

# Christianity and Jewish-Christian Relations in American Rabbinical School Programs

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## PREFACE

The survey summarized in this report was undertaken at the initiative of the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee to ascertain what curricular and extracurricular opportunities exist in rabbinical seminaries in the United States for learning about Christianity and Jewish-Christian relations. The survey was motivated by a conviction that some basic knowledge of Christian thought and history and some basic skills in interreligious dialogue will be desired, if not required, of rabbis and other Jewish communal leaders in the years ahead.

While the modest study reported in these pages is, in a sense, a Jewish counterpart to recent Christian self-examinations of teaching about Jews and Judaism, the basic asymmetry of the Jewish-Christian relationship must be stressed. Christianity cannot define itself without exploring its roots in Judaism. And Judaism's self-definition does not depend on a comparison or an encounter with Christianity. Yet, despite this imbalance, there are important reasons for promoting knowledge about and encounter with Christianity. Christian leaders and scholars have made great strides in recent years in overcoming Christianity's negative legacy toward Jews and Judaism. Emerging Jewish religious leadership should be prepared not only to help in that effort, but also to dispel prejudices and misconceptions on the other side.

Students in today's rabbinical seminaries will be among the Jewish religious leaders of the 21st century. We hope that their leadership qualities will include an openness to Jewish-Christian dialogue and an adequate preparation for this endeavor. This report, despite its limitations, is offered as a contribution toward that end. We hope it will also be of interest to Christians, as well as to rabbinical school administrators and curriculum planners as they consider and revise course requirements and electives.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to several individuals at the American Jewish Committee, without whom this study would not have seen the light of day. Judith H. Banki, associate national director of Interreligious Affairs, first conceived this project and has been of immeasurable assistance in its preparation and editing. Rabbi Alan Mittleman, program associate in the Interreligious Affairs Department, helped focus my thinking, and Francine Etlinger, senior editor in the Publications Department, helped focus my writing. Rabbi A. James Rudin, national director of Interreligious Affairs, consistently lent his support and encouragement to the project, as did his predecessor, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum.

I am also grateful to George and Arlene Hecht for having established an internship in interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee in honor of their friend, Harry Sudakoff. I have been the beneficiary of their generosity, and this study is one of its fruits.

S.W.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen pathbreaking developments in Jewish-Christian relations in the United States. Major Catholic and Protestant church institutions have issued official statements rejecting anti-Semitism and espousing the reformulation of centuries-old teachings concerning Jews and Judaism. Many Jewish and Christian leaders have moved from distance and isolation to ongoing and formalized contacts -- in the span of a few years. Interreligious dialogues, public forums and social action projects have taken place in all major American cities.

Interreligious awareness has also entered American theological schools. Jewish and Christian students are increasingly learning about each other's religious traditions through various curricular and extracurricular activities. Apart from interreligious content inherent in certain traditional seminary subjects, some institutions have initiated courses about the other's faith, and about Jewish-Christian relations in particular. Seminary faculty, both Christian and Jewish, have produced an impressive body of literature about the Jewish-Christian encounter. Interinstitutional academic colloquia, faculty exchanges and cross-registration arrangements, as well as extracurricular interreligious programs, such as weekend retreats, foreign study tours and social action projects, also serve to enhance relations between the two communities.

Such activity takes place in both Jewish and Christian seminaries, even though the motivation and rationale for such involvements differ. The Christian impulse to study Judaism derives significantly from the desire to learn about one's own origins. Many Christians, especially since Vatican II, feel morally impelled to gain an understanding of Judaism, particularly of the Rabbinic era in Jesus' lifetime and afterward. A 1975 statement of Catholic-Jewish relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops asserted that

...a task incumbent on theologians, as yet hardly begun, [is] to explore the continuing relation-

ship of the Jewish people with God...and the fulfillment of God's plan for both Church and Synagogue. To revere only the ancient Jewish patriarchs and prophets is not enough.

The Jewish interest in studying Christianity may be seen more as a pragmatic survival skill than as a moral or religious imperative. Jewish seminarians are aware that American society welcomes, indeed requires, interreligious contact. As rabbinical school graduates assume congregational, chaplaincy, academic and other posts, they are likely to encounter their Christian colleagues in a variety of situations. They will be invited to participate in interreligious dialogues, teach Judaism to Christian audiences, contribute to public interreligious panels about social issues, share campus, hospital or military chaplaincies, exchange pulpits with Christian clergy on national holidays, and so on. The seminaries' interreligious programs seek to make these future rabbis knowledgeable about Christian beliefs, history and communities, and to provide them with the experience of presenting Judaism to the Christian world.

While it may be this "defensive" purpose -- i.e., the desire to see Judaism fairly and adequately presented -- that motivates many rabbinical students to pursue Jewish-Christian studies, it is also true that once exposed to Christian thought, either through the study of Christian sources or the human interchange with their Christian counterparts in dialogues or conferences, some rabbinical students become interested in Christianity as an independent field of study, or in Jewish and Christian approaches to specific themes or events. For example, one rabbinical student was moved by her participation in a seminarians conference sponsored by the American Jewish Committee to devote her thesis to a comparison of Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Akedah (the Binding of Isaac). Another was exploring the comparison of Jewish law and canon law as a possible thesis.

Such instances are still rare. However, they will undoubtedly increase as opportunities for intellectual exposure to other traditions and dialogue with persons of other faith commitments increase in Jewish (and Christian) seminaries.

### SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

This report surveys courses, programs and activities that pertain to the promotion of interreligious knowledge and skills in five major American Jewish rabbinical schools: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Cincinnati and its sister institution of the same name in New York (Reform); the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) in New York (Conservative); the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) in Philadelphia; and Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in New York (Orthodox).

