

A Bridge to New Christian-Jewish Understanding: Nostra Aetate at 40

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In a 1986 address to the Catholic Theological Society of America meeting in Chicago the Canadian theologian Gregory Baum argued that chapter four of *Nostra Aetate* represented the most radical change in the ordinary magisterium of the Catholic Church to come out of Vatican II.¹ Baum's perspective is basically substantiated in the work of Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, longtime staff person for Catholic-Jewish relations at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In a paper presented at the 1985 Vatican-Jewish International Dialogue in Rome, Fisher pointed to the uniqueness of chapter four of *Nostra Aetate* in terms of conciliar documents. He maintained that "*Nostra Aetate*, for all practical purposes, begins the Church's teaching concerning a theological or, more precisely, a doctrinal understanding of the relationship between the Church as "People of God" and "God's People Israel."² These affirmations assume particular importance today when some in the Church are claiming that the ecumenical and interreligious documents from Vatican II are only "pastoral" in nature without any doctrinal implications. Such a view, in light of what Baum and Fisher have said, completely misrepresents these documents, including *Nostra Aetate*. Certainly one of the continuing challenges facing those whose understanding of the Christian-Jewish relationship has been profoundly transformed by *Nostra Aetate*, and I count myself among them, is to maintain and even deepen its theological significance.

Examining chapter four of *Nostra Aetate*, we find scarcely any reference to the usual sources cited in conciliar documents: the

Church Fathers, papal statements, and previous conciliar statements. Rather the Declaration returns to Romans 9-11, as if to say that the Church is now taking up where Paul left off in his insistence that Jews remain part of the covenant after the Resurrection despite the theological ambiguity involved in such a statement. Without saying it so explicitly, the 2,221 Council members who voted in favor of *Nostra Aetate* were in fact stating that everything that had been said about the Christian-Jewish relationship since Paul moved in a direction they could no longer support.

It is interesting to note that *Nostra Aetate* never makes mention of the several passages in the Letter to the Hebrews where the original covenant with Israel appears to be abrogated after Christ and Jewish law overturned (Heb 7:12, 8:13, and 10:9). In retrospect this may be unfortunate in light of attempts to return to the “authenticity” of these passages as contemporary Catholic teaching by scholars such as Cardinal Avery Dulles.³ It would have helped if *Nostra Aetate* had more explicitly rejected these passages in Hebrews as a valid starting point for the theology of Christian-Jewish relationship today. But given the interpretive role of a Church Council in the Catholic tradition this omission of the texts from Hebrews is still theologically significant. It indicates that the Council Fathers judged them a theologically inappropriate resource for contemporary thinking about the link between the Church and the Jewish people.

Nostra Aetate has affected the Catholic Church and beyond in many parts of the world. Many Protestant churches took a cue from Vatican II and issued statements on Christian-Jewish relations that sometimes are even bolder in their assertion about the nexus between the church and synagogue. And the document has generated new theological thinking as well as major revampings of Christian educational materials in North America, Europe, Latin America, and Australia/New Zealand. African and Asian Catholic thinking has thus far been only minimally affected by *Nostra Aetate* although scholars such as Peter Phan and John Mbiti have shown genuine interest in the Christian-Jewish question.

Some Christian theologians have insisted on the overall theological implications of *Nostra Aetate*. The German theologian

Johannes-Baptist Metz is one such example. Metz has rightly argued that the implications of *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent Vatican documents on relations with the Jews in 1974 and 1985 go well beyond the parameters of the Christian-Jewish dialogue. Especially after the Holocaust, Metz insists, they involve a “revision of Christian theology itself.”⁴ Yet, despite Metz’s rightful claim, one of the great challenges still remaining after forty years is the incorporation of church statements on Catholic-Jewish relations into the mainstream of Catholic theological thinking. To this end, the International Council of Christians and Jews has recently joined with the World Council of Churches and other Christian-Jewish centers in launching a multi-year consultation of Christian theologians in the hope finally of achieving such a mainstreaming of the insights of *Nostra Aetate* and the scholarly research it has generated. Certainly there is also hope that this process on the Christian side will inspire further consideration of the implications of the revised Christian thinking for Jewish self-understanding. The Jewish document *Dabru Emet* and the volume of theological reflections that accompanies it has inaugurated such rethinking among Jewish scholars.⁵

