

The Teaching of the Second Vatican Council on Jews and Judaism

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Introduction

At a meeting with Jewish leaders on March 16, 1990, Pope John Paul II suggested that the *Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on Non-Christian Religions* be placed in the context of the other Council documents.¹ The fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* is indeed an appropriate context for such an evaluation of the entire Council's contribution to Catholic-Jewish relations.

"The Second Vatican Council was perhaps the most profound religious event of the twentieth century."² For Catholics this statement can be accepted without qualification. Certainly many Jewish and other scholars would accept this claim for its impact on the development of Jewish-Christian relations. Perhaps many outside the Catholic community would focus attention on *Nostra Aetate* as a high point in the Council's teaching. However, the impact of this Declaration would have been less profound without the important developments that are found in other documents, especially the Constitutions relating to the very heart of the Church's life. Of course, the subsequent texts of the Holy See and various national conferences of bishops have made a significant contribution to its implementation.³

Many commentators use the phrase "watershed event" when describing the impact of the Council. Indeed, a number of significant changes in the life of Catholics followed from conciliar decisions. However, it would be unfortunate to underestimate the

continuity of the practice of Christian life on all levels. The Council's accomplishments are clearly founded on the work of pioneers in various fields of theology, liturgiology, and pastoral care. The teaching of Pope Pius XII on the nature of the Church (*Mystici Corporis* [1943]), the Sacred Scriptures (*Divino Afflante Spiritu* [1943]), and the liturgy (*Mediator Dei* [1947]) as well as his leadership in other areas effectively guided the entire Church toward many of the achievements of the Council.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
(*Sacrosanctum Concilium*)

Public worship, the celebration of the sacraments, and other forms of prayer constitute the core of the spiritual life for Catholics, both the community and the individual.⁴ For this reason, it was most appropriate that the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* was the first document of the Second Vatican Council to be promulgated (December 4, 1963).

Just as the liturgical heritage of the Church constantly draws upon the Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures, so the Council documents echo biblical texts, themes, and images throughout. The “salvation history” model of biblical theology developed by Gerhard von Rad and Oscar Cullmann may be recognized at many points, but with a clear emphasis on the *mystery*, i.e., the divine plan, operative in these events.⁵ The activity of God in creation and human history must be appreciated from the perspective of the divine “economy” and the ultimate goal of history (and, therefore, of every human life). For the Church this salvation history is centered on the person and work of Jesus:

The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ our Lord in redeeming humankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved his task principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead and glorious ascension. (*Liturgy* #5).⁶

The marvels of God's presence and guidance of the twelve tribes of Israel over the centuries will be accorded more attention in other documents. Here the perspective of Christian faith in the universal impact of Christ's work is stressed, without necessarily diminished the magnitude of God's prior gifts to the chosen people. At no one moment did these mighty deeds have the same universal effects that Christian faith ascribes to the "paschal mystery," i.e., the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus (see Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:3-5). However, the very term "paschal" emphasizes that only in the framework of the Passover-Exodus and Sinai Covenant can the depths of the Christian interpretation of Jesus' accomplishment be elucidated. This will be evident from the first paragraph of *Nostra Aetate* #4. Throughout the New Testament, writers point to the Exodus as the key event in Israel's history, whose symbols are used to enhance Christian understanding of Jesus' death-and-resurrection. The phrase "paschal mystery" draws attention to the Jewish Passover as paradigm for grasping profound dimensions of Jesus' work.

From the first generation of Christianity, "the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery, reading those things 'which were in all the Scriptures concerning him' (Lk 24:27)" (*Liturgy* #6). The liturgy is the favored context for applying the message of the Scripture to the contemporary needs of the Church, a lesson learned from the synagogue service. This principle, like the use of psalms and other canticles of the Jewish Scriptures, derived from the practices of the Temple and Synagogue. The focus of all Christian worship on the paschal mystery follows the Jewish precedent of rooting all prayer in the "ascending blessing" of thanks-and-praise for what God has done already for his people. From this perspective of gratitude, help is sought for present needs and the community is oriented to the future, when God's plan will be fulfilled.⁷

At the same time as the Church orients the faithful toward the consummation of history in the triumphant return of Christ, she stresses, again with the ancient Jewish liturgy, that we live constantly in God's presence and must strive to make our worship (e.g., in the

Sanctus, drawing on Isa 6:3) and lives (e.g., in the Lord's Prayer) correspond with the activity of the heavenly Court/Temple, the celestial Jerusalem: "In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem to which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (#8).