These schools represent the four principal religious trends in contemporary American Jewry. Together they ordain some 100 rabbis every year, approximately as follows: Reform, 35; Orthodox, 35; Conservative, 20; Reconstructionist, 10. About 20 percent of the graduates are women, though that percentage should rise significantly in coming years, following the recent decision of the Jewish Theological Seminary to ordain women.<sup>1</sup>

About two-thirds of the graduates of the Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative rabbinical schools assume congregational pulpits; most of the others take positions in hospital, military and campus chaplaincies, academic departments of universities, Jewish education and camping, and Jewish communal agencies. A very small number, who often have additional advanced degrees, enter secular professions. The distribution of RIETS graduates is different: some 40 percent in Jewish education, 30 percent in pulpits, 10 percent in

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<sup>1</sup> At this writing JTS has ordained only two women. However, women now make up about one half of the entering classes in its rabbinical school. Of the schools discussed in this report, only RIETS does not ordain women.



chaplaincies and communal agencies, and 20 percent in secular fields.<sup>2</sup>

For each of these schools, three kinds of interreligious education were investigated:

1. Courses with a focus of at least three weeks per semester on Christianity or some aspect of Jewish-Christian relations (historical encounters and exchanges, ideological or literary comparisons, and so on)
2. Extracurricular programs, such as dialogue groups or social gatherings with Christian seminarians
3. Formal academic relations, such as cross-registration or professorial exchanges with Christian seminaries or with departments of religion at secular universities

The research involved examining course descriptions and syllabi in the catalogs of the five schools from fall 1980 to spring 1984, and interviews with administrators, professors and students active in interreligious affairs.

Most of these rabbinical schools are arms of institutions that prepare students for vocations other than the rabbinate (e.g., religious education, sacred music or Jewish communal service). This report does not cover the curricula of these nonrabbinical programs, nor does it survey the courses offered at the branch campuses of RIETS, JTS and HUC in Los Angeles and Jerusalem.

This survey is limited in another respect. It does not examine the curricula of the numerous Hasidic and ultra-Orthodox yeshivas or rabbinical academies that exist in New York City and other large Jewish centers. At present these schools do not promote interreligious theological dialogue, do not feature the study of Christianity or Jewish-Christian relations in their course offerings, and do not -- unlike RIETS and other "modern Orthodox" centers -- encourage the additional secular education that might expose their students to intellectual encounters with Christians.

While this report is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, it may provide clues and models for expanding interreligious awareness among Jews and Christians alike.

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<sup>2</sup> The concentration of Orthodox rabbis in education is certainly related to the wide network of Orthodox day schools and yeshivas; the relatively high percentage of RIETS graduates who pursue secular careers reflects the movement's encouragement of intensive Jewish and Talmudic education even for men who do not enter the rabbinate.

### HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION, CINCINNATI

Hebrew Union College was founded in Cincinnati in 1875, when the Reform movement was growing among America's Jews and seeking to define itself in its new setting as distinct from its European origins. Reform's stress on Judaism as a religion of ethical monotheism and its desire to reduce social and cultural barriers between Jews and non-Jews have placed that movement and its institutions in the forefront of Jewish participation in interreligious relations.

The character, scope and thrust of interreligious education, both formal and informal, offered at HUC exemplify the Reform movement's positive endorsement of Jewish-Christian dialogue, the specialized interest and expertise of several of its faculty members, and the fact that its graduate school student body enrollment is roughly one-half Christian.

The rabbinical school offers a five-year program of graduate study leading to a master of arts degree and to ordination. Students generally spend their first year on the HUC campus in Jerusalem, then follow a four-year curriculum of "core" and elective courses on the home campus. The 24 core courses are made up as follows:

Bible	3	Education	1
History	3	Hebrew literature	1
Midrash	2	Homiletics	1
Philosophy	2	Human relations	1
Talmud	2	Liturgy	1
Aramaic	1	Theology	1
Codes	1	Speech (three semesters)	1
Commentaries	1	Practical rabbinics	2

Students are also required to complete a minimum of 12 elective courses, of which at least four must emphasize Hebrew and Aramaic texts; three rabbinic-skills practica in education, human relations, community organization and homiletics; and supervised fieldwork, which includes at least one year as a student (pulpit) rabbi. Candidates for ordination must submit a thesis on a faculty-approved subject.

With regard to its formal rabbinical school curriculum, HUC exhibits a pattern characteristic of other seminaries as well: the only required courses stressing interreligious content are the surveys of Jewish history, especially those focusing on the ancient and medieval periods, when the legal and social status of Jews and other groups was determined by religion. Primary emphasis is placed on the political and social relationships of Jewish communities with their Christian rulers and neighbors, and the larger patterns of history are viewed in terms of how they affected the destiny of Jews. Relatively little attention is directed to theological comparisons, or to Christianity per se. However, the origins of Christianity are discussed, and Christian texts are analyzed against the background of the Jewish milieu from which Christianity arose. The medieval survey takes up the study of both the positive impact of Christianity on Jewish communal development and the experiences of cultural oppression and physical persecution.

The rabbinical school of HUC regularly offers four elective courses with primary emphasis on Christian origins, history, literature and beliefs, and Christianity's encounter with Judaism. Dr. Michael J. Cook, professor of intertestamental and early Christian literature, has taught three of these for the past several years:

"The Gospels and Book of Acts as Sources for Understanding First Century Judaism and Christianity" analyzes early Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity. An introductory unit considers the emergence of Christianity in Palestine and its rapid expansion throughout the Hellenistic world. Students examine problems of interpreting sources on early Christianity, using Christian and Jewish scholarship to investigate such questions as Jesus' ancestry and birth, the pre-Markan Passion tradition, the trial and execution of Jesus, the Resurrection, and the portrayal of Jewish leaders in the Gospels.

The "Citation of Jewish Scriptures in Christian Apologetics and Missionizing" chronologically explores Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. The course begins with an analysis of the principles governing Christian allusion to the Hebrew Bible, including prooftexts, typological exegesis and other methods in which Scripture was utilized by Paul, the four Evangelists and other early church writers. Later sessions follow these methods in medieval Christian-Jewish disputations and in modern Christian missionary movements. The history of Jewish responses to Christocentric interpretations of Hebrew Scripture is surveyed as well.

