

Introduction

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I WAS A YOUNG and callow rabbi serving a congregation in New Jersey about forty miles from New York City. The year was 1960, and Thanksgiving was approaching. I had an inspirational idea: My synagogue was literally across the road from a Roman Catholic church. Why not invite the priest and his flock to join my congregation in a program—not a worship service—of thanksgiving for the blessings of freedom in this blessed land? So I called the priest whom I had never met and enthusiastically told him of my idea, stressing that this would be a program without any liturgical content, confident that he would accept my invitation. I was quite wrong: The priest responded, “Rabbi, I should very much like to take you up on your offer but I cannot. You see, my bishop, Bishop Ahr of Trenton, prohibits his priests from ever entering a synagogue.” I was amazed and crushed. The fact that I vividly remember that conversation after over fifty years have elapsed underscores my sense of despair and the lasting impression it made on me. Imagine that a scant fifteen years after the *Shoah*—the Holocaust that destroyed six million Jews in Christian Europe—and the Catholic Church would not even talk to Jews or enter their houses of worship! We were just across the road from each other, but we might as well have been on other sides of the world. Perhaps that episode was the catalyst of my commitment to interreligious dialogue throughout my long rabbinic career.

That was in 1960. In 1986, the Holy Father himself, Pope John Paul II, of blessed memory, went to the Great Synagogue of Rome (the first pope ever to do so): he embraced Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff, sat with him

before the Holy Ark containing the Torah scrolls, and chatted amiably and amicably with him, younger brother with his beloved older brother, as the pope put it so warmly, stating that Judaism is intrinsically bound up with Christianity. And then his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, visited synagogues in Cologne, Germany; New York City; and Rome. Moreover, I met Pope John Paul II at a small gathering in the office of the late Cardinal John O'Connor of New York in 1995. And I was an official Jewish greeter to Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 when he met with a delegation of religious leaders of various faiths at the Pope John Paul II Center in Washington DC. Frankly, I never dreamed that I would meet and greet a pope!

What had happened to bring about such a sea change in Catholic-Jewish relations? What occurred since my youthful rebuff of 1960? The answer is Pope John XXIII, of blessed memory, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, and a document known as *Nostra Aetate* (*In Our Time*). Nothing less than a Copernican revolution in Catholic-Jewish relations had taken place in the wake of that historic Ecumenical Council that lasted from 1962 to 1965 and that produced a number of earth-shaking documents, most notably *Nostra Aetate*, especially section 4.

Pope John XXIII had served as Nuncio Roncalli in the Balkans and Turkey during World War II. He had seen firsthand what was happening to European Jewry, and his conscience was deeply affected. He was responsible for issuing fake documents including “Certificates of Immigration to Palestine” for Slovak and Bulgarian Jews that enabled numerous Jews to escape the Nazi killing machine, and he tried in vain to prompt the Vatican to take more vigorous action. When he was elected pope, he determined that he would set the course for the Catholic Church towards *aggiornamento*—updating its teachings and doctrines, and revising the Church’s attitude to Judaism and Jews was a high priority. He greeted a delegation of Jewish leaders early in his pontificate with the words, “I am Joseph your brother” (Gen 45:4; his middle name was Giuseppe). He removed the odious Good Friday prayer: *pro perfidis Judaeis*, (“for the conversion of the perfidious or unbelieving Jews”). On June 16, 1960, he met with a frail Holocaust survivor from France, Professor Jules Isaac, who had failed to involve Pius XII in reevaluating the teachings of the Church on Judaism and the role that “the teaching of contempt” had played in preparing the soil for the *Shoah*. The role of Pius XII in dealing with Nazism, racism and genocide of the Jews of Europe remains a puzzle—a puzzle that may not be solved unless the Vatican archives are fully opened to scholars, and even then we may not find an answer to the

question, could Pius XII have done more to save Europe's Jews? But this we do know: 4,447 Italian Jews were sequestered and saved in convents, schools, seminaries, and other Catholic institutions.¹ Did this come about at the behest of the pope? We don't know for sure. And this we also know: Pius XII was pope from 1939 to 1958. That means he served as pope for thirteen postwar years—a term longer than his wartime pontificate. What did he do to reeducate Catholics in their dealings with Jews? What new teachings did he promulgate regarding Judaism? Did he do anything to uproot the religious roots of anti-Judaism? He removed the translation of the odious term *perfidious*, in the Good Friday Prayer, but so far as I can tell, he did little or nothing.

But if Jules Isaac failed to sway Pope Pius XII, he was eminently successful with Pope John XXIII; his appeal to John XXIII fell on receptive ears. John XXIII appointed a German scholar, Cardinal Augustin Bea, to oversee the production of a document on Jews and Judaism that the Council could adopt that would acknowledge the role of Christian teaching in preparing the soil for the *Shoah* and that would chart a new course for the relations between the two faiths. Sadly, Pope John XXIII died before the second session of the Council, and now it was left to his successor, Paul VI, to carry on the remarkable process that John had started.