The central place of the liturgy in the Church's life is clear from the following principle: "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows" (*Liturgy* #10). This centrality of the liturgy to Christian life echoes the Hebrew understanding of '*abodah*, meaning both worship and work (service). This link between the sublime drama of worship and the fabric of the mundane shows the unity of human life, wherein all details of daily activities must be ordered to the service of God and neighbor, with the purpose of bringing all creation closer to its goal.

In several acts of reform the changes that followed the Council have drawn upon biblical and liturgical principles that ideally should have a beneficial effect on Christian-Jewish relations. Of course, the primary purpose of these reforms is to foster the spiritual life of the faithful, but it is indeed felicitous that people have frequent occasions to reflect upon our roots in the biblical and Jewish heritage. Filling a vacuum of ignorance with a positive appreciation of what the Jewish community was in past ages should be a foundation for a Christian sense of solidarity with the Jewish people now and for cooperating with them to overcome anti-Jewish bigotry in the contemporary world. Bringing the faithful to knowledge of God's Word and the people who preserved it is imperative in every part of the world, whether these Christians are in contact with Jewish communities or not. The message of the Council regarding the Jewish people is very important for all the Christian faithful because it is essential to the integrity of the Church's self-definition.

Following the Council's call for "the treasures of the Bible to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful" (*Liturgy* #51), a three-year cycle was devised for

the Sunday readings and a two year cycle for weekdays. The ancient synagogue in the Holy Land had a three-year cycle for Sabbaths and, already in the decade preceding the Council, scholars were debating its possible impact on New Testament writings. Did the reformers have this background in mind? Archival sources of this work are not yet available to answer this question. At any rate, the selection of passages from the Jewish Scriptures both for Sundays (except after Easter) and weekdays was an important step toward presenting God's Word in its fullness to the faithful. It also made the teaching of "Old Testament" in seminaries much more relevant.

The series of complex prayers at the Offertory of the Mass was replaced by texts that derive from the Jewish meal prayers for bread and wine. Future priests and other teachers should be introduced to the riches of the Jewish prayer books (especially those of the Orthodox tradition) so that they will be alert to such parallels and to this treasury of Jewish spirituality.

The change of January first from the Feast of the Lord's Circumcision to the Solemnity of the Mother of God may have taken away an opportunity to discuss aspects of the fact that Jesus was born under the Law (Gal 4:4); however, the Gospel (Lk 2:16-21) concludes with reference to the circumcision and naming of the Child. The homily should stress the Jewishness of the Holy Family and their observance of the Law. The change of February second from the Purification of Mary to the Presentation of the Lord provides another link with the Law of Moses, but this is not a holy day of obligation.⁸

The reform of the Divine Office (the Psalms and other texts for daily rhythms of prayer) was discussed in chapter IV of the *Constitution* (# 83-101). This was extensive, dividing the Psalms and canticles into a four-week cycle rather than the monastic model of reciting all these prayers each week.⁹ Of interest to our topic is the fact that Saturday continues to be called "Sabbath." The "brief reading" for *Compline* on Saturday evening is taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-7, the core of the *Shema*; this is one of several contacts with the Jewish tradition in the texts for Saturday.

Prayers of intercession (“the prayer of the faithful” or bidding prayers), whose presence in the Good Friday liturgy gives evidence of a very ancient practice, were introduced into the Eucharistic liturgy for Sunday and feasts (*Liturgy* #53); they were introduced as well into the Divine Office of Lauds and Vespers. A careful review of the prayers for the Jewish people in these petitions shows that the spirit of the Council’s Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, was not always observed. Perhaps this work of providing new prayers was well underway before the last session of the Council, when *Nostra Aetate* was promulgated. At any rate, this area should be reviewed in coming years.

Long before the Council, John M. Oesterreicher challenged the usual English translation of the Good Friday Liturgy’s prayer *pro perfidiis Judaeis*; he argued that the Latin term does not mean “perfidious” but “unbelieving.”¹⁰ Pope John XXIII ordered that the adjective be omitted from the announcement of the prayer; in 1966 and 1974 the prayer itself was changed completely.

The Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)

In their search for a deeper understanding of the Church’s very nature, with the intention of bringing all humanity to the light of Christ, the Council Fathers discussed the Church’s relationship to ancient Israel: “Already present in figure at the beginning of the world, this Church was prepared in a marvelous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and in the Old Covenant . . . At the end of time . . . all the just from the time of Adam . . . will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church” (*Church* #2).

This statement embraces the entire sweep of human history, relating those who believe in Christ to the children of Abraham as the covenanted people. The ultimate experience of redemption will be shared by all who are “just,” gathered into unity with God and each other. The title of this chapter, “The Mystery of the Church,” conveys the realization that the Church is “a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.”¹¹ The term “mystery” refers to the divine

plan revealed in stages to Abraham and his descendants, coming to fulfillment in the work of Jesus (see Rom 16:25-26). In *Nostra Aetate* the Council Father endeavored to “sound the depths of the mystery which is the Church”; this led to a longer reflection on “the spiritual ties which link the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham” (#4). To appreciate this point of the Declaration of October 28, 1965, it is necessary to study its roots in the *Constitution on the Church*.