"The Evolving Jewish and Christian Perspectives on the Historical Jesus in Ancient, Medieval and Modern History" is a survey of 19 centuries of Christian and Jewish views of Jesus and early Christianity. Jewish attitudes are inferred from supposed rabbinic allusions to Jesus in the Tosefta and in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, as well as from a careful reading of the Jewish voices in early Christian texts. The course probes the arguments of medieval

Jewish polemics (e.g., Toldot Yeshu) and various outlooks in modern Jewish scholarship, and traces historical Christian perspectives from the New Testament and the church fathers to medieval clerics and modern Christian scholars.

Professor Ellis Rivkin has been teaching "Reconstructing the Intertestamental Period," a four-semester course that relies heavily on primary sources. The first year covers the Jewish foundations of early Christianity, concentrating on Palestinian Jewish literature, the canonization of the Pentateuch, the rise of priestly hegemony, and apocryphal or pseudepigraphical texts. In the second year, students study Hellenistic and Christian texts, such as Paul and the Gospels, as well as the origins of the Christian centers in the context of their Pharisaic and other Jewish settings.

Interreligious dimensions are also brought into other HUC courses. In the philosophy elective, "Contemporary Ethical Theories and Their Relationship to a Philosophy of Reform Judaism," Professor Alvin J. Reines deals with various non-Jewish religious systems, including Roman Catholic "natural law" and the ethics of Sunni Islam. The course also discusses ethical systems identified with self-consciously Christian thinkers, such as the situation ethics of Fletcher or the existential ethics of Kierkegaard. Another elective, "Anti-Semitism," taught by Professor Michael A. Meyers, considers anti-Jewish expressions in the Christian Bible and the writings of the church fathers; in medieval disputations, passion plays and literary stereotypes; and in the Protestant Reformation. Christian influences on modern anti-Semitism are also evaluated.

Some of the courses at HUC deliberately attempt to develop students' skills at interreligious dialogue. Dr. Cook's courses on the New Testament, for example, which occasionally attract significant numbers both of rabbinical students and Christian students from the institution's graduate school, use such interchange as a pedagogic technique. As Dr. Cook puts it, "Students have expressed high enthusiasm for what they consider the unique kind of 'laboratory' experience in Jewish-Christian dialogue, enabling them to break through the 'sounding-out barrier.'" One final examination of his course on the Gospels and Book of Acts required rabbinical students to imagine themselves as participants in a public dialogue and to compose an oral response to some New Testament theme.

As suggested above, interreligious education at HUC is significantly enhanced by its School of Graduate Studies, which includes a large number of Christian students. The school developed from the one-year "Christian Fellows Program" instituted in 1947 for young Christian scholars who wished to study Judaism and its historical and textual resources. After meeting with an eager response from the Christian community, it was expanded to include master's and doctoral degrees. Since then, HUC has awarded graduate fellowships to 250 Christians, including 50 who obtained Ph.D.'s.

At the time of this survey, about 30 of the College's 60 graduate students were Christians, for the most part ordained priests and ministers who had come from as far as Dublin and Rome. About half were concentrating on Bible and ancient Near Eastern history, languages and literature; the rest specialized in Hellenistic literature, inter-testamental studies, rabbinics and other subjects.

The presence of both Jewish and Christian students, and their participation in the sophisticated interreligious courses described above, create an enriched interreligious awareness and sensitivity on the HUC campus. This ambience was succinctly conveyed by Dr. Cook in an address he delivered to the HUC-JIR Board of Governors in 1975, entitled "Why Teach Christians and Christianity?"

For Christians, HUC courses often marked their first, serious exposure to Jewish perspectives on the Bible, Dr. Cook asserted. Even if they had initially enrolled at HUC to learn about the origins of their own religion, many eventually developed an interest in Judaism as such. Moreover, ingrained anti-Jewish prejudices they might previously have held eroded as they gained familiarity with Judaism's continued vitality. And finally, Dr. Cook noted, "in practical effect, our graduate program...is one of the finest ways of enabling Christians to comprehend the Jew's visceral attachment to the State of Israel."

As for Jewish students, the speaker stressed, HUC's interreligious focus enhanced the ability of future rabbis to maintain professional relationships with Christian clergy, teach Judaism to Christian audiences, counsel persons contemplating intermarriage and conversion to Judaism, make public statements on topics involving Christianity and Christian holidays, work comfortably with Christians, and transmit that confidence to other Jews.

In recent years, Hebrew Union College has initiated a number of extracurricular programs to help Jews and Christians on campus to learn about each other. An annual two-day spring retreat for Jewish and Christian faculty and students was incorporated into the College calendar in 1983. The first retreat was given over to "Issues of Social and Personal Morality"; the theme for 1984 was "Spirituality." Christian students from the graduate school helped plan and lead both events. In addition, and particularly through the agency of student representatives of both the rabbinical school and the graduate school, the faculty committee on religious affairs instituted a campus interreligious dialogue that meets regularly throughout the year. In 1984 rabbinical school students participated in an interreligious seminarians retreat sponsored by the American Jewish Committee in Chicago.

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION, NEW YORK

In addition to Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion maintains a rabbinical school in New York City. Founded in 1922, this school, too, has a five-year program that leads to an M.A. and to rabbinic ordination. Students generally spend their first year in Jerusalem. The curriculum of the remaining four years involves required and elective courses in six major subject areas:

	Required	Elective
Bible	4	3
History	2	2
Hebrew language and literature	2	1
Philosophy/Theology	2	2
Professional development	5	3
Rabbinics	6	4

Candidates for ordination must take four additional electives, present a thesis, and fulfill at least one year of part-time service as student rabbi in a congregation, or an approved equivalent.

The study of Christianity and Jewish-Christian relations is integrated into the curriculum with varying degrees of emphasis. Three electives focus exclusively on the history of Jewish-Christian relations:

"The Jewish-Christian Encounter," a course in philosophy taught by Professor Eugene Borowitz, is continuously redesigned to meet students' interests. In fall 1982, for example, it encompassed the following areas: New Testament foundations of Christian attitudes toward Jews; rabbinic polemics and medieval disputations; contemporary American issues, such as cults and missionaries; views of selected, modern Jewish thinkers on Jewish-Christian dialogue; and contemporary Christologies.

