Q. This is Brian Mitchell interviewing Father Atwell in his office in the Genesee Ecumenical Ministry on June 24, 1976.

A. The Genesee Ecumenical Ministry is the successor to the old Rochester Area Council of Churches, which in the pre-ecumenical era was an all Protestant coalition of churches. And then, about 5, 6 years ago, both Catholics and Protestants determined that they wanted a closer relationship and so they formed this new organization, Genesee Ecumenical Ministries. Name Genesee coming from the region in which we are, Genesee Regional Transit Authority, Genesee Regional Health Planning Council. So they decided to take the Genesee region name. Ecumenical because it's Catholic and Protestant. And, ministries because rather than being an agency, somewhat like an ecclesiastical automobile club, which would serve its own members, it's meant to be now an agency that reaches out and meets the needs of the community, in so far as the churches can meet those needs.

Q. I see.

A. The Jewish community is not an actual part of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries. I think there are two reasons. First, the Catholics and Protestants at the time of the formation felt that there should be a specific Christian Ministry. Or, a way of serving the community. And, now I don't think the Jewish community was even invited in. Secondly, five, six years ago, this was when the Jewish community was ... almost totally entranced, captured by
A. (Continued)  the need to help Israel survive. And, this was their ministry.  Their ministry was more or less to Israel.  Although, in our particular, would you want to say priority, agencies, particularly our Judicial Process Commission, there we have, and also in our GEM Urban Team on Education. . . for. . . Let's see. The GEM Team on Urban Education.

In both of those we have Jewish participation. There is another area where the Jewish community was very active. And, that was when there was thought that we were going to have two new towns, as they're called. These. . . there was some kind of Federal legislation which authorized the establishment of whole new communities. I think there's one in Maryland called Columbia.

Q. Columbia. Reston.

A. Reston, yes. And, there is to be one East of here called Gananda. And one South of here called Riverton. Riverton got started, but it never developed to the extent.

Q. Ran into financial problems of all sorts.

A. Yea, right. And Gananda has never even gotten started, other than I think having a school district. But, the idea was that these were going to be blossoming communities within five years. And, what were we going to do about religion? And, it was through a coalition that GEM put together which definitely included the Jewish community that we were going to go into these communities cooperatively, rather than competitively. And, but since they didn't develop, the ideas of cooperation didn't develop either.

Q. There are a couple of questions that come to mind. First of all, did you get any feedback from the Jewish community when they weren't invited to participate in the Ministries?
time they were so preoccupied, was the word I was so preoccupied with Israel, I think that . . .

I guess, that what we were trying to do as Christians

well, that's their business, let them do it. We've

with one another. I have many personal friends who

her Louis. And, whenever I thought that GEM was up

would be concerned about, . . . A good share of

ve years was to a great extent simply surviving and

inter-Christian relationship. And . . .

ation to mind. What would be your personal relationship

five years, I was Director. Had a heart attack,

myself to five years, anyway. I really think that

ll-new face on the job at the beginning. Mine's an

a. And, I think it would have been better if they

start, but they asked me to do it, and I did it.

they're looking for a new Director. And, I imagine

first of September. I am considered now what is

in Rochester? Are you a native?

from? What section of town?

Parochial in 1935. Attended St. Andrew's and

ich are local. Ordained to priesthood in 1946, New York, which is east of here; in the town of

