THE DIPLOMAT AND THE PIONEER IN JEWISH-CATHOLIC RELATIONS PRIOR TO NOSTRA AETATE: JO WILLEBRANDS AND TOON RAMSELAAR

Marcel J. H. M. Poorthuis

PRECIS

A combined search of documents in the secret archives of the Vatican and of hitherto unexplored Dutch archives sheds new light on the genesis of Nostra aetate, the declaration of Vatican II, mainly on Judaism. Two Dutch Catholics exercised a decisive influence upon the making of this declaration: monsignors Johannes Willebrands and Anton Ramselaar. In 1958 and 1960 Ramselaar organized a meeting with international pioneers in Jewish-Christian relations at the Dutch city of Apeldoorn. Research into Dutch and Vatican archives proves the decisive influence of these meetings upon Nostra aetate. In addition, original documents demonstrate that, for the pioneers, the State of Israel was not just a political affair but also the recognition of the Jewish right to survive as a people. Later attempts to marginalize this aspect of the Apeldoorn memorandum coincided with the exclusion of the issues of the State of Israel and World War II as too political. Without Willebrands’s ingenious strategic powers that took over Ramselaar’s network of pioneers, while sticking to traditional theological insights, the declaration would probably never have been promulgated. However, without Ramselaar’s courage, Nostra aetate would not even have been considered a necessity.

Introduction

At the end of 2014, it will be fifty years since the declaration Nostra aetate on the non-Christian religions was released at the Second Vatican Council. It is well known that numerous persons contributed to the promulgation of this small but highly influential document. The American bishops took a firm stand during the dramatic events surrounding the making of Nostra aetate, and without them the declaration either would have been watered down or would not even have been published.1 Recently, the role of Belgian bishop Emile Josef Marie De Smedt has been highlighted.2 Still, the story of Nostra aetate is not exhausted by these facts.


Next to the events during Vatican II is the period preceding the Council, during which the soil had been prepared. A combined research of documents in the secret archives of the Vatican and of hitherto unexplored Dutch archives sheds new light on the genesis of *Nostra aetate*. Two Dutch Catholics exercised a decisive influence upon the making of this declaration: monsignors Johannes Willebrands (1909–2006) and Anton Ramselaar (1899–1981). Whereas the former is internationally well known for his role in the preparation of *Nostra aetate* as secretary of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity (SPCU) from June, 1960, onward, and later as president of the same organization, the latter’s fame has been restricted mainly to pioneering circles of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

While Ramselaar’s role as *peritus* (expert adviser) at Vatican II concerned primarily the topics of the youth movement and the position of women in the church, the similarities between the two men are striking: Both were internationally orientated, cherished strong cultural affinities, and were highly interested in the interplay between religion and art, probably under the influence of the *renouveau catholique*. In the Netherlands, this movement of Catholic renewal was concentrated in the pre-war cultural magazine *De Gemeenschap* (The Community). Ramselaar was a well-known guest in these circles, having demonstrated his artistic affinities by studying musicology in Rome. He returned to the Netherlands after finishing his studies in 1927 and became involved with the youth movement. As a chaplain in the city of Utrecht, he became acquainted with artistic circles. In 1945, Ramselaar was appointed president of the seminary in the city of Apeldoorn. Until that time, he had displayed no special interest in the relationship between the Church and Judaism. Eventually, both Ramselaar and Willebrands would devote a good part of their lives to the Jewish-Christian dialogue, although there was little in the pre-war period that announced their special interest.

In this essay, I will argue that it was mainly Ramselaar’s sudden interest in Judaism almost directly after the Second World War that eventually served as a bridge that enabled Willebrands to promote this theme in Vatican circles during and after Vatican II. This is not to say that the two followed the same track in mutual harmony. On the contrary, documents in the archives of the Dutch Catholic Council for Israel (Katholieke Raad voor Israel), founded in 1951 by Ramselaar, and the recent publication of Willebrands’s notebooks and diaries allow the reconstruction of a strong antagonism between the two men.3

During the 1950’s, Willebrands chaired the Dutch ecumenical society Sint Willibrord Vereniging voor Oecumene, of which the Catholic Council for Israel was a section. In addition, there was, next to the Catholic Council for Israel, a Study Committee, instituted upon the express wish of Willebrands. Ramselaar was not invited to take part in that Study Committee, however. This makes clear that Willebrands had little confidence in the course of the Catholic Council for Israel and in

---

3 The author thanks the Willebrands Research Center (http://willebrands.org/) and especially Dr. Karim Schelkens, Willebrands’s biographer, for insightful comments.
its chair, Ramselaar. The Study Committee should provide a "solid" theological foundation for the relationship between the Church and Judaism. In retrospect it is clear that the result could be no more than a hesitant and halfhearted attempt to describe the "mystery of Israel," a mixture of prophetic foresight and prejudice. At that time, it could not be foreseen that during the next decade this issue would cause a revolution in the Catholic perspective on Judaism.

I want to pursue the research one step further by documenting how Willebrands gradually became acquainted with circles of Jewish-Christian dialogue and how he benefited from them in the preparation of the declaration Nostra aetate on the non-Christian religions, especially on Judaism, promulgated at Vatican II. I will point out Ramselaar's indispensable role in this respect, although Willebrands avoided at all costs, it seems to me, to follow in Ramselaar's tracks.

Personal history and international Church matters appear to be strongly interwined. By using documentation from the Secret Archives of the Vatican as well as archives preserved in the Netherlands, it has been possible to throw a wholly new light upon the genesis of Nostra aetate.

