

**MEN OF GOOD WILL:  
J. ELLIOT ROSS AND THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS**

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*Abstract*

An impetus toward becoming actively intercultural and interreligious emerged in the third decade of the existence of the Religious Education Association. This paper explores one aspect of this period through an examination of the role of Catholic priest and R.E.A. member, John Elliot Ross (1884-1946) in a series of seminars conducted by the National Conference of Jews and Christian that sought to foster tolerance and good will among Jews, Protestants, and Roman Catholics. These seminars were part of an initiative sponsored by the REA during the interwar years in the United States. The journal, *Religious Education*, was the forum for numerous descriptive articles on these seminars and showcased the Association's emerging public stance on interreligious understanding and tolerance.

**INTRODUCTION**

Though William Rainey Harper and the Council of Seventy were all Protestant and the 1903 "Call for a Convention" was in part for the improvement of Sunday schools and better ways to teach the Bible, the phrases "religious and moral education," "the churches," and "other agencies" hint at the inclusiveness that Harper had observed and admired at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago ten year earlier. The membership rosters of the early years of the Religious Education Association indicate a small number of Jews and a few Catholics, but any significant interreligious activity did not occur in actuality for some time. In fact, during its first two decades, the association was neither intercultural nor interreligious. At best it may be described as *interdenominational*<sup>1</sup>.

Since its origin the REA has continually acknowledged the universality of religious education. Early volumes of the journal, *Religious Education*, contained articles with titles such as "The Religious Education in Girls in Turkey," "Religious Instruction in Japan," and "Religious Instruction in the Orient: Buddhism, Confucianism and Hindoo [sic]," acknowledging the unique nature of the challenges faced by religious educators world-wide. However, it was

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Schmidt acknowledges the early "diversity among individual members" (1983, 7) and Boardman Kathan writes, "While it is clear that Harper was not committing the new organization to a monolithic philosophy or theology, it is not certain that he intended it to be inter-faith in nature" (2004, 6). Nor is it certain, in my perspective, that he intended it *not* to be. While the initial and overriding concerns of the REA were particularly Christian in nature, the study and teaching of scripture is undertaken by all Abrahamic traditions.

not until later in articles like one written by Jane Addams<sup>2</sup> (1909) on the education of Jewish, Catholic and “Evolutionist” youth, that the association’s awareness of itself as an intercultural and interreligious body began to emerge from the pages of the journal.

The importance of cultural and religious diversity education and its potential to promote world unity and peace began to appear in journal articles even before the First World War. In 1911, *Religious Education* published an article by Fannie Fern Andrews entitled, “A Course of Study in Good Will” (570). The American School Peace League, whose aim it was to promote good-will among all people, suggested a graded program in which students in Grade VII would study “world family” topics (sounding very stereotypical today) such as

self-control—the American Indian, wit and humor—the Irish, loyalty—the Jew, love of beauty—the Italian, patriotism—the Greek, thoroughness—the German, industry—the Scandinavian, courtesy—the French, the Hague conferences and the characteristics of all nations. (572)

By 1916, it was evident to Protestants, Jews and Catholics alike that the public school system in this country would not be providing religious instruction of any kind. This challenge to the founding aims of the REA led to a gathering of minds from all religions on the range of possible responses. Articles written by Jewish, Protestant and Catholic authors on the subject of weekday religious instruction appeared frequently in the journal over the next several years. United by such common concerns, the REA took on a more explicit inter-religious nature.

In addition to concern for the growing immigrant population and working together on weekday religious school issues, voices from each of the three major religious groups of the REA became intertwined in political issues (World War I, education for good citizenship and for peace and tolerance), economic issues (unemployment and the Depression), and social issues (racism, gender inequality, religious prejudices). Character education, perceived as a corrective to many of these problems, is a frequent and enduring focus for the journal in the first half of the twentieth century. World War I prompted journal articles on educating youth for world-mindedness and the “brotherhood” of nations.

To the chagrin of not a few members, the REA moved toward a strong social science emphasis and concern for research. Stephen Schmidt notes that in spite of REA president, Arthur Cushman McGiffert’s plea in 1921 for greater focus on theology in religious education, “other forces within the organization, more individualized, more de-Christianized, more humanized, would lead the REA into privatized research and ultimately toward a neo-Christian humanism” (1983, 59).