The Catholic-Jewish dialogue has gone through several phases since the release of *Nostra Aetate*. Phase one can best be described as the “cleansing” phase. It has primarily affected Catholic education. Thanks to the pioneering work of Sister Rose Thering, O.P., recently profiled in the Academy Award nominated documentary, *The Passion of Sister Rose*, whose studies on Catholic religion textbooks at St. Louis University played a significant role in convincing bishops at Vatican II of the need for a statement on the Church’s relationship with the Jewish people, the vision of Vatican II regarding the Catholic-Jewish relationship has been widely implemented.⁶ Virtually all of the major Catholic textbook publishers undertook substantive revisions of their materials, often with Jewish consultants. Subsequent studies on Catholic teaching materials by Eugene Fisher and Philip Cunningham have confirmed the continuity of these revisions, though Cunningham did detect one somewhat problematical series published by the Ignatius Press.⁷

Since there has not been a comprehensive study since the early nineties it would prove useful, in this fortieth anniversary year of *Nostra Aetate*, if a new analysis of currently used books were undertaken.

If there is a potential problem on the horizon it has to do with the, possible use of the DVD version of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, with its numerous stereotypes of Jews and Judaism, as a resource in Catholic educational programs. Well over a hundred Christian scholars and church leaders have expressed their deep concern about the potential for this film to undercut the advancements in Christian-Jewish understanding realized since Vatican II, and a number of recent volumes have critiqued many elements in *The Passion of the Christ* for a false presentation of the role of Jews in the death of Christ and the theological implications therein.⁸ And a communique from the ongoing dialogue between the National Council of Synagogues and the Catholic Bishop's Secretariat on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs in May of 2004 warned educators that the perspectives of the Gibson film cannot substitute for the official teachings on the Catholic-Jewish relations promulgated in *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent documents issued from the Vatican as well as the late Pope John Paul II's two volumes of constructive statements on the Church's bonding with Judaism and the Jewish people.⁹

The first phase of the post-Vatican II Jewish-Christian encounter has seen the removal from Catholic educational materials of the principal defamations of Jews and Judaism found in the textbooks analyzed in the St. Louis University studies. These included the charge that Jews collectively were responsible for the death of Jesus, that the Pharisees were the archenemies of Jesus and spiritually soulless, that Jews had been displaced in their covenantal relationship with God as a result of their refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah, and that the "Old Testament" was totally inferior to the New, being rooted in legalism while Christianity was based on grace. This "cleansing" phase seems substantially completed though ongoing monitoring remains necessary given the current efforts to "reinterpret" Vatican II in

ways that would substantially eviscerate it in certain quarters of contemporary Catholicism.

The second phase of the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue dates back in some respects beyond *Nostra Aetate*. It involves decidedly new perspectives with regard to the role of the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures in Christian faith identity as well as an enhanced appreciation of the importance of understanding the Judaism of Jesus' days in interpreting the New Testament. Gradually an awareness has been building regarding the positive impact of the Scriptures, as Jesus knew the Old Testament, on his basic perspective. As the late Raymond Brown once remarked, prior to this revolution in understanding the Hebrew Scriptures, Christians tended to emphasize primarily the failures of the Jewish people to abide by their covenantal responsibilities. But more and more scholars are now emphasizing that the basic message of Jesus becomes truncated without a clear, positive association with the Hebrew Scriptures. There is a growing recognition of the spiritual values of the Hebrew Scriptures in their own right and not merely as a backdrop or even foil for New Testament teachings.