The document that emerged from Vatican II did not come about easily or readily. Quite the contrary: it was subjected to sharp debates and disagreements. Conservative clergy did not want to say anything benevolent about the Jews, the historic “enemies” of Jesus and the Church who murdered Jesus. Anti-Semitism was rife in certain clergy circles. Moreover, the prelates from the Middle East and Arab lands were very wary lest the Council articulate anything positive about Jews and Judaism and thereby strengthen the State of Israel in its confrontation with the Arab world. But the bitter impact of the *Shoah* was determinative. Pope Benedict XVI, who had as a young priest attended the Council, reflected many years later on what motivated the Council to approve a document on the Jews. “From the very beginning, our Jewish friends were present and said

1. See Renzo de Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), 628–32; trans. Robert L. Miller, *The Jews in Fascist Italy* (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), 466ff. & 751–756; Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Window* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), esp. 300–326; Zuccotti, “Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews in Italy: Evidence of a Papal Directive,” in Joshua D. Zimmerman, ed., *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 287–307.

to us Germans, but not only to us, that after the sad happenings of that Nazi century, of that Nazi decade, the Catholic Church ought to speak a message about the Old Testament, and about the Jewish people. They said: Even if it is clear that the Church is not responsible for the *Shoah*, those who committed those crimes were, for the most part, Christians, and so we ought to deepen and renew the Christian conscience, even if we know well that the real believers always resisted against those things. And so it was clear that the relationship with the world of the ancient People of God ought to be an object of reflection.”²

Even more remarkably, several of the key players who helped bring about the positive statement in section 4 were converts from other religions to Catholicism, including converts from Judaism and Protestantism. Rev. John Oesterreicher played a key role in drafting the text of *Nostra Aetate* on the Jews, as did Rev. Gregory Baum—both former Jews. And the writings of Rev. Karl Thieme and Rev. Dietrich von Hildebrand, both converts from Protestant faiths, helped shape the thinking of the Church on Jewish affairs.³ And then we must record the role that Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel played in swaying the opinion of Pope Paul VI, successor to John XXIII, on the matter of converting Jews to the true faith. When a version of the statement called for “the reunion of the Jewish people with the Church” (i.e., the conversion of Jews to Catholicism), Heschel flew to the Vatican, met with the pope and Cardinal Bea and stated that he would rather “go to Auschwitz than give up my religion.” The pope struck the noxious passage, and a revised version was submitted for approval by the Council. The Council approved it overwhelmingly and on October 28, 1965, Pope Paul VI promulgated it. It was the first time in two millennia that a Council had issued an authoritative declaration about Jews and Judaism. Hitherto, popes issued bulls and encyclicals dealing with Jews, but never had an Ecumenical Council undertaken such a task.⁴

Section 4 of *Nostra Aetate*, “On the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian religions,” is a short but revolutionary declaration. It acknowledges the Jewish roots of Christianity, noting that Jesus and his disciples were all Jewish. It reaffirms that God’s covenant with Israel is still very much valid. It deplores anti-Semitism. It states that all Jews then living

2. Vatican Website, <http://www.vatican.va>, February 15, 2013.

3. See John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

4. For the full text, see Appendix I.

or in subsequent generations are not to be held guilty for Jesus's death. It urges that preachers and teachers not give rise to anti-Judaism in their preaching and teaching. It calls for fraternal dialogue between the two faiths. And rather than advocating proselytizing Jews, it cites Paul's views in Rom 9–11, which stress that Christianity is the new shoot grafted on the old (nurturing roots of Judaism) and that God does not renege on His promises or calling; and it looks forward to the eschatological joining of the faiths into one in worshipping the one God (Zeph 3:9). By citing Rom 9–11, the document rejects the usual interpretation of Letter to the Hebrews chapter 8 that seems to portray Judaism as obsolete and passé. To put it differently, Romans trumps Hebrews.

On the other hand, *Nostra Aetate* stated that “the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ.” Who were those so-called leaders? Surely not the corrupt and venal high priest and Roman lackey, Caiaphas, and his stooges! And it reiterated that the Church is “the new people of God,” thereby reaffirming the theology of supersessionism or displacement. And it merely “deplored” anti-Semitism rather than condemning it. It remained for Pope John Paul II to condemn anti-Semitism as “a sin against God and humanity.” But as Boston's gravel-voiced Cardinal Richard Cushing, a staunch champion of the document, noted, “The declaration we have is not perfect, but, in my opinion, it is a good start.” And Cardinal Walter Kasper, long-time president of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, described it as “the beginning of the beginning.”

However, Paul VI was somewhat ambivalent about the pronouncements of Vatican II and *Nostra Aetate*. True, he was responsible for emending the odious Good Friday prayer for the conversion of the Jews to read, “The Church prays for the Jewish people that they may continue to grow . . . in faithfulness to God's covenant” and to look forward toward “the fullness of redemption” at the end of time. And he established the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, headed for some years by Cardinals Johannes Willebrands, Edward Idris Cassidy, and Walter Kasper, and currently by Cardinal Kurt Koch. At the same time, he delivered a Lenten Mass sermon on Passion Sunday in which he called the day “a grave and sad page because it narrates the conflict, the clash between Jesus and the Hebrew people, a people predestined to await the Messiah but who, just at the right moment, not only did not recognize Him but

fought him, abused him, and finally killed him.”⁵ Old stereotypes and prejudices die slowly, it appears. Then, in 1964, he made a somewhat bizarre visit to Israel, entering via the obscure town of Megiddo; he never met officially with Israeli leaders; he never mentioned the State of Israel once during his brief stay. Was his reluctance to acknowledge the existence of the State a concession to the Arab world in which Christian presence was growing increasingly tenuous? Or was it due to the ancient view of the Church, dating back to Justin Martyr in the second century, that the Jewish people having rejected Jesus lost their Temple and their independent state and would never return home until they accept Jesus as their messiah and savior?

