



July 2005

Dear Friend,

Once again we are happy to share with you the Elijah Interfaith Institute's most recent activities. As usual, we have much to report and hope you enjoy this month's *Wisdom* e-newsletter.

Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein  
Director  
The Elijah Interfaith Institute

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**News Update – Scranton Conference and Jerusalem Follow-Up**

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From June 21<sup>st</sup> through 23<sup>rd</sup>, in Scranton, Pennsylvania, the ground was laid for launching a multi-year conversation on a Contemporary Jewish Theology of World Religions, which we hope will capture the attention of large audiences within Jewish religious, intellectual and educational leadership. Twenty five scholars from the United States, Israel and Europe attended the Conference. A still wider circle of thinkers, scholars and religious leaders who are deeply interested in the project, but were unable to attend this meeting, are involved in the project. The goal of the Scranton conference was to raise the initial issues that Judaism faces in an attempt to begin a process of historical study and theological self-examination, necessary as an accompaniment to genuine involvement in interreligious relations.



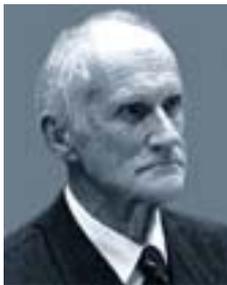
**Participants in the Scranton Conference**

It is fair to summarize the urgency of the subject matter, as expressed by participants in the conference, as nothing short of its relevance to the significance of the continued existence of the Jewish people. The ability to state a relationship to the religious other is also the ability to state a sense of uniqueness and a purpose for the continuity of the Jewish people and religion. Thus, the theological work necessary for a better understanding of the other is, in reality, nothing short of a consideration of the continued purpose of Judaism, as seen in the broader framework of its relations with and attitudes to other world religions. Thus, what may seem as a purely theological or philosophical exercise was deemed by participants to be of great urgency for the agendas of Jewish survival, continuity, education and leadership. All these are necessarily affected in major ways by the question of Judaism's relations to other religions and that question is in the present day and age, as in many other periods, a pressing issue, and not a tangential consideration.

The interest and momentum created at the Scranton Conference will be continued at the WCJS Meeting, to be held in Jerusalem, 31 July through 4 August. This follow-up is seen as beginning a sustained conversation with broad audiences within the Jewish community on this vital topic.

### Remembering Count Karl Konrad v.d. Groeben

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We are saddened by the death of Count Karl Konrad v.d. Groeben on July 6th at age 87. The count and his wife Ria have been dear friends and supporters of the Institute. After losing the family estate through the Russian occupation of East Prussia after World War 2nd, K.K. v.d. Groeben became a very successful businessman in the West. Always mindful of his social responsibilities and deeply engaged in Interfaith-understanding and peace work, he used his fortune to support various foundations, the most internationally well-known of which is the Global Ethic Foundation under the leadership of Prof. Hans Kung.

We will miss his friendship, hospitality, enthusiasm and encouragement that were founded on a deep personal faith in God and love for humanity. Our deep sympathies are with his dear wife Ria and family.

### Sharing Reflections - Celebrating 40 years of *Nostra Aetate*

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In the spirit of the Scranton Conference, we acknowledge that without addressing in a deep and systematic way the core attitudes that each religion espouses towards the other, such engagement in interfaith relations risks being superficial at best and double-talk at worst. This year the Catholic Church celebrates 40 years to the composition of *Nostra Aetate*, one of the major documents of the Second Vatican council. This document is a theological reassessment of the Catholic Church's position to world religions in general, with special reference to a complete



"Nostra Aetate -  
In Our Time"

reconsideration of its historical attitude to Judaism.

In honor of this anniversary, several symposia and conferences will be held worldwide, including in Rome and in Jerusalem. Nostra Aetate provides a model of the type of theological questioning and assessment that is a necessary correlate of the advance of interreligious relations.

To date, no other religion has invested as much thought into the theological significance for a religion's own self understanding of the engagement in interfaith dialogue as the Christian Church, as witnessed not only in Nostra Aetate, but also in the works of many other theologians, representing other strands of Christianity. Such reflective work must be undertaken by all religious traditions if serious advance is to be made in interreligious relations. If not, the unexamined portions of traditions may continue to nourish streams of thought that will undermine efforts at understanding, growth and peace, through dialogue between world religions.

As an institution devoted to interreligious reflection, study and dialogue, the Elijah Interfaith Institute is committed to advancing such introspective reflection among all religions with which it works. Some important steps in this direction have been taken in relation to both Judaism and Islam, and plans are underway to engage other religious traditions in such systematic examination as well.

### Getting Involved - Limited Preview Edition of "A Contemporary Jewish Theology of World Religions"

For a limited time only we are delighted to be able to offer recipients of our newsletter the opportunity to receive a preview summary edition of "Towards a Contemporary Jewish Theology of World Religions". This ground-breaking work in interfaith dialogue, developed by a think tank of eminent Jewish scholars, is the result of the Scranton Conference. This preview edition contains initial summary papers by such notable scholars as:

- David Berger, CUNY
- Allan Brill, Yeshiva University
- Paul Fenton, Sorbonne
- Reuven Firestone, HUCA
- Yehuda Gellman, Ben Gurion University
- Alon Goshen-Gottstein, The Elijah Interfaith Institute
- Michael Gottsegen, CLAL
- Yitz Greenberg, Jewish Life Network
- Bradley Hirschfeld, CLAL
- Nathan Katz, University of Florida
- Menachem Kellner, Haifa University
- Eugene Korn, Seton Hill University
- Stanislaw Krajewski, University of Warsaw
- Ruth Langer, Boston College



- Barry Levy, McGill University
- David Novak, University of Toronto
- Michael Rosenack, Hebrew University
- Tamar Ross, Bar Ilan University
- Norbert Samuelson, University of Arizona
- Meir Sendor, Hebrew College
- Marc Shapiro, University of Scranton
- Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, Arizona State University

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