Disputes still remain between Christian and Jewish scholars, and within both Christian and Jewish scholarship, about whether Christians and Jews draw authority from the same book, as *Dabru Emet* put it. But clearly there has been a sea change in Christian thinking regarding the role of the Hebrew Scriptures in the faith life of the Christians. Certainly there are still areas of improvement that are required. By and large lectionary texts from the Hebrew Scriptures do not often become the basis for preaching during the Eucharistic liturgy. Training preachers in using these texts constructively in sermons is still a goal to be achieved. The Catholic Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy did issue an important set of guidelines on the presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic preaching in September 1988, entitled *God's Mercy Endures Forever*.¹⁰ But little has been done to implement these guidelines in a widespread way. Hence they remain largely a secret in liturgical and homiletical circles. In an important address delivered in Mainz, Germany, in 1980, Pope John Paul II linked the renewed

understanding of Scripture with the Church's new appreciation of its relationship with the Jewish people, stating that the dialogue, as "the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God, is at the same time a dialogue without our Church, that is to say, a dialogue between the first and second part of the Bible."¹¹

Research resulting from the mindset about Christian-Jewish relations generated by *Nostra Aetate* has begun to influence even more profoundly New Testament interpretation. This is true both with respect to the teachings and person of Jesus and the pastoral journeys of St. Paul. Recent years have seen a profound shift in New Testament exegesis with an increasing number of scholars emphasizing that Jesus must be returned to his essentially Jewish context if the Church is to understand his message properly.

Scripture scholars in particular have played a major role in the process of rethinking the Church's relationship with the Jewish people. For the past couple of decades we witnessed a fundamental change of perspective within biblical studies regarding Jesus and Judaism. The emerging new biblical template has in part been stimulated by the about-face in official Catholic teaching generated by *Nostra Aetate*. Earlier scholarship from the hands of influential figures such as Rudolf Bultmann, Ernst Kasemann, Gerhard Kittel, and Martin Noth which undercut any notion of Jesus' concrete ties to, and dependence upon, biblical and Second Temple Judaism and which argued that Jewish history had come to an end with the coming of Jesus who had no role in that history has generally lost its foothold in biblical circles. It is being replaced by the studies of scholars such as James Charlesworth, W.D. Davies, E.P. Sanders, Daniel Harrington, Clemens Thoma, John Meier, Cardinal Carlo Martini, and Robin Scroggs, to name but a few, who have moved New Testament interpretation in the opposite direction to Bultmann, Kittel, and Noth. Cardinal Martini, a biblical scholar who served as Archbishop of Milan, is an excellent representative of this fundamental shift in outlook on the Jesus-Judaism question. He writes: "Without a sincere feeling for the Jewish world, and a direct experience of it, one cannot fully understand Christianity. Jesus is

fully Jewish, the apostles are Jewish, and one cannot doubt their attachment to the tradition of their forefathers.¹²

One of the best contemporary summaries of what where we have come in our new understanding of Jesus' relationship to the Jewish community of his day can be found in the writings of Robin Scroggs. His view was accepted by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, an episcopal leader in the promotion of authentic Jewish-Christian reconciliation.¹³ Scroggs has emphasized the following points in terms of the vision Jesus appears to have left the earliest Christian community with respect to its identity relative to the Judaism of the time: 1) The movement begun by Jesus and continued after his death in Palestine can best be described as a reform movement within Judaism. Little or no evidence exists to suggest a separate sense of identity within the emerging Christian community; 2) Paul understood his mission to the gentiles as fundamentally a mission out of Judaism whose aim was to extend God's original and continuing call to the Jewish people to the gentiles; 3) Prior to the end of the Jewish war with the Romans in 70 C.E., one has difficulty speaking about a separate Christian reality. Followers of Jesus did not seem to understand themselves as part of a separate religion from Judaism. A distinctive Christian identity only began to develop after the Roman-Jewish war.¹⁴

While not every New Testament scholar would subscribe fully to each and every point made by Scroggs, a consensus is definitely building that the process of church-synagogue separation was longer and more complex than was once believed. This picture definitely challenges how most Christians have previously been taught. They were raised, as was I, with the notion that by the time Jesus died on Calvary the Church was clearly established as a distinct religious body apart from Judaism. This understanding was subsequently expanded, especially by the Church Fathers, into what is known as the *adversos Judaeos* tradition, which had as its theological foundation the belief in a total displacement of the Jewish people from the covenant.¹⁵ But increasingly, due in part to scholars such as Robin Scroggs, we are coming to see that many people in the very early days of Christianity did not see the Jesus movement as

launching a new, totally separate religious community that would stand over against Judaism.