Despite the papal ambivalence, a series of very important documents on the relationship of the Church to the Jewish people ensued, fleshing out and expanding on the views promulgated by *Nostre Aetate*. “Guidelines for Implementing the Councilor Declaration *Nostra Aetate*” was produced in 1974. Then came “Notes on the Correct way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis” in 1985. “God’s Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching” followed in 1988. An important statement on the *Shoah* was published in the paper “We Remember: A Reflection on the *Shoah*” in 1998. “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures” was issued in 2002 and was partly the work of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who was later to be elected Pope Benedict XVI. It was remarkable in that it acknowledged for the first time that the Jewish interpretations of Scripture are possible, and that the “Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain.” Further, it expressed the belief in a messiah who “will have the traits of Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us.”⁶ All these documents are important because they constitute a vital part of the magisterium—the official body of teachings of the Catholic Church, teachings that will undoubtedly shape Catholic understanding of Jews and Judaism for the foreseeable future.

But if Pope Paul VI was somewhat ambivalent about Jews and Judaism and the State of Israel, his remarkable successor, Pope John Paul II (1978–2005), was definitely not. No other pope in history did as much as John Paul II in fostering a new relationship with the Jewish people based

5. Quoted in John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*, 269.

6. Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Jewish People and Their Scriptures.” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html/.

on understanding, trust, and respect and, yes, even love. Undoubtedly his Polish background was responsible, because he grew up with Jews, had Jewish friends and soccer buddies, witnessed the tragic destruction of over three million Polish Jews, and felt deeply the tragedy of the *Shoah*, describing it as “an indelible stain on the history of the [twentieth] century.”⁷ Some years ago I met his closest Jewish friend, Jerzy Kluger, who warmly described the devoted and loving relationship between the two men that continued into John Paul’s pontificate. When a young bishop in Krakow, he ordered a Jewish child who had been hidden by a Catholic family during World War II returned to its Jewish family. Baltimore’s Cardinal William Keeler, who served for many years as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Relations with the Jews, and had attended Vatican II as a young priest, remarked that this was a revolutionary change in the Church’s policy. In 1848, when little Edgardo Mortara of Bologna was kidnapped by Church police because his nanny had secretly baptized him, Pope Pius IX refused to return the lad to his parents and raised him as a priest—lost to the Jewish people forever. But this was a different pope and a different century. The pope devoted many hours during his almost twenty-seven-year tenure as pope to rectifying some of the terrible wrongs that were the root causes of anti-Judaism. Early on, he visited Auschwitz and begged forgiveness for the crimes committed by Christians against Jews and other peoples, and he called for a “purification of memory.” In 1986, he paid his historic visit to the Rome synagogue, embraced and sat with Chief Rabbi Toaff, and chatted amiably. He stressed that Judaism is intrinsic to Christianity, remarking that he regarded Jews as “our elder brother in faith.” In a speech at Mainz, Germany (1980), he stressed that Jews are “the people of God of the Old Testament, never revoked by God, the present-day people of the covenant concluded with Moses.” He denounced anti-Semitism as a “sin against God and humanity.” But strangely he viewed Nazism as a “neo-pagan phenomenon,” playing down the religious roots of that abomination.

In December of 1993, at the pope’s prompting, the Vatican recognized the State of Israel and established full diplomatic relations. It was a stunning reversal of the ancient theological position—going back to Justin Martyr and developed by John Chrysostom and Augustine among others—that viewed the loss of the Temple and nation of Judea

7. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “We Remember: A Reflection on the *Shoah*.” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_16031998_shoah_en.html/.

as punishment for the Jewish rejection of Jesus, causing the Jews to be eternal wanderers—stateless people forever—until they accept Jesus as the messiah, protected but kept in an inferior status.⁸ I remember well the intimate and amiable kosher reception at the home of Cardinal John O'Connor of New York to mark that historic event. The reader should recall that on January 26, 1904, the president of the World Zionist Organization, Dr. Theodor Herzl, gained an audience with Pope Pius X, urging him to recognize and endorse the Zionist goal to rebuild the ancient homeland. The pope rebuffed Herzl, indicating that “we cannot favor this movement . . . the Hebrew people have not recognized our Lord, therefore we cannot recognize the Hebrew people.” He insisted that “we cannot support the Hebrew people in acquisition of the Holy Places.” However, the pope added: “And so, if you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we shall have churches and priests ready to baptize all of you.”⁹

In 1994, John Paul II hosted a remarkable concert to commemorate the *Shoah* at the Vatican with the Krakow Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of its Jewish conductor, Gilbert Levine. In 2000, John Paul II made his historic visit to Israel. This time it was an official and public visit including a moving event at Yad Vashem where he asked forgiveness for the crimes against the Jewish people and then offered a deeply emotional, poignant prayer at the Western Wall. He inserted a private prayer in the crevice of the Wall, the receptacle of so many tens of thousands of notes throughout the ages that read:

God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring Your name to the nations: We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of Yours to suffer, and asking forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.¹⁰

The iconic pictures of that extraordinary event still stir me profoundly to this day.