Students of that class also elected to hear from a series of guest lecturers, including a Jewish specialist in interreligious affairs, a Christian active in interfaith dialogue, and even a Christian proponent of evangelizing the Jews.

Professor Martin Cohen teaches two history courses on the social and religious encounter of Judaism and Christianity. "Judaism and Christian Beginnings" (as described in the spring 1982 catalog) explores the Jewish origins of Christianity, the parting of the two communities, and their contacts and conflicts until the convocation of the First Council of Nicaea. The course has a dual focus: Jewish society in the first three centuries C.E. and the process through which one of its eschatological movements became Christianity. Thus, students learn about the emergence of the synagogue and other institutions of Rabbinic Judaism and about the development of early Christian communities.

In fall 1982 Dr. Cohen instituted another elective course, a historical survey of Jewish-Christian relations, beginning with the church fathers and continuing on through the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation, 19th-century Emancipation, World War II and Vatican II. To enable students to appreciate the contemporary relevance of dialogue, special emphasis is placed on methods and goals of American inter-religious programs since 1945.

Interreligious themes are also woven into other departmental courses, though less prominently, depending on the relevance of Christianity, Christian scholarship and Jewish-Christian relations to the subject and, again, on the interest of the particular professor.

For example, the required course "Introduction to Tannaitic History," also taught by Dr. Cohen, surveys Mishnaic responses to Christianity, the Jewish reaction to Jewish-Christians and other sectaries, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the development of the Christian calendar. "Survey of Sephardic Judaism," an elective, covers Jewish-Christian disputations in medieval Spain, parallels between Jewish and Christian philosophies, Christian influences on Jewish art and literature, and the Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492. Inter-religious subjects also enter in a required survey of modern Jewish history and in other electives on medieval Jewry and American Jewry.

In an elective on "The Canonization of the Hebrew Bible and the Exclusion of the Apocrypha," Dr. Harry Orlinsky uses Christian scholarship on the canonization of the New Testament to illuminate the process of the canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures. Other courses taught by Dr. Orlinsky prepare rabbinical students for Christian questions on interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. In two required courses on the Prophets, students are given da/de'i mah l'hashiv assignments, in which they evaluate diverse Jewish and Christian interpretations of passages,

themes, and specific words from the biblical texts.<sup>1</sup> These assignments clarify differences between Jewish and Christian exegesis, and train students to respond to Christian explications of the Hebrew Scriptures. In an elective course, "Translating the Hebrew Bible," a comparative analysis is undertaken of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant translations, with particular emphasis on their theological implications and on the social and religious conditions that influence the translator's work.

A philosophy elective entitled "Feminist Theories of Religion: The Implications for Judaism" explores modern feminist critiques of traditional religions. In spring 1981, it was co-taught by Professor Eugene Borowitz and Visiting Professor Judith Plaskow. Students studied contemporary Christian feminist theologians, because of their concern with questions of feminism and faith (as opposed to the Jewish feminist emphasis on religious law and institutional life). "Modern Jewish Ethics," an elective course taught by Dr. Borowitz in 1983/4, comprised two units with interreligious themes. One compared Jewish and Christian ethics; the other involved a critical reading of the Catholic Bishops' 1983 Pastoral Letter on War and Peace in the Nuclear Age.

Hebrew Union College students in New York have also been taking part in several extracurricular interreligious activities. In 1984 members of the institution's Women's Rabbinical Alliance began a dialogue group with women from Manhattan's (Episcopal) General Theological Seminary. In March of that year, some 10 HUC-JIR rabbinical students joined the Institute for Peace and Social Justice of New York's Maryknoll Seminary for a day-long dialogue on social justice issues. This conference, which is designed to become a continuing program, was also sponsored by the Department of Interreligious Affairs of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the Reform movement's lay organization), and involved seminarians, interreligious professionals, social service workers and Christian lay missionaries. In addition, HUC students have participated in interreligious seminarians retreats sponsored by the American Jewish Committee in Dallas (1983) and Chicago (1984).

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<sup>1</sup> Da mah l'hashiv, literally, "Know what to respond," is a type of polemical literature that Jews once used to prepare for Jewish-Christian disputations. De'i is the feminine form.



## THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, founded in 1886, trains rabbis for the Conservative movement. Conservative Judaism, known in the 19th century as "the historical school," gained momentum in the United States from the influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and from their descendants, who wished to become acculturated even while retaining traditional Jewish practices. While its institutions, both lay and rabbinic, are not as heavily engaged in interreligious affairs as their Reform counterparts, Conservative Judaism does affirm dialogue as a healthy and necessary responsibility in a pluralistic society.

The rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary pursues a six-year program leading to ordination and to a master's degree. The second or third year is ordinarily spent in Jerusalem at the Seminary's American Student Center. The curriculum includes the following distribution of semester courses:

Talmud and Rabbinics (Midrash, codes and Talmudic commentaries)	18
Professional skills (homiletics, synagogue skills, counseling, etc.)	11
Jewish history	7
Jewish philosophy	3
Hebrew	2
Advanced courses in any three of the following: history, literature, philosophy, codes and Midrash	6
Advanced interdisciplinary courses related to contemporary issues	4

Additional electives	8
Supervised fieldwork	2

The JTS rabbinical student's main exposure to the topic of Christianity or Jewish-Christian relations derives from the required Jewish history surveys, especially those that cover the medieval and ancient periods. The 1981/2 offering of "Jews and Judaism in the Ancient World," taught by Professor Shaye J. D. Cohen, devoted three sessions each semester to the study of Christianity and Jewish-Christian relations. In the first semester (mid-6th century B.C.E. through 1st century C.E.), students examined the sociology, theology and practices of early Christianity, and followed its evolution into a separate religion. The second semester (2nd through 4th centuries C.E.) stressed the political relationship of the Christian Roman Empire and the Jews, and the major role of Christian ideology in the formation of that relationship.