There has also been considerable reevaluation of Paul's view of Jews and Judaism. This is especially important for Protestant Christianity where Pauline thought has exercised a somewhat greater influence in defining the Christian-Jewish relationship than is the case in Catholicism. Paul's missionary journeys are now seen by a number of scholars such as the previously mentioned Robin Scroggs as essentially constituting a Jewish mission to the gentiles (Judaism definitely had a missionary orientation in this period) rather than an effort to create a split between church and synagogue. The late Fr. Raymond Brown once remarked that it was his view that if Paul would have had a son he would have circumcised him. What is beginning to emerge is a picture of Paul as still very much a Jew, still quite appreciative of the Torah (he may well have assumed its continued validity for Jewish Christians), and still struggling towards the end of his ministry to balance his understanding of the newness he recognized in Jesus and his message with the continuity of the Jewish covenant. This tension is certainly apparent in the notable chapters 9-11 of Romans on which *Nostra Aetate* built its revolutionary understanding of the Church's relationship to the Jewish people. It is also possible that some of the Pauline writings, especially those which have served as the basis for later Christological thinking in the Church, may have their roots in Paul's personal contact with the Jewish mysticism of his time, though Paul would have added his distinctive interpretation.

From the scholarly evidence now at hand it does not seem that Jesus conveyed to his disciples and initial followers a clear sense that he meant to create a new and distinct religious entity called the Church which was to separate itself totally from Judaism. This sense of a separate Christian identity apart from Judaism only emerged gradually well after his death. We now are aware as a result of the research of scholars such as Robert Wilken, Wayne Meeks, Alan Segal, and Anthony Saldarini that this development took several centuries to mature. Evidence now exists for regular Christian

participation in Jewish worship, particularly in the East, during the second and third centuries and, in a few places, even into the fourth and fifth centuries.

The challenge now facing Christianity in light of this new research on the origins of the Church is whether the creation of a totally separate religious community was actually in the mind of Jesus himself. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini has addressed this question by reintroducing the notion of “schism” into the discussion of the basic theological relationship between Jews and Christians, an idea that first appeared in the early part of the twentieth century. Martini applies the term “schism” to the original separation of the Church and Synagogue. For him the break between Jews and Christians represents the fundamental schism, far more consequential in negative terms than the two subsequent ruptures within Christianity itself. In introducing the notion of schism, Martini has interjected two important notions into the conversation. First, schism should ideally not have occurred and, second, it should be regarded as a temporary situation rather than a permanent reality. So schism, which had been applied previously only to the two disruptions within the body of Christianity, implies a certain mandate to heal the rupture that has ensued.

There is legitimate room for debate as to the appropriateness of the term “schism” in reflecting on the nature of the Christian-Jewish theological relationship today. I myself do not think it will take us too far. But for Cardinal Martini its strength is that it reminds Christians that they cannot forge an authentic self-identity without restoring the profoundly Jewish context of Jesus’ teaching. Clearly the Church will not return to an understanding of itself as one of among many Jewish groups. But in light of recent biblical scholarship it needs to reassess how its self-identity remains rooted in Judaism. Johannes Metz has rightly argued that “Christians can form and sufficiently understand their identity only in the face of the Jews.”¹⁶ For Metz such a vision involves a definite reintegration of Jewish history and Jewish beliefs into Christian theological consciousness and statement. Jewish history is not merely Christian pre-history; rather, it forms an integral, continuing part of ecclesial history.