8. See Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

9. Raphael Patai, ed., Harry Zohn, trans., *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl* (5 vols., New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 4:1601–5. Interestingly, his successor, Pope Benedict XV, expressed support of the Zionist endeavor.

10. Franklin Sherman, ed., *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, vol. 2 (New York: Paulist, 2014), 207.

I can state unequivocally that John Paul II accomplished more in his pontificate of almost twenty-seven years to improve Catholic-Jewish relations than had been achieved in all the preceding nineteen centuries, and that the Jewish people will never forget this remarkably benevolent and compassionate friend.

Benedict XVI, who succeeded John Paul II and served from 2005 to 2013, witnessed the calamity of the Second World War but from a very different perspective than that of John Paul II. He was born in Bavaria, Germany, had been a member of the Hitler Youth, and was drafted into the Wehrmacht as a teenager. Nevertheless, he chose a clergy career after the war, was closely associated with John Paul II, and was known as a distinguished theologian and scholar. He carried on the work of John Paul II. He visited synagogues in Cologne, New York City, and Rome. He deepened his Church's understanding of *Nostra Aetate*. He wrote the important introduction to "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible." At the remarkable meeting that I attended in Washington in 2008, he reaffirmed his commitment to the teachings of *Nostra Aetate* and then met privately with the Jewish delegation to wish them a blessed Pesah. He visited Israel in 2009. He stressed on a number of occasions that the roots of Christianity are found in Judaism, without which one cannot understand Christianity.¹¹ He insisted that "every effort must be made to fight anti-Semitism wherever it is found."¹² He reiterated that the Sinai covenant is enduring and irrevocable. He actually quoted a passage from the Talmud in one of his talks ("The world stands on three pillars: Torah, worship and deeds of kindness"—Mishnah *Avot* 1:2). That in itself is quite remarkable if we recall that throughout the ages, popes condemned the Talmud as a book of lies and blasphemies and insults against Jesus and Christianity, and in 1240 in Paris and again in the 1550s in Italy, they ordered the burning of the Talmud along with other Hebrew volumes.¹³

11. For a powerful and scholarly argument stressing the need to study the Hebraic roots of Christianity, see Marvin R. Wilson, *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

12. Franklin Sherman, ed., *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, vol. 2 (New York: Paulist, 2014), 210, 224–25.

13. Benedict XVI was also capable of some original reinterpretations of anti-Jewish biblical texts. For example, the odious curse in Matthew 27:25: "His blood be upon us and our children," so often cited by Christians in condemning Jews to perpetual imprecation, is interpreted by him to mean that Jesus's blood atones for their sins just as the blood of an animal sacrificed in the Temple was sprinkled on the sinners to atone for their errors.

Benedict XVI also referred to the *Shoah* as a neopagan phenomenon, downplaying the religious roots. He committed some strange blunders in his attempt to woo back into the Catholic fold the members of the heretical St. Pius X Society. He lifted the excommunication of four of their bishops, including that of Bishop Richard Williamson, a vile anti-Semite and Holocaust denier. When he learned of the bishop's sordid record, he actually apologized for his blunder (a remarkable departure from the doctrine of papal infallibility!), cautioning about the need to check out backgrounds on the Internet. He also restored a revised version of the Tridentine Latin Good Friday Prayer, *Pro Conversione Iudaeorum* ("for the conversion of the Jews"), although Cardinal Walter Kasper assured the outraged Jewish community that the prayer was eschatological—that it referred to the end of days, not to historical times. And Benedict raised hackles in the Jewish world when he advanced Pius XII one step closer to sainthood. Still, Benedict's pontificate has been marked by continued rapprochement between the Catholic and Jewish faiths.

Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina succeeded Benedict XVI in March of 2013, after Benedict XVI resigned, taking the name of Pope Francis I (for Francis of Assisi, whom he admires so profoundly). He is the first pope from Latin America. His record as a warm friend of the Jewish community of Buenos Aires is well documented. He was involved in interfaith activities, visiting the synagogues on several occasions and actually speaking from their pulpits. The picture of him lighting the Hanukkah menorah in the synagogue is iconic. He cultivated a long and warm friendship with the rector of the Seminario Rabbinico Latinoamericano, Rabbi Abraham Skorka, and the two of them produced a volume, *On Heaven and Earth*. He was notable in his denunciation of the tragic murder of eighty-five men and women in the bombing of the Jewish Community Center of Buenos Aires in 1994, apparently the work of Iranian terrorists. Francis wrote recently: "The Church officially recognizes that the People of Israel continues to be the Chosen People."¹⁴ He rejects the deicide charge and reiterates that *Nostra Aetate* and Vatican II are the new, official teachings of the Church. He also urges the opening of the Vatican Archives to examine the war years of Pius XII's pontificate

14. Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis I) and Abraham Skorka, *On Heaven and Earth: Pope Francis on Faith, Family, and the Church in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Image, 2013), 188; see also Franklin Sherman, ed., *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, vol. 2 (New York: Paulist, 2014), 238–39; Pope Francis I, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

and to search out the truth once and for all. Within hours of his election to the papacy, he sent a note to Rome's chief rabbi, Ricardo Di Segni, inviting him to the inauguration of his papacy and assuring him of his friendship and commitment "to contribute to the progress in relations between the Hebrews and the Catholics which has become well known since Vatican Council II, in a spirit of renewed collaboration to the service of a world that may be more in harmony with the will of the Creator."¹⁵ What a striking difference from the Middle Ages! In those times, a delegation of Roman Jews would greet a newly inaugurated pope, carrying a Torah scroll that they would extend to him, while begging the pope to renew the *Constitutio pro Judaeis* that dates back to Pope Calixtus II (twelfth century) but really derives from Pope Gregory the Great's bull, *Sicut Judaeis* (ca. 600). The pope would bless the Jewish delegation and admonish them that while the Church reveres the Torah, it deplores the fact that the Jews remain blind to the truth of the Gospels. Some of the popes would commit the ultimate indignity of dropping the scroll to the mortification of the Jewish delegation.

More recently, Pope Francis noted that "to be a good Christian it is necessary to understand Jewish history and traditions," and he stressed that "a Christian cannot be an anti-Semite." He wondered what of the promises made to them by God: has it all come to nothing? "With the help of God, and especially since the Second Vatican Council we have rediscovered that the Jewish people are still, for us, the holy root from which Jesus originated." The pope reminded himself and others that "I also questioned God, particularly when my mind turned to the memory of the terrible experiences of the *Shoah*." He reiterated the teaching of Paul that God's fidelity to the covenant established with Israel was never abolished, and that "through the terrible testing during those dark centuries the Jews have clung to their faith in God, for which we can never adequately thank them. By persevering in their faith they recall for all of us Christians the fact that we are always awaiting the Lord's return."¹⁶ And on his May 2014 visit to Israel, in addition to visiting the Western Wall and Yad Vashem, he placed flowers on the grave of Theodor Herzl, in a gesture of apology for Pius X's rebuff of the Zionist movement. Clearly, Francis I is warmly and profoundly committed to working for

15. <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/francis/1206-f2013march13/>.

16. For the text of his Exhortation, see Appendix II.

greater trust and respect between the two faiths in the spirit of that historic document, *Nostra Aetate*.

So it is clear that the Catholic Church has come a long way these past fifty years or so. But it would be naive for us to conclude that the work is over, the task accomplished, and that we can now move on to other areas of exploration and exposition. Let us recall that nineteen centuries of the teaching of contempt preceded Vatican II: you cannot undo nineteen hundred years in a mere fifty, I believe. Remember that teaching, preaching, biblical exposition, homilies, and prayers denigrated Judaism during those long centuries. Good Friday and the Easter season were always dangerous times for Jews; often mobs who had just heard preachers denounce the Jews as perpetrators of deicide, as Christ killers, would pour out of churches and set upon the Jewish quarter for a pogrom or a massacre or an expulsion. If you teach your child that the neighbor down the block had killed your god, you surely cannot expect your child to love or respect that Jewish neighbor. Quite the contrary: contempt was bred in the churches and cathedrals down through the ages.¹⁷ I believe it is a serious error to downplay the religious roots of the Nazi horrors and to blame it all on so-called neopaganism. Of course the Nazi phenomenon was partly neopagan. But what prepared the soil of Germany and other lands in Christian Europe where the *Shoah* occurred? I firmly believe that the teachings of contempt, the charge of deicide, the denigration of Jews, their portrayal as devils and demonic creatures fixed in the minds of Christian Europeans a despicable, contemptible and cursed race that would best be eliminated. And whereas it is true that popes officially protected Jews to keep them as living evidence of the truth of Christianity, as Augustine understood it, papal policies consisted of, in the words of Salo W. Baron, “general sufferance with severe restrictions.”¹⁸ Let us remember that Pope Innocent III inaugurated the Jew badge at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215; that the ghetto that unofficially began in Venice in 1516 reflected papal desires to segregate Jews lest they contaminate Christians; that Pope Paul IV in his odious bull, *Cum nimis absurdum*

17. See Mary C. Boys, *Redeeming Our Sacred Story: The Death of Jesus and Relations between Jews and Christians* (New York: Paulist, 2013). Sister Mary analyzes the disastrous influence the deicide charge exerted, and she suggests concrete measures for uprooting this malign teaching.

18. See Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (18 vols., 2nd ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 1952–83), 4:3–149 for a thorough survey of papal policies.

