



Approaching Passover and Easter: The Past and Future of Jewish-Christian Relations

Ron Kronish | 01.05.2019

As we approach the holidays of Passover and Easter, we are mindful that this used to be a time of great tension historically between Christians and Jews. “Good Friday” – the Friday before Easter – was often a time of anti-Jewish pogroms in medieval Europe, with the blood libel and accompanying violence haunting the Jews all over Europe for centuries.

Fortunately, much has changed, but some of the central issues of Jewish-Christian relations in the contemporary period remain with us to this day. Witness the fact that the announcement of the Vatican’s opening of their archives made headlines in newspapers all over the world a few weeks ago (see my recent post on this topic: [Opening the Vatican Archives – Will it Matter?](#)). There is still much misunderstanding and often great mistrust between the followers — and often the leaders — in their diversity, of these two major monotheistic religions.

One of the reasons that this topic is still hot is that not many people know much about the modern history of the major revolutionary changes in the relations between Jews and Christians since World War II, and especially since the 1960’s.

During the 1960s, Pope John XXIII met with a delegation of Jews in the Vatican and said, “I am Joseph Your Brother.” This was the beginning of a new relationship between Jews and Catholics.

The award-winning 59 minute documentary film, *I am Joseph Your Brother*—which was produced by Tal-El Productions of Jerusalem, in 2001, for my former organization, the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI) in association with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and was broadcast on the ABC television network throughout North America — tells the story of this history. It has now been posted on YouTube, thanks to Eli Talel — one [version in English only](#) (see *also below*), and another [version with Hebrew subtitles](#) -- and is therefore available for streaming on the internet. During the past 18 years, it has been screened at film festivals in the US and in Italy and at conferences around the world, as well as in courses on Jewish-Christian Relations in seminaries, universities and colleges and at synagogues and churches.

Inspired by the visit of Pope John Paul II to Israel in the year 2000, *I am Joseph Your Brother* assesses and reflects on the changes that have occurred in the often difficult and turbulent relationship that has existed for centuries between Jews and Christians, Judaism and Catholicism, and more recently, between the State of Israel and the Vatican. This troubled relationship centered around sensitive issues such as the role of the Vatican during the Holocaust, and the many accusations made against the Jews in the past, such as the blood libel.

I am Joseph Your Brother discusses the complex issues behind these questions and investigates the significant changes that have been made in recent decades. The changes which are explored include: the *Nostra Aetate* document from Vatican II (1964), the *We Remember* document which grapples with the role played by members of the Catholic Church during the period of the Holocaust (1998) and recognition of the State of Israel (end of 1993).

This film explores these controversial issues with sensitivity and insight and makes use of interviews with religious leaders and educators — both Jewish and Catholic. The visuals include footage never seen before from the Vatican Archives and powerful emotional moments from the Pope John Paul II’s

historic visit to Israel in March 2000, such as scenes of the Pope at the Western Wall, the holiest of Jewish religious sites, and at Yad Vashem, the Israeli national memorial to the victims of the Holocaust.

I am Joseph Your Brother examines what comprises this new relationship: the expectations, the issues and the hopes. In fact, the film ends on a note of hope, looking towards the future. Dr Eugene Fisher, former director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, says eloquently:

After 2000 years, we in this generation right now have an incredible opportunity to turn around something that it took 2000 years to mess up. The clean-up has begun, and we can now structure the future so that the next 2000 years will be much more productive, so that, for this period, Jews and Christians will be able to stand together to address the problems of the world. This is virtually without precedent, after this much animosity, for two groups this ancient to turn towards each other and say, 'We have something to say to the world.'

I personally have screened the film in synagogues, seminaries, churches, and at international conferences around the world, with informative discussions always following the film, often including a dialogue with me and a Catholic educator. For many viewers, this film is an eye-opener, since it reveals an amazingly positive contemporary set of developments which are still unfortunately not well-known among the masses of Christians as well as Jews.

At these screenings and discussions, I have argued that we are in a totally new era of Christian-Jewish Relations, one that I and others call "the era of dialogue." It is one of the greatest non-violent revolutions in modern history, and more needs to be known about it. This is the reason we made this film 18 years ago, and I am glad that it is now available on the World Wide Web for all to view in order for more people to know about the amazing progress that has been made in this field in our lifetime.

I am Joseph, Your Brother

Israel, 2001, 59 minutes, color, English
Directed by Amy Kronish and Eli Tal-EI

Produced by Tal-EI Productions for the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel in association with the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops

Editorial remarks

First published: Times of Israel, April 17, 2019. Re-posted with kind permission by the author