The third phase of the dialogue is only in its beginning stages. A number of Christian theologians and a few Jewish scholars have attempted to rethink the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people in fundamentally new ways. And a few significant documents have appeared recently, such as the 2002 Jewish document on Christianity, *Dabru Emet*,¹⁷ a two hundred-plus page document from the Pontifical Biblical Commission with a foreword by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on the Jews and their Scriptures in the New Testament,¹⁸ and *A Sacred Obligation*¹⁹ from a group of Catholic and Protestant scholars who have been jointly studying the Christian-Jewish relationship since 1969. Finally, there is a study document coming from an ongoing Catholic-Jewish dialogue co-sponsored by the National Council of Synagogues and the Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs called *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*.²⁰

The last of these documents has stirred considerable discussion, including a critical assessment by Cardinal Avery Dulles and a response to his criticisms by several of the drafters of that document.²¹ Particularly challenging for some Catholics is its claim that Jews need not be the subject of Christian evangelization, an assertion found in a number of the recent writings of Cardinal Walter Kasper.²² In fact, *Reflections on Covenant and Mission* was a response to the call by Cardinal Kasper as President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, for national churches to produce new theological reflections on the Church's relationship with the Jewish people. Unfortunately, as has already been noted, these documents and scholarly studies thus far have largely remained on the fringes of mainstream Catholic theology. If we are to be true to the bold new vision of *Nostra Aetate*, these statements and studies must begin to penetrate the core of contemporary Catholic theological reflection. The late Pope John Paul II certainly provided leadership in this regard with two published volumes of addresses on the theological linkage between Judaism and Christianity.²³

As biblical scholars and theologians have begun to probe the implications of this new vision of Jesus as profoundly intertwined

with the Jewish community of his time, they began to see the need for recasting the Church's understanding of its relationship with the Jewish people. The first efforts along this line tended to focus on Paul's reflections in Romans 9-11, where he asserts that God remains faithful to the original covenanted people. They argued that "newness" in Christ cannot be stated in a way that invalidates Jewish covenantal inclusion. Some of these pioneering scholars such as Kurt Hruby, Jacques Maritain, Jean Danielou, and Cardinal Augustine Bea were forced to conclude that it is not possible for the Church to go beyond saying what Paul himself had stated, i.e., that reconciliation between an assertion of redemptive "newness" in Christ and the concomitant affirmation of the continued participation of the Jewish people in the ongoing covenant remains a "mystery" presently understandable to God alone. Only at the endtime might we come to see the lack of contradiction in these twin theological statements.

Theologians, however, do not like to stop creative reflection. So as time went on, the initial inclination of the early scholars on Christian-Jewish relations to remain content with the Pauline "mystery" approach began to wane. New proposals began to come to the fore along the lines of what we term the "single" and "double" covenantal perspectives

The first approach is generally called the "single covenant" perspective. It holds that Jews and Christians basically belong to one covenantal tradition that began at Sinai. In this model the coming of Christ represented the decisive moment when the gentiles were able to enter fully into the special relationship with God which the Jews already enjoyed and which they continue. Christians were grafted onto the tree of Judaism, to use a Pauline image. Some holding this viewpoint maintain that the decisive features of the Christ Event have universal application, including to the Jews. The statement on the Jews and their Scriptures in the New Testament from the Pontifical Biblical Commission referred to earlier appears to argue that within historical time Jews await the Messiah through their own covenant. There is no need for Jews to convert to Christianity, a basic point also made in the September 2002

document, *A Sacred Obligation* (#7). But when the Jewish Messiah eventually arrives, he will have some of the characteristics integral to Jesus' messiahship. Thus Jesus' messiahship retains universal significance. Other scholars in this continuing discussion are more inclined to argue that the Christian appropriation and reinterpretation of the original covenantal tradition, in and through Jesus, applies primarily to non-Jews.

The "double covenant" theory begins at the same point as its single covenant counterpart, namely, with a strong affirmation of the continuing bonds between Christians and Jews. But then it prefers to underline the distinctiveness of the two traditions and communities, particularly in terms of their experiences after the final separation of the church and synagogue. Christians associated with this perspective insist on maintaining the view that through the ministry, teachings, and person of Jesus a vision of God emerged that was distinctively new in terms of its central features. Even though they may well have been important groundwork laid for the emergence of this distinctive new vision during the Second or Middle Judaism period, what came to be understood regarding the divine-human relationship as a result of Jesus' coming has to be regarded as a quantum leap.

