Thomas Campbell, Dr. Andre LaCocque and sister Margaret Traxler and added Rabbi A. James Rudin (AJC/IAD) and AJC President Elmer Winter.

<sup>16</sup> Task Force co-chairs would be Sister Margaret Traxler, Executive Director of the NCCIJ and President of National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN); Dr. Andre LaCocque, Professor of Old Testament at CTS; Reverend Robert G. Stephanopolous, Director of inter church affairs of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America; and Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, Director of IAD of AJC. The Greek Orthodox Church would soon leave the Task Force. NICSJ Press Release, March 8, 1972 (Box 174) & AJC Press Release, February 17, 1972 (Box 175).

<sup>17</sup> “More Aid Urged for Russian Jews” Chicago *Tribune*, March 20, 1972 (Box 176); NICSJ Press Release, March 19, 1972 and WINS Commentary of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, (Box 175).

<sup>18</sup> “Report on National Interreligious Consultation on Soviet Jewry, March 19, 20, 1972 (Box 302, folder 4) & “Press Release,” March 21, 1972 (Box 195).

<sup>19</sup> “Report on...”, March 19, 20, 1972 (Box 302, folder 4).

<sup>20</sup> “Drinan’s Address”, March 20, 1972 (Box 175).

<sup>21</sup> The evening began with a torchlight procession through “Chicago. Memo, Marc Tanenbaum to Bertram Gold, “NICSJ”, April 12, 1972 (Box 174). Speakers included Most Reverend Fulton J. Sheen, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, Dr. Cynthia C. Wedel, President of NCC, Rev Dr. W. L. Wilson, Chair National Committee of Black Churchmen and Dean Emanuel Vergis representing Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Church (Report on...”, March 19, 20, 1972 (Box 302, folder 4).

<sup>22</sup> Press Release NICSJ, March 21, 1972 (Box 195).

<sup>23</sup> He adds “Jews cry out today in the Soviet Union ‘Let us live as Jews or let us leave to be Jews.’”

<sup>24</sup> “Report on...”, March 19, 20, 1972 (Box 302, folder 4).

<sup>25</sup> Memo, Marc Tanenbaum to Bertram Gold, April 12, 1972 (Box 174). A press release by NICSJ claimed this was the largest national interreligious assembly ever held for the cause of Soviet Jewry (ibid). The Statement of Conscience (Box 210 folder 2) of the NICSJ

<sup>26</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Daily News* (April 21, 1972 (Box 210, Folder2) Sister Margaret Traxler and Dr. Andre LaCocque wrote “In considering the plight of the Jewish minority, we would do well to remember that their struggle is not merely that of a single people yearning for their inalienable rights. It is rather the personification of a deeply rooted movement within the USSR, a movement broadened by the protests of many Christian and intellectual dissidents, who likewise desire the same human rights which their Jewish brethren are demanding.” Another co-chair Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum on his WINS Religious Commentary on Solidarity Sunday, broadcast on April 30<sup>th</sup> (Box 210, Folder2) referred to 3m Jews “and ...other religious and national groups who suffer denial of their basic human rights.”

<sup>27</sup> Note, Ann Gillen to Marc Tanenbaum, March 22, 1972 (Box 174).

<sup>28</sup> The following is from Ann Gillen, "Biographical data concerning Sister Ann Gillen" written in first person (Box 177).

<sup>29</sup> She became convinced early on that “Christians must know the Jewish people, must learn something of their tradition and spirit if only to understand more fully the many meanings of biblical literature and the literal sense that was originally intended.” Later she spent two months studying and touring in the Holy Land.

<sup>30</sup> In early 1972 she was a member of the executive committee of the NCAN headed by Margaret Traxler.

<sup>31</sup> Ann Gillen, “The Interfaith commitment,” May 17, 1972 (Box 210 folder 2).

<sup>32</sup> At the time, Ann worked with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Houston Galveston TX

<sup>33</sup> In negotiations with Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, she commented that she was impressed with his vision that our “collaboration might one day become a Secretariat for Human Rights.”

<sup>34</sup> Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum secured funding for the Task Force from the MartinTanenbaum Foundation of New York City (Letter, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum to Mrs. Maurice Goldstick, September 7, 1972 (Box 177). Within a year, the NCCIJ withdrew and AJC became the sole sponsor. The AJC also provided funding for the Task Force.

<sup>35</sup> She asked Rabbi Tanenbaum for his thoughts on the project name: Soviet Jewry Secretariat or Christian Secretariat for Soviet Jewry? Traxler announced to the major superiors of women religious that a permanent Secretariat on Soviet Jewry, a Christian Jewish Voice of Conscience had been opened (Letter, Ann Gillen to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, October 23, 1972 (Box 177).