from there went to the Catholic Courier newspaper.
A. (Continued). The diocesan newspaper in 1958, and became pastor in Avon, which is south of here in 1967, and in 1971, in addition to pastor, I became the Director of GEM. And, to bring us to the Jewish subject, I would say that it was in my years as editor of the *Courier* where I developed my knowledge of the Jewish community. And, I must admit it was somewhat of a backdoor approach. I knew there were such people as Jews; my mother had worked for them in Rochester in the early part of the century was quite a clothing center. We still have Bond clothes...  
Q. Hickey-Freeman...  
A. Hickey-Freeman and Michael Stern, Timely Clothes, and so on. But there were many clothing firms and many of them were Jewish. And, Hickey-Freeman is a good example.  
Q. My first job was selling Hickey-Freeman clothes.  
A. And my mother worked for a Jewish firm, I forget their name, and I remember she used to tell us the son of the owner, she was about the only goye that worked in the company. She kept the payroll, and the payroll was calculated in shekels, because many of these people were immigrants.  
Q. Immigrants, sure.  
A. They spoke Yiddish, and she would have to translate the Yiddish and shekels into American currency. But the son of the owner, he was young, too, at that time, he remarked to her on different occasions, if you were Yiddish, I make you my bride. And I know my mother said that had that happened, I probably would have been a Rabbi instead of a priest. Other than that, I had no relations, except very casual acquaintances with Jewish people.
feel the relationship of the Catholic community in general is
Jews?

tely parallel trends. Very little interaction. There are one
ishes in the Rochester area, in Brighton, which is your little
and that parish I think has an annual dinner with one of the
as. Other than that I'd say that there is just massive dis-
the Catholic community in Rochester will establish one with
you . . .
as an Irish and a British, and I should think it would be.
of course, I would say that Rochester . . . 50% Catholic. I
one that that's dropped in recent years as the whole population
a the suburbs and you have an increase in the proportion of
in the city. And, few of them are Catholic. So that I would
me of your suburban communities are perhaps as high as 80%
ic.

m, which is Brighton and Irondequoit you have your Jewish
. Your next highest proportion probably would be Catholic,
agine that would be down around 30%.

where your Catholics are concentrated, your Jews are not.
holic groups are in Henrietta and . . .
ese, Gates,
nteresting.
Interview with Father Henry Atwell

A. Catholics seem to have been . . . have moved west, whereas the Jews seem to have moved east.

Q. East, I see.

A. There's a story, I don't know whether this can be substantiated factually, but that Jews have traditionally tended to reside on the side of a river opposite a cemetery. And the Jewish cemetery in Rochester is on the northwest side of the river, and so the Jews tend to concentrate on the southeast.

Q. Southeast, which is true.

A. Yea, right.

Q. Right, of course. That's something I hadn't thought of. Pretty good. Do you think there's a changing Catholic attitude? Do you think there's slowly an increasing awareness of the Jews?

A. No. I think that the prevalent idea among most Catholics and most people and that is that most Jews are well-off, that they're the ones that run the businesses in town, and that well they do live in Brighton, which is the affluent area. I think there's a trickle and that's about all I could say, of awareness and concern for the Jewish community.

Q. Do you think that's an anti-Semitic face?

A. No. No, I don't think . . . But, it's just . . . No, I don't think that there's any . . . This is perhaps the worst thing, that there is no feeling.

Q. It's just strictly parallel lines.

A. That they're, they're just other people, that's all. They're not, they're not Catholics, they're just other people.

Q. I hadn't expected that. Interesting point. Could you describe your relationship with the Catholic Courier?
A. All right. Yes, I was Editor there starting in 1958, that of course, from 1958 to 1967 was a remarkable decade. That was the transition from Pious XII to John the XXIII to Paul the VI. It was the change and considering the best non-Catholic is one who becomes a Catholic. To the point where we can accept people either as people or even realize that God speaks to other people in other ways. And, therefore, their religion is authentic.

Q. You do now?

A. Yes. And, also it's important for us. This, of course, emerged in the two great documents of the Vatican Council on religious freedom and ecumenism. And, I was in Rome twice during Vatican Council. I heard John Courtney Murray speak, he was almost the sole author of that document on religious liberty. And, I also know that there was the disappointment in the statement on the Jews. But, even at that . . .