I. Anton Ramselaar

During his period of study in Rome from 1924 to 1927, Ramselaar lived in the house of the Crosier Friars on the Aventine Hill, where he met Crosier Friar Anton van Asseldonk, a charismatic figure who was one of the leading persons of the Amici Israel, the "Friends of Israel." Van Asseldonk had founded this movement for priests in 1926, together with the Franciscan Laetus Himmelreich. The driving force behind this movement, however, was a Jewish convert to Catholicism, Sophie/Francisca van Leer. Ramselaar had felt absolutely no affinity with this movement, which was abolished by the Vatican in 1928. It was only after World War II

---

4See the painstaking analysis of the Catholic Council for Israel and its Study Committee by Alette Warringa in Adelbert Denaux, ed., De Nederlandse periode van Willebrands (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).
that a personal meeting with a Jewish woman, Irmgard (Miriam) Rookmaaker-van Leer (1914–2010), who had become Catholic, totally changed his perspective on Judaism. He came to see his former Catholic point of view as “latent anti-semitism” and realized for the first time the catastrophe of Judaism in the heart of Europe. Rookmaaker-van Leer also pointed out to him that the founding of the State of Israel should not be seen merely as a political fact but that it also constituted the concrete means of survival for the Jewish people. The Zionist background of the Jewish van Leer family had remained with her despite her conversion to Catholicism. Ramselaar decided to devote the rest of his life to the Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

His writings show him to have been a careful and rational writer who was highly informed about the manifold aspects of Judaism. Still, his first publication on Judaism must have come as a big surprise in Catholic circles. In it he wrote in no more than three pages about “the mystery of Israel,” a well-known expression, coined inter alia by Jacques Maritain. Ramselaar stated: “The Jewish people has united and found a state, it restores its old territory and experiences all this as a liberation and a homecoming . . . This is why Israel occupies a special place in the Christian life. This is also why the Church cannot refrain from a dialogue with Israel without detracting from her mission.” The wording was careful, indeed. Ramselaar did not state that in Catholic perspective the return of the Jewish people to the land should be regarded as liberation, but he described the feelings of Jews themselves. In addition, he did not abolish the concept of mission to the Jews but gave it a new interpretation, which should take into account the dialogue with Israel. However, mentioning the State of Israel as such (founded just one year before) was enough to cause turmoil in Catholic circles.10 The subtle dividing line between religion and politics, so dear to Vatican declarations until well after Nostra aetate, was blurred here.11 The tense relation between Ramselaar and Willebrands may have been a consequence of this.


Rookmaaker-van Leer was a niece of Franciscus van Leer. Her sister, Ellen Flesseman-van Leer, became a well-known theologian in the Dutch Protestant church. Hence, Rookmaaker-van Leer was not a convert from Protestantism, as is maintained in John Connelly, From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 7 and 179. In the Netherlands, the role of women in the discovery of Judaism has been considerable. Rookmaaker-van Leer was a member of the Catholic Women’s Dispute, to which Marga Klompé, the later minister of culture, also belonged, as did Anna de Waal, the first female secretary of state. This Dispute organized the first conference on Judaism after World War II, which eventually led to the foundation of the Catholic Council of Israel. Connelly’s thesis of the high influence of Jewish converts should be supplemented by the considerable influence of Jewish women upon (non-Jewish) celibate priests.


10The strongest opponents of the State of Israel in Dutch Catholic circles were Prof. Magister Jan van der Ploeg, O.P.; Lukas Grollenberg, O.P.; and Bernard Alfrink (later cardinal). All three were Bible scholars who had been trained at the École Biblique in Jerusalem, who strongly identified with the Arab cause. See Marcel Poorthuis and Theo Salemink, Een donkere spiegel: Nederlandse Katholieken over joden, 1870–2005 (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2005).

11It was only in 1985 that the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism issued the Notes on the Correct Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechism in the Catholic
have had its origin in these few lines.12

In 1956, Willebrands dictated to Carolus Pauwels, O.P. (1903–65), a member of the Catholic Council for Israel, a general guideline in reaction to an initiative of Ramselaar to give public support to Israel: “In case the Catholic Council for Israel was to give public support, then it needs to distance itself from political questions and even from the appearance of them. It is always important to awaken Catholic conscience for the meaning of the Old Covenant and the people of the Old Covenant in salvation history.”13

During the first years of the Catholic Council of Israel, Ramselaar began to build his international network not only among “pioneers” but also in the Vatican. In 1952, the influential Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (1884–1972) intended to come to the Netherlands to visit the Catholic Council for Israel.14 In 1958, Ramselaar organized a highly important international conference that would prove to be very important for budding Jewish-Catholic relations.15 How Willebrands was involved in this will be clear in what follows.

II. The First Conference on the Church and Judaism, August 9–13, 1958, in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands16

As the president of the seminary in Apeldoorn for boys from twelve to eighteen years of age applying for the priesthood, Ramselaar did not isolate himself in that place but had ample opportunity to maintain international relationships. From August 9 to 13, 1958, he invited pioneers in Jewish-Catholic relations to Apeldoorn. The list of names contains almost all leading Catholic persons, some of them editors of a journal specifically devoted to the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The members of the Catholic Council for Israel were also present.17 It is worthwhile to