"Jews and Judaism in the Middle Ages" surveys European and Mediterranean Jewish communities from the 4th to the 17th centuries. Specific interreligious topics include anti-Judaism in the New Testament and the writings of the church fathers, papal attitudes and civil ordinances pertaining to the Jews, the "badge," blood libels, the Crusades, Jewish-Christian disputations, and finally the late medieval expulsion of Jews from countries of Western Europe.

Two electives treat Christianity and Jewish-Christian relations. In philosophy, Professor Fritz A. Rothschild teaches "Judaism and Modernity: Secularism, Marxism and Contemporary Christianity in Their Relationship to the Faith of Israel." The first two-thirds of the course cover the challenges which secularism and Marxism pose to Judaism. The final third discusses the challenge which Christianity's claim to be the "new Israel" poses to Judaism, and also the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue. Special stress is placed on positions that emphasize similarities in Judaism and Christianity (e.g., Will Herberg) and those that stress differences (Karl Barth).

"Anti-Judaism and Philo-Judaism in Antiquity," a history course taught by Professor Cohen in fall 1983, concentrated on attitudes toward Jews as expressed in Greco-Roman literature and Christian writings. The latter unit included a study of New Testament passages, Adversus Judaeos, Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, and treatises by Melito, Chrysostom and other church fathers. The class also explored the relationship between early Christian anti-Judaism and pagan anti-Judaism.

The Seminary shares curricular and extracurricular arrangements with Christian institutions in New York. In the spring semester of 1982, for example, Professors Seymour Siegel of JTS and Roger Shinn of the neighboring (Protestant) Union Theological Seminary (UTS) taught a joint philosophy course on "Jewish and Christian Approaches to Ethical

Problems." As explained in the syllabus, the course was designed "to help Jewish and Christian students, studying together, to understand their own and each other's ethical traditions and insights in relation to a series of contemporary ethical issues."

Class sessions focused on modern social issues, such as sexual ethics, abortion, economic justice, feminism, civil disobedience and pluralism. Students received two parallel reading lists -- one Jewish and one Christian -- consisting of works by ethical theoreticians and social activists. While they were answerable only for the literature of their own faith, they were urged to familiarize themselves with the other sources as well.

Since the mid-1970s, JTS and UTS have allowed students enrolled in their respective ordination and graduate programs to cross-register for any course without having to pay tuition. As a result of this agreement, there were by 1980 some 20 UTS students annually enrolled at JTS. For the most part they were interested in studying the intertestamental period -- the period of Christian origins -- from a Jewish perspective and in learning primary Rabbinic texts to minimize their reliance on translated and secondary material.

Encouraged by this interest, JTS in 1981 instituted an interdisciplinary, nondegree program consisting of six courses in the history, languages, literature and theology of early Rabbinic Judaism. "Rabbinics for Seminarians" is designed mainly for Christian students, but one of its components, "Jews and Judaism in the Ancient World" (described earlier), is also required of Seminary rabbinical school and graduate students. Thus, "Rabbinics for Seminarians" provides opportunities for personal and academic contacts between Jews and Christians at JTS.

As for extracurricular activities involving Jewish-Christian encounters, the JTS rabbinical school has been engaged for the past 30 years in a "Theological Student Program." Participants from JTS and from six New York Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox seminaries meet three times a semester to discuss theological, scholarly and textual themes, after having reviewed the designated topic within their respective institutions. JTS rabbinical students have also attended the National Workshops on Jewish-Christian Relations as well as AJC-sponsored interreligious seminarians retreats.

## RECONSTRUCTIONIST RABBINICAL COLLEGE

Reconstructionism, founded in the 1920s by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, defines Judaism as an evolving religious civilization and holds that creative Jewish survival requires ongoing and dynamic interaction between historical Jewish civilization and the surrounding cultures. For this reason, Reconstructionist rabbis are encouraged to acquire knowledge of non-Jewish religious traditions, and students, faculty and graduates of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia (founded in 1968) tend to be very active in interreligious activities.

The five-year curriculum of RRC centers on a chronological exploration of Judaism as an evolving civilization. Each year, rabbinical students are exposed to a different period of Jewish history in weekly three-hour seminars:

- 1st year: The biblical period
- 2nd year: The Rabbinic period (from the beginnings of the Oral Law in the 5th century B.C.E. to the completion of the Babylonian Talmud in the 6th century C.E.)
- 3rd year: The medieval period (7th to 18th centuries)
- 4th year: The modern period (from the Enlightenment -- about 1800 -- to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948)
- 5th year: The contemporary period (from 1948 to the present)

In conjunction with these core seminars, students must also complete various requirements in biblical and Rabbinic texts and languages, Jewish philosophy and literature, Bible commentaries, and codes. Also required are eight semesters of elective courses, many of which involve interdisciplinary study overlapping several civilizational

eras (e.g., Jewish ethics, Jewish leadership models). In addition, students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in Hebrew and to complete two courses in Reconstructionist thought and eight courses in "Practical Rabbinics." These eight courses consist of various pastoral skills and fieldwork in schools, synagogues and other communal agencies. Finally, RRC encourages its students to spend a year in Israel prior to graduation, and retains academic supervisors to facilitate these study programs.

Reconstructionism's affirmation of Judaism as a civilization that interacts with other cultures and traditions adds a significant inter-religious dimension to the school's program. It is expressed primarily through the core civilization seminars and through academic relationships maintained with major Philadelphia universities.

The seminars on the Rabbinic and medieval eras, in particular, are strong on interreligious topics. For example, five sessions of the Rabbinic Civilization Seminar, taught by Professor Ronald Brauner in 1981/2, were devoted to "Christianity and Judaism." Utilizing Jewish and Christian scholarship, this unit explored various aspects of this critical formative period in Jewish-Christian relations: 1) the social and religious life of Palestinian Jewry at the time of Jesus as historical background; 2) the treatment of Jesus in the Talmud and other Jewish texts; 3) the linguistic, ethical and religious influences of Judaism on the New Testament; 4) Christianity from Paul to its ultimate break with Judaism; and 5) "Retrospect and Prospect," a bird's-eye view of the history of Jewish-Christian relations to the present day and its implications for students as future Jewish community leaders.