(1555), called for segregation of Jews and for avoidance of any business or social contacts with them, compelled the men to wear a yellow hat and the women a veil, reduced them to dealing in secondhand goods, prohibited them from engaging Christian nurses, and added further oppressive measures to marginalize them and make life more miserable for them.¹⁹ Jews were depicted as having a veil over their hearts to the truth (2 Cor 3:15), a frequent theme in Christian art and architecture. The Hebrew Bible or “Old Testament” was viewed with disdain as merely a prelude to the New Testament, a position that goes back to Marcion in the second century that had been condemned as heretical but never really disappeared until Vatican II. The Church, through the Inquisition office, periodically seized Hebrew writings for censorship or worse: it condemned them to the flames. And although the Catholic Church officially did not espouse a “racial” notion of salvation, teaching that any race or ethnic group was saved by belief in Jesus and no race is superior to any other, the Spanish Church in the days of the Inquisition did preach the notion of *limpieza de sangre*, “purity of blood,” as a mark of a true Christian, and the modern German Catholic Church exhibited some strong racial tendencies in dealing with other faiths—especially Judaism.²⁰ Clearly, the Nazis learned their lesson well and borrowed many of their despicable ideas and actions from the Catholic and Protestant churches and their leaders. Under the Church the pattern was, the Jews *cannot live as equals* among us, so their rights were severely curtailed. The next stage was, the Jews *cannot live among us*, and the ghettos were instituted. The Nazis took it one step further: the Jews *cannot live . . .*

But other media were invoked in the service of this teaching of contempt. Some years ago, my wife and I visited Madrid for the first time, and we rushed to the Prado Museum to see some of its treasures. I was struck and shocked on visiting the European gallery where I noticed two paintings from the School of Rubens (fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Flemish). One depicted God in heaven above a sacrificial lamb (Jesus—*agnus Dei*). Below was a mob of confused and benighted Jews surrounded by a hodgepodge of torn texts and Hebrew letters, symbolizing the

19. See Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, vol. 1 (New York: Hermon, 1966); vol 2, ed. and arr. Kenneth Stowe (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1989); Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews in Italy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1946), 294ff.; Attilio Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), 74ff., 150ff. and passim.

20. Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*, 36–93.

superseded Old Testament. The other displays a maddening crowd screaming to crucify Jesus. One man, who looks like a maniac or a devil, has a rope around Jesus's neck and is dragging him to the cross. Below are mobs of Jews—fat, vulgar, fingers festooned with gems and rings, reeking of opulence. The contrast between Jews and Christians was appalling.

Next we visited Paris and of course went to Notre Dame. I stood outside the main entrance of the famed cathedral and observed two contrasting statues: one was a disheveled woman, blinded by her crown that had slipped from her head, clutching a broken staff; the other was a resplendent woman, crown proudly perched on her head, clutching a perfect scepter. I knew the symbolism at once: the former represented Judaism—blind to the new truth and no longer the receptacle of sovereignty; the other represented the new and true faith—Christianity. These artistic depictions are found in other cathedrals throughout Europe.²¹ Nor should we forget the anti-Jewish biases and stereotypes found in literature and theater—in Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Dickens, T. S. Eliot—just to mention a few.²² The Passion Plays at Oberammergau, a blatantly anti-Jewish production, attracted hundreds of thousands through the centuries. And even in music (e.g., Bach's chorales), anti-Jewish themes are explored and developed. All of this is part of the campaign of *adversus Judaeos*—opposing the former truth of Judaism, now replaced by the new truth of Christianity. In art, architecture, literature, theater, theology, preaching, teaching, commentaries, and liturgy, this was the line followed for nineteen centuries.

Vatican II reversed all that and shifted Catholicism away from all that had preceded that historic Council. The Bishops' Committee on Relations with the Jews meets twice yearly in the United States with the National Council of Synagogues, and I am certain in other nations as well.

21. See Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: Continuum, 1996).

22. In his *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens referred to the villainous Fagin some three hundred times as "the Jew." Several British Jews wrote him letters of protest causing him to reconsider his portrayal, and in subsequent editions of the novel he removed most of those references. Furthermore, in his last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, he introduced a Jewish character named Judah Riah, who is the perfect model of a Jewish gentleman—honorable and upstanding. But the damage was done, and Fagin remains in the minds of millions of Christians the symbol of the ruthless and bloodthirsty Jew. The truth of this can be seen by the fact that when Menahem Begin was elected prime minister of Israel, *Time* magazine maliciously informed its readers, "BEGIN (rhymes with Fagin) WINS."

There are frequent visits to both churches and synagogues, with clergy speaking from the pulpits of both institutions. Joint statements on important issues are publicized periodically. There is no current office in the Vatican that targets Jews for conversion. Rabbis and priests are in constant dialogue, and many warm friendships have resulted. It is not unusual to find a Catholic priest or bishop or cardinal at a rabbi's Passover Seder or Shabbat dinner table. Catholic colleges and universities have established departments and centers for Christian-Jewish relations and chairs for Jewish studies. Even the Orthodox Jewish community, which for many years had shunned interreligious conversation or theological discussions, in great part due to the admonition of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, has been drawn in. The Israeli Chief Rabbinate meets regularly with its Vatican counterpart. Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Jonah Metzger met Christian leaders in Jerusalem (March 10, 2013) and reflected on the persecution of Jews through the ages in the Diaspora but noted that the adoption of *Nostra Aetate*, which repudiated the notion of Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus, had provided for an opportunity for reconciliation between the two faiths. He added, "I want to thank you for your support and help for us to fulfill the right to be citizens in the Holy Land, and may God bless you for coming to visit us." In the same month, when the Orthodox Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York City dedicated its new building on a Sabbath morning, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan was the guest speaker from the pulpit of that synagogue. I submit that all this would have been impossible had it not been for *Nostra Aetate*. I look back fifty years and I marvel at what we have achieved in this Copernican revolution in Catholic-Jewish affairs. We have come a long way since 1960!²³