It is very likely that discussions regarding the best way to reformulate a Christian covenantal theology will continue in earnest for the foreseeable future. Cardinal Walter Kasper, the President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, has begun to rethink the basic Christian-Jewish relationship in a number of addresses he has given since assuming his role at the Vatican, the two most recent being an address in December 2004 at the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge and one in Washington in March 2005 commemorating the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. In these addresses Cardinal Kasper has stressed that the Church's relations with Jews is *sui generis* because Jews have divine revelation from the Christian theological perspective. He has also argued against the need to proselytize Jews because they are already in the covenantal relationship with God. But Cardinal Kasper has not yet offered a comprehensive theological

perspective on the Christian-Jewish relationship, which he certainly seems capable of producing, given his stature a one of Europe's most important Catholic theologians. Nor has he indicated his reaction to what appear to be contrary views by another Cardinal-theologian, Avery Dulles, who spoke in a vein that seems to move in an opposite direction from the Cardinal Kasper at the same conference in Washington in March 2005. Given his reappointment as the Holy See's representative to the world Jewish community by Pope Benedict XVI, we can hope that he will have the opportunity to provide the Church with such a comprehensive statement that would solidify and expand his own previous work and integrate the important insights of the late Pope John Paul II on Christianity's intimate bonding with Judaism.²⁴

Two developments in contemporary biblical scholarship have important implications for the theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship. The first, brought forth by scholars such as Jacob Neusner, Hayim Perelmuter, and Efraim Shuemli, have emphasized that the Judaism of the first century was far from monolithic. In fact, this period was marked by considerable creativity. New groups were emerging that challenged the viewpoints of traditional Judaism in many areas. What Ellis Rivkin has termed the "Pharisaic Revolution,"²⁵ a revolution that clearly seeded the perspectives of Jesus and early Christianity as the 1985 Vatican *Notes on Jews and Judaism* insist, was transforming significant aspects of Judaism faith understanding. Many scholars now see the need to speak of "Judaisms," rather than Judaism, at the time of Jesus. This reality makes it much more difficult for Christians to claim that Jesus "fulfilled" Jewish messianic prophesies. And since Christian interpretations of the Jewish-Christian relationship within the single covenant model are often rooted in an ongoing, linear understanding of Judaism, this new understanding of "Judaisms" poses a genuine challenge for the authenticity of such a model. Most advocates of the single covenant approach have not dealt with this new, complex picture of Judaism at the time of Jesus.

The other dimension of recent scholarship has to do with how and when the separation of church and synagogue took place. Most

Christians have been weaned on the idea that the church was basically established as a distinct religious entity by the time Jesus died on Calvary. We now know that such a view is quite simplistic. The late Anthony J. Saldarini made this clear in his 1999 Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Jerusalem lecture in Chicago.²⁶ Neither the so-called Council of Jerusalem described in Acts nor the claimed expulsion of Christians from the synagogue at the Jewish Synod of Jabneh at the end of the first century completely settled the issue of the Christian-Jewish relationship.

Important Christian and Jewish scholars such as Saldarini are now insisting, based on new documentary evidence, that the actual separation between the Church and Synagogue, while well advanced by the end of the first century, was not completed for several centuries thereafter. These scholars have uncovered evidence of continued Jewish-Christian ties, including joint worship, into the second, third, fourth, and perhaps even the fifth century. Clearly there were Christians who did not see their acceptance of the Way of Jesus as automatically severing their bonds with the Jewish community and there were Jews who obviously were of the same opinion. These Christian Jews continued to believe that their Jewish roots remained integral to their new Christian identity despite the development of the notorious *Adversus Judasos* in the writings of major Church Fathers. We certainly would like to know more about this period, but the documentary evidence is not currently at hand. But the evidence we do have presently still requires a major theological reevaluation from both Christians and Jews of the relationship between them.

As a result of this recent scholarship, a number of scholars have begun developing new images of the Christian-Jewish relationship beyond the ones that first arose in response to *Nostra Aetate*, such as “mother-daughter” religions and “elder and younger brothers.” These images depend on an essentially linear development of Christianity out of Judaism which does not stand up anymore in light of the new documentary evidence.