Q. For the purposes of the paper could you explain what the statement was?

A. Well, the . . . it had been proposed that there be a statement on the various religions, such as Portestantism, religious freedom and particularly Jews. The proposed statement, I think was submitted by Cardinal Baiff, and was supposed to come up to the floor, I think it was in the second session. There were four sessions of the Council, in 1962, 63, 64, and 65. I think it was in '63 that the statement was supposed to come up. Somehow, it faltered. It didn't get onto the floor in the 1964 session. It looked as if it was going to be somehow buried or sidetracked. Apparently due to the pressure of the prolits from the Arab nations, who felt that any recognition of Judaism would be tantamount to an approval of Israel, which the modern Arabs . . .
Q. Would themselves have been approval. Sure.
A. And apparently felt that if it did come to the floor, for discussion or debate, that many of the Arab prolits, who apparently would be what we would call anti-Semitic, but that many other of them, because they would want to survive when they got back home, would think that this statement would be inopportune at this time. Not necessarily wrong, but inopportune. And would have voted it down. And too... if it did get debated and did get acted on, it probably would have passed, but with very close margins. And, that would have been perhaps worse than not passing at all. So, apparently there were other forces that didn't want it to come to the floor for that reason. But, there were forces that did finally bring it out. And, it was one of the first items acted on in 1965. But, it was a rather negative one. It said that the Jews living today cannot be blamed for the Crucifixion of Christ.
Q. Christ... I remember.
A. Which has somewhat of the nuance that Jews living then did...
Q. There's an implication.
A. Right. Now it did say that and not all Jews living at that time could be held responsible. But, again you see, it's sort of a double negative. Not all can be held guilty.
Q. But some...
A. But some, therefore, are. And, and it says nothing about... Well, it... The statement sort of backs into, we should know more about them and... but it's a very cautious statement. And, then of course we went ten years after that statement before anything came up with that about how to implement it. And, here again, we had a statement that was just issued, I think last year, and in none of these documents is the land of Israel mentioned. Now this is
A. (Continued) like talking about the Germans without Germany, or Irish without Ireland, Italians without Italy.

Q. Sure. Of course.

A. And, it just . . . it's a glaring omission. So, there are many Jews who feel that it's somewhat of a weak smile.

Q. Do you think it has been omitted in 1976 for the same reason it was in 1964?

A. Yes.

Q. I see. I see. What would you like?

A. I would like, I guess myself, two things. I would like, first of all, I think that the Christians through the centuries, and this is one of the things that we always boast about, we are the successors of the Saints and we belong to this family that has stretched through the centuries, and that we have solidarity with the Martyrs . . .

Q. Continuity exists.

A. And, we boast about that. But, if we boast, we must also share the blame for what our ancestors did. And, admit that our ancestors, through the centuries made a hell on earth for the Jews. The pogroms, the ghettos, the anti-Semitism, that was latent, if not actually virulent. The number of Jews who were butchered at the time of the Crusades, . . .

Q. Is it your opinion, for instance, that, say in late nineteenth, early twentieth century Rochester, there was anti-Semitism practiced?

A. Well, I'm not aware of it. I have heard that some Jews who lived in areas where there were Catholic schools, and the Jews, of course, went to public schools, that the Catholic kids would refer to them as Christ-killers. I, myself, had all Catholic education. I never heard that term being used. So, I think that some of this might simply be the inevitable antipathy, rivalry maybe would be a better word, that youngsters feel between two schools.
A. (Continued) I know we felt that we were better than the public school kids. And, I guess when you put two parochial schools together, in a basketball game, or football game, one always claims "We're the best." and the others are the idiots and the dogs. So, I think that some of this talking of children might not necessarily be anti-Semitism, but simply children's inhumanity to one another.