Apart from the revolution in Catholic-Jewish affairs, the Protestant world has also been deeply affected. Actually, the Protestants preceded the Catholics in seeking to understand the great tragedy of the *Shoah* and the role Christians and Christian thinking had played. Shortly after World War II, some Protestant theologians and clergy began to question how Christian Europe could have been the scene of the atrocious *Shoah*. Some began to suggest that maybe Christian teachings had prepared the soil

23. Some years ago, I met the late Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini of Milan. He told me of his love for the land of Israel, his familiarity with the modern Hebrew language, and that he had purchased a tomb in Israel in which to be buried. He asked if I had studied with Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel. When I replied in the affirmative, he eagerly urged me to tell him all I knew about Dr. Heschel because he admired his writings and teachings. This attitude was surely unheard of prior to Vatican II.

for the *Shoah*. The Seelisberg Declaration (1947) was an early joint but unofficial statement of the newly created International Council of Christians and Jews, consisting of Jews, Protestants, and a few Catholics. The ten points reminded all that one God speaks in the Old and New Testaments; that Jesus was a Jew, as were his first disciples and apostles; that the commandment to love one's neighbor is binding on both Christians and Jews; that in extolling Christianity we should not distort biblical or post-biblical Judaism; that Jews must not be depicted as enemies of Jesus; that the Passion must not be presented in a way that brings odium on all Jews then alive or in following centuries; that the curse that his blood be upon us and our children must be mitigated by the statement that God should forgive them for they know not what they do; that we must not teach that Jews are an accursed race; and that we must avoid suggesting that the first members of the Church had not been Jews. These principles anticipated the landmark statement of *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent documents.²⁴

Moreover, individual theologians and clergy such as England's James Parkes, America's Bishop James Pike, Reinhold Niebuhr, Roy and Alice Eckardt; Sweden's Bishop Krister Stendhal; and others engaged in deep soul-searching and called for a reevaluation of Christian teachings on Judaism. Gradually, the various Protestant denominations, including Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, and others, issued statements to this effect and frankly acknowledged the tawdry role Christian teaching had played in that enormous tragedy. For example, in 1988 the Protestant World Council of Churches gathered in Sweden and issued a document titled "The Church and the Jewish People: Toward a New Understanding."²⁵ The document enumerated five guiding principles: 1) The covenant of God with the Jewish people remains valid; 2) anti-Semitism and all forms of the teaching of contempt for Judaism are to be rejected; 3) the living tradition is a gift of God; 4) coercive proselytism directed towards Jews is incompatible with Christian faith; 5) Jews and Christians bear a common responsibility as witnesses to God's righteousness and peace in the world. The fact that the document cites *Nostra*

24. For the full text of the Seelisberg Declaration and background, see William W. Simpson and Ruth Weyl, *The Story of the International Council of Christians and Jews* (Heppenheim: ICCJ, 1995), appendix II, 117–18.

25. "The Churches and the Jewish People," in *The New Relationship between Christians and Jews: Documentation of Major Statements* (Heppenheim: ICCJ, n.d.), 55–60.

Aetate buttresses my argument that *Nostra Aetate* was the catalyst that propelled a Protestant reevaluation of those teachings.²⁶

Sadly, mainline Protestant churches have seen relations with Jews break down and founder over the Israel-Arab conflict. Mainline churches have a deep stake in the Middle East, going back to the early nineteenth century as their missionaries worked in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, and other lands in that region.²⁷ The leadership of those churches has exhibited increasingly hostile attitudes towards the State of Israel and is perceived by many as being anti-Israel and even anti-Jewish. Consequently, the warm relations of the 1970s and 1980s that dominated relations between the faith groups have chilled noticeably to the point of frozen indifference and even outright hostility.

Paradoxically, as relations with mainline churches have soured, evangelical churches are experiencing a rapprochement towards Jewish leaders and organizations. I say paradoxically because the Jewish community and its religious and secular organizations have most in common with the mainline, liberal churches—especially in the area of social justice, whether in the realm of women’s rights, abortion, ordination of women, same-sex marriages, ordination of gays, and other issues of concern. But evangelicals are generally passionate supporters of the State of Israel—in part because they view the return of Jews to the Holy Land as a *sine qua non* for the second coming of Jesus (the Parousia), but also because they are sympathetic to the plight of a small, beleaguered nation in a sea of hostile Arabs, especially after the *Shoah*; and partly because they identify with a Western-style, democratic state in a region replete with brutal dictatorships. Hence, we are witnessing the growing bonds of affection and respect between the Jewish community and the evangelical churches.

Still, despite all the progress we have witnessed, we must not rest or be satisfied with past accomplishments. We need to move forward and flesh out the promise of *Nostra Aetate*. There are still opponents of its great teachings. The late Cardinal Avery Dulles, referred to it as “a hermeneutic rupture with past Church teachings,” and he insisted that

26. An important statement by the Christian Scholars Group (Catholic and Protestant) titled, “A Sacred Obligation,” was issued in 2003. See the volume that discusses it in depth, edited by John C. Merkle, *Faith Transformed: Christian Encounters with Jews and Judaism* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical, 2003).