Among the newly emergent images of the Christian-Jewish relationship, the following appear to hold out the most promise.

The first is the “sibling” model advanced by Jewish scholars such as Alan Segal and the late Hayim Perelmuter. This image is rooted in an understanding of the appearance of two new communities within the revolution within Judaism during the Second Temple period. The first of these communities was rabbinic Judaism and the second the Christian Church. Both went beyond former incarnations of Judaism in their basic teachings. While they had some early connections and both retained links with the Jewish Scriptures they eventually split into distinct and separate religious communities. This model has the advantage of stressing continued bonding while also allowing for recognition that Christianity is far more than Judaism for the gentiles.

Another image along the same lines is put forth by Mary Boys in her important volume *Has God Only One Blessing*.²⁷ She depicts Jews and Christians as “fraternal twins.” This image has some of the same advantages as “siblings,” although Boys appears to posit a somewhat deeper connection between Jews and Christians than even the “siblings” model. Her model may in fact tilt a bit too much towards the connected rather than the disconnected side of the relationship.

The Protestant theologian Clark Williamson, who has authored important works on the Christian-Jewish relationship, such as *A Guest in the House of Israel*, proposes a relationship model of “partners in waiting.”²⁸ This is a more open-ended image. It lacks the emphasis on inherent bonding contained in the “siblings” and “fraternal twins” models. “Partners,” after all, have no basic familial ties, but it does imply some linkage in terms of future hope. There is also a sense of common witness to the world implicit in Williamson’s model.

The final model is in the process of being developed by the University of California scholar Daniel Boyarin. In a series of addresses at Catholic Theological Union and the University of Chicago as well as published articles and books, Boyarin has put forth the thesis that what finally resulted from the complex social and religious revolution in Second Temple Judaism were two distinct religious communities known as rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.²⁹ Thus for Boyarin we should image the Christian-Jewish relationship

in terms of “co-emergent religious communities.” His perspective accounts fairly well for much of the new historical evidence now at hand in terms of the multiplicity of Judaisms at the time of Jesus and for the gradual process of separation outlined above. But it is weaker than the other images in stressing the continued bonding between Church and Synagogue and thus needs some correction in this regard. This “co-emergence” was a drawn out process, not an instantaneous happening.

As we celebrate the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, we remain in the early stages of the rethinking of the Christian-Jewish relationship launched by that conciliar document. We should note that the newly emerging images are all more parallel than linear in their understanding of the Christian-Jewish relationship. The gradually emerging viewpoint on the relationship has a central motif that we can no longer draw a simple straight line of development from biblical Judaism to rabbinic Judaism to Christianity. Certainly a profound connection remains, but the process is not as linear as once believed, a perspective we continue to maintain in significant ways in the celebration of Christian liturgy. We need now to continue the scholarship and reflection upon it. New models may appear that will capture the complexity of the relationship even better than those we have just examined. For now, my preference is for the “siblings” model. I believe it takes into account the pioneering work of Daniel Boyarin, but leaves us with a better and clearer balance in terms of similarity/distinctiveness. Yet I could move towards the primacy of Boyarin’s “co-emergence” model if we were to speak of it as “fraternal co-emergence.”

The affirmations of *Nostra Aetate* as well as the new biblical scholarship that it partially generated raise important questions for Christological understanding. Traditional Christological approaches have been significantly rooted in the notion that the Church replaced the Jewish people in the covenant because of their supposed failure to recognize that the coming of Christ marked the fulfillment of Jesus messianic prophecies and the inauguration, in Jesus’ lifetime, of the Church as a totally new religious community in opposition to the “old Israel.” Such a perspective no longer

seems to meet the test of historical accuracy. So Christology will require substantive rethinking as the 2002 statement from the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations *A Sacred Obligation* makes clear: “Affirming God’s Enduring Covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian Understandings of Salvation” (#6).