Very succinctly numerous aspects of the biblical message are utilized to describe the work of Christ, who did the Father’s will by inaugurating the kingdom of heaven on earth (*Church* #3). Matthew’s use of a circumlocution to avoid inappropriate familiarity with the divine Name must be kept in mind when reading the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven,” as well as the double meaning of the Hebrew term for kingship/kingdom. The royal *authority* (kingship) of God is recognized now by people of faith, whereas the acceptance of divine *rule* (dominion) by all creation will come after evil has been vanquished definitively.¹² The Council document here identifies the Church as “the Kingdom of Christ,” a theme developed in *Church* #5. The identification of the Church with “the Kingdom of Christ” was applied to the Byzantine Empire in Asia Minor and Eastern Europe, with unfortunate ramifications in the period before the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Acknowledgment is made of the rich heritage from the ancient Hebrews: “In the Old Testament the revelation of the kingdom is often made under the forms of symbols” (*Church* #6). Thus, the Church is a sheepfold, a tract of land to be cultivated, the field of God (1 Cor 3:9): “On that land the ancient olive tree grows whose holy roots were the patriarchs and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been brought about and will be brought about again (Rom 11:13-26). That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly Cultivator (Mt 21:33-43; see Isa 5:1-7). The true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us (Jn 15:1-5)” (*Church* #6).¹³

These passages go far beyond the context suggested by Paul, who speaks of “one planting, another watering but only God causes

growth” (1 Cor 3:7-8) by alluding to prophetic images appropriated by the Gospels. The field seems to be identified with the promised land where Israel had flourished as an olive tree (Hos 14:7) or fruitful vine (Hos 14:8; Ps 80, etc.). This should lead to an extended reflection on the link between people and land in the biblical tradition, with implications for the Jewish attachment to the land of Israel over the centuries.¹⁴ Using the next Pauline image “the building of God,” this paragraph then describes the Church as God’s Temple, corresponding ideally to that of the heavenly Jerusalem. Although in ages past theologians usurped such “symbols” by denying the continuing meaning of the realities of Land and Temple for the Jewish people, the rules of typology should be followed, as in the works of biblical writers who applied the Exodus experience to explain the return from exile. The reality has a meaning in itself and also points to a theological or spiritual moral application, without eviscerating the meaning and value of the original for the Jewish people.

Chapter II, “The People of God,” contains material of great importance both for the Church’s self-understanding and for Catholic-Jewish relations.¹⁵ God’s plan for humanity constitutes individuals as “a people who acknowledge him and serve him in holiness. He therefore chose the Israelite race to be his own people and established a covenant with it. He gradually instructed this people . . . and made it holy unto himself. All these things, however, happened as a preparation and figure of that new and perfect Covenant which was to be ratified in Christ . . .” (*Church* #9). After quoting the covenantal promise found in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the text continues: “Christ instituted this new covenant, namely the new covenant in his blood; he called a people made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and this race would be the new People of God” (*Church* #9).

Again *Lumen Gentium* prepares for *Nostra Aetate* and developments in the theology of the Church’s relation with the Jewish people and offset misinterpretations of what may seem to be ambiguous statements in the *Constitution on the Church*.¹⁶ “The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God’s plan of salvation the

beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets . . . The Church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles and made them one in himself” (*Nostra Aetate* #4).

The image of the olive tree (Rom 11:13-26), cited in *Lumen Gentium* #6 and in *Nostra Aetate* #4, helps to foster the truth of continuity in the divine plan rather than have readers think that phrases like “new covenant” and “new People of God” imply the abrogation or demise of God’s relationship with the People of Israel (now usually designated as the Jewish people). Theories of God’s rejection of Israel/the Jewish people must not be part of Catholic thinking; rather the Church (“whose members, as people of faith, are children of Abraham”) should recall with gratitude that “she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant” (*Nostra Aetate* #4).

An emphasis on continuity must be balanced by recognition of Christianity’s claim to “newness” in the union of Jew and gentile into one people, achieved in principle through the paschal mystery of Jesus. Thus the Council speaks of “the messianic people,” pointing to the role of Jesus as God’s Anointed, leading humanity into a communion of life, love and truth” (*Church* #9) that will blossom forth in the *eschaton*.