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<sup>2</sup>Jane Addams is listed in a brochure of the National Conference of Jews and Christians as a member of their Executive Committee along with REA members such as Galen Fisher, Ernest Johnson, William H. Short and J Elliot Ross. The same brochure also identifies the President of Columbia University and REA member, Nicholas Murray Butler, as a prominent seminar speaker and leader for the NCJC, which later was called the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) and today is known as The National Conference for Community and Justice. See their website at <http://www.nccj.org/> for the current mission statement and agenda.

Character education was the catch phrase for much the Association's work in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. However, as REA historian Stephen Schmidt recounts, this era of REA history also

marked a significant increase in ecumenical efforts. Jewish/Protestant/Catholic dialogues regularly appeared in the journal, and the same denominational triad balances all convention presentations. There was greater interaction with the Jewish community than with the smaller Catholic membership. (1983, 93)

Helen Archibald writes

The century from 1850 to 1950 permits a survey of religious education in the United States during a period marked at its beginning by a strong evangelical consensus within the nation and characterized at its conclusion by religious pluralism. The Evangelical consensus of 1850 becomes by 1950 the consensus of which Will Herberg [1983] described in *Catholic, Protestant, and Jew* as the consensus that there existed three ways of being American. (1987, 407)

So too it was with the REA as it came of age interreligiously and interculturally in the interwar years.

It was during the interwar period that J. Elliot Ross, a Paulist priest and REA member, rose to national recognition as a man "of pioneering spirit who was able to challenge the conventions of his age and his church<sup>3</sup> by declaring publicly his Christian interest in calling Jews his sisters and brothers" (Hayes 2000, 322). Father J. Elliot Ross, along with Rev. Everett R. Clinchy and Rabbi Morris Lazaron, conducted interfaith dialogue seminars in thirty eight U.S. cities on a unprecedented coast-to-coast good will tour in the fall of 1933 under the auspices of the National Conference of Jews and Christians, with support from the REA and other groups such as the Inquiry, the Calvert Associates and the Institute of Social and Religious Research.

### **JOHN ELLIOT ROSS: A SINGULAR AND GENEROUS SPIRIT**

John Elliot Ross (1884-1946) was born in Baltimore, Maryland into a family that traced its roots back to George Ross, signer of the Declaration of Independence and his flag making niece, Betsy Ross. He was educated in Catholic schools and early on became interested in sociology and economics. His dissertation was written under the direction of Rev. William J. Kerby at the Catholic University of America who had also directed the dissertation of John A. Ryan, the most noted Catholic social philosopher of his time (Lynch 1995, 1). Ross was ordained in 1912 at St. Paul the Apostle Church in New York (Hayes, 322).

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<sup>3</sup>The Ross Papers in the Paulist Fathers Archive at St. Paul's College in Washington, D.C. contain letters referencing the difficulties Ross experienced in obtaining permission to participate from some of the local bishops of the various dioceses in which the inter-religious seminars were scheduled to be held. There was a widespread concern in the Catholic Church that such interfaith gatherings promoted a tendency to harmonize the differences between religions. (See the papal encyclical of Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos*, 1929, for strong directives on these concerns.) Ross was careful to write the local bishop well in advance of any scheduled event to put to rest any such fears and to seek permission to participate. For more on this tension see Patrick Hayes (2000).

Ross soon became involved in the Newman movement, acting as Chaplain to Catholic students attending a non-Catholic college. First at the University of Texas at Austin (1915) and later at Columbia University in New York City (1925), Ross held the position of Chaplain, helping Catholic college students maintain their faith life at these non-Catholic universities through participation in the Newman Club. In addition, he taught courses in religion and conducted his Sunday dinner discussions which were popular among students and faculty alike. Through these years of campus service, Ross wrote five books and numerous articles. He became fully entrenched in teaching Catholicism and sought to help his students see the beauty in its tenets (Lynch, 2-3). His developing pedagogical skills and openness to addressing questions about the religion prepared him well for his future endeavors in interfaith dialogue. Moreover, Ross gained recognition as a rare progressive Catholic religious educator. John L. Elias remarks that Ross was “well-suited for the liberal ethos of the REA”, (2004, 236) and, “until the 1950s was [its] most prominent Catholic participant”(234).