Because Christology stands at the very nerve center of Christian faith, reevaluations of Christology cannot be done superficially. There is a trend found in some sectors of Christianity, especially in those most open to general interreligious understanding, that tends to depict the Christ Event as one of several authentic revelations with no particular universal aspect. Such a starting point is not acceptable to myself nor to the people who have called for a significant rethinking of the Church’s theology of the Jewish people, such as Cardinal Walter Kasper or the scholars associated with *A Sacred Obligation*. We must maintain from the Christian side some understanding that the Christ Event has universal salvific implications. As I have expressed in my major writings on this topic, such as *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*,³⁰ for me Incarnational Christology has the best possibility for preserving such universalistic dimensions of the Christ Event while opening “authentic theological space in for Judaism,” as the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin termed it.³¹

One potentially productive track has appeared in the writings of the Pope Benedict XVI prior to his election. Then-Cardinal Ratzinger, in a major book as well as in an article, maintained that Jews represent a special case in terms of salvation.³² Cardinal Ratzinger appeared to exclude Jews from the framework of his controversial document, *Dominus Jesus*, although it would have been immensely helpful if he had said that directly. According to Cardinal Ratzinger, the Jewish community moves to final salvation through its own revealed covenantal tradition. This seems in line with the affirmation found in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document referred to earlier issued with Cardinal Ratzinger’s endorsement that Jewish messianic hopes are not in vain. What is not entirely clear in these works is whether Cardinal Ratzinger would

demand explicit recognition of Christ as the Messiah from Jews as a requirement for their salvific confirmation. Hopefully Pope Benedict XVI will use his new position to clarify and enlarge upon the promising start he made in these writings of several years ago.

In rethinking Christology in light of the theological dynamic stimulated by *Nostra Aetate*, there will also be need to take into consideration the implications of the Holocaust for thinking about God and hence for reflection on Christology as well since the two cannot be separated. Both Christian and Jewish scholars, including myself, have addressed this issue.³³ And it will also be necessary, without undercutting the special nature of the Jewish-Christian relationship to pursue the encounter with Islam and beyond that with Buddhists, Hindus, and Jains.

We remain at a very early stage in the process of rethinking the theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship, even after forty years since II Vatican's substantial turnabout on the question. We must remember that it took almost two millennia to forge the negative theology of the relationship which Vatican II abrogated. As Catholics, we will likely never come to a point where our Christological affirmations will lead us to a theology of religious pluralism that will be in total sync with the perspectives of Judaism or other world religions. Nor will the development of new thinking about Christianity exemplified in the Jewish document *Dabru Emet* resolve all Jewish theological concerns about church teachings. But in our globalized world in which interreligious understanding is not merely confined to the realm of theological ideas but directly affects our life together in community, we can ill afford to shrink from this task.

Notes

1. Gregory Baum, "The Social Context of American Catholic Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 (1986): 87.

2. Eugene J. Fisher, "The Evolution of a Tradition: From *Nostra Aetate* to the *Notes*." International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, *Fifteen*

Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue: 1970-1985 (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana and Libreria Editrice Lateranense, 1988), 239.

3. Avery Dulles, "Evangelization and the Jews," *America* 187:12 (21 October 2002): 8-16.

4. Johannes Baptist Metz, "Facing the Jews: Christian Theology after Auschwitz," in Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza and David Tracy, eds., *The Holocaust as Interruption, Concilium* 175 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984), 27.

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16. Johannes-Baptist Metz, "Facing the Jews," 33; and *The Emergent Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

17. For one Jewish theologian's current thinking, see Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004).

18. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002). For a discussion of the document, see a special issue of *The Bible Today*, May/June 2003.

19. The text of *A Sacred Obligation* can be found in Mary C. Boys, ed., *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), xiii-xvii.

20. "Reflections on Covenant and Mission, by participants in a dialogue between the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues," *Origins* 32:13 (September 5, 2002): 218-24.

21. Avery Dulles, "Evangelization and the Jews," with a "Response" by Mary C. Boys, Philip A. Cunningham, and John T. Pawlikowski, *America* 187:12 (October 21, 2002): 8-16.

22. Cardinal Walter Kasper, "The Good Olive Tree," *America* 185:7 (September 17, 2001), and "Christians, Jews and the Thorny Question of Mission," *Origins* 32:28 (December 19, 2002): 464.

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24. See the works cited in note 24.
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