Q. I see.

A. Maybe to get back onto my interest in Judaism... I had been invited a couple times by Rabbi Abraham Karp to speak to an adult study group of his. Simply to explain the Catholic ways of worship, and particularly at the time of the Vatican Council, I think I had been invited twice before the Council, and then during the Council as Editor, I was somewhat in demand because it was taken for granted that I somehow knew what was going on over there. And, in a way I should, because that was my job. And, I was asked to speak at both Protestant and Protestant Churches and Jewish Temples. And, I became much more aware of the Jewish community. But, I still didn't... I still was not aware of the tremendous importance of Israel. It was not until the Six Day War erupted that I chanced to be having lunch one noon, Thursday of that week, with my friend Lou Ouzer, a Jewish gentleman who is a photographer and who had worked with me at the Courier. And, in turn, Mel Simon, who had worked for Lou Ouzer and now has his own photoprocessing laboratory here in Rochester, and who had also been with me on some photographic stints. For example, when a new Bishop would be consecrated or ordinations or something like that, these gentlemen would come along and we'd position ourselves at different vantage points and we came out with good photos. Well, it was at that lunch that... I had been reading the newspapers, was
A. (Continued) impressed with the victory of the Israeli forces, and the fact that they had occupied Jerusalem, which I had visited in '63 when it was a divided city, like Berlin. One side was Jewish, and the other side, the old city, historic city was Jordanian or Arab. And, well anyway, in the course of the lunch Lou and I decided that we would go and mention it to Mel Simon and he joined us. And, ten days later we were in Jerusalem, which was the day that the Israeli Knesset annexed the old city and made it one city and made it available for civilians to enter.

Q. It raises... Before we continue, it raises a couple of questions. First of all, was there any problem getting a visa from the State Department?

A. No. That came through very easily. We got it through, oh I think it was Mr. Horton's office. And he had a public relations man or something like that who used to work at radio station WHAM, whom I know, and so I think he expedited it. I know he did, I know he did.

Q. OK. And, the second question was there any problem within the Catholic hierarchy? Did there have to be approval of you going?

A. I didn't ask them.

Q. OK. That's really what I was getting at.

A. I felt that it was news and our newspaper, our Catholic paper paid the way for us to go. And, so we took off. This leads way back a few minutes ago, I said that there were two things that I wished that the statement on the Jews from the Vatican Council would incorporate. One was the admission of Christian anti-Semitism in the past, suffering and cruelty we as Christians inflicted on the Jewish people. I think there should be a confession of that fact. And, secondly, I think that there should be a public admission of our recognition of the Jewish identity with the land of Israel. So, it's both confession of the past and an admission of the present. I guess that's
A. (Continued) what I would like to see, and until those two statements are made, I don't think that we will have credibility with the Jews. I think that those two are so engrained in the Jewish psyche, their awareness of how much they suffered at the hands of Christians and how much Israel means to them.

Q. Do you think it's something that could come about in the future?

A. Of course in the future. Immediate future. .

Q. That's my question.

A. I don't anticipate it. All right, so we went to Israel and I do think that just due to coincidence that Lou Ouzer and Mel Simon, who were with me early the morning that we got there, went into the old city, up to the Temple Mount. I really think that's the first time that American Jews had ever been up there, because in the year 70 the city was destroyed. The Romans took over and wouldn't let the Jews there, and the Christian era, the Christians wouldn't let the Jews come up. And, when the Moslems took over the area in the 7th Century, they wouldn't let the Jews come up there.

Q. Some force or other had maintained control to that day.

A. Right. And it was up until that day that no American Jew could have gotten in the city.

Q. What was your feeling when you went there?

A. Well, of course it was a . . . I realized it was historic, and I guess it was from speaking I met Teddy Kolack, the Mayor of Jerusalem. .

Q. Sure . . .

A. I, through Irving Norry who is a Rochester businessman, I met his daughter, who was at that time had a boyfriend who was a sabra, an Israeli native, who had been one of the paratroopers who had fought his way into Jerusalem.
And, just... We also stayed at the Franciscan Monastery in the Old City, which is right near the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. So, I'd say from talking with people like that, then I realized what a tremendous significance the land of Israel had for Jews. Not just the Jews there, but for all Jews. As a matter of fact, I think that the Six Day War was both a revelation and a cause of Jewish identity with the land of Israel.