---

12 Some years later, an unpublished lecture on Judaism and the significance of the State of Israel made Ramselaar well known in circles of pioneers. Jewish historian Jules Isaac wrote a personal reaction, as did Paul Démann. For Willebrands, Ramselaar’s popularity was rather suspect. I owe this observation to Warringa (see note 4, above).
13 Prof. Dr. Carolus Pauwels, O.P.; Prof. Joseph Cools, O.P.; Dr. Johannes Nota, S.J.; Dr. Adriaan Bredero; and Ms. Ottilie Schwarz, who had a Jewish father and was herself a convert from Protestantism.
mention the guests from abroad: Abbot Leo Rudloff, O.S.B. (1902–82), from German-Jewish descent, monk of Beuron, since 1950 abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of the Dormition of Our Lady Mary on Mount Zion in Jerusalem; Prof. Dr. F. Cantera Burgos (1901–78), from Madrid, editor of the journal Sefarad, devoted to the study of Judaism in Spain; and Paul Demann (1912–2005), a priest of the Fathers of Our Lady of Sion, from Hungarian-Jewish descent, who with the convert Renee Bloch edited the famous Cahiers Sioniens and was the only participant who had also been present at the groundbreaking Seelisberg conference in 1947. De- mann entertained close relations with the Jewish historian Jules Isaac, whose visit to Pope John XXIII on June 13, 1960, constituted a breakthrough in the Vatican attitude toward Judaism.

Also present were Gertrud Luckner (1900–95), who initially belonged to the Quakers but joined the Catholic Church in 1934, and as a pacifist was active in rescuing Jewish children and survived the concentration camp at Ravensbrück, then co-edited Freiburger Rundbrief from 1948 on; Dr. Irene Marinoff (1901–?), London, a writer from Jewish descent who converted to Catholicism in 1939, entered the order of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, and wrote about “the heresy of National Socialism” during the war; Dr. John Oesterreicher (1904–93), from Moravian Jewish descent, who became a priest in 1927 and monsignor in 1960, who directed the Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University (founded in 1952) and edited the Yearbooks on Jewish Christian dialogue, The Bridge; Fr. Francesco Sabia, a Father of Our Lady of Sion, from Montreal, who cooperated with Oesterreicher; Fr. Lukas Malik, O.P., from Lebanon; and Prof. Dr. Karl Thieme (1902–63), a lay theologian, who converted in 1934 from Lutheranism to Catholicism and co-edited the important Freiburger Rundbrief from 1948 on.

This was clearly not a group of isolated individuals; most participants were active on a national or international level in Jewish-Christian relations, a movement that had begun with the foundation of the International Council of Christians and Jews in 1946 and with the Seelisberg Conference in 1947. Thieme and Luckner...
had been in contact with the Catholic Council for Israel as early as 1952.24 Together with seven members of the Catholic Council of Israel,25 this illustrious company met to discuss the future of Jewish-Catholic relations. The remarkably high rate of converts from Jewish descent had a decisive influence upon their new theological ideas of Judaism, which eventually found their way into Nostra Aetate.26 It is noteworthy, however, that Willebrands, although involved in ecumenical affairs and chair of the Willibrord Vereniging voor Oecumene, did not participate in this highly important meeting, although Ramselaar had invited him on July 30, 1958.27 The initiative for contact did not come from Willebrands, or, for that matter, from Ramselaar, but from Oesterreicher, a priest of Jewish descent, who was to become the most important peritus for Judaism at Vatican II.28 Ottilie Schwarz conveyed the message to Willebrands that Oesterreicher would like to meet him at the Apeldoom conference from August 9 to 14, 1958. Willebrands sent a message that he was prevented from coming but that there might be an opportunity at the reception of the company in Hotel Krasnapolsky, Amsterdam, on August 12, where he would like to meet both Thieme and Oesterreicher, whom Willebrands apparently considered the most important members. This was the first contact between Willebrands and Oesterreicher.29

At the conference, Démann spoke about the relationship between the ecumenical movement and the dialogue between the Church and Judaism. Judaism should not be seen merely as an object of mission. He pointed to Protestant theologian Karl Barth, who had called the separation between Judaism and the Church the "original
schism" (Urschisma), but Démann argued that this schism did not belong to ecumenism proper. Unity between the Church and Judaism could not have the same meaning as unity between the churches, Démann thought. Pauwels expounded that the ecumenical movement aimed at the unity of all Christians, which implied the exclusion of the Jews as long as they did not recognize Christ. The 1954 conference of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, Illinois, had not dealt properly with the question of Israel, because it regarded the issue as a footnote to ecumenism in general. Although in a paragraph on Israel “Evanston” had not mentioned the State of Israel, Christians in Arab countries had voiced protests, which had led to the complete removal of this paragraph, according to Pauwels.

Marinoff reported about the situation in England, which in her perception was less marred by Antisemitism and persecution than was the rest of Europe. Still, the apostolate to the Jews should be accompanied by education of Catholics about the significance of Judaism to combat prejudice and ignorance. Burgos reported about Spain, where a solid scholarly study of Judaism existed. The Jewish influence upon Spanish culture had been considerable, which demanded future historical research. Oesterreicher proposed that all these local activities between Catholics and Jews be coordinated, preferably in the Netherlands. A Catholic declaration on “the mystery of Israel” was highly desirable. Thieme presented a questionnaire about Judaism not only in biblical times but also in the Middle Ages and especially in the period after the massacre perpetrated by the Nazis, which he thought should be sent to all leading Catholic theologians.

Rudloff drew attention to the position of the church in Israel and defended a Christian presence rather than active mission. Active mission would not be tolerated by the Israeli government, he stated. Ramselaar pointed out that a secretariat for Jewish-Catholic affairs could not be founded without consulting the Vatican. The Netherlands could, however, function as the source of information about studies on Judaism. It is clear that this meeting felt a historical mission regarding the dialogue between Judaism and the Catholic Church. It is also clear that none of the participants had an inkling of what was going to happen within a few years: the announcement of Vatican II. This would change, however, by the time of the second meeting in Apeldoorn. Willebrands, who had been chair of the Willibrord Vereniging voor Oecumene since 1951 and secretary of the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions since 1952, was suddenly confronted with the questions of Catholic-Jewish relationship. On June 28, 1960, Willebrands was appointed secretary of the SPCU, which would be charged with the preparations of a text on Judaism in 1961.

