A Student’s Course Reflection  
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I was about thirteen years old when I saw posters in my secondary school which included antisemitic statements related to tensions in the Middle East. This was in the 1980s, in a city about an hour’s drive from the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. I recall standing there and looking at the posters, wondering what exactly was happening, why there was so much hatred against the Jews. This was prior to the internet, and information was limited to government-controlled newspapers. Over the years, the continuous stream of antisemitic sentiments rubbed off onto most of us students, irrespective of our religious or ethnic origins. I, for one, certainly had antisemitic feelings by the time I was in my late teens. Every now and then, one would see a small gathering of street demonstrators (though this is illegal in Malaysia) carrying posters bearing antisemitic sentiments. Most non-Muslims would not be actively involved in these demonstrations and would be indifferent to them—if such a thing is ever possible.

When I took the course “Jewish and Christian Interpretation of the Bible” with Prof. Ruth Langer and Prof. Tom Stegman, SJ, a lot of my prejudices were challenged. I recall entering the class, and as I heard Prof. Langer speak, I sensed my prejudices shedding away; the human face-to-face encounter helped. The more we delved into the course, the more I was shocked with what I had to face in myself. The dark events of the past against the Jews truly gripped me more than ever. I have certainly heard and read of these events from secondary sources and from the movies, but perhaps due to the strong antisemitic influences of my childhood, they never made any great impact on me. But this time around, it was certainly different. I now see myself having to own up to the Christian response (or should I say non-response) to these events. As the great Christian saints edify me in many ways, these actions and inactions move me to review Christian interpretations of the past. I find myself asking, “How and where did we go wrong?” I am not sure if I have the answers, but I certainly now feel that I cannot remain indifferent. The “Day of Pardon” by John Paul II means more to me now.

As the course progressed and as both professors explained the respective liturgies, rites, and traditions, I began to appreciate more the richness of the Jewish tradition and how it has influenced and shaped the Christian faith. The meaning of “Jewish tradition” is no longer the same for me. I now want to know more of it. It dawned on me that perhaps the Asian Church’s desire to acculturate Christianity with our own traditions would progress better if we first appreciate and understand more of our own roots first, the Jewish tradition.

The course also spurred me to attend talks on Jewish-Christian relations held on campus. I even decided to attend a Jewish-Christian prayer session held at the School of Theology & Ministry chapel. I wish we could have had some encounters with our Jewish “seminarians” and perhaps even attended prayer sessions at the synagogues. Such face-to-face encounters would surely help most of us who would never have such opportunities in our own countries to return home and continue to shed whatever prejudices may remain in our midst so that we can build a more peace-loving society for all.