Many Jews in America had, up until that time, not as yet identified themselves with the land of Israel. They had been, perhaps, contributors just to appeals in order to enable other people to go to Israel. They had taken a decidedly back-seat interest in it, up to that point. They wanted it there for those who wanted it, but they themselves did not identify... I think that interest has been maintained since the Six Day War?

I think that now this is... that they realize that if Israel doesn't then there could be another Holocaust.

Don't have too much time, Father, a couple quick questions. First what kind of response... You came back and published a newspaper in the Catholic Courier. What was the response to it? What was the article and so on? I guess the second question first.

I'm right. It was a reporting job, I'd say. And, I think that we... the significance of the... the historic significance... before similar media did. As a matter of fact, it was a year later on the January that TIME MAGAZINE ran an article which was somewhat similar to that I'd run the year before. Recognizing the tremendous significance...
of Israel and Jerusalem. Particularly Jerusalem.

particularly Jerusalem, I see.

the Jewish mind, and so I think that . . . well, as a matter of fact, I

talk recently over at Dov Peretz' temple, that's the one over on

Jaton Road.

El.

El. And, now he's a rather newcomer to Rochester. He's only been here

years and . . . but, after I gave my talk he said that he was amazed

use -- and I consider it a very great compliment -- that I was the first

Jew that he had known who could understand the Jewish mind through Jewish

And I really think that it was my visit in '67 . . .

's quite a compliment.

. . that enabled me to do that.

you been back since?

. Three times. I hope to go again maybe next year.

you notice any change in Israel . . . is that sense of dynamism, I suppose,

are use that word, . . .

ink that's a good word. And, the three times that I've gone since, I've

ae as a tourist. And, so that meant that I followed more or less the

rist circuit.

ink that you've got a new generation coming up. . . Golda Meir, that

eration, and even your freedom fighters of 1948 are now retirees and I

ink that you've got a newer generation which is . . . I think they see

el . . . How will I phrase it? . . . They are completely secularist for

ost part. That Israel is no longer just a dream, now it's a necessity.

I think that that hardens a person's outlook, it . . . that I think
A. (Continued) that the people, and I think many Jews in America still have the dream of Israel of somehow as the promised land, somewhat the Irish think about the lakes of Killarny, what a beautiful "Irish Eyes Are Smiling" and "Stardust" and all like that...

Q. It's almost a romanticized version.

A. Yes. A Camelot. Whereas I think that the people of Israel today are a new ghetto. They're a new ghetto. A fertile one, but an embattled one. And, that I think the older immigrants to Israel they went happy simply in order to be there. I think the newer generation, they want to be there, but they want commodities of comfortable living, and you can't have that if you're paying 50% of your money in taxes for the military.

Q. The military hardware... I see.

A. Yea. So, all right, to maybe summarize. I think that Catholics are still woefully ignorant of Judaism as our religious source. I think that we are woefully ignorant of the practices, the beauty of the practices of Jews today. I think that we turn to Jews in such projects as new towns or so on, in the same way that we would turn to blacks or to any other what you might call sub-group within the population. Because we're aware of minorities today, and you've got to take them into consideration.

Q. Do you think Catholics are pretty well assimilated into the mass?

A. Yes. Right. And, so I think we take them into consideration, but... and there are friendships, but just because we happen to be neighbors or business friends or something like that. To my knowledge, there are still country clubs that exclude Jews in Rochester, Oak Hill Country Club, for example. That'd be something interesting for you to test out.
A. (Continued) You know, it's a subtle anti-Semitism.

Q. I imagine a couple of private clubs and so on, too.

A. Yea. And, well that's what Oak Hill is, and there probably would be other ...

Q. Oh, I see Father. I didn't realize.

A. And, but I think ... I know that our Seminary, we have a Rector down there, Joseph Brennan, who speaks Hebrew fluently and has been to Israel, boldly calls himself a Zionist. And certainly at the official level we are aware that we exist, but other than that I wouldn't say that it goes much deeper, unfortunately.