30 Göte Hedenquist, in The Church and the Jewish People (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1954), offers a collection of Jewish and Christian perspectives, meant as a preparation to Evanston, but this publication could not prevent its failure in respect to Judaism.

31 She may have in mind the remarkably unprejudiced works by scholars such as George Foot Moore, Charles Taylor, James Parkes, and others. Their openness to Judaism was not paralleled in German scholarship. Whether the general situation in England had been “less marred by Antisemitism” may remain a matter of debate.

III. The Second Conference on the Church and Judaism, August 28–September 1, 1960, in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands

This second meeting proved to be highly important for the new Catholic theology of Judaism. The group of participants was almost identical to that of the first meeting. New participants included a Fr. Calliari from Montreal; Fr. Rogér Hény, O.S.A. (1918–79), baptized at the age of sixteen though his mother was Jewish, and co-founder of the Oeuvre de Saint Jacques in 1955 in Jerusalem, a Catholic initiative to celebrate the liturgy in Hebrew and to foster relations between Jews and Christians; Fr. Joseph Stiassny (1920–2007), of Jewish descent, living in Jerusalem, co-founder of the Oeuvre de Saint Jacques and head of the Ratisbonne convent in Jerusalem; Fr. Alexander Diez Macho (1916–84), from Barcelona, a well-known scholar on the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible; and Prof. Willehad Paul Eckert, O.P. (1926–2005), from Bonn, who later published important studies on Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages. The secretariat was enlarged to include one more Woman of Bethany in addition to Larsen, namely, Ms. Eleanor Gerritsen. In addition, Hans Jansen, a priest from Rome, who would publish elaborate studies on Christian Antisemitism from 1982 on, was present.

The atmosphere was remarkably different from that of the first meeting, for there was a sense of urgency among the participants. At the outset Démann proposed that the meeting should result in a report to be sent to the SPCU. Cardinal Augustin Bea had expressly asked for such a document to be sent via Willebrands, who had been appointed secretary of the SPCU that same summer. Ramselaar reminded the group of the opportunity that this appointment of Willebrands might offer. Démann had brought with him eleven points to be considered in Jewish-Catholic dialogue. However, Oesterreicher offered a document as well, consisting of three requests: (1) to proclaim that the Church start with the call of Abraham and Israel’s Exodus, (2) to introduce the feasts of the just men of the Old Covenant as celebrated already in the liturgy of Jerusalem into the universal Church, and (3)
that the Church denounce again, as in the past, the hatred against the people "from which is the Christ according to the flesh," (quoting Rom. 9:5).38

During the conference, there was much debate about which line to follow: Österreicher's or Démann's. The participants then started to discuss the chances that the Council would really speak out about Israel. Démann pointed to the visit of Jewish historian Isaac to John XXIII "some months ago" and to the ensuing conversations with Cardinals Alfredo Ottaviani and Bea. He did not doubt that "the mystery of Israel" would be on the agenda. Ramselaar agreed, referring to a conversation between Dr. Marga Klompé, a member of the Catholic Council of Israel and minister of social affairs, and John XXIII and Bea during Holy Week in 1960.39 Moreover, the fact that Willebrands had explicitly asked for a report was a sign of deep confidence, according to Ramselaar, who told the audience that Willebrands had sent a letter in the name of Bea.40 This is all the more noteworthy as Bea received the official task to prepare a document on Judaism only in September, 1960.

In an inventory of the wishes for such a report from the dialogue centers in the different countries, Rudloff expressed the wish that priests be trained in a proper attitude toward Israel, especially in view of Romans 9. The Church should condemn Antisemitism. Rudloff also stated that the Church should establish relations with the actual State of Israel. Because of his position as an abbot in Israel, Rudloff emphasized issues involving Christians in Israel and proper relations with the Israeli government.41 Stiassny warned participants not to confuse here the terms of Israel: The "Mystery of Israel" is the proper expression, and the declaration would be addressed to Christians, not to Israel. Eckert stressed the need for adequate catechesis, as most Catholics still remained stuck in the idea that the Jews killed Christ and were enemies of the Christian faith.

The participants disagreed whether the persecution of the Jews should be mentioned in a declaration by the Church. Diez Macho argued that the historical circumstances were complex. Démann, however, considered a mea culpa indispensable. The return of the Jews to their land has not the same salvific significance as the biblical events, but it should still be mentioned in a declaration. Again, the dialectical tension became clear: The land of Israel should not be seen as part of salvation history, but the Church should not dispense with it—especially not after World War II. One should realize that this emphasis upon the significance of the State of Israel

---

38 These three points coincide with the document of "Requests of the Institute of Judaico-Christian Studies, Seton Hall University," which was sent to Bea on June 24, 1960, but was prepared on June 8—hence, even before Isaac's audience with John XXIII on June 13, 1960. I thank Fr. Thomas Stransky for this observation. Compare Österreicher, "Erklärung," pp. 410–411.
39 See Proceedings of the Apeldoom meeting, 1960, p. 4 (note 32, above). This meeting with John XXIII, even preceding that of Isaac, has remained unnoticed by historians and deserves further research. For the pioneering role of Klompe and other women in Jewish-Catholic dialogue, even before the founding of the Catholic Council for Israel, see Poorthuis and Salemink, Een donkere Spiegel, pp. 578–581.
40 See Proceedings of the Apeldoom meeting, p. 3. Still, the Apeldoom report is addressed not to the SPCU but "to whom it may concern."
41 As the head of the preparatory committee "De Judaicis," in the plenary of April, 1961, Rudloff again emphasized the importance of the return of the Jews to the land and language of the Bible, accompanied with a series of recommendations in view of the local situation in Israel, but none of these reached the final version of Nostra aetate. See Velati, Dialogo e rimovamento, pp. 491–509 (Plenarium, April, 1961), especially p. 494.
in a Catholic religious perspective was completely unheard of in the theology of that time. Further, lectures were given about the attitude of young Israelis to Christianity (Stiassny) and about the influence of the State of Israel upon Jews outside Israel (Thieme, Ramselaar, and Oesterreicher). The question of the report for the SPCU would fill the rest of the conference. It produced complicated but profound debates about the new and the old in Christ, about the blindness of the Jews, about original sin, and the eschatological destiny of Judaism, which could not be compared to the reunion of the churches but remained God’s secret. The meeting decided to send the report to Rome, but not publicly, in order to avoid debates in the press.42

IV. The Apeldoorn Memorandum

The main body of the memorandum consists of Démann’s so-called “eleven points,” which are enumerated by Oesterreicher in his account of the Apeldoorn memorandum.43 Oesterreicher’s “three requests” have not been integrated into the Apeldoorn memorandum but reached the SPCU as the Seton Hall requests. I offer the original English version of two points from the memorandum, including the idiomatic imperfections.44 Its similarity with Nostra aetate will be obvious. Point six in its original fashion reads:

It is greatly important, therefore, to avoid the harmful error that consist of rendering the Jews responsible for the death of Christ, all the Jews of the period and even all Jews of all time, and Jews alone; to forge the absurd image of a “God-killing people,” to seek to move the faithful, where the passion is concerned by inspiring them with a veritable horror against its authors, and not only against its authors, but against the entire Jewish people. Through such errors one falsifies the meaning of the Passion and deforms the spirit of the faithful by taking the Cross, which ought only to be a source of love, humility and repentance for them, a source of aversion, hatred and rejection of sin on somebody else.45


43Oesterreicher offered a German version of the original English document in his “Erklärung,” pp. 412–413. His own English rendering of it appeared in Oesterreicher, New Encounter, pp. 121–125.

44For the six-page document, see Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Carte Bea, busta 7. I thank Fr. Marcel Chappin, S.J., for his generous cooperation to obtain this document. Ton H. M. van Schaik, in his Vertrouwde vreemden: Betrekkingen tussen katholieken en joden in Nederland 1930–1990 (Baam: Ten Have, 1992), pp. 106–109, while drawing attention to the significance of this document for Dutch church history, offered an abridged version of the eleven points; his source was Oesterreicher, “Erklärung,” pp. 412–413.

45The last lines are especially awkward. Compare Oesterreicher’s rendering of them: “Es sei von ausserster Wichtigkeit, den verhangnisvollen Irrtum zu vermeiden, der alle Juden jener Zeit—ja die Juden aller Zeiten und die Juden allein—für verantwortlich am Tode Christi halte, der die absurde Vorstellung eines ‘gottesmörderischen Volkes’ aushecke, der die Gläubigen angesichts der Passion dadurch rühren möchte, dass er ihnen Abscheu vor den unmittelbaren Urhebern einflöesse, doch nicht nur vor ihnen, sondern auch vor dem gesamten Volk der Juden. Durch solche Irrtümer verfälsche man nicht nur die
The twelfth and final point reads:

The divinely guaranteed hope for the reintegration of Israel is an essential part of the Christian hope. It is, at the same time, the key to the mysterious destiny of the Jewish people. According to the teaching of the Apostle to the heathens, if rejection (of Christ) by a great number of Jews was a favorable factor for proselytizing and the salvation of heathens, all the greater reason that the reintegration of Israel will strikingly show the mercy and faithfulness of God and will be, as the Apostle says, “Vita ex mortuis” (Life out of death) (Romans 11:15).

There is no Christian understanding of the destinies of the Jewish people without this hope. If this be overshadowed or forgotten, then Christian perspectives are spurious. This eschatological hope has remained with the Church ever since. The faithful should revive that hope in their prayers and in their thoughts vis-à-vis the children of the people “out of which Christ comes after the flesh” (Rom 9:5).

The Church recalls this hope ceaselessly, and invites his faithful to inspire themselves with it in their prayers, in their thinking and in their comportment toward the children of this people “from whom physically Christ came—God who is over all be blessed forever” (Rom 9:5).

Apeldoorn, Augustus 1960

These “eleven points,” which in this original were twelve, formed the main body of the memorandum. The similarity between it and the fourth paragraph on Judaism of Nostra aetate is obvious: The reference to Antisemitism, the rejection of a curse on Judaism of all times, even the reference to deicide, which was removed from Nostra aetate only in its penultimate stage, the reference to Rom. 9:5 that emphasizes Christ’s Jewish background “after the flesh”—all these elements are parallel. Still, Oesterreicher states that the Apeldoorn memorandum “could not exercise the influence it deserves. For years it lay in the files of the Secretariat and of those who had taken part in the conference.” He added: “Though unknown to the Church as a whole, even to most members of the Council, the memorandum was influential. Its words did not find their way into the Conciliar text, but its spirit did.” These remarks display a remarkable tension: On the one hand, Oesterreicher wanted to highlight the importance of the document, to which he himself contributed; on the other hand, he had to explain its nearly total oblivion. I venture to bring forward some other reasons for its neglect. We have had occasion to note that all the participants had taken care not to publish the text to avoid putting pressure upon the SPCU. In addition, the proposals and memoranda sent to the SPCU were not discussed during the plenary sessions but served only as preparation.

46In Oesterreicher’s account in German, this forms point eleven; see ibid., p. 413.

47Letter from Fr. Thomas Stransky, June 22, 2013. I thank him for his extensive correspondence, which clarified many matters. Any errors remain mine.
Curiously, the content of the document may have been the primary cause of its subsequent marginalization, although one cannot prove that from either the German or the English rendering of it by Oesterreicher. These two accounts have formed the “official story” for decades to come. All the more striking is its treatment of the Apeldoorn preamble, to which Oesterreicher referred only loosely. Still, the preamble contained the most explosive thoughts and may even have fostered the suppression of the memorandum as such.

V. The Preamble to the Apeldoorn Memorandum

The preamble states that the Church maintains its interest in that part of Israel that had not followed Christ and that the Church itself is rooted in the people of the Old Covenant. This implied a solidarity between the Church and the Jewish people in both past and present. Jesus constituted both a sign of contestation and the bond that united both. In the past, popes had protested against Antisemitism, according to the preamble, referring to Pius XII and John XXIII. The time for a solemn declaration by the Church was ripe, for this question of prime importance was then more urgent and richer in promise than ever, the preamble concludes. However, in between there is a paragraph that was left out by Oesterreicher. This paragraph contains the deepest emotions of most of those present in Apeldoorn and was the ultimate reason that they were involved in Judaism:

The Church does not ignore the suffering undergone by Jews in the past among Christian peoples. It deplores the lack of knowledge and the deformations of thought and attitude which have been, on the part of many Christians, the cause of sufferings. Finally, it knows that the prejudices, sources of hatred and of scorn have not yet disappeared.

But, in our time, Jews have just undergone the most monstrous of persecutions. Their terrible suffering, and the fact that the authors of these persecutions purposely showed the same pagan hatred both of Christians and of Jews, have opened the eyes of many Christians. Awakened by these events, impressed, also, afterwards, by the unexpected return of a great number of Jews to the Land and the Language of the Bible, deeply concerned, furthermore, by the problem of the unity of the People of God, and more and more drawn to the Scriptures which are the basis for it, many a Christian thus became aware of his duty to learn about, to reflect about, the subject of Jews, to struggle against the ignorance, the prejudices and the deformation that had created such an abyss between the Jewish world and the Christian world, and to do everything possible to favor a rapprochement and reconciliation between the Church and the Jewish people.

The reference both to the persecution of the Jews in World War II and to the existence of the State of Israel would not leave any trace in Nostra aetate, or, for that matter, in any Vatican documents for many years after. Already in the debates

---

48The most recent study of Connelly, From Enemy to Brother, followed Oesterreicher’s account as well.
49See Preamble: Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Carte Bea, busta 7, p. 1; emphasis added.
in Apeldoom, there had been a strong emphasis both upon the condemnation of Antisemitism and upon the State of Israel as a concrete means of survival for Judaism and an integral part of the Jewish identity. This explains why these elements had been integrated into the preamble to Démann’s “eleven points.” However, in both the German and the English rendering of the Apeldoon memorandum by Oesterreicher, the State of Israel is never mentioned. Moreover, the original Apeldoon memorandum remained unnoticed for fifty years. Oesterreicher may have had his own reasons not to mention this topic in his overview, prepared after Vatican II. In his historical account, one might get the impression that mention of the State of Israel had never been proposed by Catholics and that it was only the exaggerated fears from the Arab side that had caused the complicated problems from 1962 on. On closer scrutiny, the matter is even more curious, as it was the Relatio Questiones de Judaeis of April, 1961, under the redaction of Oesterreicher himself, which stressed the recent events of the persecution of the Jews and the establishment of the State of Israel as the two major factors for a renewed interest of Catholic theology in Judaism. Oesterreicher obviously derived this from the Apeldoon preamble but completely glossed over it in his historical accounts.

According to Oesterreicher, then, the Apeldoon memorandum was too long to be used for Nostra aetate. However, this cannot be the reason for leaving out such an essential paragraph. Several reasons can be brought forward to explain this curious procedure. As a convert, Oesterreicher’s theology was a mixture of solidarity with Judaism and staunch Catholicism with supranaturalistic tendencies. I already noted his defense of the prayer Pro perfidis Judaeis. Like many Catholics, he was initially convinced (but as a convert even more so) that Judaism in the time of Jesus had been too attached to an earthly redemption and, hence, could not understand the wholly spiritual redemption in Christ. In that perspective, the notion of return to the land must have appeared to him as obsolete. He had been involved in the missionary organization, Pauluswerk, in Vienna. He remained convinced that Jews should convert to Christ and published a book that described how major Jewish philosophers were supposed to agree on that.

Oesterreicher’s initial ambiguity is even clearer in the way he related, deeply moved, the following episode in a sermon shortly after World War II: “The Jews offered pope Innocent II a beautiful Torah scroll. Gl addened by the gift, the pope said gently: ‘May the Lord remove the cover from your eyes’.” No doubt, this statement would have been experienced as an outrage from the Jewish side. However, in recently discovered private correspondence from before the war, Oesterreicher was highly critical of Pius XII—much more than after World War II. Oesterreicher's strategic operations to accommodate the patriarchs from the Middle East about Nostra aetate were described in Mathieu Lamberigts and Leo Declerck, “Msgr. Willebrands and Nostra Aetate 4: Diplomacy and Pragmatism,” in Denaux and De Mey, Ecumenical Legacy, pp. 245–260.

51Quaestiones de Judaeis, in Fondo Thils 1278 and in ASV Conc. Vat II, 1426; see Velati, Dialogo e rinnovamento, p. 495.


54See Connelly, From Enemy to Brother.
The Diplomat and the Pioneer in Jewish-Catholic Relations 485

terreicher protested strongly against currents of renewed Antisemitism even after World War II. He petitioned the Vatican to take up the issue of Antisemitism, which he viewed as directed not only against the Jews but also against the Church.

Another element that may explain the suppression of this paragraph is the unfortunate combination of the historian (who should be unbiased) and the engaged protagonist in one and the same person. A certain self-aggrandizement can hardly be avoided. It would be perfectly comprehensible that the reference to the State of Israel had been suppressed for strategic reasons, as Oesterreicher understandably wished to highlight his triumphs, not his failures. It is the task of the historian, however, to bring such a fact to light. The Church should not write its own history. In addition, the Apeldoorn conference itself was divided over the State of Israel—not all of the converted Jews being the most outspoken about the necessity to refer to it, probably for reasons mentioned above. Next to the (Jewish) Rudloff, the (non-Jewish) Ramselaar was the staunchest advocate of introducing the State of Israel as the concrete means for Jews to survive and as a present-day reality.

The document in its integrity contains the most important difference in perspective between Ramselaar and Willebrands: the existential significance for Jews of the State of Israel. A whole difference in theological outlook came to the surface here: Willebrands who remained on the level of theological convictions and regarded Judaism likewise as a theological issue, and Ramselaar who realized that Judaism with its sad history is first and foremost a people.

It was not only a matter of strategy for Willebrands to react in an allergic way to the topic of the State of Israel, although he was certainly right that such a statement would not have had any chance of being accepted. For Willebrands, the State of Israel was a purely political affair in which he could not discover any theological significance. The traditional theological conviction that the Jewish eschatological expectation had remained too “earthly” to match the Christian spiritual fulfillment was still on his mind. This allergy to the topic of the State of Israel may explain why, according to my perception, in the years that were to come Willebrands dealt in a highly strategic way with Ramselaar.

VI. The Aftermath of Apeldoorn 1960

After the meeting in Apeldoorn, in August, 1960, Oesterreicher met Willebrands again, on September 8, 1960, this time in Rome. Three days later, they

57Note the estrangement between the former friends Thieme and Oesterreicher from 1960 until Thieme’s death in 1963. Thieme suspected Oesterreicher of giving in to Vatican demands. Compare Connelly, From Enemy to Brother, p. 126. They had been allies in combating Antisemitism since 1934.
58The protest by Arabic Christians, the fear of Islamic aggression, and pressure by conservative Catholics have been amply documented.
59It should be noted that Ramselaar, Démann, and Rudloff met again in 1961 at a conference of Jews and Christians in Paris, to which Bea was invited as well. This conference did not send a message to the Vatican, however. This matter deserves additional research.
60The actual meeting between Oesterreicher and Willebrands had taken place in de Tiltenberg near
dined together, and Willebrands started to ponder whom the Secretariat might need as consultants for Jewish affairs. Although at that time he was not yet sure whether this topic would be given to the Secretariat, Willebrands had already noted some names in his diary. Here, it is obvious that Ramselaar had paved the way with his network of contacts all over the world and especially with the participants in the Apeldoorn conferences. Willebrands noted: “Oesterreicher, Démann, somebody from Jerusalem: Bruno Hussar O.P., 61 Father Stiassny, Abbot Rudloff.” Apparently only priests were needed. All those mentioned, except Démann and Stiassny, became members or consultants of the SPCU. 62 Rudloff and Oesterreicher became periti for Jewish affairs, as did Fr. Gregory Baum, incidentally also of Jewish descent. 63

No doubt, Willebrands has benefited immensely from the Apeldoorn meetings, not only regarding the report, but even more because of Ramselaar’s network. There is, however, one conspicuous element that should not be ignored: The architect of the whole movement, Anton Ramselaar, was initially not invited to join the Secretariat. He would become peritus at Vatican II as well, but for the topics of youth and women. Although Ramselaar is sometimes mentioned as peritus on Judaism, he was invited to participate only after the declaration was transferred from being especially devoted to Judaism to a declaration of non-Christian religions. The subcommittee was enlarged in 1964, in order to sift through all the proposals from the Council Fathers. Fr. Thomas Stransky, C.S.P., from the staff of the SPCU was co-opted, simultaneously with Anton Ramselaar. 64

As is known, Nostra aetate had a complicated prehistory. Initially, there was a declaration in preparation, De Iudaeis, which would deal only with Judaism. One gets the impression that, especially in the first draft for this declaration, some influence from the Apeldoorn meetings can be traced. The members of the subcommittee of the SPCU, then consisting of Oesterreicher, Baum, Rudloff, and George Tavard, had several documents before them to be used for the first drafting of the declaration, among which were Oesterreicher’s above-mentioned “Requests of Seelisberg,” the three points and the Apeldoorn report. 65 Whereas the

the city of Haarlem, home of the Grail movement for Catholic women, founded by van Ginneken (see note 34, above). Willebrands felt affinities with this religious and cultural movement, whose members did secretarial work for him on behalf of the ecumenical movement.

61 Bruno Hussar, O.P. (1911–96), of Jewish descent, was also involved in the Oeuvre de saint Jacques.

62 Fr. Roger Héne had asked Willebrands later (on March 4, 1961) to include Démann, but for some reason this did not happen. See Salemink, “You will be called Repairer of the breach,” p. 269. Compare Velati, Dialogo e rinnovamento, p. 51.


65 In addition, there were the “Ten Points of Seelisberg,” 1947; the memorandum by Isaac for his audience with John XXIII; the “Schwalbacher Thesen” of 1950 (eight points, an emendation of Seelisberg by German Catholic and Protestant teachers of religion); the 1959 votum of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, “De antisemitismo evitando”; and the 1959 votum of the University of Fribourg (Charles Jour-
requests of Seton Hall contained as the second proposal the introduction of the Hebrew Bible saints in the liturgy, the preamble of the Apeldoorn report referred to the State of Israel. It is interesting to see that the decisions still reflect some motifs of the original proposals and memoranda, although these were not explicitly discussed in the plenary sessions.

At the plenary session of August, 1961, Willebrands expressed doubt about the proposal of the introduction of Hebrew Bible saints. Undoubtedly, this ultimately goes back to the second request of the Seton Hall document quoted earlier. Then, Willebrands firmly rejected the proposal to refer to the State of Israel, as this was "not on the agenda of the Council." Likewise, Bea rejected this suggestion as too political. The decision was then made to cut out the practical recommendations altogether and to retain only the theological part, including the rejection of Anti-Semitism. The proposal to bring up the State of Israel had been emphasized in the preamble of the Apeldoorn memorandum. It was, however, especially after the "Wardi affair" in the summer of 1962, when the World Jewish Congress announced it would send a counsellor on Christian Affairs to the Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs, Chaim Wardi, as an observer to Rome—although Wardi as an Israeli government official had not been invited by the Vatican—that Arab voices started their protest against the "political" document of *Nostra aetate*.

In October, 1964, Ramselaar wrote about the difficulties surrounding the declaration on the Jews. The draft had just received some new formulations that greatly disappointed him. Ramselaar pointed to the pressure by Arab states but refused to accept this argument: "The Vatican does not expect anything from consideration with Arab governments which continue to cause many problems to Christian churches." The Eastern Christian attitude to the Jews might be the real problem, as there was a strong hatred of Jews in the East, Ramselaar argued. He warned, however, for opportunism, as if tactics could be more important than principles. The deepest problem was not the Eastern attitude but the lack of understanding of the theology about Israel. The more recent insights were not yet known, and the older theology could see no meaning at all in the Jewish people. Ramselaar saw a fundamental choice here: either mere tactics, or a mystery of faith from which the Church should not distance itself.
In November, 1964, *Nostra aetate* was approved with an overwhelming majority. The reactions from the Arab side were outspoken and negative, although the State of Israel had not been mentioned at all.\(^1\) Of course, one can argue that the decision to leave out any reference to World War II and the State of Israel from the declaration was no less political than its possible inclusion. In any case, this was Ramselaar’s conviction. For him and for others present at the Apeldoorn meetings, mentioning the State of Israel was not just a political matter but also the recognition of the Jewish right to survive as a people. Later attempts, especially by Oesterreicher, to marginalize the preamble of the Apeldoorn memorandum coincided with the exclusion of the issues of the State of Israel and World War II as too political. The issue of the State of Israel was framed in retrospect as an attempt from the Arab side to read political elements into the religious document of *Nostra aetate*. Our research has shown that, from the outset, it was Catholics themselves who considered a reference to the State of Israel a theological necessity, in order to do justice to Judaism as a people.

With *Nostra aetate*, the Church had made an official statement on Judaism that would have a profound and lasting influence. Without Willebrands’s ingenious strategic powers having taken over Ramselaar’s network of pioneers, while sticking to traditional theological insights, the declaration would probably never have been promulgated. However, without Ramselaar’s courageous pioneering in Jewish-Christian relations, together with his fellow pioneers, *Nostra aetate* would not even have been conceived to be a necessity.

Marcel J. H. M. Poorthuis (Catholic) is a professor of interreligious dialogue at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Tilburg, the Netherlands, and chairs the foundation for the study of Jewish Wisdom, PARDES, in Amsterdam. He finished the conservatory for music in Hilversum, the Netherlands, in 1982 and worked as a secretary for Catholic-Jewish relations in the Netherlands until 1992, during which time he cooperated with Cardinal Willebrands in Rome. He holds a Th.M. and a Ph.D. from the Catholic Theological Faculty in Utrecht, with his 1992 dissertation on the Talmudic-philosophical works of Emmanuel Levinas. He is a board member of the Dutch Levinas society. Co-editor of the international series, Jewish and Christian Studies, from Brill, his published work is in the areas of Catholicism, Jewish philosophy, Buddhism, Dutch perceptions of Islam, religion and art, and the interaction between Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity. He discovered and co-edited the exchange of letters between the young German poet Wilhelm Runge and the Jewish poet Sophie van Leer during World War I: Jattie Enklaar, Marcel Poorthuis, and Theo Salemink, eds., *Auf springt der Tod... Wilhelm Runge—Sophie van Leer: Briefe aus eine holländischen Kollektion* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011). In 2013, *Der Islam* published his “Hagar’s Wanderings: Between Judaism and Islam,” and he has published several studies on the work of Willebrands and on *Nostra aetate* (including “The Theology of Nostra Aetate on Islam and Judaism, or How Converts Introduced a New Thought into the Vatican”). His books include *Van Harem tot Fitna* (Nijmegen, 2012), on the image formation of Islam in the Netherlands; *Lotus in de Lage Landen* (Almere, 2009), on the image formation of Buddhism in the Netherlands; and *Een donkere spiegel* (Nijmegen, 2006), on Catholic images of Judaism since 1860.

\(^{1}\)Piero Doria, “La dichiarazione conciliare sugli Ebrei e le reazione dei paesi Arabi,” *Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Notes et documents* (January–August 2012), pp. 84–94.