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INTERFAITH RELATIONS IN THE WAKE OF OCTOBER 7

Dr. Ghila Amati

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments **5**

Introduction **7**

Methodology **9**

Christian-Jewish Relations Review **13**

Jewish and American Evangelical Interfaith Relations **35**

Jewish-Muslim Interfaith Relations **45**

Interview Analysis & Findings: Jewish-Muslim Relations after October 7 ..... **57**

Interview Analysis & Findings on Jewish-Christian Relations after October 7 ..... **77**

Policy Recommendations **97**

Conclusion **103**

Endnotes **105**

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Introduction

On October 7, 2023, a surprise attack by Hamas on Israeli communities near Gaza sparked a devastating war. The brutality of the assault – which killed approximately 1,200 Israelis and resulted in over 200 individuals being taken hostage – along with the subsequent military response in Gaza, profoundly altered interreligious relations around the globe. Across the world, Jewish relationships with Christian and Muslim communities have been tested in unprecedented ways. Long-standing interfaith relations faced new strains as each community grappled with pain, fear, and conflicting narratives of the war. At the same time, the crisis underscored the potential value of interfaith engagement: religious leaders across faiths may play a role in calming tensions, countering hate, and affirming a shared humanity in the midst of conflict.

This paper examines the state of interfaith relations among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in Israel and the United States following the events of October 7 and focuses on the period from November 2023 to February 2025. It draws on 25 practitioner interviews (eight from the U.S., two from Argentina, one from Britain, two from continental Europe, Twelve from Israel, and one from Morocco); a review of recent articles, reports, and books; and an analysis of key press releases and public statements on Muslim-Jewish and Christian-Jewish relations. The paper has three objectives:

1. To assess how interfaith relations dynamics have shifted after October 7, identifying any breakdowns or breakthroughs;

2. To analyze specific developments within Christian and Muslim communities vis-à-vis their relations with Jews, as well as the implications for ongoing dialogue;

3. To offer evidence-based policy recommendations to the Israeli government, NGOs, interfaith practitioners, community leaders, and civil society organizations, aimed at improving interfaith activities and tolerance.

The significance of this inquiry is clear. In times of war and terror, interreligious trust can easily deteriorate, yet interfaith solidarity is important in preventing societal polarization. In Israel, where approximately 20% of the citizenry is Arab (mostly Muslim, with a smaller Christian minority), Jewish-Arab relations are a bellwether for internal cohesion. In the United States, both Jews and Muslims are relatively small minorities who have recently experienced spikes in hate and suspicion, testing alliances formed in calmer periods. Meanwhile, Christian-Jewish dialogue – long considered a pillar of post-Holocaust reconciliation – now faces new sources of tension as church leaders respond to evolving events on the ground. By examining these dynamics in depth, this paper aims to provide nuanced insight into the post-October 7 interfaith landscape, along with practical recommendations to foster communal resilience and unity.

The paper begins with a methodology section that outlines the interview process and the approach used to synthesize diverse sources. This is followed by a literature review that surveys recent developments in interfaith relations, drawing upon media coverage, scholarly analyses, and public statements. The core section, Analysis and Findings, presents key events and trends in interreligious dialogue, with a particular focus on Christian-Jewish and Muslim-Jewish relations as reflected in the interview data. Building on these insights, the paper concludes with a set of actionable policy recommendations aimed at stakeholders in Israel, Jewish Diaspora communities, and international organizations involved in promoting interfaith engagement.

It is inherent to research conducted amid ongoing events that any analysis is shaped by the specific period under examination. This study focuses on developments between November 2023 and February 2025 and therefore does not consider subsequent political, religious, or societal changes, including the death of Pope Francis, the election of the new pope, or the return of the hostages and the end of the war. While these developments will undoubtedly influence interfaith relations, it is important to underscore that their full implications cannot yet be assessed: both a papal transition and the conclusion of a protracted conflict require time, distance, and additional evidence before a true perspective can be formed. Nevertheless, the analysis presented here remains valuable. By examining responses during the war and its immediate aftermath, it captures the dynamics, tensions, and realignments that emerged at a formative moment.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that combined qualitative interviews with key practitioners and an extensive review of secondary sources to triangulate findings by comparing on-the-ground perspectives with published accounts. The research comprised two main components. First, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom with clergy, practitioners, scholars, and activists from Israel, the United States, Britain, Italy, France, and South America; each participant had significant experience in interfaith work, thus providing rich, firsthand insights. Second, a wide-ranging literature review encompassed news articles, academic papers, organizational reports, press releases, and books. This approach aimed to weave together media, popular, and scholarly sources, offering a nuanced portrait of the evolving landscape of interfaith engagement.

Interviews

Between December 2023 and February 2025, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Twelve of the interviewees were based in Israel, eight in the United States, two in Argentina, and one each in Italy, France, Britain, and Morocco, reflecting the broad geographical focus of the study. In addition, the analysis incorporates a public talk on this topic given by the Chief Rabbi of London, Sir Ephraim Mirvis, although no interview with him was conducted.[1] Participants were selected to represent a wide range of perspectives, predominantly from within the Jewish community of practitioners and activists, with occasional input from Christian and Muslim figures. These included rabbis engaged in interfaith initiatives, academics involved in both interfaith research and activism, and several directors or scholars from NGOs specializing in interreligious work.

A snowball sampling method was employed, beginning with a small set of "seed" participants who met the study's criteria and then asking them to refer others in their network who also fit these criteria. This process continued cumulatively, effectively expanding the pool of qualified interviewees. Many participants

served as "practitioners," meaning they led or facilitated dialogue groups, educational programs, or interfaith advocacy coalitions in their respective areas. Among them were figures such as the Chief Rabbi of Italy, academics specializing in interfaith dialogue, directors of interfaith organizations, and the head of interreligious affairs at a major Jewish institution.

All interviews followed a standardized guide to maintain consistency while still allowing open-ended conversation. The core questions addressed the interviewee's background in interfaith work and their organization's mission, as well as perceptions of interfaith relations before and after October 7, 2023 – including the state of Jewish-Muslim or Jewish-Christian dialogue, ongoing challenges, and typical discussion topics. Emphasis was placed on understanding the impact of the events of October 7 and the subsequent impact on interfaith efforts, focusing on changes in attitudes, participation, and dialogue. Interviewees offered specific anecdotes illustrating these shifts, such as instances of dialogue breakdown or the emergence of new forms of solidarity. They reflected on community reactions and potential surprises in how congregants or grassroots members responded. The conversation then explored adjustments to dialogue approaches following October 7, including new discussion topics, altered tones, or an increased focus on trauma. Finally, interviewees were encouraged to suggest policies or best practices to strengthen interfaith relations in the future.

Interviews usually lasted 60 to 90 minutes and were primarily conducted via Zoom, with a few in-person sessions in Israel. With participants' consent, the conversations were recorded and later transcribed. The interviewer (the author of this paper) is fluent in English, Hebrew, and Italian; interviews in Israel were conducted in Hebrew when preferred and then translated into English during transcription. One interview was in Italian; those in the U.S. were conducted in English. To ensure accuracy, all quoted material in this paper is drawn directly from transcripts with only minor edits for clarity. Each quote is referenced accordingly. Every effort was made to safeguard the confidentiality of sensitive material. All interviewees agreed to be identified by name and title under the condition that they would have the opportunity to review the text prior to publication.

The majority of the interviews conducted for this report were with Jewish practitioners, scholars, and institutional actors involved in interfaith initiatives. The same can be said of the materials analyzed in the review, which focus primarily on Jewish responses to developments in interfaith dialogue after October 7. This reflects both the institutional framework within which the research was commissioned, the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), and the specific question guiding the project: how Jewish actors in interreligious settings interpreted and responded to the rupture following October 7. As a result, the analysis foregrounds Jewish perceptions of dialogue breakdown, resilience, and moral tension. It does not claim to offer a symmetrical account of Christian or Muslim internal deliberations. Where relevant, the report draws on public statements, institutional documents, and secondary scholarship to contextualize Christian and Muslim responses; however, a full parallel ethnography of those communities lies beyond the scope of this study. This limitation is acknowledged explicitly to clarify that the findings illuminate one side of a relational field whose dynamics are necessarily reciprocal.

Literature Review

In parallel with the interviews, a broad review of external sources was conducted from October 2023 to February 2025, capturing immediate post-attack developments. Leading news outlets provided journalistic accounts, while religious journals and magazines (Tablet, America Magazine, Christian Century, etc.) offered analytical perspectives. Official statements from faith-based organizations were also examined, including the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the Vatican News site, and the Archbishop of Canterbury's website. These documents were treated as critical data sources and are cited directly where relevant.

Because the events of October 7 were relatively recent, much of the written material was journalistic or preliminary rather than the product of long-term academic study. Nonetheless, integrating these evolving news and commentary sources with the real-time testimony of practitioners allowed for a well-rounded view of how interfaith dynamics shifted in the immediate aftermath of the attacks.

Throughout this paper, direct quotations are used extensively to let participants speak for themselves. Given the ongoing nature of the conflict, the study provides a snapshot of the first year and a half following the outbreak of war. While conditions may evolve further, the combination of near real-time practitioner testimony and early documented responses offers a solid empirical foundation for analysis. Any tendency toward retrospective rationalization in the interviews was mitigated by conducting them soon after the events.

Christian-Jewish Relations Review

To understand the significance of the current moment, one must recall the dramatic transformation in Catholic-Jewish relations over the past six decades. The Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* (1965) repudiated the Church's long history of anti-Jewish teaching, affirming "the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock"[2] and condemning antisemitism. Over the subsequent decades, successive popes have deepened this rapprochement. Saint John Paul II, in particular, revolutionized the relationship: he became the first pope to visit Rome's Great Synagogue (1986), calling Jews "our elder brothers" in faith, and later prayed at the Western Wall in Jerusalem (2000), asking forgiveness for Catholic sins against Jews.[3] Under John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, the Vatican established diplomatic relations with the State of Israel in 1993 – a milestone that Pope Francis explicitly celebrated, insisting "the State of Israel has every right to exist in safety and prosperity."[4]

Building on his predecessors' achievements, Pope Francis described Christian-Jewish friendship in personal terms. Marking the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in 2015, he rejoiced that "enemies and strangers have become friends and brothers."[5] However, the Vatican's geopolitical approach also included official recognition of the State of Palestine that same year, signaling a complex diplomatic balancing act. He has also affirmed that "to attack Jews is antisemitism, but an outright attack on the State of Israel is also antisemitism"[6] – a statement linking the Church's rejection of anti-Judaism with vigilance against anti-Zionism. As a result, on the eve of October 2023, Catholic-Jewish relations were widely regarded as a success story – a "strong bond of friendship," in the words of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, supported by theological dialogue, official commissions, and a shared commitment to combating hatred. This hard-won trust, however, was about to face a profound test amid war and terror in the Holy Land.

Immediate Catholic Responses to the Hamas Attacks: Solidarity and Caution

In the immediate aftermath of Hamas's assault on southern Israel, Catholic leaders at the highest levels reacted with sorrow and condemnation – but this soon became a source of contention.

1. Papal Rhetoric Under Crisis

On October 8, 2023, just one day after the attacks, Pope Francis used his Sunday Angelus address to express shock and empathy. "I am following apprehensively and sorrowfully what is happening in Israel where violence has exploded yet more ferociously," he said, lamenting the hundreds of dead and injured.[7] However, by condemning terrorism and war simultaneously – declaring, "terrorism and war do not lead to any resolutions, but only to the death and suffering of many innocent people. War is a defeat! Every war is a defeat!" – the pope implicitly equated the violent aggression of Hamas with Israel's defensive measures. At that point, Israel had not yet entered the Gaza Strip with ground forces.

At his General Audience of October 11, 2023, Pope Francis again acknowledged Israel's right to defend itself, while expressing deep concern over Gaza's civilians. He appealed for the immediate release of all hostages taken by Hamas and emphasized that "terrorism and extremism do not help reach a solution… but fuel hatred, violence and revenge." This balanced stance – condemning terrorism, affirming Israel's self-defense, and pleading for Gaza's civilians – foreshadowed the approximately 75 public statements Francis would issue in the year following October 7. Across these remarks, the pope exhibited a consistent pattern: strong humanitarian concern for all civilians, refusal to justify terrorism, and caution about framing the conflict in strictly binary or partisan terms.[8]

2. Statements by High-Level Vatican Officials

Other Catholic leaders reinforced Pope Francis's messages, though with varying nuance. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State, labeled the October 7 assaults "inhuman" and affirmed Israel's right to self-defense.[9] In

Boston, Cardinal Seán O'Malley unequivocally condemned Hamas, calling its actions "barbaric." He further stressed that "resisting such terrorism and aggression is the moral duty of states, to be carried out within moral limits."[10] In the Holy Land, Catholic and other Christian leaders issued a more cautious initial statement, condemning all acts targeting civilians but avoiding specific mention of Hamas. Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, an ecumenical body including the Latin (Catholic) Patriarch Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, issued a joint statement in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas invasion. That text offered prayers and "unequivocal condemnation of every act that targets civilians," but notably did not explicitly name Hamas or describe the massacres in any detail.[11]

3. American Catholic Leadership

American Catholic leaders, for their part, were quick to show solidarity with Jewish victims and to condemn Hamas by name. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) – long a partner of American Jewish organizations in interfaith work – issued statements through its Committee on International Justice and Peace that mirrored the Vatican line, but in a somewhat more direct register. "The October 7 terrorist attacks of Hamas which initiated this war must be condemned," declared Bishop David Malloy on October 27.[12] "We renew the call for the release of hostages and protection of civilian populations." At the same time, Malloy's statement urged the provision of humanitarian aid corridors and quoted Pope Francis's lament that "war is always a defeat…a destruction of human fraternity."[13] The USCCB message also included a pastoral reminder relevant to the American context: "With passions enflamed in our own communities, online, and around the world, we must guard against any tendency to sow hatred against other people or faiths," Malloy wrote. He pointedly cited the Council's teaching that the Church "reproves…any discrimination against [people] or harassment of them because of their race… or religion."[14]

Jewish Reactions to Catholic Responses

Despite expressions of sympathy from Catholic leaders and the Vatican's careful diplomatic positioning – grounded, as some Catholics argued, in a universal

moral concern for all victims – Catholic-Jewish relations nonetheless came under significant strain in the aftermath of October 7. Many Jewish interlocutors, including Israeli officials and long-standing partners in interreligious dialogue, perceived the Catholic response as lacking sufficient moral clarity regarding the nature and singular brutality of the Hamas assault. What some Catholics understood as principled neutrality, peace advocacy, or a consistent application of humanitarian ethics could be interpreted within Jewish discourse as moral flattening: an unsettling equivalence between aggressor and victim, or even as a form of indifference at a moment of profound vulnerability. These responses crystallized across three primary spheres: the Israeli government, religious leaders and academic scholars, and prominent public figures.

1. Israeli Governmental Criticism

Israeli government officials did not hide their dissatisfaction. In late October 2023, as noted, Israel's ambassador to the Holy See excoriated the Jerusalem church leaders' muted initial statement as "sterile" and morally obtuse.[15] As the war continued, Israeli criticism moved to the very top. On December 22, 2024 – over a year into the conflict – Israel's Foreign Ministry sharply rebuked Pope Francis for comments it considered one-sided. Pope Francis had used his annual Christmas address to decry the suffering of children in Gaza, lamenting that "Yesterday, children were bombed…This is cruelty. This is not war."[16] In response, Israel's Foreign Ministry accused Francis of "double standards," saying his remarks were "disappointing as they are disconnected from the true and factual context… a multi-front war… forced upon [Israel] starting on October 7."[17] The statement scolded Pope Francis: "Enough with the double standards and the singling out of the Jewish state and its people… Cruelty is terrorists hiding behind children while trying to murder Israeli children… holding 100 hostages… including a baby… Unfortunately, the pope has chosen to ignore all of this."[18]

Such a public reproach of the pontiff was unusual, illustrating how deeply the war had strained the normally cordial Vatican-Israel relationship. Israeli officials felt that Pope Francis was amplifying criticism of Israel's conduct (e.g., civilian casualties in Gaza) without equally spotlighting the unprecedented brutality and antisemitic intent of Hamas. The fact that Francis often spoke in generalities

– condemning "every war" and "every form of hatred" – left Israelis with the feeling that he was evading the uncomfortable truth that in this conflict, one side (Hamas) was the clear aggressor. As a senior Israeli diplomatic source told a journalist in November 2023, there was frustration that Pope Francis had not explicitly labeled Hamas a terrorist organization nor met with Israeli victims' families, even as many other world leaders did so.[19] The Vatican's perspective, as it was conveyed anonymously to the media, was that Francis refrained from such actions to keep channels open for a possible mediation role, and out of concern for Arab Christian populations who "tend to be strong supporters of the Palestinian cause."[20] Others, however, may argue that this posture was shaped by a distinct Vatican interpretation of the war – one that viewed the magnitude of Palestinian civilian suffering as morally alarming and unjust. At the same time, critics maintain that such moral judgments do not always derive from principled ethical analysis alone, but may also be influenced – whether consciously or unconsciously – by antisemitic assumptions and a biased approach to Israel's actions and its legitimate responses to an attack widely described as a "pogrom" – an attack that was both unjustifiable and aimed at mass violence – and to Israel's effort to ensure that Hamas cannot carry out such atrocities again.[21]

2. Responses of Jewish Religious Leaders and Scholars

Jewish religious leaders and scholars – including some of the Catholic Church's longtime dialogue partners – also voiced anguish and disappointment. An especially eloquent testimony came in an open letter to Pope Francis sent on November 12, 2023.[22] The letter was signed by leading figures in Jewish-Christian dialogue, including Karma Ben-Johanan, Ph.D. (Jerusalem); Malka Zeiger Simkovich, Ph.D. (Chicago); Rabbi Jehoshua Ahrens, Ph.D. (Frankfurt/Bern); Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Ph.D. (Jerusalem); and Rabbi David Meyer, Ph.D. (Paris/Rome). Their collective appeal expressed surprise at the lack of solidarity from the Church, at a time of great crisis in the Jewish community. It was an attempt to convey to the Catholic community as a whole, and not only to Pope Francis, the shock that had been experienced at that time across the Jewish world.

The letter stated, "In a time of distress and anguish for Jews all over the world,"[23] these Jewish authors described in searing detail what happened on October 7: "Approximately 1200 civilians were slain… including women, children and babies, disabled people, and Holocaust survivors. The terrorists abused bodies, burned entire families, brutally raped women, and committed other atrocities which the hand hesitates to write… About 240 men, women, and children were abducted… This massacre was the most horrific attack on Jews since the Holocaust. It was a full-fledged pogrom of the kind we all hoped was no longer possible."[24]

They went on to recount how "blame for the massacre and for the war" was perversely shifted in some quarters onto Jews themselves, fueling a "global surge in onslaughts against Jews… – including killings, physical assaults, threats, harassment and vandalism – [which] marks the worst wave of antisemitism since 1945."[25] This stark appraisal – "the worst wave of antisemitism since 1945" – conveyed the depth of Jewish alarm. "This state of affairs shakes the ground beneath our feet," the letter confessed. "The heavy grief for the lives that were taken is joined by a sense of deep loneliness, and a loss of confidence in the possibility of a life of safety and freedom… Most of all, the events invoke great anxiety among us for our future. October 7 will be forever marked in Jewish memory."[26]

In this distressing context, the writers turned to the faithful of the Catholic Church – their "Catholic brothers and sisters" – for solidarity. They acknowledged with appreciation that Pope Francis and some bishops "reiterate[d] their renunciation of antisemitism and affirm[ed] Israel's right to defend itself" in public statements.[27] They also noted they "share the Church's grief for Palestinian civilians… killed as a result of the war without committing any crime," showing empathy for all innocent victims.[28] Yet, they argued, the situation "transcends politics" and required a clearer moral witness from the Church. In a direct appeal, they wrote: "We ask the Church to be mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love"[29] – quoting Nostra Aetate itself – and not to marginalize that commitment "in a time of crisis."

What did they concretely want from the pope? Their letter spelled it out in detail: "We ask the Church to act as a beacon of moral and conceptual clarity

amid an ocean of disinformation… to distinguish between legitimate political criticism of Israel's policy… and hateful negation of Israel and of Jews; to reaffirm Israel's right to exist; to unequivocally condemn Hamas' terrorist massacre aimed at killing as many civilians as possible, and to distinguish this massacre from the civilian casualties of Israel's war of self-defense, as tragic and heartbreaking as they are."[30] They also urged the Church to "extend a hand in solidarity to the Jewish community throughout the world, in the spirit of… genuine brotherhood" – recalling John Paul II's description of Jews as the people of an unrevoked covenant with God.[31]

In essence, these Jewish dialogue partners sought an affirmation that the Church understood the asymmetry of the situation: that Hamas's actions represented genocidal antisemitism, not merely another episode of conflict, and that Jews should not feel alone in the face of that evil.