In 1929, The State University of Iowa instituted the School of Religion funded by a grant from John D Rockefeller (Blakeman 1953, 266). The School of Religion was a unique and somewhat controversial experiment in which a secular university sought to offer sectarian courses taught by outstanding scholars nominated by leaders from each of their respective religions. When the originally appointed Catholic professor resigned, Ross was offered the Catholic professorship as well as the position of Associate Director of the program. Ross saw this as an opportunity to reach even more young adult Catholics (Lynch, 3) and was intrigued by the thought of becoming the first Catholic priest to teach in a secular school of religion (Hayes, 323). The Paulists denied him permission to take the position since they had no connections with the university and few Catholic students were enrolled there. In an unfortunate turn of events<sup>4</sup> involving ecclesiastical and canonical intervention, Ross resigned from and then later rejoined the Paulists, but the damages of the tumultuous year were devastating to his scholarship (Hayes, 323). Ross’ stay in Iowa was short-lived. He was assigned as Chaplain to University of Virginia in 1932 where he remained until ill health forced his retirement to the Paulist community in New York.

In the last twenty years of his life, before his death in 1946, Ross was able to lead a parallel life, one that followed another dream, one more connected to his social mindedness and passion for tolerance and understanding among diverse groups. J. Elliot Ross joined forces with the emerging interfaith movement that was also capturing the attention of the national organizations such as the Calvert Associates, the Inquiry, the National Conference of Jews and Christians and the Religious Education Association.

## **THE FAIRFIELD EXPERIMENT**

While historian Robert Lynn reminds his readers that history is seldom shaped by ideas alone (1972, 91), the idea of the desirability of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue became

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<sup>4</sup>For a scholarly and detailed account of these events, see John E. Lynch, CSP, (1995, 1-14). Lynch concludes, “If J. Elliot Ross had been born fifty years later and exercised his ministry in the post-Vatican II Church under the 1983 Code, he would have been spared much personal anguish and canonical entanglement” (13).

an historical reality by the 1920s. This was the result of multiple and interactive events including the immigration of Catholic and Jewish populations, the movement of African-Americans into urban areas and the awful realization of the hatred and violence human beings could inflict on each other as was evidenced by World War I. By the year 1927, when Father J. Elliot Ross walked into a home where a group of fifteen Protestants had been gathering for weeks in an attempt to understand the religion of their new Catholic neighbors, the inter-religious movement was well underway.

These fifteen citizens of Fairfield, Connecticut, were participating in an experiment designed by a group of approximately twelve scholars, religious leaders and social scientists who were collectively known as the Inquiry (1923-1933). The Inquiry, in conjunction with the Calvert Associates<sup>5</sup>, designed and sponsored the Fairfield Experiment as a proposed methodology for tolerance education with adults. Ross described the overall function of the Inquiry in *The Commonweal* (the *The* was later dropped) magazine in 1927:

Several years ago a group of men who had had experience in religious and social work formed what is now called the Inquiry. Their purpose was to inquire into racial, industrial, political and religious prejudices in the country, with a view to lessening somewhat the friction in the community due to these various prejudices. (1927a, 750)

Fairfield seemed the ideal place to inaugurate the experimental method. “The advent of the newcomers has undoubtedly created many problems for the older and devoted Fairfielders, many of whom would prefer to see the town as it once was. . . . While one cannot say there was or is any bitter feeling . . . there is undoubtedly mutual suspicion” (*The Inquiry* 1927, 7).