Focusing on the Hebrew designation of Israel and *qahal*, a convocation (rendered in Greek by *ekklesia*) by God’s word for service, *Lumen Gentium* sees the people’s wandering after the Exodus as a type of the Church’s pilgrimage toward full communion with God:¹⁷ “As Israel according to the flesh which wandered in the desert was already called the Church (*ecclesia*) of God, so too the new Israel, which advances in this present era in search of a future and permanent city, is called also the Church of Christ” (*Church* #9). This typology is Pauline in origin (1 Cor 10:1-11) and was developed in the Letter to the Hebrews; again it rightly alludes to the unique role of Christ. The phrases “new covenant” and “new People of God” have explicit antecedents in the New Testament. In this text the phrase “Israel of the flesh”

need not be taken pejoratively (see 1 Cor 10:8) because the Council does not refer to sins of the desert generation nor contrast it with the Christian Church. However, the title “new Israel” (whose only possible New Testament antecedent is “the Israel of God” in Gal 6:16) must be avoided or used very carefully to avoid a judgmental contrast with the Israel that included people who did not acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah and Son of God. Again *Nostra Aetate* completes the Council’s teaching with its quotation of Paul’s list of attributes belonging to the Jewish People (#4, citing Rom 9:4-5) as well as the statement that “God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made” (#4 citing Rom 11:28-29).

The rich section (#10-12) on participation of the faithful in Christ’s three-fold function as king, priest, and prophet and the meaning of the sacraments could be explored for biblical and Jewish roots, but that will be left for another study.

The Church’s clear sense of its universal mission, first enunciated in *Liturgy* #1 and #2, is reiterated throughout *Lumen Gentium*: “All human beings are called to belong to the new People of God. This people, therefore, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God’s will may be fulfilled” (#13). The *Declaration on Religious Liberty* provides a basis for tempering zeal with a deep respect for each individual’s freedom of conscience.¹⁸

Already in *Lumen Gentium* this sense of mission is followed by a reflection on the situation of baptized Christians who are not Catholic (#5; see the *Decree on Ecumenism*). A very important interpretation of the ancient dictum “Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus” (“Outside the Church no salvation”) has an explicit reference to the Jewish people:

Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways. There is, first, that people to which the covenants and promises were made, and from which Christ was born according to the flesh (Rom 9:4-5): in view of the divine choice, they are a people

most dear for the sake of the fathers, for God does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the call he issues (see Rom 11:28-29). (#16).

How do the Jews relate to the Church? Should there be a second question: How does the Church relate to the Jews of our generation? The Council has alluded to the key ideas flowing from the New Testament, but much work remains for the theologians and ecumenists.¹⁹ Of course, this paragraph includes a carefully nuanced section on the divine help given to all who, “through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart.”

Chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* places the Catholic teachings concerning the blessed Mother of God explicitly within the context of the Council’s understanding of the Church itself. Although the biblical preparation for the role of the Redeemer’s Mother is sketched briefly (#55), there is no allusion to her Jewishness. This fact is mentioned in *Nostra Aetate* #4, but only in passing. Perhaps the reticence is due to the fact that this is a question “which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified” (#54).²⁰

The Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)

Preeminent among the gifts which the Church received from the chosen people is the Jewish Bible.²¹ The Council’s work embodied in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* is the fruit of a generation of scholarship inspired by the 1943 encyclical of Pope Pius XII entitled *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

The *Constitution* begins by mentioning that God’s Word is heard and proclaimed (#1); this perspective on the primacy of listening (see Rom 10:14-17) places the Scriptures within the liturgy as the heart of the Church’s life. Reading and study are necessary as preparation for appreciating the Word as proclaimed and heeded, after attentive, prayerful listening. Thus the Church draws upon the ancient Hebrew and Jewish experience of God’s

Word. Uniquely Christian is the relation of this Word to the Word-made-flesh in Jesus Christ (citing Jn 1:2-3).

The Hebrew term *dabbar* means word, thing, and event; this range of meaning should assist the Christian to grasp the profound link between word and sign (or symbolic gesture), between the historical event and its interpretation, between the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of sacrifice and sacrament:

The economy of revelation is realized by deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other. As a result, the works performed by God in the history of salvation show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain. (#2)

Lumen Gentium (#9) already spoke of God's choice of Israel and the covenant which made this people his own. A brief sketch of salvation history is given in *Dei Verbum* #3 and #14: "In his own time God called Abraham and made him into a great nation (see Gen 12:2). After the era of the patriarchs, he taught this nation, by Moses and the prophets, to recognize him as the only living and true God, as a provident Father and just judge. He taught them, too, to look for the promised Savior" (#3). The second text mentions the covenant with Abraham, referring to the "pact of the pieces" (Gen 15, which promises offspring and land) and with Israel at Mount Sinai through Moses (see Ex 24:8) as the basis for God's acquisition of a people destined to have their own land wherein to serve God freely (Ex 19:6). There are slight differences in the description of the divine pedagogy, the second text (*Dei Verbum* #14) referring to Israel's mediation of knowledge about God's ways among the nations.