27. See Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy* (New York: Norton, 2007), esp. 80–97.

we must continue to target Jews for baptism.²⁸ The heretical St. Pius X Society rejects the new views codified at Vatican II, remains deeply anti-Semitic, and refuses to be reconciled in the Church of Rome despite serious efforts of Benedict XVI to woo them back into the fold. But Cardinals Kasper and Koch, doubtless speaking in the name of the pope, made it abundantly clear that the society and its followers must subscribe to the newer teachings of the Church as codified in Vatican II or else remain excommunicated. Consequently, religious education and educational materials must reflect these newer teachings about Jews and Judaism. The flaccid and feckless responses of many Catholic and Protestant clergy to the Gibson film *The Passion of the Christ*, a film that revived ancient stereotypes and is at variance with many of the teachings of Vatican II, was stark proof that more work needs to be done.²⁹ The principles of *Nostra Aetate* have yet to be absorbed by too many seminarians, clergy, and laity in America—not to mention in South America, where 40 percent of the world's Catholics reside. And we need to educate Catholics in Asia and Africa and other parts of the world where the newer teachings have yet to penetrate. We have to uproot once and for all the “teaching of contempt” from Christian teaching and preaching if we are to uproot anti-Judaism from society. In short, there is much work left for us to build on the foundations set by Vatican II. But as Rabbi Tarfon observed, “You are not expected to complete the task; neither are you free to desist from making a start” (Mishnah *Avot* 2:16). This is the challenge to the new generation of preachers, teachers, clergy, theologians, and educators.

This volume contains contributions from a wide range of authors from five countries. There are Catholics and Jews, Protestants and evangelicals, Orthodox and liberal, men and women, theologians and congregational clergy represented here in my effort to give voice to the widest possible spectrum. The first section gives us some historical insights into what Vatican II achieved and how *Nostra Aetate* came about.

28. See Cardinal Avery Dulles, “Covenant and Mission,” *America* (October 21, 2002) 8–11 and the rejoinders that follow on 12–16 by Mary Boys, Philip A. Cunningham, and John T. Pawlikowski. Also see Dulles’s piece, “The Covenant with Israel,” *First Things* (November 2005) 16–21. Cardinal Albert Vanhoye also subscribed to this position. For a full discussion and refutation, cf. John Pawlikowski, “Defining Catholic Identity against the Jews: Pope Benedict XVI and the Question of Mission to the Jewish People,” in Alan Berger, ed., *Dialogue and Terror* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 102–20.

29. See Philip A. Cunningham, ed., *Pondering the Passion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

The second section reflects the impact of the Council on various faith groups. The third section describes its educational and pastoral impact. The fourth section spells out for the reader several unresolved issues that still challenge us. The fifth section contains brief, personal statements and vignettes from a variety of contributors assessing how *Nostra Aetate* impacted their lives, thinking, teaching, and relationships. It is my sincere hope that this volume will inspire clergy and laity, educators and students, professional religion leaders as well as ordinary folks who seek a deeper understanding of the roots of their faith and the relationship between “the elder and younger brother”—Judaism and Christianity. Above all, I hope it will stimulate conversation and dialogue between members of the faith groups.

Once upon a time, not that long ago, Jews and Christians rarely spoke to one another. They ignored each other; they vilified each other; they shouted at each other. But they rarely spoke. My long study of history has taught me that *people who do not speak to one another do unspeakable things to one another*. We dare not return to that ancient state of being. The Second Vatican Council and its great pronouncements, especially *Nostra Aetate*, have ushered in a new era of respect, understanding, honor, and friendship. We must move forward in solidifying its achievements. That means that we Christians and Jews alike must expunge and finally remove any teachings or dogmas that demean or denigrate other faiths or show them in an invidious light. And furthermore, religious imperialism must go: the notion that “I’m in and you are out; that I am saved and you are damned; that it is my way or the highway; that I have a monopoly on truth and I possess the keys to the kingdom” must be discarded if we are to foster respect and trust. Vatican II moved away from the age-old doctrine, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—there is no salvation outside the one, true Catholic Church—a position that was never de jure part of the magisterium but was certainly de facto ingrained in Catholic attitudes. But now several of the documents ratified at Vatican II affirm that “other religions often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”³⁰

30. The Vatican II documents that articulate this position are *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church), sec. 16; *Nostra Aetate* sec. 2; *Gaudium et Spes* sec. 22; and *Unitatis Redintegratio* sec. 13. See Christian Rutishauser, “‘The Old Unrevoked Covenant’ and ‘Salvation for All Nations in Christ’—Catholic Doctrines in Contradiction?” in Philip A. Cunningham et al., eds., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 229–50; Clark Williamson, “What Does It Mean to be Saved?,” in *Pondering the Passion*, 119–28; Gilbert S. Rosenthal, “Salvation Jewish Style,” in *Trialogue and Terror*, 23–36; Rosenthal, “*Hasidei Umot Ha-Olam: A*

Finally, in all of my interreligious work I have been guided by two biblical verses: “Come now let us reason together”(Isa 1:18), and “Then those who revered the LORD spoke to one another and the LORD took note and listened” (Mal 3:16). May those verses inspire us all.

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Remarkable Concept,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48 (2013) 467–90.