The process began with giving three tests to the group, all of whose members were, in this case, Congregationalists. The first test was a religious “social distance” test, which “listed nineteen situations in which Protestants might show their willingness or reluctance to deal with a Catholic” (*The Inquiry* 1927, 13). Included in this list were such line items as “Would you approve of a Catholic as a day school teacher? Would you be willing to recognize one as Christian? Select one as intimate friend?” (*The Inquiry*, 73). The second test was a word-reaction test in which the participant was to consider each of sixty words for no longer than five seconds. If the word seemed disagreeable or annoying, it was to be crossed off the list. On the list were words such as “His Eminence, Ave Maria, Confessional, High Mass, Jesuit, Inquisition, Nun, and Infallibility” interdispersed with “Holy Bible, Salvation Army, Martin Luther, Evangelism, Mary Baker Eddy and Dwight L. Moody” (61). The third test was called “The Anthology of Indictments” which consisted of fifty-five statements which the participants were asked to evaluate as justified, probably justified, doubtful, unjustified or probably unjustified. The statements are political, economical, educational, intellectual as well as moral and religious

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<sup>5</sup>The Calvert Associates were chartered in 1922 as an educational society with Michael Williams, a convert, as its leader and first editor of its journal, *The Commonweal* (1924-present). (Williams name appears on the REA Board of 1933.) The Calvert Associates, who were named for George Calvert, founder of Maryland Free State, had as their mission the “dissemination of honest information regarding the Church of Rome. Among its many famed non-Catholic directors [is] . . . Nicholas Murray Butler. . . .” (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,929074,00.html>). [accessed September 9, 2007]. Butler, Williams and Ross were all involved with the REA, the Inquiry and The National Conference of Jews and Christians.

allegations Protestants might make about Catholics. The Fairfield group was in general agreement with several statements that seem stereotypical and unjustified today such as “when they have been to mass on Sunday, they can do anything they like the rest of the day” or “their confessional system makes them less scrupulous about wronging anyone” (17). However the group was strongly opposed to the ideas that “Catholic church cellars are full of rifles” and “Catholics hope to establish a Pope in Washington”(17).

This experiment was repeated with the roles reversed, Catholics studying Protestantism.<sup>6</sup> Equally interesting, but apparently milder in nature, the group decided that the “greatest point of interest for the Catholics, as well as the source of the greatest friction between Catholics and Protestants in this country, was the question of relations between church and state” (Ross 1928a, 15-16).

Following the completion of the tests, the group began a study of the Catholic religion lasting for six weeks with the intent of unearthing suspicions and misunderstandings. On the seventh week a competent authority and member of the Catholic Church was brought in to address the questions that remained following the study. J. Elliot Ross, then Chaplain at Columbia University, was the perfect Catholic representative. Ross’ visit to the study group was characterized by “perfect frankness and even at times some vigorous discussion, especially at one point when one of the members of the group objected to the Catholic practice of ‘indoctrinating’ the mind of the child” (*The Inquiry* 1927, 31). At the eighth and final meeting Ross’ visit was evaluated by the members of the Fairfield study group:

Upon invitation of our leader, a priest had agreed to discuss with us this subject from his viewpoint. This distinguished guest came, gave each in turn a hearty handclasp, smilingly spoke a cordial greeting.

The meeting with Father X was the climax of the meeting. At that meeting . . . there was no airing of biased opinion.

A feeling of friendliness and respect for Father X. A strengthening of respect for two or three pretty close Catholic friends.

I was interested in all that we learned of the Catholic faith and perfectly charmed (no would could fail to be that) with Father X. He is a delightful person and I shall long remember the evening.

If Catholics in general can be judged by Father X it seems they have grown more tolerant.

Meetings similar to ours last Friday conducted by scholars of like character to Father X would soon remove most of our doubts and arouse an urge for more friendly

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<sup>6</sup> Ross identified one such Catholic gathering as taking place in the home of Professor Carlton J. H. Hayes of Columbia University who was a convert to Catholicism and the Catholic Co-Chair of the National Conference of Jews and Christians (with Hon. Newton D. Baker and Roger w. Straus). Hayes was also a popular speaker the Sunday gatherings at the Newman Center of Columbia University while Ross was Chaplain there.

fellowship. (*The Inquiry* 1927, 35-39)

J. Elliot Ross was quickly recognized by the Inquiry group as a colleague who brought his gifts of honest teaching and pastoral sensitivity to this direct and challenging form of interfaith dialogue. Through his ensuing association with The Inquiry, J. Elliot Ross was introduced to Claris E. Silcox who in turn introduced him to Everett R. Clinchy, an Inquiry associate and the director of the newly formed National Conference of Jews and Christians. “Clinchy found a natural cohort in Ross, and with his help, launched a national agenda to promote religious tolerance . . .” (Hayes 2000, 325).

### NO FANCIFUL UNDERTAKING<sup>7</sup>

The National Conference on Jews and Christians (NCJC) grew out of the Committee on Goodwill between Jews and Christians which in turn had been formed in conjunction with the Federal Council of Churches. Clinchy’s association with the FCC and the Inquiry led to his appointment as its first Director. In 1927 as Clinchy and Ross were becoming aware of their common hopes for greater understanding between Christians and Jews, the REA was in the throes of a self-proposed evaluation. The Rockefeller-funded Institute of Social and Religious Research was engaged to carry out a study of the REA which found itself in the midst of an identity crisis in the wake of a leadership dearth following the death of Henry Cope in 1923 and the emergence of the new International Council of Religious Education (Kathan 2004, 7). REA historian Theodore Soares wrote of the Association’s questioning if there was “still a function for the organization” (1928, 633). The results of the Institute’s study indicated that the REA should stay its course but called for some adjustments. Soares noted, “The survey was most carefully made, resulting in very illuminating recommendations. The continuance of the Association was definitely advised. It was urged to adjust itself more carefully to other similar organizations. . . .(633). The NCJC was just such an organization.

The groundbreaking interfaith Seminar Concerning the Relations of Jews, Roman Catholics and Protestants took place on January 30-31, 1929, at Columbia University under the sponsorship of The National Conference of Jews and Christians.<sup>8</sup> The NCJC held as its aim

To unite Jews and Christians in good will; and to promote cooperation in behalf of a social order more nearly based on those ideals of justice, fellowship, and peace which are common to the prophetic traditions of Jews and Christians alike.  
(Silcox 1929, 207)

Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, was so “enthusiastic that he gave one of the three opening addresses, along with Rabbi Isaac Landman and Ross” (Hayes,

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<sup>7</sup> This is the title given to Nicholas Murray Butler’s welcome address to the Columbia Seminar in an edition of the journal containing several articles that concern the event (*Religious Education* 24, 1929, 215-219).

<sup>8</sup> The REA took notice and became involved in sponsoring such initiatives on college and university campuses around the country and addressing such inter-faith events in the pages of the journal over the next decade. The REA co-sponsored initiatives for seminars at Rollins College (1929), Dickinson (1930), Bucknell (1931), and one in Washington, D.C. (1932). See *Religious Education* for descriptive articles on each seminar from a variety of perspectives.

326). (Landman was an REA member as well.) Butler's call for the seeking out of a common denominator among the represented religions did not sit well with the majority of attendees who "represented scores of civic movements" (Hayes, 326) and sought primarily to understand other points of view "without compromising [their] own principles" (Hayes, 326).

Following the opening addresses, two sessions of two hours each were held at three separate round tables. These tables were populated by invited "expert" participants who were experienced in the topical areas of vocational adjustments for discrimination in hiring practices (vocational bureaus, social service agencies), misrepresentations of religious beliefs and practices (priests, rabbis, ministers) and community areas of conflict and cooperation (community organizers, adult educators, goodwill leagues). Members of the Inquiry designed the agenda for these discussions (Silcox 1929, 208). Ross noted in *The Commonwealth*

The National Conference of Jews and Christians conceived the idea of bringing together a number of representatives of the different religious groups for the purpose of having them say out in the open, to one another's faces, the worst that has been said behind their backs. It was a bold move . . . not without danger. . . . There was enough dynamite in these topics to start a civil war, but it was essential that the committee itself should prove its willingness to face facts frankly. (Ross 1929, 448)

Accounts of the seminar do indicate there were tense moments. Personal agendas found a way to intrude and some uninvited speakers had to be asked to leave. But by and large, the seminar which Ross hoped would be characterized by its frankness, fairness, factuality, and a sense of humor (1929b, 210) was indeed so. It was not without incidents, each religion contributing its own share. An exhibit of copies of anti-Catholic publications (many of which centered on campaign materials from the 1928 presidential campaign) "aroused great interest" according to Ross (1929a, 448) but Silcox noted, "This "data" gave a very real pungency to the discussion, although the criticism was expressed that similar exhibits of anti-Protestant or anti-Jewish literature might also have been well displayed" (Silcox 1929, 209).

Though the press was not permitted inside during the sessions, the planning and efforts of the men and women of goodwill in the National Council of Jews and Christians and other supporting organizations did not go unnoticed by the world. Silcox thought it was perhaps the first gathering of the three religious groups for the purpose of discussing differences and noted that on the day after the conference the *New York Daily Mirror* featured a leading article and photograph of "Professor Harrison S. Elliott at the inevitable blackboard conducting a discussion at one of the round tables of a Seminar at Columbia University" (1929, 207).

Everett R. Clinchy, wrote that the most evident outcome of the seminar was the realization that "the educational problem is staggering" (1929, 245). He surmised that the seminar had advanced civilization because its sponsors saw to the "scientific presentation of every kind of prejudice existing between the different religious cults, together with a complete statement of the social and economic evils resulting" (1929, 248). The syllabus prepared for each round table was exhaustive on the issues and most left with the idea that this sort of gathering needed to be repeated throughout the country in churches and synagogues as well as on college campuses.



Ross summarized the recommendations that came out of the Columbia Seminar Concerning the Relations of Jews, Roman Catholics and Protestants in *Religious Education and The Commonweal*. Not only did he report the common consensus that this sort of conference be multiplied, but that experiments such as the ones at Fairfield and Professor Hayes's home be conducted in other towns and cities and that indirect approaches such as inter-religious groups gathering around a common task be more commonly employed (1929c, 227). In *The Commonweal* Ross reminded his readers that entire religions should not be judged by the behavior of some of their adherents. Each religion should "remove the beam from its own eye before seeking to remove the mote from another religion's" (1929a, 449). He ended this article by referring to the apologetic power of the individual who models "a fine public spirit, who serves efficiently and unselfishly for the betterment of the community" (1929a, 449). He cites Louis Pasteur and Cardinal Gibbons as Catholics whose witness to the faith bore the fruit of good will for all Catholics and Catholicism as a whole. "May this adventure be but the forerunner of many more to follow" and "one step on the road to better things" (450).

### THE ROAD TO BETTER THINGS

The Columbia seminar was a forerunner to hundreds such conferences nationwide. The National Conference of Jews and Christians, in its effort to "moderate and finally to eliminate a system of prejudices which disfigures and distorts our business, social and political relations,"<sup>9</sup> expanded its activities to include an increased number of seminars and round table conferences, radio broadcasts, the publication of an official bulletin, distribution of pamphlets, the formation of a research committee within the NCJC, and the sponsorship of nationwide educational activities.

In 1931, the National Conference of Jews and Christian began plans for an unprecedented seven-week national tour and later decided to invite Father John Elliot Ross and Rabbi Morris Lazaron to accompany Everett Clinchy. The three men embarked on November 4, 1933 on a goodwill tour that would take them to thirty-five cities in twenty-four states for over one hundred speaking engagements and twenty-three radio broadcasts (Hayes, 326). According to a brochure, entitled "An American Adventure," the three men again sought, through seminars and round table discussions, not to reduce differences to a common denominator and not to make resolutions or form active committees, but to study and exchange experiences and to arrive at a common understanding of the causes of the difficulties. In addition to conducting such seminars, the three religious leaders made themselves available to speak in schools and with local service groups and clubs. The brochures lists "among the timely topics to be discussed: 'The Lessons for America from the Current Religious Conflicts in Germany, Spain, and Mexico;' 'The Relation of the Social Ideals and Programs of Religious Groups to the National Recovery Program;' and 'What Are the Most Practical Steps and Methods for Furthering Mutual Understanding and Civic Cooperation between Religious Groups?'"(NCJC 1933). The overarching aim of the tour was to

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<sup>9</sup>This definition of the purpose of the National Conference of Jews and Christians is according to Co-Chairman Hon. Newton D. Baker in an undated brochure found in The Ross Papers, the Archives of the Paulist Fathers, St. Paul's College, Washington D.C.

set up permanent organizations that would allow for local seminars and round table discussions to continue.

After the tour the three men remained personal and professional friends. A public dialogue concerning the landmark road trip was held in New York City. B'Nai B'rith's *National Jewish Monthly* published a transcript of the three men's report on the tour. In the report, Everett Clinchy explained the aim of the tour was not to remove the differences between religions but to make America safe for differences. Rabbi Lazaron then stated:

But America will not be safe for differences until the masses grasp this idea. It is not enough that our message be brought to a few thousand intellectuals here and there. It involves nothing more or less than the education of an entire generation through painful and arduous efforts to root out the old prejudices and develop attitudes of appreciation and habits of cooperation. (1934, 180)

Rabbi Lazaron also noted that the National Conference continued to make progress after the goodwill tour as they added over nine hundred lay members and community leaders as regional advisors. Dorothy Canfield Fisher was at work as "chairman in the plan to build a parallel constituency of National Conference women throughout the land, so that circles of opinions and programs will be set going among the organized women of America" (1934, 211).

The tour brought notoriety to the three men but also much recognition for the worthy cause. They were featured in a Paramount Pictures Newsreel and awarded the Gottheil Medal for Americans who had done the most for Jewry that year (Hayes, 329- 330). The efforts of the NCJC continued but increasingly without Ross. Failing health, constraints from the Church and his isolationist views on U.S. foreign policy led him to more and more frequently decline invitations to speak. In 1936, two years after the end of the goodwill tour, Ross suffered a stroke and never fully regained his health (Hayes, 331).

## **THE ROUND TABLE**

It is obvious that J. Elliot Ross helped pave the road for Jewish-Christian dialogue in the United States. His sincere and authentic desire to educate for understanding made him a rare Catholic progressive, unmatched in ecumenical endeavors in his own time. He represented the Catholic Church with dignity and taught its beliefs and practices with a sincere love for the faith. No doubt he was instrumental in changing stereotypical attitudes of the time. Sadly, he has been little noted historically for his efforts.

It is common to end a historical paper with implications for the present day but that is difficult to do here given the pluralism of religions in the United States. There are today many more than Herberg's "three ways of being American." It would take far more than three persons to form a goodwill team for this country today. The role of women would be integrative rather than "parallel."

What remains memorable about this story is the courage Ross showed in joining the interfaith movement when the Church was not supportive of such a vocation. From the early days of his college Chaplaincy, Ross valued open and honest dialogue and the hard conversations of confronting the evils of prejudice and the dangers of self-complacency. Surely his tireless energy and his pastoral patience in dealing with religious intolerance model a much-needed perspective for today's conflicted world. The round table, where no one person, group, religion, or nation is given title or precedence over another, is a strong symbol for the kind of dialogue needed.

The Religious Education Association continued to deal with questions of its identity and relationship to other organizations like the National Council of Jews and Christians. In 1933, REA Board minutes indicate interest in forming a committee to discuss further cooperation between the REA and the NCJC. In the same meeting endorsement was given to the REA's sponsoring of a proposed Inter-Faith pageant.<sup>10</sup> In 1934, Ross was invited to join the REA Board of Directors, but declined. By 1940 a statement on "Policy and Strategy of the Religious Education Association, was prepared following extensive deliberations of the Board of Directors and other Association groups in New York City and Chicago. The deliberations were considered so important that they were printed in *Religious Education*. Section III of the report addresses what may still be an important question for today. In coming to understand itself, is the REA to be concerned with "developing the basic understanding and the emotional attitudes which will make it possible for us to live together in a society which is characterized by diverse religious backgrounds and points of view?" or is "the reason we come together . . . because we originally sought better ways of teaching our religion to our own people?" (1940,184). Perhaps this is not an either-or question. By better teaching our own religions and by improving the way we do *religious education* can we not help people to live together more deeply, more *religiously* in a diverse and intercultural world?

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<sup>10</sup>Minutes of the Adjourned Meeting of the Board of Directors of The Religious Education Association, October 9, 1933, New York City. In the Archives of the Religious Education Association, Yale University Library, Divinity Library Special Collections, New Haven, CT.

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