The unique contribution of Jesus to the divine plan of salvation is taught by stating that he completed and perfected revelation by his presence and work on earth: "The Christian economy, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious

manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ" (*Dei Verbum* #4). The full expression of Christian certitude about the person and work of Jesus must be made clearly, as the Council documents do time and again (see *Dei Verbum* #5). That the new covenant builds upon the old and does not abrogate the election of Israel flowing from the promise to Abraham should also be enunciated just as carefully.

Dei Verbum dedicates a chapter to "The Old Testament" (#14-16). The Council declares that the books of the Jewish Scriptures are the true Word of God; "that is why these books, divinely inspired, remain permanently valuable," quoting Romans 15:4 as a proof-text (#14). Anyone who knows the Church's use of the Psalms and other canticles in her liturgy and who studies the great patristic and medieval commentaries on most parts of the Jewish Scriptures would acknowledge that practice proves the Church's faith in the divine inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures. However, in both liturgy and exegesis, the tendency has been to see these texts primarily as preparation for the fuller revelation in the work of Jesus and in the New Testament writings.

This thrust of the divine message remains a basic Christian conviction, as is shown in the revised lectionary.²² In addition, however, the Council acknowledges that lessons for every age can be discovered by studying all parts of the Jewish Scriptures *for themselves*, i.e., as revealing aspects of "that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures" (#11). Because the New Testament presupposes the biblical heritage of the Jewish people and because these texts were composed over a relatively short period of time, there are areas of life that its authors treated only fleetingly. The millennial traditions of Israel, and their interpretation by the Jewish community through the ages, can provide us with many insights needed to grapple with problems of our time.²³ "These books, even though they contain matters imperfect and provisional, nevertheless show us authentic divine teaching" (#15). There is a note after this sentence that refers to Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (March 14, 1937), which dramatically confronted Nazi ideology and racism:

Christians should accept with veneration these writings which give expression to a lively sense of God, which are a storehouse of sublime teaching on God and of sound wisdom on human life, as well as a wonderful treasury of prayer; in them, too, the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. (#15)

This last clause leads to a restatement of the central Christian conviction that our Bible possesses a profound unity, deriving from its divine origin: “God, the inspirer and author of the books of both Testaments, in his wisdom has so brought it about that the New should be hidden in the Old and that the Old should be made manifest in the New” (#16).²⁴ Augustine of Hippo is credited with this felicitous formula which teaches the necessity of a thorough study of the two Testaments. Jerome expressed the idea in another dictum: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”²⁵ The function of priests as the ministers of God’s Word (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* #4) makes a thorough education in the Scriptures a necessity of the highest order (see *Dei Verbum* #23-26). This should include a special study of Judaism, both in the Second Temple period and in later times so that the faithful may never be exposed to anti-Jewish attacks from the pulpit. *Nostra Aetate* addressed this point directly:

It is true that the Church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from Holy Scripture. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the Word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ. (#4)²⁶

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
(*Gaudium et Spes*) and the *Declaration on*
Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae)

Just as individual Christians find strength and insight by contemplation of God’s Word, so the Council Fathers and their theologians refreshed themselves at the “pure and lasting fount of

spiritual life” (*Dei Verbum* #21). Coming to know God and divine ways more profoundly, they answered the great philosophical questions about human life (see *Nostra Aetate* #1) and destiny by reiterating the ancient truth that every human being is created in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1:26-28).²⁷

“The Council lays stress on respect for the human person: everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as another self, bearing in mind above all his life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way” (*Gaudium et Spes* #27). This text continues with the challenge to come to the aid of any person in need, especially the least fortunate. Among the crimes against humanity listed are several that have been perpetrated against Jews: murder, genocide, mutilation, physical and mental torture (#27).