The Medieval Civilization Seminar, taught in 1981/2 by Professor Howard Kriesel, explored the history of the major European and Mediterranean Jewish communities. Two class sessions analyzed classical Jewish-Christian disputations; in another, students presented papers about medieval Jewish-Christian relations for class discussion. Topics for the papers, chosen by the students themselves, included the institution of the Jewish badge, blood libels, Jewish martyrdom, and relations between the two communities as reflected in their legal ordinances. The seminar also discussed Jewish-Christian relations in the context of the Protestant Reformation, including expulsions of Jews and other restrictions, and the eventual toleration of Jews by Protestant societies.

Interreligious topics also surface in RRC elective courses. For example, Dr. Rebecca Trachtenberg Alpert teaches a year-long elective in medical ethics. While most required reading involves secular and Jewish literature, a significant portion is from Christian journals or written by religiously identified Christian authors. Moreover, Christian ethical perspectives are introduced through a study of the involvement of religious organizations, Christian and Jewish, in medical issues.

Until 1985, RRC students were required to complete a master's degree at a secular university.<sup>1</sup> Many students enrolled at Temple University, which bordered on the College's first location in North Philadelphia from 1969 to 1983. About 40 have earned graduate degrees from Temple's Department of Religion.

Their experience at Temple enhanced the interreligious awareness and knowledge of RRC students by making them interact with a variety of scholars and students. Thus, a rabbinical student might have occasion to participate in discussion with a Pakistani Muslim and a German Christian in a class on Hinduism taught by an Indian professor. Degree candidates were also required to choose one of four religious traditions -- Judaism, Christianity, Islam or Eastern religions -- for academic concentration and to complete proseminar survey courses in two of the other three. Over the years, RRC students also took many other courses at Temple, mostly in church doctrines and history, the New Testament and interreligious dialogue. Several RRC professors noted that these students brought to their home classes new information and insights, and that when they graduated they turned their expertise and skills to creative interreligious projects.

Rabbinical students have developed a personal involvement in extracurricular interreligious projects. Women from RRC and the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia held several informal social gatherings in 1980. Recently a dialogue was instituted for men and women students of both institutions. RRC students have attended National Workshops on Jewish-Christian Relations and AJC-sponsored interreligious seminarians retreats; they have also discussed interreligious themes before church audiences and on radio talk shows.

During the 1979/80 academic year, three RRC doctoral candidates in Temple University's Department of Religion took part in an ambitious interreligious program sponsored jointly by Temple and the Journal of Ecumenical Studies. The project involved a year-long, cross-cultural seminar between a Temple group of 17 Jewish and Christian students and faculty, and a Christian contingent from nine German universities and theological schools. In the first stage of the seminar (September 1979 to April 1980), the two groups met separately in their respective

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<sup>1</sup> The institution decided to discontinue the requirement of an outside degree beginning with the entering class of 1985/6 because it left students insufficient time for their RRC studies. The faculty concluded that the goals of the outside curriculum could best be served by introducing relevant courses within the institution itself. With the revised curriculum, rabbinical students must complete a variety of new courses, including one on Christianity, and at least two of the following: "Islam," "Eastern Religions," "Social Science Methodologies in the Study of Religion" and "Philosophy of Religion." It is interesting that RRC is the first American rabbinical school to have initiated a required course about Christianity.

countries, studied theological literature pertaining to Jewish-Christian dialogue, and prepared papers for exchange in a transatlantic "paper dialogue." The second stage (May-June 1980) brought the American participants to Germany for a seven-week encounter with their colleagues. As Dr. Leonard Swidler, the editor of the Journal, put it, "the experience in Germany (perhaps especially for the Jews) was... profound, moving and creative." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard Swidler, "Introduction," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 18, no. 1 (Winter 1981), p. v. This issue featured participating faculty and student papers.

RABBI ISAAC ELCHANAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Orthodox Judaism opposes the flexible attitude to tradition represented by Reform, Conservatism and Reconstructionism. Indeed, it was mostly in response to the first two movements, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, that Orthodoxy began to build its formal institutions, both in Europe and in the United States. While some elements in Orthodoxy advocate the insulation of Jews and Judaism from modern social and cultural life, "modern" Orthodoxy adopts a more open attitude toward the surrounding culture. Its major academic center in the United States is Yeshiva University in New York, whose rabbinical school, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, established in 1886, is discussed here.

With regard to Jewish-Christian relations, American modern Orthodoxy generally adheres to the position of one of its most respected leaders, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. While favoring Jewish-Christian cooperation in social and cultural endeavors, it opposes theological dialogue, viewing the Jewish and Christian faiths as radically unique and incommensurable, and not subject to any essential conversation. In Rabbi Soloveitchik's words, "Our common interests lie not in the realm of faith, but in that of the secular order."<sup>1</sup> (This position was adopted by the 2,000-member [Orthodox] Rabbinical Council of America in a 1964 resolution on dialogue.)

The rabbinical student at RIETS pursues a four-year program leading to Semikhah, or ordination. The major portion of his studies is devoted to intensive study of the Talmud and legal codes, and to practical applications of Halakhah (traditional Jewish law) to problems of modern life. Rabbinic training also includes homiletics, counseling and other pastoral skills, as well as chaplaincies, fieldwork in an approved school, synagogue or Jewish communal agency, and successful completion of a Hebrew proficiency exam. Although RIETS does not mandate a year of study in Israel, virtually all of its

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," Tradition 6, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1964), p. 24.



students enter the school with at least one year of prior study at an Israeli yeshiva. Several of them return to Israel in the course of their RIETS careers to spend a year or two at the Caroline and Joseph Gruss Institute, Yeshiva University's academic center in Jerusalem.

In addition, RIETS students are required to complete one of the following programs:

1. A master's degree in
  - a. Jewish studies at the Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University
  - b. Jewish education at the Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, Yeshiva University
  - c. Social work through the Block Education Plan of the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University
  - d. An approved equivalent to any of the above
2. Six semesters of Kollel -- selective programs of advanced Talmudic studies
3. Six semesters in the Mahshevet Yisrael (Jewish Thought) Program of Yeshiva University

In line with Orthodoxy's position not to engage in theological dialogue with other faiths, the core ordination program does not stress interreligious content. However, two of the supplementary programs provide some RIETS students with such exposure, or at least with personal contact with Christians. These are the Jewish Studies program at the Bernard Revel Graduate School and the Block Education Plan of the Wurzweiler School of Social Work.