The open letter was notable for its respectful yet urgent tone – a plea from friends who felt wounded. It also hinted at disappointment that Pope Francis's own statements had not yet met these expectations. In particular, the authors noted that they "understand that the Church seeks to maintain political neutrality… due to diplomatic considerations."[32]

3. Public Jewish Criticism and Media Reactions

The depth of feeling in such private communications was mirrored in more public critiques as well.[33] In the Italian press, for example, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Riccardo Di Segni, offered a pointed reflection on the massive interreligious "prayer for peace" vigil that Pope Francis called in late October 2023. Rabbi Di Segni cautioned that while praying for peace is laudable, "one must consider whether looking beyond [the terms of conflicts] does not mean flattening differences and making everyone equal; in every conflict… certainly there are those who are better and those who are worse. Prayer can become an alibi… for establishing inappropriate equidistance, for erasing moral evaluations."[34] This remark, published in La Repubblica, directly targeted the Vatican's "inappropriate equidistance." It was a rare instance of a prominent rabbi suggesting that Pope Francis's approach risked a kind of moral relativism – treating a terrorist massacre and a defensive military operation as if they were equivalent tragedies to be mourned. Di Segni continued to criticize the Vatican

on many different occasions. At a Catholic-Jewish dialogue meeting in Rome on Jan. 16, 2025, he again claimed that the Israel-Hamas war has severely strained Jewish-Christian relations and criticized Pope Francis for what he called a moral imbalance in addressing the conflict. He warned that "the moment we are living in is one in which it seems that the church is again giving in to the temptation to cut ties with Judaism," and described the pope's approach as "selective indignation." He went on to say that while "a pope cannot divide the world into children and stepchildren and therefore must denounce the suffering of all… that is precisely what the pope does not do."

Responding at the same meeting, Father Marco Gnavi, director of the Diocese of Rome's Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue, rejected the accusation that the pope ignores Israeli suffering, stating, "I do not believe it is true that the pope is silent about some of the horrors of our day, including the Hamas attack and the hostages," while emphasizing that "you can't ask us not to suffer both with you and with others." He also underlined that criticizing Israel's military actions does not amount to denying its right to exist or defend itself, though he warned against rhetoric that could slide into anti-Israeli or anti-Jewish propaganda. Despite the tensions, Di Segni stressed that interreligious engagement must continue, insisting that although the relationship has been "a dialogue that has been ruined for months," for believers, "dialogue is not and cannot be something trivial to interrupt." [35]

Perhaps the most striking controversy with the Catholic Church arose from a theological misstep by Pope Francis himself. On October 7, 2024 – exactly one year after the Hamas attacks – Pope Francis issued a letter to Catholics in the Middle East. In it, while encouraging prayer and fasting for peace, he included a quotation from the New Testament that immediately raised alarm in Jewish circles. He referred to "our one true enemy: the spirit of evil that foments war, because it is 'murderous from the beginning,' 'a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44)." The biblical citation – "You are of your father the devil… he was a murderer from the beginning… and the father of lies" – might have passed unnoticed by Christian readers, but for Jews it bellowed with horrifying resonance. This verse, in which Jesus addresses a group of Jews as children of the devil, has been called "arguably the single most antisemitic verse in the New Testament."[36] For centuries, John 8:44 fueled Christian contempt and

violence against Jews, weaponized by preachers to brand all Jews as Satan's offspring.[37]

From a strictly Catholic homiletic perspective, referencing John 8:44 can be seen as a theological trope used to describe the devil – "the father of lies" – as the ultimate author of war, hatred, and division. Vatican insiders and Catholic theologians frequently cite this verse in general pastoral contexts, and it could be argued that they do so with no conscious intent to link it to the Jewish people. The Vatican quickly issued a clarification reflecting this internal logic, stating that Francis intended "the spirit of evil" as the common enemy of all humanity. However, this internal Catholic defense demonstrated a historical blind spot. For centuries, this exact verse was weaponized by Christian preachers to literally demonize Jews, fueling violence and persecution. Its echo in a papal letter during an ongoing war involving the Jewish state was, to many Jews, simply staggering. "Regardless of Francis's intentions, he invoked a dangerous legacy," wrote one Jewish commentator, noting that citing that verse "creates an unavoidable implication: The Jews are the reason for this horror. They are the children of the devil."[38] Ethan Schwartz, a Jewish scholar, wrote bluntly that the pope's letter was "a disaster for Jewish-Catholic relations."[39] Dr. Adam Gregerman,[40] a prominent Jewish scholar of Jewish-Catholic relations, noted that Francis's inclusion of John 8:44 "provoked widespread confusion and consternation among Jews and Catholics," calling it "inexplicable" in light of "the disturbingly high levels" of global antisemitism at that moment.[41]

It is difficult to regard the episode as a mere oversight. The citation reopened old wounds and seemed to "threaten the intellectual work of [Francis's] predecessors going back to the 1960s."[42] In other words, a single scriptural reference risked undermining decades of Catholic teaching that insisted the Jews remain beloved by God and must never again be dehumanized by Christian preaching.

All these reactions – from Israeli diplomats, rabbis, and Jewish dialogue partners – convey a common theme: a feeling that the Catholic response to Jewish trauma was, at times, too muted or equivocal. Critiques ranged from the diplomatic – such as that Francis's stance was seen as "positioning the Vatican" for mediation at the expense of calling terror by its name[43] – to the

theological – Francis's worldview was seen as so vehemently anti-war that he struggled to acknowledge the justice of Israel's defensive fight. In a pointed opinion essay titled "The Vatican Is Risking Its Relationship with the Jewish World," an Italian Jewish activist argued that "Pope Francis's refusal to firmly condemn Hamas as a terrorist group was a moral failure," contending that a clear condemnation "would demonstrate a serious commitment to combat antisemitism by action rather than vague ritual condemnations."[44] The same author noted that the Vatican still had not adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism – a definition that includes denying Israel's right to exist as a form of antisemitism – and quoted a Vatican official's dismissal of the need for it.[45] In the context of post-October 7 tensions, such omissions seemed glaring. Similarly, Dr. Gregerman's extensive analysis in Tablet magazine lamented that "Francis, with rare exceptions, ignores or minimizes the nature of the threats faced by Israel." Despite the openly stated genocidal aims of groups like Hamas, "he never acknowledges this as distinctly genocidal in intent."[46] Gregerman observed that Francis consistently speaks of war in general terms, judging it by its consequences (dead children, grieving mothers) rather than its causes.[47] This approach, Gregerman argues, "misrepresents the nature of the conflict and simplistically presents highly complex and nuanced situations in service of his a priori views on war in general."[48] In his critique, Pope Francis's laudable desire to move Catholic teaching toward a "just peace" theory leaves him offering "little practical or moral guidance in the present Israel-Hamas war."[49] Most pointedly, Gregerman concludes that Francis "has failed to consider the need for military self-defense or to assess whether antisemitic hatred of Jews…lies behind any of the aggression and rhetoric against Israel."[50] In other words, by treating the war as just another regrettable cycle of violence, Pope Francis did not believe that the October 7 massacre was fueled by the same eliminationist antisemitism that the Church today calls a "sin against God."

Examples of Attempts for Continuity and Reaffirmation of Dialogue

Alongside the strains in dialogue outlined above, various efforts emerged – albeit unevenly – to reaffirm the principles of solidarity, dialogue, and mutual respect that have marked post-Nostra Aetate engagement. These initiatives did not originate from a single authoritative center but were instead dispersed across a spectrum of actors: the Vatican, local Catholic institutions, and interfaith representatives. What follows is an examination of how these reaffirmation efforts unfolded in three key domains: formal statements from the Church leadership, grassroots actions within Catholic educational and pastoral settings, and institutional encounters between Jewish and Catholic leaders.

1. Belated but Symbolic Statements

As mentioned above, over 400 Jewish scholars and clergy, alarmed by the Vatican's measured response, sent an open letter to Pope Francis on November 12, 2023, urging him to "unequivocally condemn Hamas's terrorist massacre" – what they termed a "full-fledged pogrom" – and to draw a clear line between Hamas's actions and Israel's legitimate self-defense. They invoked *Nostra Aetate* to underscore Catholicism's moral duty to confront antisemitic tropes that resurface in the wake of such atrocities.

On February 2, 2024, Pope Francis replied in a letter to his "Jewish brothers and sisters in Israel," denouncing any form of Jew-hatred as "a sin against God." Rabbi Guy Alaluf, an Orthodox Israeli rabbi, described the letter as a significant moment in Jewish-Catholic relations: he highlighted the enduring friendship since Nostra Aetate, expressed appreciation for Francis's empathy toward the Jewish people, and urged readers to distinguish between political disagreements and the deeper continuity of interfaith relations. Alaluf acknowledged the pope's consistent concern for all victims while interpreting the letter as a reaffirmation of the bond between Jews and Catholics.[51] Others, however, noted that the letter did not explicitly name Hamas. Concern grew that Francis's rhetoric continued to frame Israel and Hamas in morally parallel terms.

2. Grassroots Catholic Efforts

At the grassroots level, some Catholic institutions – especially in the United States – did express support. Catholic universities condemned antisemitism, convened interfaith vigils, and offered pastoral care to Jewish students. These efforts were appreciated but often came across as islands of empathy in a sea of institutional disarray and equivocal language.[52] In contrast, the broader campus climate remains challenging. For instance, a survey by Hillel found that 83% of Jewish college students have experienced or witnessed antisemitism firsthand since the October 7 attack.[53]

This statistic underscores a persistent hostile environment on many campuses, where the sporadic supportive gestures of a few institutions stand in stark contrast with the everyday realities of discrimination faced by Jewish students. The survey's findings highlight that while certain universities make commendable efforts, the overall approach across Catholic – and even secular – campuses often fails to fully acknowledge or address the depth of trauma experienced by the Jewish community.

3. Institutional Encounters

The November 6, 2023 meeting between Pope Francis and the Conference of European Rabbis was symbolically important. But again, its content was tempered and guarded, emphasizing dialogue and Christian roots without confronting the catastrophe of October 7 head-on. Even as antisemitic demonstrations surged across Europe, Pope Francis failed to offer a robust denunciation of the theological and ideological antisemitism fueling these movements. Despite the reference to "shalom," Francis's language continued to prioritize peace as a metaphysical ideal rather than acknowledging the need to defeat those who glorify Jewish death. Many Jewish interlocutors were left with the sense that the Vatican was speaking in the wrong register – abstract, detached, and diplomatic – while the Jewish world was engulfed in existential anguish.[54]

At the same time, the Vatican's posture was not merely one of diplomatic restraint. It also reflected a moral critique of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, which leading Vatican figures and the pope himself repeatedly described

as potentially disproportionate and excessively harmful to civilians. Francis condemned Israeli airstrikes as "cruelty" and insisted that "terror should not justify terror,"[55] while calling for an immediate ceasefire and strict adherence to humanitarian law. Within the Vatican's universal moral framework, the suffering of Palestinian civilians demanded equal attention. Yet this attempt at moral balance often intensified Jewish frustration, since it appeared to place the massacre of October 7 and Israel's defensive war against Hamas within the same ethical frame.

Theological and Diplomatic Dimensions – A Jewish Perspective

The rupture in Catholic-Jewish relations following the October 7 Hamas attacks is not reducible to differing temperaments or rhetorical missteps. Rather, it has exposed deeper fault lines – structural, theological, and historical – that continue to shape the contours of this interreligious relationship. For many Jewish leaders, scholars, and lay observers, the Church's response revealed more than a failure of communication; it signaled an erosion of the moral and theological foundations painstakingly laid in the post-Vatican II era. Three interlocking concerns emerged with particular urgency: the Church's struggle to fully internalize the Jewish experience of historical trauma; a perceived dilution of the special theological bond between Jews and Catholics in favor of a broader universalist ecumenism; and a diplomatic posture that, in the face of targeted antisemitic violence, seemed – at least from the Jewish perspective – more committed to neutrality than to moral clarity. Yet another interpretation also emerged: that the issue was not simply one of diplomacy or rhetorical caution, but rather the perception that a substantive moral position had been adopted. What was articulated in universal ethical language – appeals to proportionality, restraint, and the protection of civilians – reflected a concrete judgment about the conflict and about Israel's role within it.

From this perspective, the tension did not primarily revolve around style, tone, or diplomatic balancing. Rather, it concerned the sense that the Church's response embodied a moral assessment that risked collapsing the distinction between an act of explicitly antisemitic violence and the subsequent military

campaign. The disagreement, therefore, was less about diplomacy than about the moral framework through which the events were interpreted and evaluated.

To understand the roots of this divergence, one must situate it within the broader theological framework that has shaped Catholic thinking since the mid-20th century. While the Catholic Church revolutionized its understanding of the Jewish people and Judaism through Nostra Aetate, it has never offered a parallel theological affirmation of the Jewish State. For the Vatican – and increasingly for mainline Protestant denominations – Zionism and the State of Israel are evaluated primarily through the lenses of liberation theology, postcolonial ethics, and universal human rights discourse. When Israel exercises military power, Catholic and progressive Christian leaders do not interpret these actions through a Jewish theological framework centered on covenantal survival or post-Holocaust vulnerability. Instead, they assess them through a Christian moral paradigm that instinctively privileges the marginalized and the stateless. Consequently, the Church's political critique of Israel and its solidarity with Palestinians are not perceived by Catholic leaders as a regression into anti-Judaism, but rather as a consistent and even necessary application of their contemporary theological commitments to justice. For many within the Jewish community, however, this same framework produces what feels like a deeply troubling moral equivalence – treating a sovereign democratic state engaged in what it understands as defensive warfare as ethically comparable to the intentional mass murder carried out by a recognized terrorist organization.

In what follows, I analyze three key dimensions of this crisis – historical memory, theological particularism, diplomatic restraint or moral criticism – to better understand both the sources of Jewish disillusionment and the challenges that now confront the future of Catholic-Jewish engagement.

1. Historical Trauma and Moral Universalism

From the outset, Jewish responses to the Hamas atrocities were shaped by a collective historical trauma. The comparisons to pogroms, to Kristallnacht, and to the Shoah were rooted in the lived memory of Jewish vulnerability and the ever-present possibility of antisemitic violence erupting once again.[56] For Jews, this was not one war among many – it was a targeted act of anti-Jewish

terror, a reminder of centuries of theological hatred, political scapegoating, and genocidal ideologies.

By contrast, the Catholic response – particularly from the Vatican – was widely seen by Jewish observers as unwilling or unable to acknowledge this specificity. Pope Francis's consistent references to "war as a defeat," to a "world war fought piecemeal," and to "innocent victims on both sides," felt to many Jews like an erasure of the asymmetry between a genocidal terror group and a sovereign nation defending its citizens. When the massacre of over 1,200 civilians, including children and Holocaust survivors, is quickly folded into generalized prayers for "peace in the Middle East," it signals a flattening of moral distinctions.

As Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni put it, universalist prayers can "become an alibi… for inappropriate equidistance."[57] For many in the Jewish community, the Vatican's desire to mourn "all innocent victims" risked becoming a form of moral relativism in the face of deliberate, ideological mass murder. The Church's failure to consistently and clearly name Hamas as a terrorist organization in public statements – even as it condemned violence – deepened this perception of ambiguity.

2. Theological Priorities and the Fraying of a "Particular and Singular" Bond

Since Nostra Aetate, the Catholic Church has affirmed a unique theological relationship with the Jewish people – calling Jews "elder brothers," recognizing the irrevocability of the covenant, and committing to oppose all forms of antisemitism. But in the eyes of many Jews, the post-October 7 period revealed a worrying erosion of these commitments in practice, even if not in doctrine.

Under Pope Francis, the Vatican emphasized a theology of universal fraternity, especially through documents like Fratelli Tutti.[58] While this vision of human solidarity is laudable, Jews have raised the alarm that it comes at the expense of the particularity of the Catholic-Jewish relationship. There is a growing perception that Judaism is being absorbed into a generalized ecumenism – that Jews are now merely one dialogue partner among many, rather than the spiritual family the Church considered them to be. Moreover, the Church's

universal language often left little room for the specific complexity in which the Jewish world found itself and was frequently experienced not as inclusive but as paradoxically exclusive toward Jews – as if proclaiming a universal fraternity that, in practice, seemed to leave Jews outside its embrace.

Francis's rhetorical posture during the war in Gaza – stressing neutrality, symmetry, and humanitarian concern – was seen by Jews not just as politically cautious, but as theologically evasive. The open letter from Jewish scholars and leaders made this concern explicit, urging Francis not to let "political neutrality" obscure the "spiritual love" that the Church has for the Jewish people.

From the Catholic perspective, however, the issue is framed differently. The political status of the State of Israel is not treated as a theological category in itself but rather approached through a post-Vatican II method that carefully distinguishes between biblical covenant and modern political sovereignty. The 2015 Vatican document The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable makes this explicit, stating that the existence and political choices of the State of Israel "are to be envisaged in a perspective which is not in itself theological."[59] In continuity with Nostra Aetate, which revolutionized Catholic teaching on the Jewish people without offering a theological endorsement of Zionism as a political project, the Church has deliberately avoided identifying any contemporary state or military enterprise with biblical covenantal promises.[60] This caution reflects a broader current in modern Catholic political theology, which resists sacralizing nation-states and instead evaluates them through the principles of Catholic social teaching.[61]

At the same time, under Pope Francis's leadership, Catholic interpretation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been shaped by a theological vision strongly influenced by global inequality and postcolonial awareness. In Fratelli Tutti, Francis consistently frames conflicts through the lens of structural injustice and the protection of the vulnerable, emphasizing the moral responsibility of the powerful toward those perceived as marginalized.[62] Scholars of his papacy, such as Massimo Faggioli and Austen Ivereigh, have noted that Francis's worldview – formed in the Latin American context – tends instinctively to interpret geopolitical crises through asymmetries of power and the plight of the stateless.[63] Within such a framework, Palestinians are often perceived as structurally vulnerable, while Israel appears as a militarily dominant, Western-

aligned state. Consequently, calls for a ceasefire, proportionality, and criticism of Israeli military conduct are not understood by Catholic leaders as betrayals of Catholic-Jewish reconciliation. Rather, they are presented as consistent applications of Catholic "just war" teaching and the Church's contemporary commitments to human rights, justice, and the defense of civilian life.[64]

3. Diplomatic Constraints vs. Moral Clarity

The diplomatic priorities of the Holy See – particularly in the Middle East – have long influenced its public positions on Israel. But in the post-October 7 context, many Jews see these priorities as morally compromised. The Vatican's refusal to name Hamas as a terrorist organization, its rapid calls for a ceasefire that, while including demands for the return of hostages, consistently paired these two demands together in a way that created a perceived moral equivalence, and its repeated focus on Gaza's humanitarian crisis without equal emphasis on Israeli trauma – all of these have been read by some Jewish observers as signs that the Church is more concerned with appeasing Muslim-majority states or preserving dialogue with Arab Christians than with defending Jewish life and dignity. In Israel, Pope Francis's perceived aloofness provoked not just disappointment, but fury. Senior officials accused him of "double standards" and "ignoring Hamas cruelty." Jewish thinkers, even those deeply committed to interfaith work, warned that the Church was risking its entire relationship with the Jewish world. The Chief Rabbi of Rome said publicly that Francis's approach was morally ambiguous.

At the same time, it can be argued that the tension did not stem from diplomacy alone, but from a deeper interpretive framework within parts of the Church regarding the nature of the war itself. This becomes evident in responses such as the open letter issued on December 21, 2023 by the Jesuit Institute of South Africa to Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein. The letter was written after Goldstein publicly rebuked Pope Francis, accusing him of denying Israel the moral right to self-defense and even comparing him to Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust. The Jesuit Institute's reply acknowledged Jewish anguish following October 7 and situated its response within the legacy of Catholic-Jewish reconciliation since Vatican II. It defended Francis by noting his public grief over the victims of the Hamas attacks, his meetings with families of hostages, and his

longstanding commitment to dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. At the same time, it highlighted incidents in Gaza – including the killing of civilians in a church compound and damage to Christian infrastructure – to underscore that the pope's concern extended to all innocent victims. The letter rejected comparisons between October 7 and the Holocaust as historically and morally inappropriate, defended Pius XII's record, and insisted on distinguishing antisemitism – unequivocally condemned – from political criticism of Israeli policy. It further called on religious leaders to oppose all forms of extremist violence, whether "jihadist," "crusader," or nationalist, and invoked a shared responsibility for tikkun olam (repairing the world). In closing, it reaffirmed its commitment to continued Jewish-Catholic cooperation.[65]

A second example is Fr. David Neuhaus's interpretation of the war not only as a response to October 7 but as a moment that exposed deeper structural and moral fractures within Israeli society and the broader conflict. In his view, the events shattered foundational Israeli assumptions – among them the belief in military invincibility and in the state as a guarantor of permanent Jewish security after centuries of persecution – while also intensifying internal societal divisions. He argues that the war has obscured longer-standing policies, particularly regarding the expansion of Israeli control in the West Bank and the restriction of the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel, suggesting that these developments represent continuations of pre-existing political trajectories rather than merely wartime measures. From this perspective, Israeli media narratives have emphasized national victimhood in ways that legitimize extensive military action in Gaza without adequately confronting Palestinian suffering. The conflict is thus understood not simply as Israel versus Hamas, but as a deeper struggle between Jewish Israeli and Palestinian national movements, rooted in historical forces that predate Hamas. Within this framework, he questions unconditional U.S. political support for Israel and stresses the need to distinguish between antisemitism and legitimate criticism of Israeli policy.[66]

Taken together, this exchange illustrates that the divergence reflected a substantive moral and theological interpretation of the conflict – one that framed the war primarily through the lens of universal humanitarian concern and interreligious ethics, rather than through the language of existential self-defense that characterized much of the Jewish response. Yet by situating

October 7 chiefly within broader structural and historical dynamics, this approach risks blurring the moral specificity of the massacre itself: an ideologically driven act of intentional, antisemitic violence targeting civilians. Such an approach may obscure the distinction between premeditated terror and a state's military response to it, however contested that response may be. In doing so, it underestimates the extent to which, for many Jews, the war is not reducible to power asymmetries or policy debates. It is experienced as a direct assault on Jewish existence and sovereignty, an assault that cannot be adequately interpreted without acknowledging its explicit genocidal intent.

Conclusion: A Fractured Trust – Jewish Disillusionment with the Church After October 7

The months following October 7, 2023, did not merely test Catholic-Jewish relations; they exposed their fragility. What Jewish communities around the world witnessed was an institution that, rather than acting as a steadfast ally, appeared rigidly committed to its own pacifist theology – a posture that clashed directly with Jewish expectations and left the Church seemingly paralyzed between its universalist commitments and the specific geopolitical realities of the crisis. The Vatican's response to the massacre – marked by silence, euphemism, and a desire for neutrality – was experienced by many Jews not as pastoral sensitivity but as a failure of moral leadership. At the same time, the Church consistently emphasized its solidarity with all victims of the conflict, presenting itself as standing on the side of human suffering rather than any particular political actor. For some observers, however, the problem was not only the Vatican's insistence on diplomatic neutrality but also what they perceived as an implicit critique within certain Church statements of the proportionality of Israel's military response, which further deepened Jewish frustration and the sense that the Church had not fully grasped the moral gravity of the attacks.

For decades, Catholic-Jewish dialogue was heralded as one of the great success stories of post–Vatican II theology and diplomacy. Nostra Aetate and the generations of leaders who built on it were supposed to have forged a bond of trust rooted in historical repentance and theological reconciliation. But when

that trust was most needed, it faltered. The sense of shared destiny gave way to a torrent of ambiguity.

Indeed, the events of late 2023 and early 2024 have revealed something deeper and more troubling: the limits of the Church's theological and emotional capacity to stand with Jews in the face of contemporary antisemitic violence, especially when that violence is entangled with political complexity. The Vatican's current moral vocabulary – shaped by postcolonial sympathies, pacifist tendencies, and a Global South orientation – has left it ill-equipped to address the reality of modern Jewish vulnerability. Moreover, the Church's universal rhetoric often failed to account for the specific historical and existential circumstances confronting the Jewish world. As a result, what was intended as an inclusive moral language was at times perceived by Jewish observers as paradoxically excluding them – articulating a vision of universal fraternity that, in practice, seemed unable to fully encompass the Jewish experience.

Yes, interfaith commissions remain in place. Statements have been issued. Meetings have been held. But these outward signs of continuity conceal an inner rupture. Jewish trust in the Catholic Church has been shaken – not because of disagreements over policy or theology, but because of a sense of abandonment at a moment of profound communal trauma.

The future of Catholic-Jewish dialogue remains uncertain. But Jews, as underlined in the letter addressed to the Pope, now have new expectations. There is no longer room for vague universalism or quiet diplomacy that often conceals deep criticism of Israel when Jewish lives are on the line. Solidarity must be swift, specific, and morally unambiguous. Jewish interlocutors will continue to engage, but many will do so with a newly sober realism: decades of interfaith progress, however valuable, do not guarantee clear and strong condemnations in times of need.

The wounds left by October 7 may heal over time, but the questions it raised – for Jews – about the limits of Christian empathy, the persistence of theological asymmetry, and the sincerity of institutional friendship will not soon be forgotten. Consequently, the relationship between Jews and Christians, once believed to be incredibly positive, now stands on unsteady ground.

As the Catholic Church enters a new papal era, the future of Jewish-Catholic relations remains somewhat uncertain. The rupture that followed the events of October 7 exposed the fragility of the trust that interfaith dialogue had carefully built over decades, leaving open the question of how the next pontificate will navigate this moment. Much will depend on whether Pope Leo XIV – long known for his commitment to interreligious engagement – will reaffirm with renewed clarity the moral and theological principles set forth in Nostra Aetate.

The present moment evokes both hope and apprehension. The challenge for the new papal leadership will be to demonstrate that universal compassion need not come at the expense of historical responsibility. It will require articulating a moral vision that is capable of acknowledging the particular historical vulnerability of the Jewish people and the security concerns of the Jewish state, while also maintaining space for ethical reflection and even criticism of specific policies. In other words, the task will be to move beyond a framework that treats all wars simply as moral failures, toward one that can recognize the tragic necessity of self-defense while still upholding the ethical demands of restraint and accountability.

Although these developments are directly relevant to the broader landscape of Jewish-Christian dialogue, they fall outside the scope of this paper, which was completed prior to the transition in the papacy. Given the continually evolving nature of these events, a comprehensive analysis of this new phase cannot be offered here.

Jewish and American Evangelical Interfaith Relations

American Evangelical Christians have long had a complex and evolving relationship with the Jewish people. In the United States, this relationship has oscillated between efforts to convert Jews on the one hand,[67] and alliances to support Jewish welfare and the State of Israel on the other.[68] Understanding how Evangelicals approach interfaith dialogue with Jews requires examining historical attitudes, theological frameworks, and recent events. This chapter analyzes American Evangelical approaches to Jewish-Christian engagement before and after October 7, 2023, covering the historical context, theological underpinnings, the immediate impact of the crisis, shifts in interfaith practice, key controversies, and future prospects.

Historical Context

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, American Evangelical attitudes toward Jews were dominated by missionary zeal rooted in supersessionist theology. Jews were primarily viewed as targets for conversion, not as partners in dialogue. Organizations like the American Board of Missions to the Jews during the 1930s and 1940s, the largest Christian mission proselytizing to Jews in America, epitomized this paternalistic approach.[69] While negative stereotypes were common, many Evangelicals held a philo-Semitic view that revered Jews as Jesus's people, fostering a paradoxical mix of respect and evangelistic intent.

The Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 marked a turning point. While mainline Protestants and Catholics began formal interfaith dialogue and renounced antisemitism and supersessionism, Evangelicals were slower to join.[70] However, Israel's founding resonated deeply with Evangelical premillennial theology, which interpreted Jewish return to the land as a sign of Christ's imminent return.

By the late 1960s and 1970s, Evangelicals began forging more direct ties with Jewish communities. Hal Lindsey's bestselling The Late Great Planet Earth (1970) portrayed the establishment of Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and interpreted the Six-Day War as evidence that the generation that witnessed Israel becoming a nation would not pass away before the end time.[71] Institutional engagement soon followed. In 1969, Southern Baptist theologians held a formal dialogue with Jewish leaders, marking one of the first structured encounters between Evangelical and Jewish representatives.[72] In 1971, Israel recognized the potential of Evangelical support by inviting 1,500 American pastors to Jerusalem, an event charged with messianic fervor.[73] These early gestures led to growing cooperation between Evangelicals and Israeli leaders.

The 1980s saw the institutionalization of Evangelical-Jewish alliances. Reverend Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority group prioritized support for Israel,[74] and Evangelical leaders like Pat Robertson built close relationships with Israeli officials.[75] Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein's 1983 founding of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ) aimed at mobilizing Evangelical support for Jewish causes. Events like "Nights to Honor Israel" and Evangelical-led tours of Israel became commonplace, reflecting increasing theological respect for Judaism.

Evangelicals gradually joined the interfaith dialogue pioneered by liberal Protestants and Jews. In 1975, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) hosted a key consultation with Evangelicals, leading to regional dialogues in cities such as Philadelphia and Los Angeles.76 Evangelical seminaries began offering courses on Jewish history and Holocaust studies and invited rabbis to speak on campus.[77] These shifts signaled growing theological recognition of Judaism's enduring value.

Organizations such as the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel[78] and the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism[79] emerged to formalize these relationships. While many Evangelicals maintained a desire to evangelize Jews, they increasingly sought to do so respectfully. Influential figures like Billy Graham distanced themselves from targeted Jewish proselytism,[80] while others, like John Hagee, built massive pro-Israel platforms through organizations like Christians United for Israel (CUFI).[81]

Still, tensions remained. The Southern Baptist Convention's 1996 resolution calling for renewed Jewish evangelism and similar initiatives sparked outrage from Jewish leaders.[82] Critics accused Evangelicals of cloaking conversion agendas in friendship. These incidents led some Evangelicals to recalibrate, affirming both their faith commitments and a desire for respectful dialogue.

By the dawn of the 21st century, American Evangelical-Jewish relations had evolved into a delicate combination of partnership and persuasion. Evangelicals were among Israel's staunchest political allies and had made strides in condemning antisemitism, educating themselves about Judaism, and expressing repentance for past Christian persecutions of Jews. At the same time, deep theological differences remained, and mutual suspicions lingered beneath the surface of an outward alliance. This historical background set the stage for how Evangelicals would engage with Jews in the decades to come – and how they would react when new crises, like October 7 and its aftermath, would put that relationship to the test.

Evangelical Theology and the Jewish "Other"

Evangelical perspectives on Jews and Judaism are deeply influenced by theological frameworks that shape their approaches to interfaith engagement, support for Israel, and views on Jewish salvation. Key theological models include supersessionism, covenant theology, dispensationalism, and dual-covenant theology.

Supersessionism (Replacement Theology): Historically, many Christian traditions, including some Evangelicals, embraced supersessionism – the belief that the Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. This view posits that the covenants and promises given to Israel are now fulfilled in the Christian Church, rendering Judaism obsolete. Such theology contributed to negative attitudes toward Jews, viewing their adherence to the Torah as misguided.83 While many Evangelicals today reject overt supersessionism, its influence persists subtly in some circles. Post-Holocaust reflection led some Evangelical institutions, like the Southern Baptist Convention, to denounce antisemitism and affirm God's enduring love for the Jewish people, even while maintaining the belief that salvation is through Christ alone.[84]

Covenant Theology: Predominant in Reformed and Presbyterian Evangelical circles, covenant theology interprets God's covenants (with figures like Abraham, Moses, and David) as culminating in the "new covenant" through Jesus Christ, uniting Jews and Gentiles in the Church. This framework often aligns with a mild form of supersessionism, viewing the Church as the continuation of Israel. While covenant theologians believe Jews can be saved, they assert this occurs through faith in Christ, not via a separate covenant. Consequently, they may support Israel for political or moral reasons but typically do not see the modern State of Israel as theologically mandated. In interfaith contexts, covenant theologians emphasize shared values and ethical cooperation, while still hoping for Jewish conversion over time. [85]

Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism:[86] Emerging in the 19th century and gaining prominence in American Evangelicalism by the mid-20th century, dispensationalism teaches that God has distinct plans for Israel and the Church across different historical "dispensations." Unlike supersessionism, it maintains that the Jewish people remain God's chosen nation in an earthly sense, with biblical promises to Israel to be literally fulfilled. This theology underpins Christian Zionism – the belief that Christians should support the Jewish people's return to, and sovereignty over, the Holy Land as part of God's plan. Dispensationalist Evangelicals often interpret current events in Israel as fulfilling biblical prophecy, fostering strong political support for Israel and combating anti-Israel sentiment. They often interpret current events in light of apocalyptic prophecies – for instance, viewing conflicts in Israel as setting the stage for the Second Coming of Christ. While critics allege that dispensationalist support for Israel is self-serving (aimed at hastening the End Times), many Evangelicals insist their support is rooted in gratitude and biblical mandate, not an ulterior doomsday plot.[87]

Dual-Covenant Theology: A minority view among some Evangelicals suggests that Jews have their own valid covenant with God through the Torah, which provides a path to salvation independent of Christ. While not widely accepted, this perspective has been considered by figures like Rev. John Hagee, who at one point implied that Jesus came as Messiah "only to the Gentiles."88 Hagee later clarified his belief that all people, including Jews, need Christ, but he advises against aggressive proselytization of Jews to maintain trust. The dominant

Evangelical stance remains that sharing the Gospel with Jews is an act of love, not intolerance. However, Evangelicals recognize the delicate balance between evangelism and respect in interfaith dialogues.[89]

Judaism and the Jewish People: Evangelicals hold varied views on the spiritual status of Jews. Many express a strong affinity for the Hebrew Scriptures and acknowledge a special bond with the "People of the Book." Romans 11:28–29, where Paul refers to Jews as "beloved for the sake of the patriarchs," underpins a respect for Jewish heritage. Evangelicals often see Jews as familial – "elder brothers and sisters in faith" – who have not yet recognized Jesus as the Messiah. This perspective fosters both warmth and the desire for Jewish conversion. Evangelicals feel called to stand with Jews against hatred and support their flourishing, believing in God's promise to bless those who bless Israel.[90] Simultaneously, they remain committed to the Great Commission to "make disciples of all nations," including Jews.

These theological frameworks significantly influence Evangelical-Jewish interfaith relations. An Evangelical with supersessionist views may engage in dialogue aiming to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish hopes, while a dispensationalist may offer unconditional support for Israel's political agenda. Christian Zionists might initiate friendships by inviting Jewish neighbors to events like "Night to Honor Israel," whereas traditional evangelists might invite them to Bible study sessions on Messianic prophecies. Theology shapes the language Evangelicals use about Jews, with phrases like "God's chosen people" and "the lost sheep of Israel" carrying significant theological weight.

Notably, Evangelical theology is evolving. In recent decades, there has been increased reflection on problematic aspects of earlier views. Many Evangelical scholars now repudiate "hard supersessionism" as unbiblical and harmful, emphasizing that God's covenantal love for Israel remains. Organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals have issued statements condemning antisemitism and acknowledging the Church's debt to the Jewish people.[91] There's also greater openness to learning about Judaism on its own terms, with Evangelicals involved in dialogue studying rabbinic texts and celebrating Jewish holidays in educational contexts. Nonetheless, the fundamental Evangelical conviction is that the ultimate fulfillment of

Judaism is found in Jesus Christ. Whether this belief is held in the background or emphasized in interfaith settings varies among Evangelicals and remains a central factor in Evangelical-Jewish relations.

October 7 and Its Impact

The October 7 Hamas onslaught represents an inflection point in Evangelical-Jewish relations, prompting significant shifts in American Evangelical discourse, advocacy, and interfaith solidarity. This analysis investigates how Evangelicals in the United States interpreted the attack and translated their theological and ethical convictions into immediate action, such as organized advocacy efforts, symbolic gestures, humanitarian initiatives, and internal debates.

1. Immediate Reactions in the U.S.

Right after October 7, American Evangelical Christians sprang into action as vocal allies of the Jewish community. Leading Evangelical voices and organizations were quick to respond with statements of support for Israel and the Jewish people. For example, within days, prominent pastors and Christian media were describing the attack as "satanic" and urging prayer for Israel's deliverance.[92] Pastor Jared Wellman's declaration was typical: "Neutrality isn't an option… [the Hamas attacks] were conceived in the darkest pits of Hell."[93]

2. Organized Evangelical Responses

Perhaps the most striking show of Evangelical support came in an organized form: joint public statements and letters. Within four days of the attack, more than 2,000 Evangelical leaders – including numerous seminary presidents and megachurch pastors – had signed onto the Southern Baptist Convention's "Evangelical statement in Support of Israel."[94] This statement, remarkable for its swift and broad backing, expressed profound solidarity with Israel. It opened by praying for "the peace of all the people of Israel and Palestine," but unequivocally affirmed Israel's right – even obligation – to defend its citizens. "In keeping with Christian Just War tradition," the leaders wrote, "we… affirm the legitimacy of Israel's right to respond against those who have initiated these attacks," citing Romans 13 as granting governments the power to "bear the

sword" against evil-doers.[95] Evangelicals grounded Israel's military response in a Christian ethical framework, arguing that fighting Hamas was a morally just act to restore peace and justice. The statement also referred to the long history of antisemitism against the Jewish people, implicitly positioning the Hamas massacre as part of that tragic pattern and rallying Christians to stand against it.

Evangelical political advocacy groups took concrete steps as well. The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention led efforts to influence U.S. policy. It helped coordinate a letter from evangelical leaders to President Biden and Congress, urging "unequivocal support" for Israel and referencing the justice of its cause.[96] In combining moral reasoning (Just War theory) with political lobbying, Evangelicals signaled that their backing of Israel was not merely sentimental but grounded in deep-seated principles.

On November 14, 2023, in Washington, D.C., a massive pro-Israel rally drew an estimated 250,000 people – predominantly Jewish but with a notable contingent of Christian supporters. Tellingly, the only non-Jewish speaker invited on stage was Rev. John Hagee of CUFI, reflecting the Jewish organizers' acknowledgment of Evangelicals as important allies. Hagee's rally address, delivered in his stentorian preacher's cadence, was a symbolic high point of Evangelical-Jewish solidarity. "There is no middle ground in this conflict. You're either for the Jewish people or you're not… Israel is the apple of God's eye," he proclaimed to loud cheers. He then led the crowd in chants of "Israel lives! Israel lives! Israel lives!" and assured Israelis, "you are not alone!"[97] Such moments cemented the sense that, in this crisis, American Evangelicals and Jews were marching in lockstep in the public square.

3. Solidarity Visits and Humanitarian Collaboration

One striking development has been the organization of solidarity trips to Israel. Both Jewish and Christian groups have long run organized tours to the Holy Land, but now there was a new urgency and focus. Within a couple of months of the attack, separate but parallel solidarity delegations of Jews and Evangelicals traveled to Israel – often crossing paths at sites of tragedy. Evangelical groups, sometimes in partnership with Israeli or Jewish organizations, visited burned kibbutzim and the site of the Nova music festival massacre to bear witness and

bring comfort. In December 2023, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee (an Evangelical leader who at the time of this writing is the U.S. Ambassador to the State of Israel) led a delegation of American Evangelical pastors to southern Israel. They met survivors, prayed at the attack sites, and even rolled up their sleeves to help Israeli farmers harvest crops in areas Thai and Filipino foreign workers had evacuated due to the war.[98] In December 2023, a visibly moved Huckabee stated: "I leave [Israel] … grieving for the pain, the hurt, the unimaginable horror. But I also leave here with an extraordinary resolve to more than ever stand with Israel." [99] Widely circulated in Christian media, this quote encapsulated how these visits strengthened Evangelical commitment.

Humanitarian cooperation also increased. Evangelical NGOs like Samaritan's Purse and World Vision, an evangelical-founded relief agency, coordinated with Israeli hospitals and charities to deliver medical supplies and trauma counseling resources after the attack.[100] The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (which has a foot in both communities and draws strong support from Evangelical Christians) reported that from October 7 through the end of 2023, it provided over $19 million in emergency aid to hundreds of thousands of Israelis affected by the war.[101] These funds, raised largely from Christian donors, went toward protective gear for first responders, shelter for displaced families, and support for victim rehabilitation. "Hundreds of thousands of donors… millions of Christians around the world continue to stand with Israel and the Jewish people." [102]

4. Navigating Tensions Post-October 7

Despite many positive developments, Evangelical-Jewish relations were not without tensions in the post-attack period. Some of these arose from differing perspectives on the ensuing Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. While Evangelical public support for Israel remained "unequivocal" in principle, there were internal debates about how to balance justice and mercy. A segment of Evangelicals (mostly younger or more globally minded) expressed concern for Palestinian civilians caught in the war. [103] When Christianity Today – a leading Evangelical magazine – ran articles acknowledging Palestinian suffering and urging restraint alongside support for Israel, a group of hardline Evangelical leaders lambasted the magazine for being insufficiently pro-Israel.[104]

This controversy illustrates a broader internal struggle within the Evangelical world – one that Jewish partners often overlook. Evangelical leaders who advocate for Israel are not simply maintaining a political alliance; they are also navigating a significant theological and generational debate within their own communities. As younger Evangelicals increasingly interpret global conflicts through the prism of social justice and human rights, many are pressing their leaders to address Palestinian suffering and the moral complexities surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this context, Evangelical pastors who publish open letters supporting Israel or who engage in public dialogue with Jewish partners are sometimes doing so at considerable institutional risk, pushing back against a rising tide of pro-Palestinian sentiment among their own congregants**.**

On the whole, the aftermath of October 7 has deepened Evangelical-Jewish engagement. Relationships that previously centered on political support for Israel have broadened to include communal spaces for sharing grief and hands-on cooperation. Evangelicals have, in many cases, earned greater Jewish gratitude for "showing up" in a moment of trauma. For Evangelicals, the crisis reaffirmed their theological commitments to stand with Israel and also taught them more about Jewish-Israeli lived experience and vulnerability.

Future Outlook: The Path Forward for Evangelical-Jewish Interfaith Relations

The future of Evangelical-Jewish interfaith relations rests on a dynamic interplay of theology, demography, global politics, and mutual trust. October 7 served as a watershed moment, prompting Evangelical communities to reaffirm their solidarity with Jews worldwide. This crisis cemented certain bonds, but it also highlighted tensions, generational shifts, and theological differences that must be addressed for the relationship to thrive in the long term. Sustaining this alliance will require a renewed interfaith framework grounded in education, empathy, and candid engagement.

A key concern is the changing landscape within Evangelicalism itself. There has been a marked decline in automatic, unequivocal support for Israel among young Evangelicals. Between 2015 and 2021, surveys revealed a dramatic drop in the proportion of Evangelicals under 30 who support Israel, alongside a notable rise

in those who sympathize with Palestinians or prefer neutrality. This trend reflects broader generational shifts: younger Christians are more attuned to social justice narratives critical of nationalism and shaped by media coverage that often highlights Palestinian suffering. Many also prioritize domestic concerns over foreign policy. [105] [106]

Additionally, a growing segment of the Evangelical community – currently 29% – comprises racial and ethnic minorities, with Black and Latino individuals accounting for 19% and 10%, respectively. These groups tend to hold more liberal views on various issues and show significantly less support for Israel.[107]

This demographic shift is driven by a theological realignment. Many younger Christians, as well as Black and Latino Evangelicals, increasingly read biblical texts through the lens of liberation theology and social justice, identifying with the Palestinians as an occupied or marginalized population. This explains their distancing from traditional Christian Zionism.

This generational shift challenges long-standing Jewish assumptions of Evangelical backing. The Jewish community – accustomed to robust support from older Evangelical leaders – must now contend with a more ambivalent future. However, this transition also offers opportunities. Both Jewish and Evangelical leaders are proactively engaging younger people. Evangelical organizations such as Eagles' Wings have begun organizing educational trips to Israel for emerging Christian leaders, offering firsthand exposure to Israel's complexities.[108] These experiences aim to foster informed, empathetic, and lasting bonds rooted in shared values like religious freedom and opposition to terrorism.[109]

Jewish organizations are urged not to take Evangelical support for granted. Articles in eJewishPhilanthropy and other Jewish media outlets have encouraged Jewish institutions to approach Evangelicals with seriousness and appreciation, shedding stereotypes of purely apocalyptic motivations. Instead, Jews are called to partner meaningfully with Evangelicals – inviting them to Israel, engaging in shared humanitarian efforts, and facilitating youth dialogue on mutual concerns like religious liberty, antisemitism, and global peace. [110]

Jewish-Muslim Interfaith Relations

Unlike the well-documented evolution of Jewish-Christian relations following Nostra Aetate, there has been no similar watershed moment that transformed Jewish-Muslim understanding. Instead, engagement between these two communities has developed gradually through civil society initiatives. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent global conflicts, Jewish and Muslim groups across various diasporas identified common interests in countering hate, sharing minority experiences, and fostering cooperation.[111] Interfaith initiatives have occurred on four different levels: (1) Theological Dialogue; (2) Political Cooperation; (3) Educational Dialogue; (4) Civil Society Initiatives.

Theological Dialogue between Muslims and Jews

Addressing Commonalities and Differences

In the wake of 9/11, theological dialogue between Jewish and Muslim leaders gained new impetus as a tool to dispel misconceptions and emphasize shared values. At high-profile conferences and in intimate study sessions alike, rabbis and imams have explored the similarities between their traditions – for instance, a mutual belief in one God, analogous dietary laws (halal and kosher), and overlapping ethical teachings – while also candidly acknowledging doctrinal differences. A landmark series of meetings, held under the auspices of the World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace, first convened in 2005 with religious leaders from 43 countries.[112] At its 2006 gathering in Seville, participants jointly declared that "contrary to widespread misrepresentation, there is no inherent conflict between Islam and Judaism," affirming that the two religions "share the most fundamental values of faith in the One Almighty… merciful, compassionate and just," even if modern geopolitics has negatively impacted their relationship.[113]

At the same time, these dialogues did not shy away from points of theological tension. A powerful illustration came from Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama,

the world's largest Muslim organization. In 2018, its chairman, Yahya Cholil Staquf, speaking to a global Jewish audience, acknowledged that "we have to acknowledge there are problems in the relationship between Islam and Judaism [today]. And some of the problems live within the teachings of the religion itself." He argued that it is not only possible but essential to reinterpret religious texts that foment hatred: "every verse of [the] Quran was revealed in a certain context… when reality changed, then the interpretation… needs to be changed also," Staquf said, calling on Muslims to re-examine anti-Jewish interpretations in light of current realities.[114]

Leadership and Institutions

Prominent religious figures have often led these theological bridge-building efforts. In Israel, Rabbi Michael Melchior spearheaded a "Religious Peace Initiative" that convened influential rabbis, imams, and Christian clergy for intensive discussions.[115] Beginning with the Alexandria Summit of 2002,[116] at the height of the Second Intifada, Melchior and Muslim counterparts (including Palestinian and Egyptian clerics) issued a joint declaration condemning violence in God's name and affirming the sanctity of the Holy Land for all faiths.[117] Over the next two decades, Melchior's coalition moved beyond dialogue into peacemaking – meeting quietly to defuse flashpoints in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as tensions around Jerusalem holy sites, even preventing some crises from escalating into violence.[118] Such examples show religious leaders directly applying theological solidarity to contemporary conflicts. They argue that faith can be a solution rather than a cause of strife.[119] Similarly, institutions like the Elijah Interfaith Institute[120] and think tanks affiliated with seminaries have brought together rabbis and imams for scriptural reasoning sessions – studying each other's holy texts – as a way to deepen understanding.[121] These forums often stress that, in theological terms, Jews and Muslims have more that unites them than divides them.

Political Cooperation and Advocacy

Joint Efforts in the Public Sphere

Beyond theology, Jewish and Muslim communities have increasingly found common cause in the political arena, collaborating to defend shared interests and minority rights. In several Western democracies where both groups are religious minorities, Jewish and Muslim leaders have banded together to lobby governments on issues such as religious freedom, anti-discrimination laws, and immigration policy. For instance, across Europe, proposals to ban circumcision or ritual animal slaughter (central rituals in Judaism and Islam alike) have galvanized joint advocacy. In 2012, the European Jewish Congress and the Great Mosque of Paris co-hosted a gathering of Jewish and Muslim leaders from 18 countries to strategize against such prohibitions.[122]

In the United States, a milestone in Muslim-Jewish political cooperation was the establishment of the Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council (MJAC) in 2016.[123] Co-convened by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), MJAC brings together dozens of Muslim and Jewish American leaders – including businesspeople, scholars, and former public officials – to advocate on issues of common concern.[124] The council's agenda has focused on combating hate crimes and promoting a positive image of religious minorities in the U.S. political discourse.[125] For example, MJAC members jointly lobbied for the passage of the federal NO HATE Act, aimed at improving hate-crime reporting and supporting victims, and they have stood together against both anti-Muslim bigotry and antisemitism.[126]

Bridging Geopolitical Divides

Political cooperation has also advanced – cautiously – in the Middle East, where it intersects with diplomatic developments. A noteworthy breakthrough came with the 2020 Abraham Accords, in which Israel normalized relations with several Muslim-majority states (the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan). While these accords were state-driven agreements, they opened space for interfaith exchange by officially ending decades of boycotts and enmity. Almost immediately, symbolic gestures followed: the United Arab Emirates hosted delegations of rabbis and opened new synagogues,[127] and Bahrain's king invited

Jewish and Muslim leaders to a regional dialogue forum.[128] These moves often carried interfaith overtones. In 2022, for example, Bahrain convened a "Dialogue Forum: East and West for Human Coexistence" under royal patronage, featuring the participation of the Muslim Council of Elders alongside rabbis and even the pope – a clear signal that Muslim-majority countries newly at peace with Israel were ready to promote broader Muslim-Jewish understanding.[129]

Educational Initiatives and Dialogue Programs

Interfaith Education and Youth Engagement

Education has been another arena for improving Jewish-Muslim relations. In the post-9/11 period, some initiatives have aimed to increase religious literacy and interpersonal contact, especially among younger generations. For example, the Woolf Institute in Cambridge (UK) offers an online course titled "Bridging the Great Divide: The Jewish-Muslim Encounter," covering topics from medieval philosophy to contemporary conflicts.[130]

Beyond classrooms, youth dialogue and leadership programs have also developed. One prominent model comprises camp and exchange programs that bring together Jewish and Muslim (often Israeli and Arab or diaspora) youth for intensive encounters. Since the 1990s, Seeds of Peace in the United States has famously hosted teens from conflict regions – including Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Muslim youths – at a summer camp in Maine, using facilitated dialogue to humanize the "other side."[131] Similarly, in Europe, a variety of interfaith networks have worked to bridge communal divides and promote mutual understanding, including organizations like Religions for Peace Europe and the Interfaith Network UK.

Community and Professional Training

In North America, a notable example of interfaith education is NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change based in Los Angeles. NewGround runs a professional fellowship and a high school leadership council (called MAJIC – Muslims and Jews Inspiring Change), which equips cohorts of Jews and Muslims with dialogue skills and conflict resolution tools. The high school program in particular offers students a chance to learn communication techniques, share

personal stories, and build projects together. It "offers a select group of Muslim and Jewish high school students the opportunity to build communication skills and conflict literacy, create lasting relationships across faith boundaries and impact the climate of community relations in Los Angeles and beyond."[132] Over an academic year, these teens study each other's traditions, engage in difficult conversations about current events, and collaborate on a service project for the wider community. In so doing, they learn to address differences openly and find common ground in civic engagement. NewGround's model has been lauded for empowering youth to become interfaith ambassadors. Similar programs have emerged elsewhere – for instance, in the UK, the Three Faiths Forum (now called Faith & Belief Forum) runs projects for Jewish and Muslim university or school students.

Challenges in Educational Outreach

While these initiatives might have achieved much on an interpersonal level, they face limitations. One challenge is scale – many programs reach a relatively small number of self-selecting individuals (often educated, urban, and already open-minded), raising the question of how to impart their lessons to the wider communities. Another challenge is navigating contentious current events in educational settings.

Civil Society Partnerships and Grassroots Initiatives

Community Solidarity and Service

At the grassroots level, Jewish and Muslim activists and organizations have forged partnerships through social and civic projects. One striking form this has taken is joint community service – coming together to do good works for society at large. In the late 2000s, the New York-based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) launched an annual "Season of Twinning," pairing dozens of synagogues with mosques around the world. On a designated weekend, each Jewish and Muslim congregation would host or visit the other for dialogues and joint volunteer activities.[133] In the first year alone, 50 synagogues and 50 mosques across the United States participated.[134] Schneier acknowledged

that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is "the elephant in the room" during such encounters, but he has also observed a "moderate, centrist" voice emerging among Muslim participants, especially in Western countries, eager to focus on common values and not let distant conflicts derail local relationships.[135]

The UK provides a prominent example of grassroots partnership through Mitzvah Day and Sadaqa Day – parallel days of service pioneered by Jewish and Muslim women leaders. Mitzvah Day, a long-running Jewish-led day of volunteering each November, inspired the creation of Sadaqa Day (sadaqa meaning charitable giving in Arabic) as a Muslim-led day of social action each spring. Rather than operate in isolation, the two initiatives collaborate: volunteers from both communities join each other's projects, doubling the impact and camaraderie. In 2017, a record number of British Jews took part in Sadaqa Day events, and Muslims likewise joined en masse in Mitzvah Day activities.[136]

Women and Interfaith Solidarity

Women have played a special role in grassroots Jewish-Muslim engagement. Notably, the UK's Nisa-Nashim network (its name is a combination of the Arabic and Hebrew words for "women") has connected hundreds of Muslim and Jewish women in chapters around the country. Founded in 2015 by Laura Marks (Jewish) and Julie Siddiqi (Muslim), Nisa-Nashim aims to "bring Jewish and Muslim women together to inspire and lead social change."[137] It facilitates everything from book clubs and holiday celebrations to discussions on difficult topics like antisemitism, Israel-Palestine, and gender roles in religion. In addition, women-led grassroots efforts – such as the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, which links Jewish and Muslim women across North America – have gained momentum in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and mutual support.[138]

Of course, civil society efforts face their own limitations. Grassroots dialogue and volunteering can be very effective in cities with sizable, well-organized Jewish and Muslim populations. But in regions where one community is tiny or absent, such initiatives are harder to implement. Additionally, not everyone in either community embraces these outreach efforts; there are voices on both sides who remain suspicious, feeling that cooperation might paper over serious disagreements on international issues.

By 2023, Jewish-Muslim dialogue had produced modest but meaningful gains: joint community service, fellowship programs, and occasional high-profile conferences. Yet it lacked the depth and theological rapprochement that characterized Jewish-Christian relations. Most dialogues focused on cultural understanding and interpersonal friendship, often avoiding the subject of Israel-Palestine to prevent contention. While this pragmatic approach cultivated goodwill, it left unresolved the fundamental issues that could flare into rifts when tensions over Israel resurfaced.

Impact of the October 7 War

The Israel-Hamas war that erupted on October 7, 2023, has exerted a complex and often contradictory impact on interfaith relations with Muslims. On the one hand, it intensified tensions, deepened mistrust, and disrupted longstanding channels of dialogue between Jewish and Muslim communities. On the other hand, it also prompted notable – if limited – expressions of solidarity and moral courage from individual religious leaders. A survey of public discourse and media coverage reveals that the immediate aftermath of the attacks witnessed a marked deterioration in Muslim-Jewish engagement, particularly in Western contexts where such dialogue had previously made significant inroads.

This section examines five defining characteristics of Jewish-Muslim dialogue in the post-October 7 context: (1) heightened intercommunal tensions and a chilling effect on existing dialogue; (2) institutional silence, withdrawal, or failure to respond effectively; (3) the persistence of certain dialogue efforts grounded not in political agreement, but in personal relationships and shared ethical commitments; (4) mutual solidarity against hate crimes; and (5) local leadership and practical cooperation in Israel.

1. Heightened Tensions and a Chilling Effect on Existing Dialogue

The Associated Press reported that the war's "polarizing reverberations in America" were "straining some Muslim-Jewish interfaith relationships in the U.S.," as long-established dialogue groups found themselves at odds over the conflict's moral questions.[139] A Moment Magazine feature similarly characterized interfaith work as reaching a "crisis point," citing both the Israeli-

American author Yossi Klein Halevi and Imam Saffet Catovic. Halevi observed a collapse of trust between Jewish and Muslim leaders, while Catovic – reflecting on the support that American Jews once provided to Bosnian Muslims – remarked that many believed this conflict-driven tension would quickly fade, yet it did not.[140] Halevi and Imam Catovic's assessments are emblematic of many observers: in the wake of the Hamas attack and the ensuing Gaza war, Jews and Muslims who normally collaborated faced a new wave of anger, fear, and mutual grievance that threatened to unravel years of bridge-building.

Across the globe, Jewish leaders looked to their Muslim counterparts for explicit solidarity or condemnation. When these responses were not forthcoming, existing interfaith initiatives frequently stalled. In the United States, for instance, the "Andalus Project," a planned Jewish-Muslim pilgrimage to Spain and Morocco, was canceled. Imam Catovic, who helped organize the trip, and Rabbi David Straus of the National Council of Synagogues both described the undertaking as "very difficult" in the face of the ongoing conflict. They lamented the "damage" inflicted on relationships built over many years.[141] According to the same report, the events in Israel "overshadowed some interfaith efforts that had been years in development."[142] Established dialogue practices were put on pause, replaced by growing anxiety. Catovic spoke of "a cooling" in relations; although he still perceived a desire to engage, he emphasized that the old ways of interacting "can't be the 'same old, same old'" after such a rupture. Rabbi Straus agreed that if interfaith work was already challenging, it had become far more difficult in light of the war.

In addition, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, who had pioneered Muslim-Jewish dialogue, was unsettled by social media slogans advocating for Israel's elimination. He noted that Hamas's question – "Does Israel have the right to exist?" – received a troubling "No" from many individuals, prompting him to disengage from certain outreach efforts.[143] These accounts reflected a widespread concern among Jewish leaders about whether their long-term Muslim partners fully condemned the atrocities.

At the same time, understanding the strain on these relationships requires acknowledging the immense pressure and trauma experienced by Muslim dialogue participants as well. While Jewish leaders expected immediate and

unequivocal condemnations of the October 7 attacks, Muslim leaders were quickly confronted with the rapidly rising Palestinian civilian death toll and the catastrophic destruction in Gaza. Within many Muslim communities, issuing a standalone condemnation of Hamas without simultaneously condemning Israel's military response was seen as morally unacceptable and potentially alienating to congregants who were closely following the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. In addition, Muslim leaders operating in both Western and Middle Eastern contexts faced significant internal pressures: maintaining dialogue with Jewish partners identified with Zionism could expose them to accusations of "normalization" or betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Yet it is also important to note that these tensions began to surface even before Israel's military campaign was fully underway. On October 7 itself – while the attacks were still unfolding – many Jewish interlocutors perceived a lack of visible public solidarity from Muslim partners.

2. Institutional Failures

In the United Kingdom, the prominent umbrella group known as the Inter Faith Network (IFN) essentially collapsed after refusing to condemn the Hamas attacks. The IFN declined to issue a statement regarding the killings. A senior lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life, Dr. Muhammad Al-Hussaini, later described the IFN's silence as "deafening," noting its willingness to speak out following events such as 9/11 and London's 7/7 terror attacks, yet its reluctance to comment on the Hamas atrocities. Al-Hussaini explained that IFN insiders admitted they "did not want to offend the Muslims" in the coalition and therefore could not bring themselves to condemn the group's actions. UK government's funding cuts followed, and by early 2024, the Inter Faith Network had disbanded completely. According to British Jewish leaders, the IFN's demise underscored the perils of not showing clear moral leadership in interfaith settings.[144]

Similar tensions arose in Australia, where two rabbis resigned from a national Jewish-Christian-Muslim forum when colleagues would not explicitly denounce Hamas's actions.[145] Many interfaith organizations in North America either suspended operations or reduced their activities to avoid fueling internal discord in the absence of a shared moral stance. It seemed safer to pause than

to ignore the profound disagreements exposed by the war. Indeed, an Israeli interfaith NGO leader noted that "the time now is too sensitive" for normal coexistence programs.[146]

3. Community-Based Resilience and Dialogue Renewal

Not all interfaith relationships collapsed. Adam Teitelbaum of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) observed that where dialogue was firmly established, it tended to survive; where it was already fragile, it often broke down.[147] Some Muslim leaders did speak out forcefully against the Hamas attacks. Dr. Qanta A. Ahmed, a British Muslim physician, penned an essay titled "The Muslim world speaks: Hamas must meet its end," denouncing both the group and the broader unwillingness of some Muslims to confront Hamas's genocidal ideology. She described in horrific detail the scenes of murder and torture she witnessed in southern Israel – "the anatomy of lethal, genocidal Islamism"[148] and declared: "For Muslims, October 7 is a stain on us all. We have tolerated the intolerable." Ahmed chastised those in the Muslim world who "lionize Hamas" or deny its crimes, warning that such refusal to acknowledge evil "stains even pristine Islam."[149] Coming from a devout Muslim, her words carried special weight. She called out Queen Rania of Jordan and others for casting doubt on the atrocity testimonies and insisted that "condemnation of Hamas by the leaders of Islam must gain momentum to steer Muslims away from the Islamist abyss."[150]

Moreover, shortly after October 7, a landmark statement by 15 leading British Muslim clerics explicitly condemned Hamas, while still urging restraint from Israeli forces. Significantly, these clerics distinguished ordinary Palestinians from the militant group, emphasizing that Gazan civilians should not be held responsible for Hamas's actions. The statement also addressed the spike in antisemitism and Islamophobia in the UK, insisting that "no one should feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods." The letter was significant because it marked one of the first times influential British Muslim figures had so directly condemned Hamas – something they had hesitated to do in the past out of fear of being seen as disloyal to the Palestinian cause.[151]

Among the Jewish-Muslim groups that survived, many refocused on personal relationships and open channels of communication. In Philadelphia, Rabbi David Straus convened a gathering of longstanding Muslim and Arab friends to better understand one another's concerns. Aziza Hasan, director of NewGround (a Muslim-Jewish partnership in Los Angeles), similarly emphasized not imposing "litmus tests" on participants' political positions, favoring inclusive dialogue over an immediate search for political consensus.[152] Some leaders who criticized Hamas openly faced backlash from within their communities. For instance, Imam Abdullah Antepli – Co-Director of a Muslim-Jewish leadership initiative – delivered a "blistering attack on Hamas" shortly after October 7, calling the massacre "an act of 'monster terrorism'" and imploring fellow Muslims to speak out. As a result, Imam Antepli "came under fierce and threatening criticism from other Muslims" and has since fallen quiet – a sobering indicator of how polarized the Muslim community became over the war.[153]

4. Mutual Solidarity Against Hate Crimes

Many reports documented a surge in both antisemitic and anti-Muslim incidents in Western countries post-October 7.[154] A joint statement by British faith leaders asserted that "over the last year antisemitic and Islamophobic attacks in this country have skyrocketed,"[155] illustrating the broad domestic fallout of the conflict. Research also suggests that antisemitism and Islamophobia often rise in tandem, fueled by xenophobia and extremist rhetoric.[156] Rabbi Straus, Executive Director of the National Council of Synagogues in the United States, underscored that groups targeting Jews frequently shift to targeting Muslims, stressing that both communities must stand together against shared threats.[157] An example of this solidarity occurred in October 2023 following the brutal murder of a 6-year-old Muslim boy in Chicago; over 150 American Jewish organizations condemned the killing as an act of Islamophobia. Amy Spitalnick, CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, explained that even amid the Jewish community's own profound pain, solidarity against anti-Muslim violence is vital for ensuring communal safety for all.[158]

Moreover, as mentioned, in December 2023, two dozen interfaith leaders in Washington, D.C. – spanning Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and other faiths

– convened to jointly denounce the twin scourges of antisemitism and Islamophobia that had spiked since the war began and signed a declaration against the two.[159] Nina Fernando, the executive director of Shoulder to Shoulder and head of the project, framed the purpose of these alliances pointedly: "The question is how can we live well together amidst our differences," she said, stressing the importance of Jewish and Muslim leaders standing side by side to "denounce all forms of hate at this moment," and "naming the problem in one breath, Islamophobia and antisemitism."[160] This framing – that antisemitism and Islamophobia must be tackled together – recurred across numerous sources of post-October 7 interfaith discourse and also in the interviews conducted.

5. Local Leadership and Practical Cooperation in Israel

On the community level in Israel, Jewish-Arab relations saw both tension and remarkable outreach. Immediately after October 7, there were fears of Arab violence toward Israelis, recalling the riots that broke out in some mixed Jewish-Arab cities in May 2021. Thankfully, large-scale violence inside Israel was mostly averted in late 2023, due in part to proactive efforts by local interfaith leaders. A notable example took place in Haifa – Israel's most religiously mixed major city (with Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze). In March 2024, as the war and its repercussions dragged on, 20 prominent religious leaders in Haifa issued a public statement "calling for cooperation, coexistence and respect between their religions amid heightened tensions after the October 7 massacre."[161] The Haifa declaration was a collaborative effort facilitated by the University of Haifa's Laboratory for Religious Studies and Israel's Ministry of Interior Department for Religious Communities. It was unprecedented in its diversity of signatories – rabbis of various denominations, Muslim imams, Christian priests, Druze clergy – all united in concern for their shared city. The joint statement began with an affirmation of the importance of learning about one another's beliefs and then directly addressed the post-war context: "During this difficult and tense period, we saw how critical it is to establish a group of religious leaders of various faiths who could promote being respectful neighbors for the sake of upholding the diverse fabric of life of our city." [162] The Haifa initiative not only condemned violence and hate; it also set up practical cooperation frameworks (such as mixed community forums) to reduce tensions on the ground.

Interview Analysis & Findings: Jewish-Muslim Relations after October 7

The October 7 Hamas onslaught marked a profound inflection point in Jewish-Muslim interfaith relations, exposing both vulnerabilities and strengths within ongoing dialogue initiatives. Drawing from extensive interviews with practitioners and scholars active in interreligious contexts, this chapter analyzes the multifaceted and nuanced impacts of these events on Jewish-Muslim relations. The analysis shows that, for some, successful dialogue frameworks require authenticity, a willingness to confront difficult issues directly, and the capacity to navigate emotional and geopolitical complexities. The findings reveal diverse and complex responses: immediate disruptions, strategic recalibrations, resilience born from deep trust, and critical reflections on the necessity of transparent communication. The study highlights different approaches in dialogue, such as insider mediation, engagement with moderate voices, and education-based interventions, all of which offer constructive pathways for sustaining interfaith engagement in a challenging and politically charged environment.

The analysis proceeds by addressing specific thematic areas:

1. Immediate disruptions to dialogue structures post-October 7.
2. Constructive models prioritizing informal engagement and patience.
3. A Muslim perspective highlighting cultural bonds amid political divides.
4. Clarifying Jewish narratives regarding Israel's centrality.
5. Neutral spaces versus politically engaged dialogue.
6. Insider mediation as a structural innovation.
7. Strengthening moderate religious voices.
8. The emerging Abrahamic coalition model.
9. Education and religious literacy as long-term solutions.

1. Disruption to Dialogue after October 7

Immediately following the Hamas attacks, many established Jewish-Muslim dialogue initiatives faced severe disruption. Interviews with prominent practitioners confirm that some groups simply collapsed under the emotional and political strain. Georgette Bennett, founder of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, a secular nonprofit organization that works to promote mutual respect and understanding and to fight religious prejudice in workplaces, schools, health care settings, and conflict zones, and a prominent advocate for Muslim-Jewish relations in the U.S., candidly described how "one of the Muslim-Jewish initiatives I'm involved in just basically collapsed… They just couldn't continue to work together." Bennett further noted that another interfaith committee managed to continue, albeit in a "less formal way," after several Muslim members resigned, either in protest or due to personal grief.

Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth, Director of Mosaica, an Israeli NGO dedicated to community mediation and dialogue, also provided a critical perspective, noting: "I can count on one hand how many interfaith groups still exist after October 7. Many of these dialogues were superficial, involving religious leaders discussing nice things in nice settings but never confronting difficult issues directly." Roth's observations suggest that superficial dialogue structures lacked the resilience necessary to weather this crisis.

Further reinforcing this perspective, Dr. Ari Gordon, Director of Muslim-Jewish Relations at the American Jewish Committee (AJC), identified a sharp deterioration in public Jewish-Muslim engagement, due in large part to social pressures emerging from within each community, but in many cases also marked by fractured friendships and intensified polarization. Rabbi Justus Baird, Senior Vice President at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, responsible for interfaith and intergroup initiatives, along with Rabbi Noam Marans, AJC's Director of Interreligious Affairs, echoed these sentiments. Both emphasized a profound sense of betrayal among many Jewish leaders, whose expectations of mutual support during crises went unmet. Baird poignantly captured this disappointment, recounting sentiments such as, "Many Jewish leaders were saying things like, 'I thought I had spent so much time building this relationship, and then when October 7 happened, they didn't text me,

they didn't call me.'" Reflecting critically, Baird identified an essential need for transparency, observing that "there were unspoken assumptions or expectations by Jews for the purposes of this work. We now have a chance to examine those assumptions and questions and to be more transparent about our expectations."

The significant disruption experienced by the Shalom Hartman Institute's Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) – an educational program that invites North American Muslim leaders to explore how Jews understand Judaism, Israel, and North American Jewish identity through a Zionist lens – further underscores these ongoing tensions. Baird observed diverse reactions among the alumni. Many remained silent, some sustained curiosity and openness, and many others expressed views rooted in deep concern and anger. Baird noted that a large number of alumni were not interested in engaging with Zionist Jews during this period. As a result, most aspects of the program were paused in early 2024. However, a Zoom conversation did occur with alumni who were open to dialogue, revealing a spectrum of emotions – from anger and deep distress over recent events to disappointment, tempered by an understanding of the decision to pause the program. Since then, Hartman has continued holding occasional one-on-one conversations with alumni, exploring potential future directions for the initiative. Other interfaith initiatives at Hartman, notably the Black-Jewish dialogue, experienced similar strain. Despite these considerable setbacks, Baird highlighted an unexpected positive development. The Hartman Institute's new initiative, "Jewish Perspectives on This Moment," specifically aimed at non-Jewish clergy, attracted over a thousand registrants within just one week. This enthusiastic response indicates a deep-seated desire for authentic, direct dialogue around challenging issues, underscoring a continued willingness among many to engage constructively amid profound misunderstanding.[163]

Example of Resilience:

Yet despite these significant setbacks, a number of dialogue efforts not only persisted but found renewed purpose amid crisis. Bennett highlighted a specific Israeli-Palestinian dialogue organization composed of religious leaders that remarkably held together, observing that "surprisingly, both sides have

been very committed to keep going." This resilience indicates that dialogue initiatives anchored in deep trust and accustomed to candid discussions could indeed endure and adapt to new realities. Some groups strategically pivoted toward humanitarian collaboration, such as joint relief efforts for Gaza civilians or support for displaced Israeli families, effectively reinforcing their shared commitments. Others opted for private, informal meetings, intentionally avoiding public scrutiny and maintaining open communication channels without external pressures.

Rabba Rori Picker Neiss, Senior Vice President for Community Relations at the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), provided a complex narrative of the events following October 7. One prevalent viewpoint Neiss frequently encounters suggests that "all our non-Jewish allies disappeared" immediately following October 7, indicating a perceived failure of interfaith dialogue. However, Neiss does not share this pessimistic assessment. Although acknowledging that some faith partners remained silent or only minimally engaged, she emphasized receiving substantial personal support from diverse interfaith allies – including Muslims, Christians, and others. Rather than seeing the interfaith effort as having collapsed, Neiss described responses as varied and at times complicated, but certainly not universally absent: "By the time I turned my phone on, I had dozens and dozens of messages from interfaith partners saying, 'I'm here for you, what do you need?'" She further noted that many religious communities, such as churches and mosques, might simply have been uncertain about how best to respond and were awaiting guidance and clarity from their Jewish counterparts.

2. Constructive Models of Response: Patience and Informal Engagement

The erosion of trust following October 7 highlights the importance of patience and informal engagement in rebuilding relationships strained by intensified political tensions. Bryant M. Frank, Co-Chair of the Detroit branch of AJC's "Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council" and former President of the American Jewish Committee's Detroit Regional Office, recommended a crucial "cooling-off period" to allow communities to process their trauma informally,

acknowledging that dialogue participants, particularly Muslims, appeared to exhibit heightened fears of backlash within their communities.

Frank emphasized ongoing successful collaborations combating antisemitism and Islamophobia, resiliently sustained by mutual recognition of shared threats. Frank elaborated, "Fighting against antisemitism and Islamophobia has been one of our most successful collaborative efforts. Both communities clearly recognize the parallels, understanding that many perpetrators of antisemitism also harbor anti-Muslim sentiments. Despite current tensions, there remains a strong consensus that we are significantly stronger when addressing these threats together. Over the past months, despite clear difficulties, our joint legislative advocacy against hate has remained one of the bright spots unaffected by October 7. Even if direct dialogue is strained, our shared objectives remain intact, underscoring the enduring value of this collaboration."

3. Muslim Perspectives Highlighting Cultural Bonds amid Political Divides

From a Muslim perspective, Abdelhak El Kaoukabi, Director of Education at the Mimouna Association – a cultural nonprofit established to promote and preserve Jewish-Moroccan heritage – offered valuable insights into interfaith dialogue after October 7. Founded by Muslim students in 2007, Mimouna promotes Moroccan Jewish heritage as an integral aspect of Moroccan identity. Prior to October 7, the association was highly active, organizing events on campuses, facilitating interfaith dialogues, and conducting exhibitions and workshops to combat xenophobia, antisemitism, and Islamophobia. A planned October 16 event in Tangier – intended to reconnect Moroccan Jews from Latin America with local Muslims – was suddenly met with hesitation in the aftermath of the attacks on Israeli tourists in Egypt. Kaoukabi noted initial resilience among participants, who insisted on proceeding to preserve Muslim-Jewish bonds: "Nobody was like, no, we don't want to do the event. Everyone was like, OK, let's do the event. I mean, yes, it's happening in the Middle East. But we should not let them win. We should not let them, you know, break this relationship between Jews and Muslims, you know." However, attitudes shifted significantly following Israel's military response in Gaza, revealing a nuanced

differentiation between general Jewish communities and Israelis specifically. Kaoukabi clarified, "If people are coming from Latin America, that's okay. They're not Israelis. They're Jewish, but they're not Israelis. But when it comes to Israelis, that's another thing." Despite tensions, organizational collaboration with Israelis continued selectively, driven by shared goals around cultural heritage rather than politics.

Interestingly, Kaoukabi mentioned a trip to Israel on behalf of the organization, as well as its hosting of Israelis at various events. This suggests that at the organizational level, there was no outright rejection of working with Israelis, as long as it aligned with its objectives of interfaith dialogue and preserving Moroccan Jewish heritage. Kaoukabi affirmed, "we still have no problem when it comes to working with Israelis, because we believe that whenever there are Jews and whenever we need to work with someone who is close to our theme or our program, he's welcome or they're welcome."

Moreover, Kaoukabi emphasized Mimouna's careful handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, explaining its focus remains cultural and interfaith-oriented, avoiding overtly political declarations. Yet, at events like the Rabat International Book Fair, he noted that nuanced discussions on the conflict did occur. The organization focused on highlighting complexity and mutual suffering rather than assigning blame. This balanced approach resonated positively with participants, despite the challenging circumstances.

4. A Need for Jewish Clarity about Israel

Neiss suggested that a greater challenge that emerged from the events of October 7 was the lack of clear Jewish communication about how and why Israel matters so deeply. She believed it was easy to assume that non-Jewish allies intuitively understood the significance of attacks in Israel for American Jews, even though, in reality, they often did not. She noted that interfaith conversations in the U.S. frequently focused on cultural or religious practices (e.g., holiday customs, Talmud study, or shared activism on local issues), while avoiding the complex topic of Israel. This, in turn, left many partners unprepared to empathize with or articulate support for the Jewish community when a crisis erupted overseas: "Part of what I learned after October 7 was how much we as a Jewish community have not done a good job of explaining ourselves… It's not

about persuading them politically, but about clarifying, 'this is who we are, and here's why Israel matters to us.'"

She argued that if Jewish communities had built personal relationships that included deeper, more authentic discussions of Israel's significance (rather than addressing it only as a political flashpoint), non-Jewish partners might have been better equipped to respond quickly and confidently in moments of crisis. Neiss, therefore, resisted the oversimplification that an institution's silence necessarily reflected deliberate disloyalty; sometimes other communities simply do not realize how personally connected Jews in the U.S. are to events in Israel. Many religious organizations also question how to respond to tragedies in other parts of the world if they do not fully grasp the local emotional stake. This is especially true for congregations that had never deeply explored the meaning of Israel for American Jews: "People in smaller churches or mosques might see the violence as distant. They never realized every Jew here has direct family or friends in Israel." She found that once she reached out to local clergy, explained the fear and mourning the Jewish community was experiencing, and invited them to share words of comfort, many wrote meaningful statements that the wider Jewish community deeply appreciated.

Along the same lines, the Chief Rabbi of London, Sir Ephraim Mirvis,[164] called for courageous and direct engagement with sensitive geopolitical and religious issues, arguing passionately that Israel must be placed at the center of Jewish-Muslim dialogue. He spoke of a "seismic shift" in interfaith engagement – comparable to the transformative efforts following the Holocaust – insisting that meaningful dialogue must confront, rather than avoid, difficult topics. For Rabbi Mirvis, Israel is not a peripheral issue but a core part of Jewish identity, and avoiding it in conversation weakens the authenticity of interfaith encounters. "Israel is the heart of our religion," he declared, urging that it should no longer be treated as the "elephant in the room" during interfaith discussions, even if doing so leads to more disagreement.

To complement these interview-based insights, this section also includes the perspective of David Bernstein, a prominent voice in the field of Jewish community relations. While Bernstein was not interviewed as part of this project, his reflections offer a revealing counterpoint that sharpens the broader picture. Writing in the quarterly journal Sapir, Bernstein argues that Jewish institutions

must adopt a more honest and assertive stance in interfaith dialogue, even at the risk of discomfort or disagreement.[165] He recalls participating in a high-level Muslim-Jewish conversation shortly after October 7, where a rabbi bluntly stated that "antisemitism is a much more serious problem than Islamophobia." Though jarring for many, Bernstein noted that no Muslim participant left the conversation. This, he argues, is evidence that truth-telling – however difficult – is not fatal to dialogue and may in fact deepen it.

Bernstein critiques what he sees as a double standard in such conversations: Jews are often expected to display moral nuance, acknowledging Israeli excesses and expressing discomfort with the occupation, while their interlocutors offer blanket defenses of Palestinian actions. "It's fine for Jews to be nuanced," he writes, "but it's long past time to expect the same from our interlocutors." He urges Jewish leaders to challenge their partners with uncomfortable questions – such as, "Why is it that you never find fault with anything that Palestinians do?" – and to be willing to walk away if real reciprocity is not possible.

Bernstein also draws a clear moral line around collaboration, warning against partnerships with individuals or groups who justify the October 7 attacks. "I'm not going to humanize people who dehumanize others," he quotes ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt. In Bernstein's view, Jewish organizations must be willing to withdraw from coalitions that platform extremists, even at the cost of influence. For him, the lesson of October 7 is that clarity – moral, political, and emotional – is not only urgent but non-negotiable.[166]

5. Neutral Spaces versus Politically Engaged Dialogue

In contrast to the positions articulated by Rabbi Mirvis and Rabbi Neiss, some interviewees emphasized the need to create neutral spaces for dialogue that prioritize shared humanistic and religious values over contentious political debates. Dr. Esther-Miriam Wagner, in particular, highlighted the importance of fostering such spaces as a means of gradually rebuilding intercommunal trust and reopening channels of Jewish-Muslim dialogue.

Wagner, the Executive Director of the Woolf Institute in Cambridge, observed the near impossibility of direct communication between Jewish and Muslim communities in the immediate aftermath of October 7. "Especially after October

7, there's no way for communities to directly get in contact at the moment," she explained. "You can't, as a synagogue, write to a mosque. It's just... it's not happening. So you need these neutral spaces – like us – to actually invite both sides."

A similar emphasis on depoliticized engagement is found in the work of Yehuda Stolov, founder and director of the Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA). He advocates a deliberate and principled avoidance of political discourse within interfaith dialogue frameworks. His model is based on the belief that focusing on political conflicts – especially the emotionally charged and often intractable aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian context – tends to reinforce divisions rather than promote understanding. Consequently, his organization explicitly instructs participants to refrain from engaging in political debates or adjudicating historical narratives. Instead, the emphasis is placed firmly on the present moment and the shared work of envisioning and building a more peaceful future.

This future-oriented vision is not simply a strategic way to avoid controversy but reflects a deeper philosophical stance. Stolov argues that revisiting past traumas can inhibit constructive engagement. For him, the objective is not to resolve historical conflicts but to foster mutual respect and coexistence in the here and now. Dialogue, according to this view, becomes an instrument of practical peacebuilding rather than political negotiation.

Stolov's approach is grounded in pragmatism. He acknowledges that participants enter interfaith dialogues with a range of motivations – some seeking deep connection, others joining out of curiosity or a desire for social engagement. The goal, therefore, is not necessarily to build intimate friendships or reach theological consensus, but rather to develop the capacity to manage difference respectfully. As he explains: "You have to learn that not everyone agrees. There are more important things, less important, but there are no two people who agree on everything. And it's more important to know how to manage those disagreements in a way that is not conflictual – and of course, also friendly."

Stolov's notion of "transcending politics" reflects a conviction that enduring solutions to conflict require a shift in paradigm – one that prioritizes human

connection, ethical relationship, and spiritual vision. As he puts it: "The general idea remains the same. Right now, it's more of a challenge, but it remains the same. We don't allow the reality of now, which is the result of the past, and all the mistakes of the past, to prevent us from building a better future. We don't want the future to be dominated by the past, because then we don't live the present." This statement underscores the organization's commitment to long-term goals, even in the face of immediate crisis.

The aftermath of the October 7 massacre posed a serious test to this model. In the initial days following the events, many interfaith meetings were canceled, reflecting a collective sense of shock and grief. As Stolov recounted: "Of course, there was a big shock, and in the first week almost everything was canceled – I don't know, five or six encounters."