Nostra Aetate incorporates this point into its reflection on the Church’s relation to the Jewish people:

The Church reproves every form of persecution against whomever it may be directed . . . she deploras all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews. (#4)

We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all human beings are created in God’s image . . . There is no basis, therefore, either in theory or in practice, for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people and people arising either from human dignity or from the rights which flow from it. (#5)

After striving to provide principles of faith that should eliminate prejudice, the Church tries to foster greater human understanding:

Those also have a claim on our respect and charity who think and act differently from us in social, political and religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understanding their ways of thinking through kindness and

love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them. (*Gaudium et Spes* #28)

The principles for developing authentic dialogue were already in the Council's *Decree on Ecumenism* (especially #5-12). Although addressed to the specific needs of uniting the Christian Churches, a goal which cannot be applied to Catholic-Jewish relations, the following principles can apply to interfaith dialogue as well:

1. Interior conversion will come to those who enter dialogue with a prayerful mind, open to learn and gentle in service of others (see #7).
2. Study of Other's teachings and practice will be the basis for discussion of specific questions with the Other on an equal footing (see #9).
3. Catholic doctrine should be presented so that it in no way becomes an obstacle to dialogue, yet it is essential that the doctrine be presented clearly, in its entirety (see #11).²⁸

When members of the Jewish community become convinced of the Church's sincerity in rejecting all forms of persecution and discrimination and when the principles of "dialogue" have been understood to eliminate all forms of proselytization, then almost all of the issues presented in *Gaudium et Spes* can be topics for discussion.²⁹ In many areas fruitful collaboration is taking place already on important social issues.

For Jews and other minorities in European and other countries with a Catholic majority, the touchstone for evaluating the Council's success is found in the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*. In the past the principle behind the exercise of authority in these nations had often been enunciated as follows: "Error has no rights." The Council, "increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person . . . searches the sacred tradition and teaching of the Church, from which it drew forth new things that are always in harmony with the old" (#1). The

result is the recognition that rights reside in the human person and people have inalienable rights, including the freedom of their conscience. Of course, every right has a concomitant responsibility, including the necessity of seeking the truth and to embrace it (see #1).

The Council Fathers were well aware of the fact that Catholics in some lands were being persecuted for their faith and hoped that principles enunciated in this declaration (like the principles of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights) would penetrate such regimes. By the same token, countries which follow the Church's guidance whole-heartedly would be required to provide freedom of assembly to religious minorities under their jurisdiction (#4).

"Parents have the right to decide in accordance with their own religious beliefs the form of religious upbringing which is to be given to their children" (#5). In the past a Jewish child, baptized because a Catholic thought the person to be in danger of death, could be taken from the parents' care.³⁰ Such a case would be extremely rare, but its poignancy caused great debates to arise. No longer will the parental right be scorned.

Religious freedom enables the Church to "enjoy in law and in fact those stable conditions which give her the independence necessary for fulfilling her divine mission" (#3). This mission is the subject of the Council's concern from the very beginning and it culminates in a *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*. Taking into account the principles enunciated in documents such as the *Decree on Ecumenism and Religious Liberty*, the Council demands that all Catholics, and especially missionaries, to be educated to respect the rights of others and to present the Christian message in candor, truth, and charity. The burden of the past may weigh heavily upon Church at times, but the search for authenticity in loving imitation of God demands this effort. The history of Catholic-Jewish relations does have bright moments and brilliant leaders in the past; in many places ordinary people showed good will towards Jews, but so often the Jewish people were vilified by those professing faith in Jesus the Jew and claiming to honor his Mother. The Council, especially in *Nostra Aetate* but throughout the other documents of its teaching, provides the foundation for a new era in

the Church's relationship with the Jews. Much has been accomplished in many parts of the world in the past forty years. This provides a basis for continuing the diligent efforts to honor God and his Son by obtaining a deeper insight into his plan for ourselves and for the children of Abraham.

Notes

An earlier version of this essay was presented to an intra-ecclesial conference organized by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity held in Nemi, Italy in August 1990, which was an occasion to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration of the Church's bond with the Jewish people (*Nostra Aetate* #4). See my complementary essay, "The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Evaluating the Results of the Second Vatican Council," in *New Visions: Historical and Theological Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, ed. Val A. McInnes (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 115-36.

1. Addressing a delegation of the American Jewish Committee on March 16, 1990, Pope John Paul stated: "Although the Catholic teaching concerning Jews and Judaism is summarized in (*Nostra Aetate*) #4, many of its fundamental elements are also present in other documents of the Council . . . Perhaps the time has come, after 25 years to make a systematic study of the Council's teaching on this matter." See Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, *Pope John Paul II—Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism 1978-1995* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 133-35.

2. Timothy E. O'Connell, ed., *Vatican II and Its Documents: An American Appraisal* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986), 7 (editor's preface). In my essay, each document will be designated by a key word or words in Latin or in English. Translations are taken from Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1975), except where accuracy requires another rendering.

3. For the three texts from the Holy See, consult Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, ed., *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990); and *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1998).

4. See *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* #2.

5. See #16 and 35; Carlo Colombo, "De Mysterio Ecclesiae in Mysterio historiae salutis," *Acta Congressus Internationalis de Theologia Concilii Vaticani II*, ed. Adolfus Schonmetzer (Rome: Vatican Polyglot Press 1968), 10-20.