#### **Bernard Revel Graduate School**

Out of a typical RIETS class of 35, about 10 students pursue master's degrees at the Bernard Revel Graduate School, an institution for advanced Jewish studies affiliated with Yeshiva University. Many of these students take five courses offered by that school's Department of Jewish History, which have some interreligious content:

"The Jewish-Christian Polemic Through the 13th Century," taught by Dr. David Berger, surveys disputations between the two communities from the time of early Christian theological rejection of Judaism. Readings and class lectures address the classic themes of Jewish-Christian polemics, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation and Virgin Birth, and cite relevant biblical prooftexts and passages. Some course units deal with Christian attitudes toward the Talmud and Jewish

attitudes toward the Gospels. Also addressed are aspects of the social context of the medieval disputations, such as monastic expansion, the Crusades, conversion and Jewish martyrdom.

Dr. Berger's "Medieval Jewish History: Christian Europe" devotes two class units to Jewish-Christian relations. The section on the rise of Christianity and its impact on the Jews scans the historical and theological bases for medieval Christian attitudes toward Jews as reflected, for example, in the doctrine of Christian supersession and the Augustinian theory of toleration. The second unit explores Jewish-Christian polemics, Jewish legal attitudes toward Christianity, canon law and other Christian ordinances about Jews, and literary anti-Jewish stereotyping.

"Sectarians in the Talmudic Era," taught by Dr. Leo Landman, probes the relationship of Rabbinic Judaism with the minim, the various sectarian movements of Judea and Babylonia in the first two centuries C.E. Talmudic sources provide insights into early Jewish attitudes toward Jesus, Jewish-Christians, and Christianity. Developments in Jewish liturgy and Jewish Bible canonization are studied in relation to the growing divergence of the two faiths.

In "Liturgy in the Talmudic Era," Dr. Landman's students consider the early formulation of Jewish liturgy. They evaluate the Christian influence on such prayers as the Birkat Haminim, which articulates the separateness of Jews and sectarians, and the Etz Tzemach David, which highlights the Davidic genealogy of the Jewish Messiah. They investigate occasional similarities in Jewish and Christian liturgical forms and assess the validity of the argument that Christianity's growing popularity at the time hastened the systematization of Jewish prayer.

A special course, "Apostasy and Conversion in the Modern Period," was taught jointly in 1983 by Professor Jeffrey Gurock and Visiting Professor Todd Endelman. Dr. Endelman focused on manifestations of Jewish disaffection in Western Europe after the Emancipation. Dr. Gurock treated conversion in 19th- and 20th-century American Jewry, as well as other issues in Jewish-Christian relations, such as missionary activity, the relationship between "Americanism" and Christianity, the "blue laws," and recent controversies over displays of religious symbols on public property.

#### Block Education Plan

Through the Block Education Plan, students receive a master of social work degree after completing four summers of academic courses at the Wurzweiler campus, and three years (September to May) at fieldwork placements. About five rabbinical students annually enroll in this program. While the Block Plan includes little formal study of Christianity or of Jewish-Christian relations, both the courses and the fieldwork have significant intergroup dimensions that increase students' interethnic, interracial and interreligious awareness and understanding.

Several of the academic courses, for example, treat social work issues from religious perspectives. "Jewish Social Philosophy" considers Jewish and Christian views on mental health, the family, sexuality and other ethical issues. "Social Welfare Organization" compares Jewish and Christian welfare institutions, and the involvement of both religious groups in contemporary social problems. A course entitled "Difference" evaluates the significance of diverse ethnic viewpoints in social work. As Block courses are open to students from various religious and cultural backgrounds, RIETS students enrolled in this program also have the opportunity to learn about American black, Asian, or white ethnic groups from their own classmates.

Fieldwork placements also promote contact with non-Jews because all Block students must spend at least one year with a non-Jewish agency. Often they are placed in a church-sponsored, governmental, nongovernmental or nonsectarian social agency that serves a diversified clientele. RIETS/Block students thus learn to interact with a variety of non-Jewish groups.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As this report shows, American rabbinical students are exposed to academic studies about Christianity and to some contact with the Christian community. The surveys of Jewish history, a central feature of most seminary curricula, regularly treat the traditional encounters between Jews and Christians. In addition, some interreligious electives have been instituted, ranging from such topics as images of Jews in early Christian literature to analyses of contemporary problems posed by cults and missionary activities. Extracurricular programs encourage theological and personal encounters between Jewish and Christian seminarians, and, in fact, are beginning to build bridges between the spiritual leaders of the 21st century. Academic arrangements with Christian and nonsectarian schools not only allow rabbinical students to further their knowledge of Christianity, but also bring Christians to rabbinical school courses. Finally, despite their overburdened academic and professional schedules, many rabbinical students and professors participate in independent interreligious projects outside their respective institutions.

With the exception of the required history surveys, which view Jewish-Christian relations from the perspective of Jewish history, most of these courses and extracurricular programs did not exist a generation ago. Their burgeoning is testimony to the fact that Jewish-Christian relations are taken seriously in the institutions surveyed. Another index of such interest is the extraordinary popularity of many of the elective courses. (At HUC-Cincinnati, for example, approximately three out of four rabbinical students enroll in the course on "The Gospels and the Book of Acts.")

While the popularity of such electives reveals a felt need for interreligious education, it is also true that the opportunities for such education and for the development of skills in interreligious dialogue are still very limited in rabbinical seminaries. The history courses, which must of necessity focus on the experience of Jews as a vulnerable minority in a frequently hostile Christendom, may leave students with negative feelings about the church as an institution -- if not Christianity as a faith tradition -- since so many of the social, political and economic disabilities endured by Jews had their

origins in church legislation. The new interreligious courses provide a more rounded approach to the study of Christianity and assign Christian source materials for reading and discussion. However, such courses tend to concentrate on certain periods or themes of the Jewish-Christian encounter. Opportunities to learn about Christianity on its own terms are still relatively rare. And possibilities for extracurricular involvement in interreligious affairs, while promising, are not as extensive as comparable offerings in other areas of rabbinic practice, such as the pulpit, Jewish education or the chaplaincy.

The initiative of Jewish faculty in establishing courses at their respective seminaries that focus on their own areas of expertise in Jewish-Christian relations represents both a strength and a weakness of these institutions' curricula. The strength is obvious: Because a number of professors have special interests in certain aspects of Christianity or Christian-Jewish interaction, they fashion academic courses focusing on these areas -- courses of high quality and, as noted, of high popularity. (That is the reason these professors and the courses they teach have been mentioned by name.) The weakness, though less apparent, is, in a sense, the other side of the same coin. One might conceivably wonder whether the same courses would be taught without these professors. With the exception of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, where a course in Christianity was instituted independently of any particular teacher, most of the courses cited in this report seem to stem from the interest of a specific professor. It is thus unclear to what extent these courses reflect the scholarly interests of individual faculty members or the institutional commitment of the seminary to educate rabbinical students about Christianity. The fact that several such courses are available at HUC-JIR seminaries would seem to indicate an institutional commitment on the part of Reform Judaism to interreligious affairs -- a commitment for which there is supporting evidence outside the seminaries -- but since all the courses are electives, it is a difficult question to resolve.

Whatever the answer to this intriguing question, there are ways of utilizing existing resources to intensify interreligious education at rabbinical schools so that future rabbis will be yet better prepared to assume their tasks in America's pluralistic society.

1. The traditional required survey courses in ancient and medieval Jewish history, which involve discussion of the social and political relationships between Jews and their Christian rulers and neighbors, might focus more directly on the origins, history and literature of Christianity and on similarities and differences between the two communities. That the historic Jewish-Christian encounter has been rife with Christian intolerance and cultural oppression, not to speak of violent persecutions, of the Jewish minority, cannot be denied. What is noteworthy is the rise of a significant body of Christian scholarship that explores this often negative encounter.

First-rate studies such as John Gager's The Origins of Anti-Semitism (1983) and James Parkes's classic The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue (1934) might be used not only as primary reference texts, but as examples of responsible Christian grappling with Christianity's anti-Jewish tradition. This also applies to the large literature on 1st-century problems written by Christian scholars ranging from George Foote Moore and R. Travers Herford to E. P. Sanders and Krister Stendahl. The extent to which classical Christian prejudices, often in secularized form, determine the modern study of the Bible (e.g., Wellhausen) and ancient Jewish literature (e.g., Strack and Billerbeck) is often pointed out in rabbinical schools. The shift in Christian scholarship toward a more fair, objective -- even sympathetic -- appraisal of ancient Judaism should also be noted. (This is not only to be "fair" to Christianity; knowledge of emerging Christian scholarship will help rabbis respond to questions from Christians and Jews alike.) In addition, a comparative approach to modern problems, such as religious responses to secularization or ethical issues, could heighten interreligious awareness. As noted, several courses already employ this approach.

2. Students' interreligious knowledge and dialogical skills might be immeasurably enhanced if rabbinical schools offered a basic one-year course about the status of Jewish-Christian relations past and contemporary. Models for such a course already exist in the elective courses taught by Eugene Borowitz and Martin Cohen on this subject at HUC's New York school, as well as in offerings by other institutions. Such an introductory survey might also explore these key subject areas:

- a. Basic Christianity, including theology, hermeneutics, rituals, and major groupings, especially in the United States
- b. The relationship between early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, including New Testament bases for Christian attitudes, the postures of the church fathers, and Jewish views of Jesus and Christianity
- c. Disputations and legal and social relationships in the medieval period
- d. Varying Christian attitudes toward Jewish emancipation in the late 18th and early 19th centuries
- e. Contemporary Christologies, post-Vatican II theological reformulations and Jewish responses, the growth of dialogue and the development of its ground rules
- f. Jewish and Christian positions on current social issues, with particular attention to how these are shaped by theological and ethical beliefs

3. As genuine interreligious understanding goes beyond academic study, rabbinical schools might well consider increasing opportunities for student involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogues, scholarly efforts, social action and other joint projects. They might invite Jews active in dialogue into the classroom to share their insights. They might arrange to have students visit the interreligious offices of Jewish communal organizations and organize internships for them in such agencies. To support such involvements, seminary courses in professional skills could be made to incorporate such activities as student preaching before mixed Jewish and Christian audiences, writing for general or Christian periodicals, and participating in community dialogues.

4. Rabbinical schools might also consider expanding their cooperative programs with Christian seminaries and university departments of religion. Most of them already share some form of consortium, cross-registration, or professorial exchange with other institutions. Christians have over the past decade shown an increased interest in Jewish studies; the experiences of non-Jewish-students enrolled in courses at HUC in Cincinnati or at JTS indicate that such involvement profoundly affects their spiritual appreciation and intellectual knowledge of Judaism. Increased use by rabbinical students of the resources of non-Jewish institutions can sharpen their skills, motivation and personal contacts for superior interreligious work, as the former RRC/Temple program attests. Expanding interinstitutional relations will not only deepen the knowledge of Jewish and Christian seminarians about one another's religion, but also create the foundations for intelligent and committed dialogue among future rabbis, priests and ministers.

Undoubtedly these suggestions entail some modification of present rabbinical school curricula. Their implementation also requires a willingness on the part of other Jewish and Christian institutions to cooperate and, most of all, a readiness to part with long-held religious and pedagogic assumptions. The need for this development is clear. Although American Jews and Christians have developed unprecedented respect for each other's traditions and communities, much ignorance still prevails. The majority of Jews and Christians require education -- and re-education -- about each other's faith, history, concerns and self-definition. Respect will thrive and endure only if it is based on solid knowledge. For clergy, Jewish and Christian, there is no more appropriate time for such instruction than the years they set aside for their theological education.