Despite the disruption, Stolov also highlighted instances of proactive engagement from some groups. "There were two groups that were out of the ordinary," he noted. "There was a group of women in Arad and Tel Arad who actually went to see – mainly the Jews – the Bedouins to see if they needed anything. And another group of high school students in a Model UN program started a daily Zoom, and for two months, they met every day. It's amazing." These examples show that, even at the highest level of shock, individuals and some of the interfaith encounter groups continued to act on the organization's values, maintaining connections and offering support through grassroots and digital platforms. The resilience of IEA was clear in the following months, when all groups that were able to resume their activity did. It even managed to start many new groups, the first of which began at the end of October 2023.

Still, not all activists agree with Stolov's emphasis on depoliticization. Rebecca Abrahamson, Co-Director of AlSadiqin, a regular presenter at the Ohr Torah Interfaith Center, who has worked with Yehuda Stolov of the Interfaith Encounter Association, including him in AlSadiqin events, is quick to contrast the approach of AlSadiqin and that of the Interfaith Encounter Association, saying, "I have attended Yehuda Stolov's gatherings and discussed my approach with him. His is an encounter regarding what the paradigms are. I propose that we challenge the paradigms."

For Abrahamson, the historical perspective is transformative: when participants see that scripture reflects particular moments rather than timeless hostilities, it undermines stereotypes and opens the door to genuine closeness. Rather than avoiding politics or focusing only on emotional commonalities, she calls for a paradigm shift in how Jews and Muslims understand their own and each other's texts, insisting that rigorous textual study can bring communities together in ways that surface-level dialogue cannot.

By situating verses and religious ideas in their historical and textual contexts, she seeks to dismantle long-standing misconceptions – such as the assumption that Islam and the Qur'an are inherently opposed to Jews. Through this approach, Abrahamson highlights, for example, that some Qur'anic critiques target specific Jewish sects like the Sadducees, long disappeared, rather than the Jewish people as a whole. She states, "Stolov demands connection among what is, a connection of hearts. I demand academic rigor, a connection of intellect; Both are important, you cannot have one without the other."

This tension between avoiding politics and engaging it differently leads naturally to the next set of approaches: those who argue for structural and strategic engagement with conflict rather than depoliticization. Here, the framework of insider mediation becomes central, introducing a model that seeks to transform conflict dynamics while still preserving the dialogue's relational core.

6. Insider Mediation as Structural Innovation

Rabbi Roth strongly advocates for a paradigm shift from cultural peacebuilding toward insider mediation, describing this change as essential for genuine progress: "Insider mediation involves engaging influential leaders who can impact both cultural narratives and structural realities. The real challenge is connecting extremes through trusted channels. Without these channels, crises inevitably lead to violent conflict." In the religious context Roth describes, insider mediation leverages the strengths of institutions or individuals recognized as "insiders" within their specific religious or communal environments. These civic, political, and governmental leaders offer significant advantages, including trust, legitimacy, cultural proximity, and the ability to convene all relevant stakeholders, especially those directly impacted by the conflict.[167]

Furthermore, Roth emphasizes a methodological approach that focuses on addressing specific, smaller problems rather than directly on grand ideological conflicts. By concentrating on manageable issues, insider mediators build trust incrementally and create conditions that can prevent larger conflicts. Roth highlights the effectiveness of this targeted strategy, contrasting it with broader attempts to directly resolve extensive ideological disagreements, which often prove less effective.

Echoing Frank's insight into the apprehension many Muslims in the U.S. feel about engaging in interfaith dialogue, Roth highlighted the severe consequences Palestinian participants often face due to accusations of normalization – that is, engaging in dialogue or cooperation that is perceived as legitimizing Israel or weakening the Palestinian struggle. He criticized cultural dialogue as inherently vulnerable, noting, "Cultural peacebuilding is often doomed because it ignores critical political realities. Palestinians face enormous dangers being labeled normalizers. Relationships formed in cultural dialogues typically don't survive intense political crises."

Roth then detailed a practical approach emphasizing direct, immediate problem-solving: "Our work is not theoretical; it's about solving immediate, concrete problems to build genuine trust. By addressing urgent issues – such as preventing violence or protecting lives – leaders experience the transformative power of genuine cooperation. Real relationships develop when participants witness their collaboration directly impacting reality." He underscored the importance of redefining success in dialogue, concluding, "The true measure of successful dialogue isn't attendance or positive feedback; it's whether participants reach out during crises. If they don't, those relationships were never truly authentic."

7. Strengthening Moderate Religious Voices in Islam

While Roth's approach focuses on bridging extremes and engaging with hard-to-reach actors through insider channels, other voices in the interfaith space stress the importance of strengthening relationships with moderate religious leaders who already possess both openness and legitimacy. Rabbi Yaakov Nagen, who serves as the Director of the Blickle Institute for Interfaith Dialogue and the Beit

Midrash for Judaism and Humanity, advocates clearly distinguishing between Islam as a whole and extremist factions like Hamas.

Nagen warns against oversimplifications, cautioning, "To say all Islam or all Arabs are Hamas directly supports Hamas's narrative." He believes the "vast majority of the Islamic world" approaches the idea of a religious Muslim-Jewish brotherhood with "a lot of respect and appreciation." Nagen stresses that "the mainstream has the potential for great openness" and argues that "the center creates the dynamic that strengthens things." He emphasizes the need for sincere engagement in interreligious dialogue, highlighting that it must come from "the heart, not just the head, and not just the mouth." According to Nagen, this authentic connection and mutual respect deeply extend into Islam's religious identity and teachings. He underscores the importance of recognizing that extremist groups like Hamas do not represent the entire Muslim world, asserting: "Dialogue must involve seeing the authentic religious identity of the other, acknowledging each other's truths, and finding space in one's heart – not just intellectually, but emotionally."

Similarly, Rabbi Dr. Aharon Ariel Lavi, managing director of the Blickle Institute for Interfaith Dialogue, stresses the need for interfaith dialogue to evolve beyond symbolic gestures into strategic diplomatic engagement. In contrast to Roth's direct engagement approach, Lavi emphasizes supporting moderate Islamic voices, asserting that significant and enduring changes depend on internal Islamic discussions that delegitimize radical ideologies and encourage theological acceptance of religious diversity, particularly toward Judaism.

Moreover, Lavi highlights the importance of state-level involvement, suggesting countries like Israel formally integrate religious dialogue into their diplomatic frameworks.[168] He believes this strategic alignment can significantly enhance peace efforts and counter extremist ideological ambitions, including those advanced by groups such as Hamas and their international supporters. He claims these alliances create supportive networks that indirectly counter antisemitism by cultivating mutual understanding and respect.

Lavi further clarifies the strategic objectives of their initiatives: "Basically, the goal is to identify and support the more moderate parts within Islam." Expanding upon this, he elaborates the importance of nurturing alliances: "We should

reach out to Christians and Hindus eager to collaborate, as well as moderate Muslims. We want to conduct studies that highlight existing partnerships and the potential of these relationships to help communities understand motivations and effectively address shared challenges. Instead of continually confronting antisemites directly, we focus on cultivating supportive groups." This strategy underscores his preference for building robust relationships over confrontation.

Similarly, in an article published in Sapir, David Bernstein proposes a recalibration of communal advocacy, suggesting that Jewish institutions must now prioritize the marginalization of extremist voices from mainstream platforms. He calls for an unapologetic "name-and-shame" approach to ensure that educational institutions and political arenas remain free of hate. "Jewish community relations," he writes, "have a golden opportunity to isolate the hang-glider crowd and demand that school officials and elected leaders keep hate out of our schools and politics." His stance underscores a call for proactive boundary-setting in Jewish public policy – a move to isolate ideological extremism, rather than continually engage with or explain it.[169]

8. Emerging Abrahamic Coalition Model

Building upon these efforts to engage moderate Islam, some thinkers are now exploring even more integrative models of interfaith cooperation. One such approach is being developed by Tom Wegner, a senior strategic adviser, peace activist, and head of 'The Middle East Center.' Wegner envisions a new paradigm – what he calls the "Abrahamic Revolution" – that seeks to transcend traditional religious and political boundaries by grounding dialogue in shared monotheistic heritage.[170]

Following October 7, Wegner began actively facilitating dialogue: "I started hosting direct Zoom meetings between various figures from the Middle East and the Israeli public. I manage a platform called 'The Middle East Center' that every week hosts individuals or groups from the Middle East and operates networks of WhatsApp groups – Israeli-Lebanese, Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Iranian, and so forth." He emphasizes a distinctive depth to these dialogues: "The religious dialogue I've been involved in with Islamic circles has reached very intriguing places… I call it 'Political Abrahamism,' or the 'Abrahamic Islam,' and at a deeper

level, an 'Abrahamic religion.' These are ideas I've never encountered before." Wegner describes the spectrum of participants, ranging from traditional Sunni leaders to more radical Abrahamic thinkers: "The dialogue includes individuals whose identity is classical Sunni, even Taliban-like, deeply rooted in the most traditional interpretations of the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence, yet who are willing to recognize Israel and its existence here."

Wegner elaborates further on the Abrahamic approach, describing it as an emerging, innovative framework rooted in shared Abrahamic heritage and monotheistic traditions. According to Wegner, this approach operates on two interconnected levels: "Abrahamic Islam," in which Muslims reinterpret Islamic texts to emphasize compatibility with Judaism and the legitimacy of Israel, and a deeper layer advocating for a broader synthesis or overarching unity of the Abrahamic religions. He explains: "There are people whose identity remains clearly Muslim, yet they see their differentiation from Jews or Christians not as a reason for conflict but as a foundation for peace." Wegner also notes a more radical layer, wherein participants propose transcending traditional religious boundaries altogether, envisioning a unified Abrahamic identity: "We don't talk about coexistence between religions; we speak of uniting religions or creating a shared monotheistic framework based on Abrahamic principles." Some participants even explore spiritual practices across religious lines, reflecting: "I prayed as a Jew in a synagogue, as a Christian in a church, and as a Muslim in a mosque – each experience enriched me and deepened my spiritual understanding." Wegner's engagement highlights a proactive, strategic interfaith dialogue aimed at engendering mutual recognition beyond established religious and political divides, marking a significant shift in inter-religious engagement following October 7.[171]

9. The Role of Education and Religious Literacy

The interviews underscored the critical role education and religious literacy play in advancing interfaith tolerance, peacebuilding, and dialogue. Georgette Bennett explicitly identified education as a fundamental component of her interfaith initiatives, stating: "One is education – we have designed curricula and teacher training programs for both primary grades and older students that teach them how to be comfortable with difference rather than fearing it."

She further described these initiatives as "academic curricula embedded with coexistence messaging and skill-building." Bennett also drew attention to the adverse effects of negative indoctrination, suggesting that education can serve as a powerful counterforce. Highlighting the severity of such indoctrination, she explained, "Syrians are indoctrinated almost from birth to believe that Israel wants to drive Syrians off their land, that Israel wants to kill all Syrians, that Jews are the devil because they support Israel, and that they need to kill Jews before the Jews kill them. They're all brought up to believe that – it's their mindset, not their fault." She then emphasized, "Contact and communication are ways to break down stereotypes, misconceptions, and hatred – when you encounter each other as human beings." Bennett's comments strongly suggest that education and interpersonal engagement can significantly reduce prejudice.

Dr. Ari Gordon of AJC expanded on this notion, emphasizing the importance of "education about the other, even when they are not physically present," as a crucial form of interfaith relations. He described this approach as "cross-cultural religious literacy," providing an example of "teaching AJC board members and other Jewish stakeholders about Islam," thereby stressing that increasing knowledge about other faiths itself contributes meaningfully to interfaith understanding. He added a forward-looking note, "If we believe that there is a time in the future when we can be more constructive and effective at Muslim-Jewish relations than we are today, then we must invest in educating community leaders about how the other community understands itself." He went on to say, "Otherwise their views are often shaped by social media and headlines that tend to give disproportionate attention to bad actors in the other community and weaponized expressions of their faith."

Bryant Frank echoed these sentiments, highlighting education as a means of mitigating fear and bias: "At the basic level, you want people to be able to approach each other, and fear is an impediment that stokes bias. Personally, I believe that if you have an opportunity to learn about someone else – even if you don't agree with them – that knowledge can eliminate ignorance and fear."

Maayan Raveh, academic director of the Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies (HLRS), emphasized the broader societal impact of incorporating interfaith education into formal curricula in Israel. She argued, "If we can integrate

the study of Christianity or Islam into the [Jewish] educational system in an open and acceptable manner, the impact will be significantly greater than simply facilitating dialogue among specific willing groups." Raveh believes that widespread educational initiatives have greater potential to promote understanding than targeted interactions alone. She further elaborated on the importance of nuanced and comprehensive education, stating, "When teaching about Islam or Christianity, we must convey the complexity inherent in these religions – just as we must teach Judaism's complexity." Her comments underscore the necessity of fostering sophisticated interreligious literacy as a foundational step toward meaningful interfaith understanding and coexistence.

Jewish-Muslim Dialogue in Israel

Following the events of October 7, Maayan Raveh described the immediate practical response in the city of Haifa, where religious leaders from multiple faiths established a dedicated council explicitly aimed at preventing violence through grassroots communal responsibility. She explained: "We established a religious council in the city of Haifa, comprising 20 religious leaders – Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druze, women, and men – who participated in six dialogue sessions to discuss ways to maintain harmony within the city." The council's primary objective was to encourage religious leaders to proactively engage their communities, fostering mutual understanding rather than addressing broader political issues. At the conclusion of these meetings, the council articulated a unified goal for Haifa's religious leadership: the prevention of violence. This group evolved into a formal council under the municipality of Haifa, providing an ongoing platform for continued dialogue and conflict prevention efforts, both in daily life and during extraordinary events.

Religious leaders were specifically encouraged to speak directly with youth in their respective religious communities. Arab leaders expressed concerns regarding collective blame and committed themselves to explaining to their communities why Jewish citizens were experiencing fear and anxiety. Conversely, Jewish leaders agreed to clearly communicate the distinction between Arabs residing within Israel – integral community members – and those outside the country. This exchange represented a pivotal moment for active community engagement and mutual understanding. For the purposes of this

research, this development serves as a valuable example of a dialogue model that not only withstood a crisis but ultimately strengthened the relationship between the two communities.

Raveh maintains a strong commitment and optimistic perspective regarding the significance of dialogue and leadership. She emphasized that recent conflicts have reinforced rather than diminished the necessity of ongoing dialogue, highlighting the crucial role of religious leaders: "The war is yet another proof that we must act. It clearly demonstrates the critical importance of religious leadership and subjective religious experiences, which simply cannot be ignored."

Nevertheless, Raveh candidly acknowledged significant challenges and emotional setbacks, especially among her Jewish colleagues. She vividly described their loss of faith: "It was very painful. People who had actively participated with us for years suddenly said, 'Enough – we can't continue anymore.' There was a devastating sense that all our hard work had unraveled in Israeli society, as faith in coexistence suddenly collapsed. Everything seemed broken."

Despite these setbacks, Raveh reiterated her unwavering commitment to grassroots education and community leadership. She firmly believes the crisis itself underscores the indispensable role religious leaders and communities play in sustaining social cohesion and preventing conflict, reinforcing the critical importance of their ongoing efforts.

Conclusion

The interview analysis reveals several important conclusions about the state of interfaith dialogue following the events of October 7. First, the analysis highlights the significant disruption that many established Jewish-Muslim dialogue initiatives faced in the immediate aftermath, as the emotional and political strain proved too great for some groups to withstand. However, it also points to examples of resilience, where certain efforts were able to persist and even find renewed purpose by pivoting toward humanitarian collaboration or shifting to more private, informal engagement.

Second, the analysis underscores that, for many of the interviewees, there is a need for authenticity and a willingness to confront difficult issues directly. Superficial dialogue structures lacking this capacity were, according to many respondents, less resilient, thereby emphasizing the importance of navigating emotional and geopolitical complexities with transparency. At the same time, some interviewees argued the opposite, maintaining that neutral spaces are precisely what enable dialogue to continue during times of crisis.

The conclusions then address several other key themes:

1. **Immediate Disruptions:** Many established Jewish-Muslim dialogue initiatives faced severe disruption and even collapse in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks, as the emotional and political strain proved too great for some groups to withstand.

2. **Resilience and Adaptation:** However, some dialogue efforts were able to persist and even find renewed purpose, pivoting toward humanitarian collaboration or opting for private, informal meetings to maintain open communication channels.

3. **Transparency and Managing Expectations:** Some interviewees emphasized the need for greater transparency regarding the purposes and expectations of interfaith work, as certain Jewish leaders felt that their Muslim counterparts did not provide the support they had anticipated during the crisis.

4. **Clarifying the Significance of Israel:** According to some interviewees, non-Jewish partners were unprepared to empathize with or articulate support for the Jewish community outside of Israel when a crisis erupted in Israel, highlighting the need for Jewish communities to better explain the centrality of Israel to their identity.

5. **Navigating the Role of Politics:** There were differing approaches, with some emphasizing the need for neutral, depoliticized spaces for dialogue, while others argued for directly engaging with political dimensions and historical narratives.

6. **Insider Mediation and Strengthening Moderate Voices:** Strategies emerged that focused on leveraging the influence of trusted "insider"

leaders and strengthening relationships with moderate religious voices within the Muslim community.

7. **Emerging Abrahamic Coalition Model:** Some thinkers explored more integrative models of interfaith cooperation, grounded in a shared Abrahamic heritage and the potential for theological reinterpretation.

8. **The Crucial Role of Education and Religious Literacy:** Interviewees underscored the importance of education and fostering cross-cultural religious understanding as a long-term solution for promoting interfaith tolerance and dialogue.

Generally speaking, it appears that the events of October 7 did not lead to a significant change in the interviewees' attitudes toward dialogue. Most of them continued to hold the view that the dialogue approach they had promoted thus far is the most successful one, and despite certain setbacks, it has not ceased to exist.

Interview Analysis & Findings on Jewish-Christian Relations after October 7

As shown in the literature review, the events of October 7, 2023, marked a watershed moment in the landscape of Jewish-Christian interfaith relations. The brutal Hamas attacks and the subsequent war in Gaza triggered a broad spectrum of responses across Christian communities – ranging from expressions of solidarity and compassion to perceived silence, equivocation, or ideological distancing. This chapter explores the multifaceted repercussions of October 7 on Jewish-Christian dialogue by examining seven interrelated themes that emerged from the interviews:

1. Emotional Disillusionment and Re-evaluation.
2. Ideological Shifts and Postcolonial Reframing.
3. Institutional and Theological Critique.
4. Enduring Relationship Capital.
5. Diverging Models of Engagement: Political or Ethical.
6. Maintaining or Questioning Dialogue.
7. Evangelical Responses.

Taken together, these seven themes reveal both the fragility and resilience of Jewish-Christian dialogue in the face of profound crisis. The events of October 7 have served as a clarifying moment, exposing unresolved theological tensions, divergent ethical priorities, and the limits of institutional solidarity – while also offering new openings for honest reckoning, recalibration, and perhaps, renewal.

1. Disillusionment and Re-evaluation

This sense of disillusionment was particularly acute in the immediate aftermath of the attacks and played a defining role in shaping both the tone and direction of subsequent interfaith engagement.

This disillusionment was voiced with particular clarity by several prominent figures within the Jewish interfaith community. Rabbi Pesach Wolicki, who served until December 2023 as Executive Director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation, conveyed his frustration bluntly: "I was very disappointed in the reaction from Christians to October 7. For the last 40 years, there's been this growing movement of Christian support for Israel... And they were basically silent. It's extremely disappointing." Echoing this sentiment, Rabbi Noam Marans, American Jewish Committee's (AJC) Director of Interreligious Affairs, criticized interfaith partners who, in his view, "didn't get it instinctually," noting that some shifted too quickly to calls for a ceasefire or discussions of root causes without first acknowledging the magnitude of the attacks against Israel.

The emotional toll of this perceived silence led some Jewish interfaith practitioners to reevaluate their engagement entirely. Yisca Harani – a scholar of Christianity and an active participant in interfaith education – described the period as deeply disheartening, to the point that she temporarily withdrew from all interfaith activity. However, Harani, reflecting on what she learned from October 7, stated: "So maybe my lesson is to take the sad opportunities and turn them into an opportunity, an opportunity to meet. That's a lesson. I used to say, let's not go to the extreme. Now I'm going to the extreme. There's no choice." What she suggests is a shift toward centering dialogue precisely on painful events – moments of shared grief and vulnerability – as a means of fostering empathy, something she had not previously considered central to her approach. This evolving perspective has also informed her ongoing volunteer work at a hospice where terminally ill Jewish, Christian, and Muslim patients share space. In this deeply human context, shaped by illness and mortality, Harani has witnessed unexpected opportunities for meaningful dialogue centered on compassion, dignity, and the sanctity of life. Despite her earlier withdrawal, she continues to affirm the essential purpose of interfaith

engagement: to bring people together across differences and cultivate mutual respect and understanding, even when the process is fraught.[172]

Wagner similarly noted a shift in the dynamics of Jewish-Christian dialogue. "It used to be much easier for Jews and Christians to talk," she explained. "A lot of Christians actually now find it much harder to get together with Jewish community members and talk about things, because even for them, the Gaza war is always there as an elephant in the room." Recognizing the emotional and political weight of the moment, the Woolf Institute responded swiftly by convening emergency panels that brought together Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders to address the immediate crisis and avert potential tensions within British society.

Beyond these immediate efforts, Wagner reported that the institute launched a research project aimed at studying the long-term impact of October 7 on interfaith relations – including between Jews and Christians. The goal is to assess where relationships have fractured, where dialogue has endured, and what insights can be drawn from both successful and unsuccessful responses. Encouragingly, Wagner also observed a surge of interest from individuals previously uninvolved in interfaith work, suggesting that even amid crisis, new possibilities for dialogue may be emerging.

Taken together, these expressions of frustration reflect longstanding expectations of solidarity, built through decades of Jewish-Christian dialogue and growing Christian support for Israel. The perceived silence – or the immediate pivot to focus on Palestinian suffering without clearly acknowledging the initial violence – left many Jewish leaders feeling betrayed and alienated from their Christian counterparts. At the same time, it is important to note that a parallel sense of disappointment emerged among Christian, and likely also Muslim, partners, who often felt that their Jewish counterparts were unwilling to acknowledge Palestinian suffering in the aftermath of the war. Even if such expectations may be regarded as misplaced or asymmetrical, they nonetheless shaped the dynamics of dialogue. Indeed, claims of a lack of empathy on the part of Jewish partners recurred across multiple interviews and contexts, underscoring that disillusionment was not one-sided but mutually experienced, further complicating efforts to sustain trust and meaningful engagement.

However, it is important to recognize that Christian responses were not monolithic. A number of Christian leaders and communities did express solidarity and compassion following the attacks. Adam Gregerman, Professor of Jewish Studies and Associate Director of the Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations at Saint Joseph's University, and a Jew himself, noted that the October 7 attacks became a focal point for recent interfaith discussions. At the annual meeting of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations, three of four panels directly addressed related concerns, including Jewish communal trauma and institutional responses – particularly from the Vatican. While Gregerman acknowledged the presence of meaningful dialogue among interfaith professionals, he remained critical of what he perceived as the Vatican's delayed and insufficient reaction, highlighting enduring tensions within institutional Christian responses to Israel.

Other voices, however, offered a more hopeful view. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rabba Rori Picker Neiss emphasized that the narrative of abandonment did not reflect the full range of experiences. She recalled that, in the immediate aftermath, "tons of different communities... reached out to say, 'I'm here for you. What do you need?'" These gestures ranged from formal statements of support for the Jewish people and Israel to more personal messages of care and empathy. Similarly, Justus Baird shared that he received direct messages from senior Christian leaders – including archbishops and cardinals – often accompanied by prayers for peace and recognition of the Jewish community's pain, as well as concern for the broader humanitarian implications of the conflict.

2. Ideological Shifts and Postcolonial Reframing

As seen in the review chapter, in the decades following the Holocaust, the Catholic Church and other Christian communities embarked on an ambitious reconciliation program epitomized by the Second Vatican Council's Nostra Aetate (1965). According to Dr. Karma Ben-Johanan – a historian of modern theology and religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, specializing in interreligious and intrareligious dialogue between Christians and Jews – this shift helped dismantle entrenched antisemitic theologies and fostered a spirit of mutual respect. She notes that "They [the Catholics] wanted to… rid the

Christian tradition of anti-Judaism" and cultivate lasting bonds with the Jewish people.

However, several interviewees observe a notable shift in the contemporary ideological landscape. Ben-Johanan explains, "At the outset, Jewish-Christian dialogue was the initiative of liberal Christians. Yet today the landscape of liberal Christianity turned sharply toward a postcolonial direction… They [liberal Christians] don't give Jewish sensibilities the same place they had in previous decades." She further emphasizes that many progressive Christians – and perhaps even Pope Francis – view Israel as a colonial power, contending that "I don't think he [Francis] is very interested in what Zionism is or in the complexity of Israel's history. I also think antisemitism is for him basically a category that the Church has already overcome, not something that requires a constant re-addressing. He is much more preoccupied with issues of racism and colonialism." Ben-Johanan points out that, due to his South American background, "his historical consciousness does not lie in the same place as that of previous, Western popes … He may not grasp Judaism and Jewish history in the same way his European predecessors did." She suggests that his postcolonial orientation, rooted in concern for marginalized communities in the Global South, shapes his approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Vatican's response to the events of October 7 has drawn robust criticism from some Jewish leaders and intellectuals. Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, characterized the situation as "a crisis in relations," describing Pope Francis's "seeming neutrality" as a moral equivalence between Hamas terror and Israel's self-defense. Di Segni also criticized Francis for suggesting that Israeli actions might constitute genocide. Moreover, he accused him of engaging in the kind of comparative preaching "that should not be done," where "the Jews… were the bad ones," and then "he came who was the good one," lamenting that "this should be a form of preaching to avoid."

This sentiment is echoed by Prof. Gregerman, who stated, "I'm extremely critical of the Vatican. It has not responded as one would expect from a church that says 'we really care about the safety of Jews.'" He describes Pope Francis as having held "very problematic views on the use of force and war," suggesting that his reluctance to distinguish between aggressor and defender stemmed from an opposition to war in general, rather than a nuanced evaluation of context. He

attributed Pope Francis's posture to an "overly idealistic" approach to violence and war, adding, "I don't think his motives [were] bad, but I'm very critical of his views … on how decisions are made about violence and war… I actually feel quite let down by the Vatican's response to exterminationist antisemitism." Many of Gregerman's Catholic colleagues also expressed dismay, noting that, as he puts it, "they care about antisemitism, and most people feel like he's not done a great job in this regard."[173] Rabbi Marans similarly observes that Pope Francis viewed the conflict through an "evolving understanding of war" and a "hypercriticism of all war," interpreting it broadly as a moral defeat. Marans states, "I can't be the first person to tell you. This is about just war for him. More than about the Jewish people." Rabbi Abraham Skorka, who had personally engaged in interreligious conversations with Pope Francis, added another perspective about Francis: "He's not malicious. He's a friend – personally, I know this. But when he used the word 'genocide,' that was devastating. He saw himself as impartial, but we see it as a failure to fully understand our trauma."

Rabbi David Rosen, an eminent English-Israeli rabbi, former chief rabbi of Ireland, and interfaith peacemaker, notes, regarding Pope Francis, a perceived "act of equivalence between Hamas's heinous attack and the legitimate and demanded response of the self-defense of the State of Israel," describing this equivalence as a "great sacrifice" for dialogue. He also, like other interviewees, interprets it as reflective of Francis's broader perspective, remarking that "it's connected to his worldview, the lack of criticism of Russia, always criticism of America," and rooted in "the solidarity with the Third World that came from his Argentinian background and political-social involvement." Rosen reports that the Vatican's response to a letter from Israeli leaders was "not enough,"[174] suggesting it could jeopardize short-term bilateral dialogue, including a planned meeting in May. Rosen also contrasted Pope Francis with his predecessor, Benedict XVI, describing Francis as less systematic and driven more by personal connections. He remarks, "He really loves Jews and has true friends. He doesn't love Israel, but this is connected to his views on America."

Criticism extended beyond the late Pope to other Catholic leaders. Di Segni singled out Cardinal Ravasi, an Italian prelate of the Catholic Church and a biblical scholar, for his references to Lamech's revenge, which he interpreted as resurrecting "the idea of the vengeful and wicked Jew." He also highlighted the ambiguous behavior of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, such as wearing a keffiyeh

during Christmas Mass. He also expressed concern about a critical letter circulating within Catholic networks that accused Israel of "the worst things" and advocated for a one-state solution, thereby calling Israel's legitimacy into question.

However, Di Segni also noted that "there is considerable discussion, considerable dissent within the Catholic world, even within the hierarchy," indicating that not all Catholics share the same position. He also acknowledged an unexpected "openness that, compared to the past, was absolutely revolutionary" since October 7. Despite the severe critiques, there is recognition that internal debates within the Catholic hierarchy have become more transparent, as many Catholics themselves feel embarrassed by certain public positions that have been taken.

While he concedes that "disappointment" exists, Marans cautions against oversimplifying the Church's stance as inherently "anti-Israel" or rooted in antisemitism, characterizing the situation as "more complicated than that." He also acknowledges that Pope Francis met multiple times with the families of hostages and was "supportive and empathetic to the Jewish people and to Israel," although some of Francis's public statements, including "War is terrorism. Terrorism is war," led to calls for more direct condemnations of attacks against Israel. Marans adds, "This was the pope who had more Jewish friends than any pope in history," underscoring the complex, multifaceted nature of the relationship.

Other observers maintain that such difficulties may serve as a catalyst for deeper engagement. Rosen suggests that, while there has been a painful "step back," there could ultimately be "two steps forward," pointing to Catholic leaders like Cardinal Dolan who have supported their Jewish counterparts. Skorka stresses the need to keep lines of communication open, insisting, "You don't cut ties with a close friend… If we keep talking, we can clarify and correct." Alon Goshen-Gottstein – founder and director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute – similarly warns against overgeneralizing the Vatican's position and notes that many Catholic institutions have proven steadfast allies. Even amid disappointment, these voices suggest that the present crisis – though fraught with pain and disillusionment – offers an opportunity for recalibration and a renewed commitment to Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

3. Institutional and Theological Critique

In the midst of criticism, some Jewish scholars chose a more proactive path and adopted measures to share their perspectives with Pope Francis. As noted in the review chapter, Ben-Johanan, together with other scholars and practitioners in interfaith activism, sent a letter to Pope Francis shortly after October 7. Their objective was to differentiate political criticism of Israel from a negation of the state's right to exist, underscore the importance of Jewish-Catholic solidarity, and reflect how the crisis was experienced by Jews.

Ben-Johanan describes Francis's response to the letter – received three months later – as a "warm letter" that was "based on familiarity and sympathy." She explains that his response was written with a "personal tone." Importantly, she mentions that this was the first letter ever addressed specifically to Israeli Jews. She highlights that it was neither judicial nor focused on moral judgments, unlike many difficult issues the Church confronts. In her assessment, it was "very important," "not diplomatic," and "meaningful," and it came at the right moment. Notwithstanding the positive evaluation of the late pope's response, Ben-Johanan maintains that the letter was an important gesture of sympathy, despite leaving many issues unresolved.

Ben-Johanan highlights two important aspects of Francis's response: first, it recognized that the war itself "liberates antisemitism," making it impossible to treat rising antisemitism as separate from the broader conflict; and second, it used the term "anti-Judaism," signaling that distinctly Christian hostility toward Jews persists as an issue alongside antisemitism.[175]

Despite these positive attributes, Ben-Johanan points out that foundational religious dialogue remains "extremely stuck." She characterizes the letter and the pope's response as a non-institutional exchange that took place outside normal channels and had a positive effect. This observation is particularly relevant for this research, as it illustrates a potential new avenue for dialogue – an opportunity to think outside conventional structures and explore alternative frameworks for engagement.

It is important to note, however, that Ben-Johanan's perspective on that early exchange in late 2023 and early 2024 does not reflect later developments in the pope's relationship with the Jewish community, such as his statement

that Israel should be investigated for genocide and his references to John 8:44. These subsequent events, which occurred after the interview, may significantly influence the ongoing conversation and could alter the conclusions drawn in her initial assessment.

4. Enduring Relationship Capital

Amid these tensions, some leaders point to the long-standing bonds that still shape Catholic-Jewish relations. Rabbi Mirvis, the Chief Rabbi of London, discussed a 2013 document published by the Church of Scotland, "The Inheritance of Abraham,"[176] and described how the Jewish community's response to it exemplified a "model of excellence" for addressing and potentially resolving interfaith disagreements. According to him, the Jewish community in Scotland felt "very offended" by this document, which examined Zionism, the biblical right of the Jews (or lack thereof) to the Holy Land, and Christian supersessionist theology.

In 2014, he addressed the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh, where he "outlined the reasons why we felt so bitterly disappointed." He then explained how rabbis and ministers subsequently formed study groups that met regularly to discuss the issues dividing them – particularly their differing views on the Holy Land and why the Jewish community was offended by the document and the beliefs it appeared to represent.

He underscores that rather than allowing the offense to fester, they chose to explore the issues openly and deeply. This process involved bringing problems "to the table," engaging in dialogue to grasp one another's perspectives, establishing study groups in which religious leaders met regularly, and clarifying the theological and historical concepts that created divisions. It thus depended on direct communication, a readiness to confront challenging questions, and a commitment to valuing each other's positions, even when disagreements were pronounced.

According to Mirvis, this approach led the Church of Scotland, after October 7, to issue statements condemning Hamas terrorism, affirming its support for the Jewish people, and expressing solidarity with their plight. He notes that, in the aftermath of October 7, the Jewish community "appreciates deeply the Church

of Scotland's comments relating to Hamas terrorism, support for the Jewish people, identifying with our plight."

For the purposes of this research, it is important to recognize this development as an example of a successful dialogue model that survived a crisis and ultimately reinforced the relationship between the two communities.

5. Diverging Approaches: Theological Versus Political Engagement

Political Engagement

Rabbi Pesach Wolicki's response to the crisis demonstrates a significant shift in his approach to Jewish-Christian relations. In the past, he focused primarily on shared biblical study and theological fellowship, guided by the idea that the Jewish people are called "to help the rest of the world draw closer to God… to be that light unto the nations." However, when many Christian leaders failed to offer visible support in the immediate aftermath of October 7 – at a time when he had anticipated widespread rallies condemning Hamas – Wolicki concluded that purely theological dialogue was insufficient. He resigned from his position at the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation and co-founded a coalition called "Keep God's Land." Explaining his reasoning, he said, "In that position, I could not really do things that were political because of the organization. So, I resigned that position in order to be able to speak more freely about political messaging, because I realized that the response to October 7 for Christians had to be a combination of faith and politics."

He further clarified, "We formed Keep God's Land to oppose anti-Israel pressures. We realized theology alone won't cut it. We need committed allies who show up when it counts." In Wolicki's view, theological discourse must now be paired with concrete political advocacy if interfaith alliances are to remain meaningful in the face of growing challenges. Consequently, his messaging moved beyond theological teachings to emphasize shared political struggles and the experience of Christians and Jews as common targets of hostile forces. He currently prioritizes encouraging Christian leaders to leverage their political influence in support of Israel, describing this new approach as effective.

Central to this effort is opposition to the Biden administration's calls for a two-state solution. Wolicki explains that "The coalition's main focus is to fight back against the Biden administration's calls for a Palestinian state," highlighting collective action to influence both policy and public discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This strategy includes building a broad coalition of Christian leaders – among them prominent political figures in the United States such as former House members Michele Bachmann and Tony Perkins – demonstrating a united front within the Christian community on behalf of Israel.

Part of Wolicki's approach involves encouraging Christian leaders who may not have been active on behalf of Israel in the past to sign position papers, take public stands, and organize educational programs in their churches. He describes this as essential for mobilizing wider Christian support. He cites several successes, including the creation of a sizable coalition of Christian leaders – numbering in the hundreds, by his account – who have aligned with prominent political figures. According to Wolicki, this coalition has actively challenged policy proposals supporting a two-state solution, reflecting direct engagement with current political debates regarding Israel.

Additionally, Wolicki notes that previously inactive Christian leaders have become more vocal, taking public positions or organizing events designed to inform their congregations about Israel's situation. He considers these developments a testament to the effectiveness of combining theological connections with coordinated advocacy. While he does not claim total success or rely on formal performance metrics, Wolicki expresses confidence that these initial achievements have validated the coalition's mission and reinforced the need for ongoing efforts.

Theological and Ethical Engagement

In contrast to Wolicki's politicized model, other interfaith leaders have responded to the post-October 7 crisis by reaffirming theological and ethical foundations as the bedrock of meaningful engagement. Rabbi Dr. Goshen-Gottstein, director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute, explained: "The immediate effect of the war was to freeze all interfaith engagement… all the groups stopped." In stark contrast to Wolicki's political reorientation, the Elijah Interfaith Institute shifted its focus toward universal ethical values – especially human dignity – as a way to foster common ground in the face of divisive political discourse.

"We found a practical, thematic niche… emphasizing human dignity as a core value," he explained. Through prayer vigils and online discussions centered on the dignity of every human being – Jewish, Muslim, and Christian alike – the institute carved out a neutral space where diverse faith communities could unite in solidarity without being weighed down by political controversy. This approach resembles that of Abrahamson, Stolov, and Wagner in the previous chapter.

A similar ethical focus is articulated by Rabbi Dr. Fernando Fishel Szlajen, an Argentine rabbi and academic specializing in the field of bioethics and interfaith relations, who offers a perspective that is both pragmatic and deeply constructive. He described the aftermath of October 7 as "a discovery" that revealed who was genuinely committed to interfaith relationships and who had merely engaged in symbolic politics. In Argentina, where communities contend with economic hardships and are geographically distant from the Middle East conflict, the emphasis is on personal and pastoral connections rather than abstract political debates. "We are 12,000 kilometers away from the problem… We have financial problems, inflation, corruption. People here don't have the time or energy to engage in purely symbolic politics. So, you see who's your friend in real life," Fishel Szlajen noted. He further stressed that authentic interfaith relationships must exist "between people, not between arguments nor institutions that claim, even falsely, to represent groups or communities" and that even amid "fake news" or misunderstandings about Israel, sincere care and support remain paramount.

Fishel Szlajen advocates for what he calls a "transcendence of interreligious dialogue to interreligious production" – a move toward collaborative ethical action that addresses local or global social challenges. Rather than issuing statements about distant conflicts, he encourages the creation of tangible projects such as schools or feeding programs. "If we create together – schools, feeding programs, ways to help our poor – then we become partners in action. That unity is stronger than any political disagreement," he explained. For Fishel Szlajen, interfaith cooperation and production must extend beyond rhetoric to practical, life-affirming, and common good initiatives.

Positioning himself as an academic in bioethics, Rabbi Szlajen pursues interfaith collaboration to address pressing societal issues through religious and ethical

reasoning. He convenes a group comprising a priest, an imam, and a rabbi – all of whom possess strong religious identities and academic credentials. Their aim is to make decisions or provide insights relevant to societal problems from a faith-based ethical perspective, in order to produce ethical public policies applicable to all and capable of resolving specific governance conflicts.

One of the group's significant initiatives includes drafting a document on how to address ethical concerns surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) in Argentina. The document engages with challenges emerging from AI's advanced usage and offers insights from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. Another area of their focus is the ethical implications of gene editing and genetic modification. These initiatives not only foster interfaith dialogue but also aim to influence public discourse and government policy.

Fishel Szlajen emphasizes the importance of making content developed in academic and interfaith contexts relevant to national governance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his interfaith team identified a lack of national protocols for triage and allocation of vital resources. In response, his interfaith group of scholars created a protocol that, according to Fishel Szlajen, aligned with Jewish ethical values, coinciding with those of Christianity and Islam. This effort illustrates how interfaith ethical reasoning and production can directly inform responses to urgent medical and humanitarian challenges.

For Rabbi Fishel Szlajen, this kind of "interreligious creation, the interreligious production" of knowledge and ethical frameworks represents a vital dimension of interfaith work – one that moves beyond dialogue into shared, action-oriented engagement with the world's most pressing concerns.

6. Maintaining or Questioning Dialogue

Calls to Reassess or Pause

Rome's Chief Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni has raised existential questions about the very purpose of maintaining official dialogues if Christian partners continue to adopt equivocal stances. "What's the point of continuing the dialogue if this is the approach?" he asked, expressing profound disillusionment. Di Segni argued that grand declarations against antisemitism are rendered meaningless when met with silence in the face of terrorism: "Loud proclamations are not

enough… You can't say 'no to antisemitism' and then remain silent when terrorists massacre Jews." For him, the near-cancellation of Italy's annual Catholic-Jewish Day of Reflection – Giornata del Dialogo – stands as a stark testament to the deep crisis in these relationships.

Commitment Amid Critique

In contrast to Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni's skepticism, other religious leaders remain steadfast in their commitment to interfaith dialogue, despite the many challenges it currently faces. Rabbi Rosen insists, "Interfaith dialogue is not only a tool to achieve certain goals. It is a value in itself." He roots this belief in the conviction that every religion captures only a partial understanding of the divine: "Every religion is just a small corner of something much bigger. In simple words, God is much greater than any religion." From the Jewish teaching that every person is created in the image of God, he concludes that "every human encounter is an encounter with God." He acknowledges the emotional toll of recent events but firmly warns against retreating from engagement: "To walk away is to confirm the worst instincts on both sides."

This theological framework leads Rosen to describe interreligious dialogue as a form of spiritual experience. He explains, "The inter-religious encounter for me was spiritual enrichment. And for me, it has a value in itself." He emphasizes that this intrinsic value exists independently of any tangible outcomes such as peacebuilding or the advancement of human rights: "I don't need it to lead me – not to peace, not to human rights… For me, it has a value in itself. But of course, the rest of the things are important."

Rabbi Rosen contrasts his position with that of Rabbi Michael Melchior, who views interfaith dialogue primarily as a political enterprise. While not dismissing political goals, Rosen maintains that even if interfaith engagement leads to no concrete political achievements, he would still be committed to it: "Even if I can't do anything positive, in a political sense, the practice remains worthwhile in its own right." This perspective reinforces the idea that interfaith dialogue, when pursued with sincerity and humility, offers not only practical benefits but also profound spiritual value. Alongside Rosen, Rabbi Abraham Skorka advocates for continued dialogue, emphasizing the importance of "critical honesty" in conversations between faiths. Skorka contends that maintaining dialogue, even under strain, is essential for dispelling misconceptions and

engendering trust: “If we keep talking, we can clarify and correct. That is far better than leaving them in ignorance or allowing resentment to fester.”

Rabbi Marans, too, rather than using this frustration as grounds for disengagement, calls for renewed commitment and strategic recalibration. “We have to redouble our efforts in the places where weakness has been demonstrated,” he argued. For Marans, the path forward lies in reinforcing AJC’s three core principles: securing Israel’s rightful place in the global community, combating antisemitism, and promoting human rights, religious freedom, and pluralism. As he explains, “There is a desire on the part of many of our interlocutors to separate their relationship with Israel from their relationship with the Jewish people, and this is a false separation for the overwhelming majority of world Jewry.” In his view, “we cannot… substitute… antisemitism with anti-Israelism,” insisting that it is unacceptable to endorse only Jewish identity while disregarding the historical and spiritual bonds linking Jews and Israel.

Marans also warns against discarding interfaith dialogue because of the turmoil triggered by October 7: “Let’s not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Let’s not let October 7… define the future.” While acknowledging that some churches have “misbehaved post-October 7,” he underscores that others are “grappling… with this issue of Israel.” He emphasizes that continued engagement – tempered by careful language and mutual respect – is crucial, noting the sensitivity involved in discussing these complex issues: “proper language” is essential to navigating the current landscape.

Ultimately, Marans advocates maintaining AJC’s foundational principles, adapting communication strategies, and re-energizing interfaith efforts to address the gaps revealed by recent events. By holding fast to respectful dialogue, mutual understanding, and careful phrasing, he contends that interfaith relationships can still emerge stronger from the challenges posed by October 7.

Evangelical Responses

The review chapter paints a nuanced picture of evangelical responses to the war, largely reflecting the perspectives of the interviewees. As Georgette Bennett notes, Christian attitudes toward the conflict are far from monolithic. While evangelicals are described as "overwhelmingly very supportive of Israel," more progressive Christian denominations "are all about siding with the Palestinians." This ideological divide underscores the complex terrain of Christian engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Adam Gregerman reinforces this dichotomy by highlighting the strained relationship between the Jewish community and mainline Protestant denominations such as the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). These churches, he explains, have issued decades' worth of theologically and politically critical statements about Israel – tensions were only exacerbated in the aftermath of October 7.

To comprehend the friction with mainline Protestantism, one must look at the theological framework guiding these denominations. Churches such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America rely heavily on a tradition of "prophetic critique" regarding state power and militarism, often heavily influenced by the narratives of Palestinian Christians. While these denominations internally rationalize their stances as the necessary application of Christian peacemaking, Jewish partners view this approach as a severe moral failure. In the wake of October 7, this prophetic lens frequently resulted in statements that blurred the lines between aggressor and victim. By treating the conflict merely as a generic "cycle of violence" to be condemned uniformly, these churches perpetuated, from a Jewish perspective, an unacceptable moral equivalence that ignored the unprecedented barbarity of Hamas's terrorism.

By contrast, evangelical Christians are often portrayed as Israel's most steadfast allies. Rabbi Wolicki attributes this loyalty to a theological belief that the modern State of Israel fulfills biblical prophecy. Prominent evangelical organizations such as Christians United for Israel (CUFI), led by Pastor John Hagee, exemplify this unwavering support, often expressing their readiness to "be on the front

lines" when Israel is under threat. Yet, as Bryant Frank cautions, this alliance is not without complications. He points out that such support is frequently motivated by eschatological beliefs that do not necessarily align with Jewish interests. "They have a built-in bias in favor of Israel… for their own purposes," Frank remarks, acknowledging that despite these tensions, successive Israeli governments have embraced the alliance for strategic reasons.

However, several interviewees emphasize that the evangelical world cannot be regarded as a unified bloc. Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni, speaking from the Italian context, refers to the "evangelical galaxy," a term that captures the ideological and theological diversity within evangelical communities. This internal plurality ranges from deeply pro-Israel segments to others that are indifferent or even oppositional, challenging simplistic generalizations about evangelical attitudes.

Rori Picker Neiss recounts instances where conservative evangelical pastors reached out seeking sincere dialogue to better understand Jewish perspectives on the conflict. These conversations, she notes, were built not on political commonalities but on mutual trust and respect, reflecting the potential for relationship-driven engagement even amid ideological differences.

Building on this theme, Aharon Ariel Lavi points to a growing interest among many Christians in Torah and the Hebrew language, Jewish culture, and even law. Some Christians describe it as a Christian "Torah awakening of Hebraic Christianity." Many of those people grew up in Evangelical homes, Mormon homes, and the like, but do not necessarily identify as such anymore. One of the key differences is that they have completely moved away from replacement theology and have banned proselytizing Jews.

This interest, according to data gathered by the Ohr Torah Interfaith Center, spans millions to tens of millions of Christians and reflects a deeper spiritual curiosity. Such encounters signal a promising avenue for interfaith engagement grounded in shared learning rather than political expedience.

In the wake of October 7, the Jewish community has also begun to reassess its interfaith strategies. Dr. Ari Gordon of AJC observes a shift in pressure from some parts of the Jewish community to focus on building coalitions exclusively with unequivocal allies and on what he calls "non-Jewish warriors for Zion,"

rather than on maintaining relationships with partners whose approach to Israel is characterized as criticism or ambivalence. This emerging approach – which he summed up by the biblical phrase "Mi LaHashem Elai" ("Whoever is for God, follow me") – creates severe (and often unrealistic) litmus tests for what constitutes a legitimate interfaith partner for the Jewish community. It is often championed by those who prioritize political solidarity over theological consensus, and who see interfaith relations as a matter of transaction rather than trust-building. It reflects a broader realignment of interfaith priorities, emphasizing pragmatic alliances during times of existential threat.

Conclusion

The interviews paint a complex, still-unfolding portrait of Jewish-Christian relations in the wake of the October 7 mayhem. Across traditions and continents, interlocutors experienced the same event through different lenses, producing reactions that ranged from silent paralysis to fervent solidarity. Taken together, the seven thematic clusters reveal a field of engagement that is at once fractured and remarkably adaptive.

A moment of deep crisis: The widespread emotional disillusionment expressed by many Jewish practitioners revealed just how profoundly interfaith trust has been shaken – especially in relation to the Catholic Church and the response of Pope Francis. For many, the moral equivocation from long-standing Christian partners marked not just a disappointment, but a rupture in decades of hard-won progress. The depth of this crisis cannot be overstated: it has led some to question the very foundations of the dialogue itself. Yet, even among the most disheartened voices, there is no wholesale retreat. Rather, Jewish leaders are re-evaluating and re-negotiating the terms of engagement, insisting that any meaningful dialogue must begin with an unambiguous moral acknowledgment of Jewish suffering and trauma – only then can broader geopolitical discussions follow.

1. **Ideological realignments are accelerating:** A postcolonial ethical framework now dominates many progressive Christian responses, increasingly displacing the Holocaust-conscious ethos that guided Christian-Jewish reconciliation after 1965. This shift recasts Jews from a

historically persecuted minority to perceived agents of colonial power, thereby undermining the moral foundations of solidarity that once anchored interfaith rapprochement. As this lens becomes more entrenched, it risks distorting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a simplistic binary of oppressor and oppressed, obscuring Jewish historical trauma, national self-determination, and the complexity of the region. Theological tensions around land, power, and supersession are no longer just academic – they are being reactivated in ways that threaten to erode decades of trust. If left unaddressed, this ideological realignment could sever critical interfaith ties and legitimize narratives that dangerously conflate political critique with theological rejection.

2. **Institutions matter, but personal capital endures:** The Vatican's equivocations following October 7 illustrate how official statements – or their absence – can reverberate negatively through local networks, deepening disillusionment and mistrust. Yet alongside these institutional shortcomings, longstanding relationship capital – patiently built through decades of study groups, clergy exchanges, and shared civic initiatives – has shown remarkable resilience. Communities that engaged in sustained, candid interfaith learning, such as the Church of Scotland, were able to respond swiftly and empathetically, condemning terror and affirming Jewish suffering without hesitation. These examples underscore that personal trust, cultivated over time, can outlast institutional ambiguity. Notably, even within Christian contexts, the current crisis has revealed the value of putting Israel squarely at the center of the interfaith conversation rather than avoiding it.

3. **There are diverging – and complementary – modes of engagement:** One cohort is doubling down on *political advocacy,* arguing that solidarity must be measurable in policy and public action. Another cohort is retreating from geopolitics to foreground *ethical universals* such as human dignity, bioethics, and care for the vulnerable. Far from mutually exclusive, these approaches suggest a division of labor: political coalitions address immediate threats, while ethical-spiritual initiatives nurture long-term trust.

4. **Dialogue itself is being renegotiated.** Calls to "pause" or even abandon formal interfaith channels underscore the depth of the current crisis. Yet the majority of interviewees continue to defend the necessity of dialogue, emphasizing its enduring value. For some, the rationale is deeply theological – not merely pragmatic – rooted in the belief that every authentic human encounter is, in essence, an encounter with the divine. Paradoxically, for several interviewees, the very pressures threatening to collapse interfaith engagement have helped clarify its meaning and reaffirm its purpose. Moments of rupture such as this offer a critical opportunity to reflect deeply on what must change within dialogue – so that future engagement is not only possible, but also more resilient.

5. **Evangelical consistency and internal diversity complicate the ally/critic binary.** Evangelical communities have offered some of the most public, unqualified support for Israel, yet interviewees caution that this solidarity is neither monolithic nor always rooted in shared Jewish-Christian priorities. This support is often grounded in theological frameworks – such as eschatology or covenantalism – that do not always align with Jewish historical or ethical perspectives. As a result, sustained engagement is needed not only to affirm solidarity but also to cultivate mutual understanding that can withstand both political shifts and theological differences.

Policy Recommendations

Drawing on the review and interviews undertaken, this document identifies concrete steps to strengthen interfaith engagement before, during, and after moments of acute conflict. The recommendations outlined here aim to help practitioners, government officials, NGOs, and religious communities build more robust dialogue frameworks, resilient trust networks, and a comprehensive support system that transcends political divisions. By formalizing interfaith education, investing in local interfaith councils, fostering courageous rather than superficial conversations, embedding faith diplomacy into national and international policy, and preserving dialogue infrastructure and resilient relationships, these measures seek not only to repair current fractures but also to fortify interfaith engagement against future shocks.

1. Integrate Interfaith Education into the National Curriculum

Stakeholders: Government of Israel (Education Ministry), NGOs

Introducing interfaith literacy in schools from an early age is vital to long-term social cohesion. Children gain comfort with diverse beliefs when exposed to accurate, age-appropriate lessons on Judaism, Christianity in all its different forms, and Islam. Such exposure counters early-stage fear and bias, normalizing religious plurality. Moreover, understanding various traditions fosters empathy: students learn facts about other faiths and cultivate the emotional maturity needed to respect different cultures.

- **Implementation:** The Education Ministry should partner with experienced NGOs to design robust curricula. Initiatives might include the development of a course that could be offered nationwide to high school students, school visits to synagogues, churches, and mosques as part of guided interfaith programs, and targeted teacher training. NGOs like the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) – already active in civics education, Jewish identity, and peoplehood – could develop an

innovative course on this topic. By formalizing interfaith education, the government underscores that respect for religious diversity is a central pillar of Israel's identity, rather than an optional add-on.

2. Establish Local Interfaith Councils

Stakeholders: Government of Israel (Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Interior), Municipal officials

Municipal-level interfaith councils, epitomized by the Haifa model, can serve as a proactive solution to communal tensions. By bringing together rabbis, imams, priests, and civic leaders before crises occur, municipalities can build trust and mutual understanding. Haifa's swift mobilization post-October 7 highlighted the effectiveness of pre-existing relationships in reducing inflammatory rhetoric and violence.

- **Implementation:** Religious Affairs and Interior Ministries should fund meeting spaces, coordinators, and basic operational costs to ensure these councils convene regularly. Members need clear crisis response roles – designating spokespersons, convening emergency committees, and maintaining open lines with municipal authorities. This institutionalized approach enables daily cooperation and rapid, unified action during high-pressure situations, thereby reducing the likelihood of communal unrest.

3. Articulate Israel's Central Role in Jewish Life within Interfaith Dialogue

Stakeholders: Religious leaders, dialogue facilitators, NGOs

Jewish interfaith participants, especially in the United States, must articulate Israel's central role in Jewish life more openly. Some interviews revealed that this connection was often assumed rather than explained, leaving some Christian and Muslim partners underinformed about its emotional importance. By bringing Israel to the forefront, rather than treating it as an "elephant in the room," interfaith groups can cultivate deeper empathy and support. The Church of Scotland's model of direct engagement with local rabbis, covering contentious theological and political issues, demonstrated that addressing core

issues about Israel fosters genuine long-term trust. Courageous conversations promote authenticity: participants feel heard and challenged, building the solidarity crucial in times of crisis.

- **Implementation:** Practitioners should create safe forums for addressing potentially polarizing topics – Zionism, colonial legacies, theological claims about the Holy Land – using conflict-resolution and mediation techniques. While initial discomfort is inevitable, openly confronting these issues generates more durable trust. Models such as the successful reconciliation between British Jews and the Church of Scotland highlight how frank study and direct dialogue can bridge even profound gaps.

4. Create Crisis Protocols and Emphasize Transparency

Stakeholders: All interfaith practitioners and coalitions

The turmoil of October 7 exposed unspoken assumptions, such as "Why didn't they call me?" Establishing crisis-response protocols – rapid communications, mutual support statements, structured "emergency check-ins" – helps circumvent feelings of abandonment. Clarity on how to reach out during emergencies not only strengthens emotional bonds but also assures stakeholders of collective support.

- **Implementation:** Formalize procedures (e.g., a group text thread, designated coordinators) so each community knows how to respond immediately in a crisis. Drafting template statements in advance and maintaining updated contact lists of clergy and community liaisons can facilitate timely public messaging that counters rumors or extremist rhetoric.

- **Addressing Unspoken Expectations:** Some Jewish participants noted feeling "betrayed" by the silence of interfaith partners post-October 7. Dialogue facilitators should encourage transparent communication of support preferences. Rabbi Justus Baird suggests that groups set explicit norms for showing empathy – whether through a quick phone call or a public statement – ensuring no one feels abandoned or unsure of how to offer solidarity.

5. Integrate Faith Diplomacy into Foreign Policy

Stakeholders: Government of Israel (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), diplomatic missions, Beit HaNassi

Israel should strategically embed interreligious dialogue within its diplomatic channels, systematically engaging global religious leaders to strengthen diplomatic ties and effectively combat antisemitism internationally. Rabbi Aharon Lavi emphasizes the necessity for Israel to "formally integrate religious dialogue into its diplomatic frameworks," underscoring its potential to foster solidarity against terror and neutralize extremist ideologies. Through regular consultations and sustained dialogue with influential religious bodies – including the Holy See, major Protestant denominations, and significant Muslim-majority communities – Israel can actively address and dismantle antisemitic narratives, clarify widespread misconceptions about Jewish identity and Zionism, and encourage explicit, authoritative condemnations of violence and extremism.[177]

Long-Term Relationship Building: Faith diplomacy is uniquely positioned to establish durable, resilient connections that transcend shifting political contexts. By organizing interfaith conferences, promoting Israel's diverse religious and cultural heritage through international pilgrimages, and welcoming influential global faith leaders to Israel, diplomatic efforts can cultivate deep-seated goodwill and trust. These carefully nurtured relationships not only facilitate cooperation during crises but also provide an enduring foundation for sustained international advocacy against antisemitism and promote mutual understanding across diverse religious communities.

6. Improve Inter-Ministerial Coordination

Stakeholders: Government of Israel ministries (Education, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Foreign Affairs)

A cross-ministry task force is essential for synchronizing efforts to advance interfaith relations. Such a body ensures that academic curricula, local

community dialogues, and international outreach align with cohesive national objectives. For instance, when implementing a new religious literacy program, the Education Ministry should collaborate with local religious leaders via the Ministry of Interior. Similarly, the Foreign Ministry could connect international faith delegations to domestic interfaith projects, showcasing positive models of coexistence.

- **Scaling Up Successful Examples:** Haifa's successful coordination among universities, local government, and the Ministry of Interior offers a blueprint for national collaboration. Replicating this model can amplify the impact of individual programs and demonstrate the government's commitment to holistic interfaith engagement.

7. Preserve Dialogue Infrastructure and Resilient Relationships

Stakeholders: interfaith practitioners, NGOs, community leaders

It is critical to protect and reinforce successful models and bonds that survived the turbulence of October 7. Certain dialogue initiatives demonstrated exceptional resilience, reflecting deeply rooted trust and candid conversations. Georgette Bennett, a veteran interfaith activist, noted that one Israeli-Palestinian interreligious committee "remarkably held together" because both sides were committed to continuity. Haifa's pre-existing interfaith forum likewise mobilized swiftly post-October 7, evolving into a formal municipal council. These examples show that when trust is genuine, communities do not abandon each other even under severe stress.

- **Identify and Nurture Existing Partnerships:** Practitioners should determine which relationships endured – or briefly paused – and make them a priority. Preserving institutional memory and leadership within these groups is essential, as they offer tested strategies for conflict navigation. Smaller initiatives, including Jewish-Muslim study circles persisting despite community pressure, can act as seeds for renewed trust.

- **Focus on Shared Challenges:** Many pre-October 7 collaborations targeted issues such as bigotry and poverty rather than dialogue alone; these efforts frequently remained intact. As Bryant Frank noted, fighting antisemitism and Islamophobia has been a highly successful form of collaboration, remaining "unaffected by October 7." Joint humanitarian or community service projects – such as supporting the homeless or aiding refugees – remind each group of their common interests and foster continuity.

- **Highlight Success Stories:** By publicizing these resilient partnerships, interfaith leaders can demonstrate the practical benefits of collaboration and encourage replication of these models. Even amidst extreme crises, well-established and sincere interfaith bonds can withstand social and political pressure, serving as powerful beacons of hope.

Conclusion

The devastating events of October 7, 2023, have profoundly reshaped interfaith dialogues among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities worldwide, exposing vulnerabilities and strengths within existing frameworks and relationships. This study, drawing insights from extensive interviews, scholarly research, and direct practitioner testimonies, illustrates both the resilience and fragility inherent in interreligious relations, highlighting critical challenges and pathways for improvement.

In Jewish-Christian relations, the immediate aftermath revealed deep disappointments and frustrations, notably with perceived equivocations from the Vatican and other major Christian bodies. The cautious diplomatic language and ambiguous statements issued in the wake of Hamas's atrocities profoundly shook Jewish trust, raising existential questions about the nature and authenticity of decades-long dialogue efforts. Jewish leaders articulated a clear expectation of unequivocal moral clarity and solidarity that was, regrettably, not universally met. Nevertheless, this period also saw genuine gestures of support and empathy from certain Christian quarters, illustrating that authentic solidarity remains possible when relationships are deeply rooted in mutual understanding and direct communication.

In the realm of Jewish-Muslim relations, the conflict severely strained existing ties and sometimes led to the outright suspension of dialogue. However, several models emerged demonstrating that where dialogue was rooted in pragmatic cooperation – such as humanitarian initiatives – it could not only withstand but actively respond to crisis. Some of the interviews underline the necessity for dialogue participants to openly and constructively confront challenging topics, particularly the role and significance of Israel within Jewish identity, and to establish clear communication protocols for future crises.

This analysis emphasizes several critical measures for strengthening dialogue infrastructures and ensuring resilience against future shocks: integrating robust interfaith education into national curricula; establishing municipal interfaith councils modeled on successful initiatives such as Haifa's; adopting structured crisis-response protocols; embedding interfaith diplomacy in formal government policy; and articulating Israel's central role in Jewish life.

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marginalize these incidents in the absence of systematic documentation and formal complaints. Its mission is threefold: to document every incident, assist victims in filing police reports, and bring the data to the attention of authorities and the wider public.

173 More on Adam Gregerman can be found in the interview chapter.

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