6. This summary statement, making the contents of the Jewish Scriptures "but a prelude to the work of Christ" needs to be balanced by the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, chapter IV. See *Liturgy* #24. On this point, see Charles Miller, "As It Is Written": *The Use of Old Testament References in the Documents of Vatican Council II* (St. Louis: Marianist Communications Center, 1973).

7. The Jewish liturgy, epitomized in the Passover meal, provided this principle: prayer pointing to the past is not only expressing the people's relation to God *now* but is oriented as well to the final days. The symbolism of the "eastward position" of the celebrant and congregation during the Canon of the Roman rite Mass was lost in the liturgical reform. This theological reference to past, present, and future is emphasized, however, in three of the acclamations by the faithful immediately after the consecration of the bread and wine.

8. The hymns for the Office on February second, very respectful of "the Law," were composed by Peter Abelard (1079-1142).

9. See Stanislaus Campbell, *From Breviary to Liturgy of the Hours: The Structural Reform of the Roman Office 1964-1971* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995).

10. "Pro perfidiis Judaeis," *Theological Studies* 8 (1947): 80-96, and *Cahiers Sioniens* 1 (1947): 85-101. See Kathryn Sullivan, "Pro perfidiis Judaeis," in *The Bridge*, ed. J.M. Oesterreicher, (1956) II: 212-23. For a survey of these questions, see Lawrence E. Frizzell and J. Frank Henderson, "Jews and Judaism in the Medieval Latin Liturgy," in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), 167-92.

11. Words of Pope Paul VI in the opening allocution at the second session of the Council (September 29, 1963). The term *mysterion* in Greek renders *raz* in the Book of Daniel and thus refers to the divine plan of salvation; the Latin equivalent is *sacramentum*, applied to the Church in #1. See Aloys Grillmeir in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York and Herder, 1967) I:140; Yves Congar, *Un peuple messianique: salut et liberation* (Paris: Cerf, 1975), 27-98; A.H.C. van Eijk, "The Church as Sacrament. A Contribution to Ecumenical Understanding," *Bijdragen* 48 (1987): 234-58; and "The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Sign, Instrument, Symbolic Reality," *Bijdragen* 50 (1989): 178-202.

12. I owe this distinction, crucial to an interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels, to my colleague, Rabbi Asher Finkel.

13. The Latin text “In illo agro crescit antique oliva, cuius radix sancta fuerunt *Patriarchae*” has been mistranslated in Flannery to read “whose holy roots were the *prophets*” (*Vatican Council II*, 353). “Vitis vera Christus est . . .” is rendered “*Yet* the true vine is Christ . . .” “Yet” sets up a contrast that need not be implied from the original. The translation in Walter Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Corpus Books, 1966), 18-19 is accurate at both places.

14. Just as Christ is the vine with which the Church’s members must be united, so Origen identifies him with the kingdom (see Lk 17:21) and the Land. See Annie Jaubert, *Origene: Homélie sur Josué*. Sources Chrétiennes 71 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 16-62. Since the *Fundamental Accord* between the Holy See and Israel (December 30, 1993) official Church teaching should be developing insights into Christian appreciation of the Jewish bond with the Land of Israel. Related themes are explored in *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, a document issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in November 2001 (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2002).

15. The themes deserve detailed attention beyond the scope of this essay. See Gerard S. Sloyan, “Who Are the People of God?” in *Standing Before God: Studies . . . in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher*, ed. A Finkel and L. Frizzell (New York: Ktav, 1981), 103-14. In his study *Le Concile de Vatican II: son Eglise, Peuple de Dieu et Corps du Christ* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), Yves Congar does not consider the Jewish people or the Church’s relation to Judaism. See Albert Chapelle, “Israël, son Serviteur (Lc 1:54),” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 125 (2003): 177-86.

16. In the aftermath of the Council, see especially the teaching of Pope John Paul II and instructions of the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism, with an English version for each indicated in note 1 and 3.

17. See *Church* #48-51, and for background my article, “Pilgrimage: A Study of the Biblical Experience,” *Jeevadhara* 71 (1982): 358-67.

18. See my article, “A Catholic Theological Reflection on Mission,” *Journal of Dharma* 6 (1981): 141-50.

19. See Daniel Harrington, *God’s People in Christ: New Testament Perspectives on the Church and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Franz Mussner, *Tractate on the Jews: The Significance of Judaism for Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); A.H.C. van Eijk, “The Jewish People and the Church’s Self-Understanding,” *Bijdragen* 50 (1989): 373-93. Teachings of Pope John Paul II must be incorporated into the discussion;

for example, in Munich on November 17, 1980, he declared that the Old Covenant was never revoked by God. See Norbert Lohfink, *The Covenant Never Revoked: Biblical Reflections on Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1991), and the discussion by Albert Vanhoye, "Salut universel par le Christ et validité de l'Ancienne Alliance," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 116 (1994): 815-35; Emmanuelle Main, "Ancienne et nouvelle Alliances dans le dessein de Dieu," 118 (1996): 34-58; and Vincent Martin, "L'ancien et le nouveau," 118 (1996): 59-65.

20. On the developments in Mariology over recent years, see Giuseppe Besutti, *Bibliografia Mariana 1978-1984* (Rome: Marianum, 1988). The work of Aristide Serra delves deeply into Jewish sources; see *E c'era la Madre di Gesù: Saggi di esegesi biblico-mariana* (Rome: Marianum, 1989). The contribution on Judaism by an Israeli scholar in *Maria nell' Ebriasm e nell' Islam oggi* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1987) leaves the field open. In *Redemptoris Mater* (#1), Pope John Paul II states that Mary uttered the first *fiat* of the New Covenant. See John McHugh, "Mary's *fiat* as the Commencement of the New Covenant," *Marianum* 50 (1988): 133-37. See also David Flusser, J. Pelikan and J. Lang, *Mary: Images of the Mother of Jesus in Jewish and Christian Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); my essays, "Mary and the Biblical Heritage" in *Marian Studies* 46 (1995): 26-40, and "Mary's Magnificat: Sources and Themes" 50 (1999): 38-59; and Marc Ouellet, "Mary and the Future of Ecumenism," *Communio* 30 (2003): 5-25.

21. The problematic designation "Old Testament" cannot for Catholics be replaced by "Hebrew Scriptures"; our canon (see *Dei Verbum* #8 and 22) includes the deuterocanonical books preserved in Greek. The term "Jewish Scriptures" avoids the limitation of language. Use of the word "gift" implies gratitude on the part of the recipient; the Church acquired the Scriptures when it was still a Jewish-Christian community, albeit for the most part in the Greek-speaking world.

22. Aspects of the continuing debate on this theme may be found in Gerard S. Sloyan, "Some Suggestions for a Biblical Three-year Lectionary," *Worship* 63 (1989): 521-35. Another debate is presented by Ignace de la Potterie, "Reading Holy Scripture 'in the Spirit': Is the Patristic Way of Reading the Bible Still Possible Today?" *Communio* 13 (1986): 308-25.

23. For the examples of Torah and ecology, see my articles, "Law at the service of humankind," *SIDIC* 19 (#3-1986): 4-7, and "Humanity and Nature According to the Jewish Scriptures," *SIDIC* 22 (#3-1989): 5-8.

24. See Edmond Jacob, "A propos d'une ancienne formule sur l'unité des deux Testaments," *Bulletin du Centre Protestant d'Etudes* 36 (1984): 20-26.

25. "Ignoratio Scripturarum ignoratio Christi est (In Isa 17B)." See Pierre Jay, *L'exégèse de Saint Jérôme d'après son Commentaire sur Isaïe* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1985), 392.

26. See *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis* (Vatican: Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 1985); *Within Context: Guidelines for the Catechetical Presentation of Jews and Judaism in the New Testament* (1986), in Fisher and Klenicki, *In Our Time*, 59-74); and "God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching" (Washington: Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, 1988).

27. *Gaudium et Spes* #2 asks "What is the human being?"; *Nostra Aetate* #1 poses a long series of questions whose depths have been explored by various spiritual traditions.

28. *Nostra Aetate* encourages the "development of mutual understanding between Jews and Catholics, especially by way of biblical and theological inquiry and through friendly discussions" (#4). Subsequently texts from the Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews and national conferences of bishops have outlined the principles for making these discussions more fruitful. See Helga Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977) and *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985). See also the document "On Dialogue with Unbelievers" (August 28, 1968), published in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 1002-14. Pope John Paul II has discussed the significance of dialogue with Jews: "The first dimension of this dialogue, that is the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God (see Rom 11:29) and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church . . . between the first and second part of her Bible" (Munich, November 17, 1980).

29. See Thomas Federici, "Study Outline on the Mission and Witness of the Church," *More Stepping Stones*, ed. Helga Croner, 37-55.

30. See "Mortara Case," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 12 (1967), 354-55, and David Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998). Another such problem occurred in World War II. Parents who died in a Nazi concentration camp had entrusted two infant sons to a Catholic; she had them baptized; after the War relatives intervened to raise them. See Edward Flannery, "The Finaly Case," in *The Bridge*, ed. J.M. Oesterreicher, 1 (1955), 292-313.