<sup>36</sup> The initial list of Honorary sponsors included Ralph D. Abernathy; Hon. Herman Badillo; Leonard Bernstein; Hon. Julian Bond, Hon. Edward Brooke, William F. Buckley’ Miss Dorothy Day; Charles Evers Hon. Gerald Ford; Arthur Godfrey; Hon. Arthur Goldberg; Hon John A. Gronouski; Gen. Alfred Gruenther; Hon Fred Harris; Mrs. La Donna Harris; Hon. Philip Hart; W. Randolph Hearst Jr.; Rev Theodore Hesburgh; Rabbi Abraham Heschel; Rt. Rev John Hines; Hon. Harold Hughes, His eminence Iakovos; Hon. Daniel Inouye; Miss Mahalia Jackson; Dr. Clark Kerr; Tom Landry; Willie Mays; Hans J. Morgenthau; Hon Wayne Morse; Hon Richard Ogilvie; Hon Charles Percy; A. Philip Randolph; Jackie Robinson; Bayard Rustin; Hon Hugh Scott; Hon Adlai Stevenson; Ed Sullivan; Theodor White; Roy Wilkins.

<sup>37</sup> When honorary sponsors died, they were not replaced.

<sup>38</sup> The NCSJ was an umbrella organization that advocated for Soviet Jewry. AJC and other “establishment” organizations belonged. It had strong ties to the Liaison Bureau. The Union of Councils was a consortium of grass roots Jewish advocacy groups for Soviet Jewry who received little or no funding from the local Jewish Federations. It operated independently of the Liaison Bureau.

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<sup>39</sup> In the early 1970s some in AJC wanted her to relocate to NYC where major Jewish and Christian organizations had their headquarters. She may have chosen not to move to NYC to avoid being under greater AJC control.

<sup>40</sup> To a lesser extent, Ann and the Task Force expressed concern for the plight of the dissidents in the Soviet Union. An exception was Andre Sakharov, whose cause Ann and the Task Force supported (more so in the 1980s).

<sup>41</sup> The NITFSJ had a special project focusing on Sister Elizabeth Pretschner of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, Jerry Goodman to Ted Comet and Abraham J. Bayer, CC: Rudin (Box 176).

<sup>43</sup> Rabbi Jim Rudin and Jerry Goodman met Abe Bayer on this issue on July 1977 (Memo, Rabbi Jim Rudin to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, July 12 (Box 194) (copy July 19, 1977 (Box 212, folder 1). The National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC) was established in 1944. In 1969 it became NJCRAC. In 1998 it became the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. It is an umbrella organization which coordinates the policies of 13 national organizations with 120 local Jewish community relations councils (See Lazin 2005: 15 n.23).

<sup>44</sup> In a later phone call to Rabbi Rudin Abe retreated. He said that he had not represented NJCRAC policy. Bayer may well have changed his mind in the future. Ann wrote him a warm note on October 26, 1983 (Spertus 122/54) thanking him for recommending her as a speaker for the Tucson Freedom weekend.

<sup>45</sup> Later, in the late 1970s, some of the advocates for Evangelical Christians argued that they were only demanding rights guaranteed in the Soviet Constitution.

<sup>46</sup> Memo, Gene DuBow to Bert Gold, February 27, 1976 (Box 208, folder 4). (Sister Margaret Traxler "A personal report of the Brussels conference" (Marquette Sister Traxler papers, series 5 box 7 folders 2-4).

<sup>47</sup> "A Report on the Second ... *The Task*... March 1976 ([www.ajcarchives.org/AJC\\_Data/files/773.pdf](http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_Data/files/773.pdf) (Last visited April 27, 2016).

<sup>48</sup> Jim Rudin "Brussels II Conference on Soviet Jewry." March 9, 1976 (Box 195).

<sup>49</sup> The major portion of the Accords recognized the redrawn post World War II borders.

<sup>50</sup> The Helsinki Accords established a review process via a series of follow up meetings of the signatory nations to insure implementation. These meetings became the arenas of an international debate over human rights involving Soviet Jews and others in the Soviet Union.

<sup>51</sup> In July 1978, seven Pentecostal Christians from Siberia (The Siberian 7) received asylum in the US Embassy in Moscow. This stimulated interest in their plight among co-religionists in the US. New support groups in the US and in Congress lobbied for the release of the Siberian 7 and in support of persecuted Christians in the Soviet Union. Ann's message was that American Christians concerned with their brethren in the Soviet Union could learn from the example American Jews involved in the struggle for Soviet Jews.

<sup>52</sup> They cited denial of visas to Vladimir Slepak and his family and the harassment, beating and arrest of Jews who protested in Moscow (NITFSJ press release, November 3, 1976 (Box 208, folder 1).

<sup>53</sup> The initiative may have come from the Israelis, NCSJ and AJC. All of them were interested in involving American lawyers in cases of Jewish refuseniks on trial in the Soviet Union.

<sup>54</sup> Active with her was Ralph Ruebner, a law professor in Chicago who represented the Decalogue Society, a Jewish legal fraternal order. Another participant was Prof. Lynn Buzzard head of the Evangelical Christian Legal Society. The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights also joined.