Q. OK. One or two brief questions, Father, and that'll be it. They're on contemporary issues. Would you consider yourself a Zionist?

A. I guess so.

Q. What do you think ...

A. I'll put it this way. I think that just as Germans have a right to Germany, just as the Irish have a right to Ireland, just as the Polish have a right to Poland, I think the Hebrews and the Jews have a right to Israel.

Q. What gives them that right do you think, Father?

A. Well, I'd say that ... three ... First, religiously. I think that it is clear from Scripture, if we take Scripture in any literal way, and I realize that this is debatable among the Scripture experts ... interpreters, but it's impossible to read the Old Testament without realizing that God gives this land to you and to your posterity forever. That's repeated page after page. I don't know how we'd get around it. Secondly, they have the highest human authority on earth, the United Nations, which voted them into existence in 1948. I don't see how we can ...
Q. Ignore that . . .

A. Ignore that. And, it's rather interesting that Soviet Russia passed an affirmative vote for the establishment of the State of Israel. So, I guess you'd put it, they've got Biblical authority, they've got the highest human authority, which is political authority, the United Nations, and then I guess I would put it on that basis. Well, if every other people can have a land, why can't they? And, this is the land with which they've been historically identified since 2000 years before Christ. I know of no other people that have been so long so identified with one land.

Q. What do you think of the Palestinian refugee problem?

A. I've been in Palestinian refugee camps. I think that they are the pawns, they are the victims. First of all, most of the Palestinian refugees in the camps today have never been in Israel. We're into the third generation now. There were, perhaps, a quarter of a million refugees. There are now something, I think it's up over a million. That these people have. . . they. . . I think that we should also realize that there have been refugees into Israel, too. Jewish refugees from Russia and other nations where they were not equal. And, Israel has absorbed these people and made them into first class citizens in the land of Israel. I can't see why the Arab nations could not have in these 25 years, a quarter century, why they permitted their own kind to fester in these camps. If the Jews could absorb their refugees, why couldn't the Arabs absorb these refugees?

Q. I see, I see.

A. So, I think that they are. . . there is a need for a solution, an equitable solution. But, I don't think that Israel should be the only one to be expected to make. . .
Q. I see. Am I right in sensing that you attribute a positive function to the United Nations?
A. Yes.
Q. Do you think it's been effective?
A. Yup. I would hate to see what things would be like if the world is as bad off with the United Nations, we would be additionally worse off without it.
Q. What is your view on the branding of Zionism?
A. Oh, I think it was a mistake. I don't think that it changes anybody's opinion one way or another.
Q. One last question. Do you think Israel could ever be defeated?
A. Yup. I think it would be a frightening and a pitiful day in the world. And, I think that the present militarism of Israel, while psychologically understandable, is only an invitation to that ultimate possible defeat.
Q. I see.
A. I think a political, a human solution is the only ultimate.
Q. Is there danger of Soviet intervention?
A. Sure, I think so. But, I think that both United States and Soviet Russia are not going to directly intervene.
Q. I see.
A. I think the present activity of Syria and Lebanon has utterly confounded Soviet Russia. This... and I'm not a politician, so...
Q. No. No. It's an interesting point, though. One last question, and then that'll be it. What do you think is the future of Catholic/Jewish relations in Rochester?
A. Well, considering how negligible they are at the present, all I can say is that they're bound to get better.
Q. OK. Do you actually anticipate that they will?

A. Yea, I think from what I said about the rector at the Seminary, and I think that he is instilling this love of the Hebrew culture, both past and contemporary, the language of the people, the appreciation of what the land means to the people, that I think we're getting a younger generation of priests that at least are going to be aware of these things.

Q. OK, well thank you, Father. This will be the end of our interview.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE A