

Catholics and Jews: Twenty Centuries and Counting

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In order to understand *Nostra Aetate*, both when it was written and how it challenges us still today, forty years later, at least the general outlines of the long and very complex history that brought us to the brink of the *Shoah* must be sketched. I am going to do this in terms of what I call the six stages of the relationship. What I want you to think about in this process is that these stages didn't just happen. These weren't inevitabilities. These were decisions of real people in real times in real places. I will speak mostly in terms of the decisions made by my own Catholic-Christian tradition over the centuries and in various settings. The reason I want to put it in these terms is that we tend to think of Jewish-Christian history as somewhat flat, as if Jews were treated in Christendom through all ages as they were, say, by the end of the medieval period, and in all places the same way.

This is really not the case. I think we need to break some of this historically "flattened" memory down into its parts, to realize its peaks as well as its valleys. This more complex view of Jewish-Christian history, I believe, is necessary in order to open up the possibilities for the future because we live in an age when new decisions are all of a sudden possible. A set of decisions, of crises if you will in the Greek sense of "opportunity for change," as Rabbi Leon Klenicki reminds us, faces us today as perhaps in no previous generation. After the *Shoah* and after the Second Vatican Council, we have broken away from a lot of the evils of the past and are

privileged for the first time in virtually two millennia with the possibility of remaking, of resetting the entire relationship between the Church and the Jewish people.

Six Moments of Crisis in Catholic-Jewish History

The first stage of Jewish-Christian relations was the briefest. It encompassed the period from Jesus' ministry to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in the year 70 of the Common Era. In this period the earliest Christians were practicing Jews who observed Jewish law and worshiped with Jewish rituals. In other words, their lives, their minds, their spiritualities were framed and forged in the traditions of the Jewish people. One of the earliest tasks these Jews faced was how to embody in their rituals (it is perhaps my own Catholic tradition that leads me to place the liturgical first) what happened to themselves and their world when the death and resurrection of Jesus occurred. Out of these liturgical decisions would come the later theology which would explain what the rituals meant. They faced the task of expressing in rituals what they were experiencing of the risen Christ in their lives. They did this quite naturally the only way they could, as Jews, in and through the rituals and sacred texts of their people. As Jews, they sought understanding through rereading the Jewish scriptures in the light of the Christ event.

There are a number of good Jewish terms for such reapplication of scriptural texts in changing milieu. Rabbis used a number of techniques similar to those used by Christians in the same and other periods, such as typology and a variety of other approaches to finding new meanings in texts for future generations. Christians thus were acting quite "Jewishly" when they adapted their own Jewish rituals to the sacred significance of the Christ event, which was for them the seminal event in the history of divine/human relations, as well as in the history of the relations between God and the Jewish people. It is not accidental that the Christian Eucharist adapts aspects of a typical synagogue service, the reading of Scripture, the commenting on Scripture, interspersed with prayers drawn

heavily from the Psalms. The earliest Christians combined the synagogue service with the ritual of the Passover Seder, which the New Testament saw as the setting of Jesus' Last Supper. One can argue the history of that setting for the Last Supper, but it is clear that in the synoptic gospels Jesus' last meal with his followers was a Passover Seder. It was in order to observe the Passover (Pesach), after all, that Jesus went to Jerusalem. The underlying theology of the temple-sacrifice became even more important for Christians as the years went on. It certainly became a crucial factor for Christianity in the year 70 when the temple was destroyed and the Jewish people had to replace this central sacred institution of worship with something.

Rabbinic tradition did it one way, by replacing animal sacrifice with prayer, good deeds (*mitzvot*), and study of the Torah. Christians did it another, as can be seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which argues that Jesus' sacrifice more than compensates for the loss of the Temple sacrifice. The sacrifices of the temple are carried on through the Mass, the Eucharist, and the understanding of the Christ event in Christianity. This is very clear in the Catholic tradition. Embedding Christian faith and worship in Jewish ritual and Jewish biblical self-understanding (since the Jewish Bible was the only bible they had) would have significant implications for future decisions of later church leaders, for it made our Christianity always and forever a spiritual entity as well as a sacramental entity with a sacred bond to the faith, history, and life of God's people Israel.

Some people in the Jewish community today tell us in dialogue "I wish you folks would just leave us alone after all these centuries; enough is enough." I respond by pointing out that we Christians can't leave Jews and Judaism alone because we can't explain ourselves except in the context of our relationship as a Church with the Jewish people, Jewish faith, and Jewish history. There is no way we can break what the Second Vatican Council called a sacred bond, a term that for Catholics is a sacramental term. We use it also of the marital bond itself, which for us, as you will recall, is unbreakable. We do not have divorce in Catholic tradition. That kind of a bond, which images the bond between God and the Jewish people (covenant), is

permanent. A major reflection of the Church's earliest appreciation of its sacred bond with Judaism can be found in St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapters 9-11, upon which the Second Vatican Council relied for its reevaluation of Christian understandings of Judaism. This, I think, is ironic to some extent because so many in the Jewish community have traditionally seen St. Paul as the "bad guy" who took Jewish Christianity away from its Jewish roots and Torah observance. Especially since the *Wissenschafte des Judentums* movement in the nineteenth century, there has been a major trend in Jewish scholarship to view Jesus as a good Jew over against Paul as a bad guy. Why this view is erroneous can be seen in the work of E.P. Sanders, among others.

But to return to the Council, *Nostra Aetate* reevaluated the entire biblical tradition through the lens of a new, more positive understanding of Romans 9-11. That crucial passage is the only one in which Paul I think consciously reflects on the relationship between the Church, the Jewish people, and God. Most of his writing, for example in Galatians, represents a different argument entirely. There, he is arguing with his fellow Jewish Christians that gentiles coming into the Church don't need to observe all the commandments of the Torah. Faith in Christ (along with a moral life, of course) suffices through the sacrament of baptism. But in Romans 9-11, Paul does take a direct look at the continuing role of Judaism in God's plan of salvation, alongside the Church.

The Council saw that while Paul successfully argues elsewhere for the inclusion of gentiles into the Christian communities without the prerequisite of first converting to Judaism, in Romans 9-11 he argues (albeit somewhat ambiguously) that God's covenant with the Jewish people is "irrevocable." Paul's argument in Galatians was another fateful decision because it meant the "gentile-ization" of the Church and its de-Judaization as more and more gentiles came in over the centuries. The same apostle's views of the irrevocable nature of the covenant between God and the Jewish people enabled a more positive theology of Judaism to develop in the Church today after two millennia when the Second Vatican Council decided to draw on it, rather than the anti-Jewish

polemics of the Church Fathers, as the basis for Catholic doctrine on God's covenant with the Jewish people.

The first stage thus goes through St. Paul and the early strata of the gospels. The second stage, which many call "the parting of the ways," began with the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and the radically different implications that Jewish-Christians and other Jews drew from that common catastrophe. That was a complex phenomenon, taking place over several centuries, a gradual development. It did not reach maturity and definitiveness until around the middle of the fourth century, when other decisions were made. These decisions centered on the liturgical calendar and were hotly debated over a long period. One involved not moving the Sabbath, but moving the observance of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, the "Lord's Day." In the Romance languages, such as that spoken in the Diocese of Rome, what happened is more clear than in our Teutonic English. "Sabato" remained the "Sabbath," the last day of the week, while Sunday, the first day, the day of the Resurrection of the Lord ("Domenica") became central to Christianity. This was an indication that the split, that parting of the ways had taken place. This new movement was no longer tied so directly to the Jewish life of prayer or to its liturgical cycle.

The Christian liturgical calendar is based on the Jewish liturgical calendar. Christianity's central feast, like Judaism's, is Passover ("Pesach" in Hebrew, "Easter" in English, "Pascua/Pesach" in Italian). Even in English one can see the rootedness of Easter in Jewish Pesach (Passover) in such phrases as "Paschal Lamb" and "Paschal candle." On the fiftieth day we Christians observe Pentecost, just as Jews observe Shavuoth (the Feast of Sevens). We Christians, however, no longer observe the High Holy Days in the Fall. That is because the theological significance of the High Holy Days (repentance and atonement) takes place in the Easter Triduum celebrating Jesus' death and resurrection. For Christians, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) became liturgically redundant to Good Friday and Easter. That is when we do ritually what Judaism does in the Fall. We do it in the Spring, attached to Passover. Splitting the Christian calendar away from the Jewish calendar, i.e.,

when we celebrate Easter/Passover away from when Jews celebrate Passover, was highly debated in the Christian tradition for many reasons. For example, it would signify a theological parting of the way that many Christians did not want to make. Other Christians, though, did not want to have to go to the Rabbis to have the date of Easter determined, so it was a very controversial issue.

I am simplifying everything, but the sense of this is important. One has in this second stage both a statement of continuity in the first century and a gradual sense of discontinuity reflected in new ways of celebrating and understanding the newness of Jesus and the newness of our Christian understanding of the one God of Israel that flowed from our understanding of Jesus. During this period one also has the beginnings of things that would have darker implications as the centuries passed. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (which is not by Paul, but dated by most scholars to the period after the destruction of the temple) there is a vision of the sacrificial death of Jesus not only replacing the temple sacrifice but being much better, not only “fulfilling” but replacing and perfecting it. That is a statement of a replacement, or supersessionist theology *vis-à-vis* a central Jewish practice. It is important to note, however, that Hebrews is narrowly focused on the sacrifice of the Temple. So it really doesn't say much about Rabbinic Judaism (in any of its forms) because they don't depend on the Temple for salvation, as we saw above. Hebrews answers the question of why we Christians significantly changed our liturgy from its Jewish roots. But Hebrews neither asks nor answers how Jews would continue to observe God's commandments (Torah) to them as their continuing obligation to God's eternal covenant with them; that was for the rabbis to decide.

During this second stage many of the New Testament and patristic polemical themes against Judaism were developed, such as the negative portrait of the Pharisees in Matthew. Ironically, Matthew is the most Torah/Law observant author of the four Evangelists. At the same time as he developed his negative portrait of the Pharisees (by which he really meant the developing Rabbinic movement of his own time), he also taught great respect for the Pharisees/Rabbis. The basic message in Matthew is that Christians

should be even more scrupulous in our observance of the Law than the Pharisees themselves, a sort of “ultra-orthodox” position if one were to use modern categories. Pharisees are his basic model, even with all the nasty things he says about them (e.g., Mt 23). They also, in Matthew as in the other gospels, have absolutely no role in the death of Jesus. All the gospels agree on this; the Pharisees had no part to play in the death of Jesus, only “the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.” Indeed, in Luke, Pharisees try to warn Jesus of the plot against his life if he goes to Jerusalem. Pharisees are counted among his followers (e.g., Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea), and the Pharisee Gamaliel is depicted in the Book of Acts as saving the lives of all the Apostles and thus the very existence of the early Church.

In the second century Justin Martyr’s misnamed *Dialogue with Trypho* was really an apologetic sliding into polemic. In some cases early Church documents reflect theological differences with fellow Jews, but do not yet reflect what we came to understand much later as “the teaching of contempt.” They do not depend on the collective guilt charge (that Jews as a people were and are guilty of the death of Jesus). Certainly there is no basis for the collective guilt canard in the New Testament. But as time moved forward, more and more negatives were added. For example, as Christians, like other Jews, reflected on the destruction of the Temple, they blamed it on the sins of the People of God. But as the centuries went on and Christians no longer identified themselves as Jews, Christians began to blame the Jews as “others” rather than seeing a self-indictment in the acknowledgment of sin.

That made a fateful turn so that the destroyed Temple was seen as proof of divine punishment for Jewish sin. What Jewish sin? Well obviously the sin of killing Jesus. Why would God be angry with the Jews for killing another Jew? Because Jesus was the Son of God. The destroyed Temple became kind of an inverted (some might say perverted) proof of Jesus’ divinity. God would not have been so angry with the Jews for killing Jesus if Jesus weren’t intimately connected with God. This is the beginning of what Jules Isaac would in our century call “the teaching of contempt,” but it took several centuries for that to develop. It was not an inevitable

outcome of the New Testament. One cannot go directly from the New Testament, even from John's gospel, which talks collectively about "the Jews," to the developed teaching of contempt that Jules Isaac described in 1960 so devastatingly that Pope John XXIII commissioned Cardinal Bea to include the issue in the agenda of the Second Vatican Council.

The Second Vatican Council thus took a fresh look at the New Testament to see what it really said without the layers of patristic interpretation that had been imposed on the text (eisegesis) rather than drawn out of it (exegesis). One great decision of this second stage for Christians was about how far to part with Judaism. We saw above how this worked itself out in liturgical innovations and continuities because the link was still there with Passover in the preservation of Holy Thursday. Today as a memory of Jesus' Passover with his disciples it is still central to the Church's self understanding.

In the second century, Marcion of Pontus proposed a radical break with Judaism. He took the logic of discontinuity, if you will, to its logical conclusion, and said, "We have the New Testament. We don't need the Hebrew Scriptures anymore. They teach a different God, a god of vengeance and justice, not the New Testament God of love and mercy." Deeply influenced by agnostic dualism, Marcion wanted to get rid of the Hebrew Bible so he could get rid of the God of Israel. Even much of the New Testament, such as the Gospel of Matthew, was too "Jewish," so Marcion sought to get rid of it, too. By the time he was through, he was left with the Gospel of Luke and expurgated parts of the Epistles of Paul. The Church thought otherwise and declared that his teaching was heretical. Marcion has the dubious distinction of being one of the first defined heretics in Church history. In this decision, Christianity decided not to make too radical a break with Judaism but to maintain the relationship because the New Testament makes no sense except as imbedded in and as a midrash on, if you will, the Hebrew Bible, which is and remains God's word. The God that the New Testament teaches is no other than the God of Israel.

The "pre-Christ" history of the Christian people is no other than the history of the Jewish people as reflected in the Bible. Now

that did not answer the question of God's relationship with Jews post-Christum who did not accept the Church's proclamation about Jesus. That was a separate question handled a bit later in the next stage. The point I want to make is that while Marcion's vision was declared heretical, some of his categories, e.g., comparing "old" versus "new," the God of justice versus the God of mercy, etc., stuck in the catechetical language of the teaching of the Church. Many negative effects even to this day go back to Marcionism. The 1974 Vatican *Notes* thus have to make a clear point that one can't place a God of love over against a God of justice. It is the same God in both Testaments. The reason they had to make that point was that too many Catholics were laboring under a misperception that was very similar to Marcion's: that there are two Gods and that the Old Testament teaches vengeance while the New Testament teaches mercy. Some of us grew up hearing those kinds of things in the past. Hopefully, fewer Catholics will hear them in the future.

The third stage begins at the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth with the establishment of Christianity first as a licit religion, which Judaism already was, then as the official religion of the Roman Empire. The transition to power in the Church's history leads to a very serious temptation to triumphalism, theologically as well as politically. The earlier apologetical and polemical language of the Church had been developed while it was a persecuted minority. Now the Church gained immense power. In a famous vignette of the period, St. Ambrose forces an emperor to go down on his knees. Ironically, the emperor wanted the people of Milan to rebuild a synagogue that had been burned by Christians in a riot. Ambrose did not want them to and bent the emperor to his will. The rejection of Marcion now became a part of the next decision faced by the Church, what to do with a large portion of the Jewish community that did not see itself fulfilled in the risen Christ or the Christian interpretation of what was increasingly known as the Old Testament (not a term that the New Testament authors would have ever used in their lives).

During the following centuries the Church was to use both the force of secular authorities and of religious persuasion to suppress

every religious tradition that existed in Europe in the beginning of the fourth century. These were gone. Look, for example, at the Pantheon. They just wiped them all out in one way or another. That was their express goal and they achieved it. There was only one exception to the universal intolerance of Christianity for other religions, and that was Judaism. Only Judaism survived this period in Europe and maintained its position, albeit a limited position, in the Christianized Roman Empire. Why?

Part of the reason can be seen in the framing of the theology of St. Augustine of Hippo. The negative part of his thinking toward Jews is often talked about, but the positive part of his theology is often forgotten. Augustine argued that since the Church's proclamation of the gospel required its continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures, the people who wrote and therefore bore witness to the sacredness of the Bible had to be preserved, since their witness was valid. Since they witness to the sacredness of the Bible, they were to be preserved, but since they resisted its fulfillment he wanted to keep them down a bit, because he didn't want them witnessing too spectacularly to that fact that they didn't feel the need for or have the question to which Jesus is the answer. Since Judaism was very attractive to potential converts to Christianity, laws were enacted to keep Jews from becoming too visibly prosperous or having authority over Christians. It was illegal for Jews to own slaves, hold certain positions of authority, or have occupations that were too prominent.

Gregory the Great, who was elected to the papacy in 590, embedded Augustinian theory in canonical legal principles that held, where papal teaching was followed, throughout the Middle Ages and were reconfirmed from pope to pope. Gregory prohibited any attempts at forced conversion of the Jews, since this might lead to insincerity in conversion, he argued, and therefore the state of their souls would be worse than if they remained faithful Jews. That became the canon law of the Church for centuries, in some places honored only in the breach. But Jews could and did appeal to those canon laws and appeal to the popes to enforce them. Judaism thus was allowed to survive in Christendom and even in some places and times to thrive. Jews were not physically kept from

leaving Christian Europe; they did not want to. They didn't see a better future anywhere else, which is something I think we need to deal with as well.

The fourth stage, and here I have not a general but an exact date, began in 1096, with the mass violence perpetrated against the helpless Jewish communities of the Rhineland by marauding crusaders. Robert Chazan's wonderful book on that first crusade shows that it was not the first wave or the second wave of crusaders who committed the massacres.¹ Rather, it was the third wave, the dregs of the followers who were pretty much uncontrolled and virtually leaderless who got the idea that they didn't need to go all the way to the Holy Land to kill infidels. They could just do it right in their backyard, because they had the Jews there to do it to. It's a very tricky story. The local bishops tried to protect the Jews, but in vain. In one case, the Jews were given refuge in the home of the local bishop. The crusaders stormed the palace, overwhelmed its defenders, and slaughtered the Jews. A martyrology developed in Judaism—an interesting one from a Jewish point of view, in that period.

In the second crusade, the pope commissioned St. Bernard of Clairvaux to travel around preaching against any attacks on the Jews as being against Church teaching and as being irrelevant to the point of the crusades, which was to free Jerusalem from the Muslims. He was reasonably successful, but not all subsequent crusades followed this example. The year 1096 represents the first massive blood letting in Christian history. Remember that a millennium had passed before it took place. Violence was not and is not an inevitable part of Jewish-Christian relations. It was in 1096, as in our own century, the result of real decisions made by real people who consciously chose evil over good.

After 1096 the theology of contempt against the Jews escalated dramatically. It came to be very different than it had been in early centuries, where the concern was with Judaism being too attractive to Christians. We have records of bishops of the ninth and tenth centuries trying to ban Christians from going to rabbis to have their fields and children blessed, which indicates that a reasonably good relationship prevailed. One does not ban a practice if it's not fairly

common. In the twelfth century the situation deteriorates in historical terms relatively rapidly. I would argue that the increase of negative theology is really part of a rationalization for the murders of Jews by crusaders: "Yes, Jews were killed, but that's because they deserved it." This is my own theory. Someone else will have to do the doctoral dissertation, hopefully at Catholic University, to prove or disprove it. But the fact of the escalation of theological anti-Jewish rhetoric is quite startling, and is, I think, quite obvious in this period.

It is in this period of the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries when so much of that which we consider endemic to Christianity is first introduced; it didn't exist before. This is when the ghetto started. This is when the blood libel was invented in Britain, and perfected in the Rhineland area of what is now Germany. It was only then that the Jews were really demonized. One can see a dramatic change in terms of portraiture. For example, on the cathedral of Strassbourg in France at the end of the latter period, there is a theological apologetic on the portals. Two statues depicting two beautiful women stand, one being the Church and one the synagogue. The Church is resplendent, triumphant, and in glory. The other beautiful woman is the synagogue and she is poignant, with the staff of the Law broken and the tablets of the Law falling out of her hands. That's a statement of theological triumphalism. But there's not an ounce of the racism we today connect with anti-Semitism.

Compare this with a cathedral in Regensburg, Germany, from some time later. There is a carving of something I was told was once fairly common in Germany: the Judensau (Jew sow). There you can recognize the Jews by the typical hats that they were by this time forced to wear. This identifying mark of the Fourth Lateran Council and Innocent III showed stone images of Jews suckling at the teats of a sow. That is very crude, and is a different sort of image from that in Strassbourg. The attempt is to dehumanize the Jews. That was a meaning and an intention not present a couple of centuries earlier on the cathedral of Strassbourg. What was going on in the minds of the people who did that sculpture?

This period saw the beginning of the Passion play. The earliest one dates from the thirteenth century in the Benedictine monastery in Germany, from which we have the manuscripts of the *Carmina Burana* folk songs. But it dates to that period in which the Jews are depicted as a “bloodthirsty race,” for killing Jesus and by implication Christians as well. The enforced ghettoization of the Jews began in Italy, where the Jewish area of Venice, which had been called ghetto (“factory”) for quite a while, was moved to a new site. One still sees on tourist maps “Ghetto Vecchio” and “Ghetto Nuovo” (“old” and “new” Ghetto). Ghetto Nuovo was an island with one bridge; it had a gate on the bridge and the Jews were expected to be back there at night and stay there. Sometimes that was for their own protection, especially around Good Friday, when Christians might come out of churches and do harm to the Jews, having misunderstood the gospel message of the day as blaming Jews for Jesus’ death rather than placing responsibility on sinners. Jesus, the gospel teaches, died for *our* sins. To the extent that we Christians try to off-load our responsibility for the death of Christ, evading our guilt by blaming Jews for Jesus’ death, we remove ourselves from participating in his Resurrection.

Beginning in twelfth century England and culminating in 1492 (Spain) and 1496 (Portugal), the Jews were expelled from virtually all of the Western Europe. This was rationalized by the blood libel charge that had been invented before that. Some Jewish families found refuge in Italy, which did not expel its Jews. Still, Italy did not really have much of the apparatus of the practice of contempt. It did have the ghettoization and other restrictive laws, but if you were a Jew living almost anytime during Christian history in Italy, you weren’t in much physical danger most of the time. There were certain things that the Italian system required you to do, but if you did those you could survive and even prosper. So a number of the refugees from the Spanish expulsion of 1492 ended up in Italy. There still exists the beautiful sephardi synagogues in Venice, for example, built by these refugees. Its beauty is all inside. The outside is nondescript and that was part of the accommodation of the time. But there, Jews were allowed to have a beautiful synagogue and a

relatively peaceful life in relative prosperity, relative to a lot of the rest of the world. So the situation varied in Catholic countries from one area to another, and it should be noted that Italy is profoundly influenced by Catholic tradition and certainly by papal teaching. Much of Italy, of course, was ruled directly by the popes and therefore the papal decrees were followed throughout the period. Likewise, some Protestant countries like the Netherlands gave refuge and a chance for a relatively normal life to Jews expelled from other countries. By the time of the Enlightenment, the Jewish communities of Europe were decimated and in most places severely oppressed. They were moving into eastern Europe in large numbers.

The fifth stage lasted from the Enlightenment to the eve of World War II. Jews were still considered outsiders by much of European society. Even though they were legally there and could claim various legal privileges and rights, they also had numerous legal inhibitions on them. They couldn't own horses, couldn't be in most of the trades, and so participated in only a few minor areas of commerce. They went into areas such as money lending and the jewelry business, I think, because these were good businesses to be in if you were likely to be expelled. You could take your assets with you in a little sack as you jumped out the back window while people banged on the front door.

Simultaneously, this period (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) saw the development of a pseudo-scientific racism. This was the dark side of the Enlightenment. According to Arthur Hertzberg, Voltaire, for example, says that the Jews cannot be assimilated into Western society.² They are different; they are qualitatively different from and inferior to the rest of Europeans. They cannot be assimilated no matter what they do. They will still have these negative characteristics. That's a racial theory that was developing, whereas the Church's idea was to love the Jews for conversion and facilitate that in anyway reasonably possible. This "enlightened" theory is different. The Jews cannot be assimilated. For the Church the Jews could be baptized and become full Christians.

The racist theories were developed to some extent to justify what Europeans were doing in Latin America and North America to

Native Americans, what they were doing in Africa in developing the slave trade, and what they were doing in Asia and the Middle East. Racialism was a handy way of justifying that “if these folks aren’t fully human you can do to them anything you want.” If one looks around Europe, however, the significant group of “outsiders” are the Jews, so these same racial theories were applied to the Jews of Europe. And then came Chamberlain and Wagner and others. Jews, for them, were subhumans, little more than dangerous animals, “vermin.” Nazism perfected this system of subdividing humanity into separate species, with only Aryans (Germans, Dutch, Danes, Austrians, British, etc.) being fully human. Italians, Greeks, Poles, and other Slavs were a little less human and the list went down until it reached the Jews, Gypsies, and Africans at the very bottom. These, of course, were not really human at all, so Europe needed to be cleansed of these unhuman things. People can do this because “they” are not human beings. One can justify the Holocaust as a purification of Europe for the “Millennial Rule” of the Third Reich.

Now that’s a quick view of two thousand years. But I think it is more important to note that you don’t get there directly from the Gospel of John. It doesn’t work. You can’t get from the Gospel of John to the mid-twentieth century without taking into account a lot of different complexities. It didn’t always happen the same way everywhere. There was essentially the same teaching by the Roman Catholic Church in Austria as there was in Italy. But the results were very different in terms of the treatment and understanding of their fellow citizens in Italy than they were in Austria. Eighty-five percent of Italian Jews survived and almost any Jew that could get her or himself into the hands of the Italian army survived. The Italian army would not give up Jews to Germans even when the Nazis demanded it. That’s an untold story in many ways but a very real one; so the record shows that Catholics acted very differently depending on where they were.

It’s a very complex story. Take just the country of France and one can see various groups of Catholics raised essentially the same in terms of the faith, but some becoming Vichyites, others

becoming resisters, and some dying trying to save Jews. World War II provides a very complex set of stories. We have to work on reconciling Jewish and Catholic historical memory. This is, of course, the sixth stage. It is the one we are in now. It began with the opening of the death camps and the discovery of what went on in them, of coming to terms with what was done to the Jews of Europe. Two out of every three Jews who were alive in Europe in 1940 were dead by the time the camps were liberated. That's astounding. It's incomprehensible. But the process to begin to comprehend it had to begin. The Second Vatican Council was our first step, as Catholics, toward an answer, but we are just in the beginning of that stage of answering it. This is where the question of youth comes in, because the lesson of this history is that if one is not very careful with one's decisions generation to generation, they can come back to bite one very deeply.

A Personal Reflection on *Nostra Aetate*

The fourth section of the *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions* dealt with the Church's understanding of and its attitude toward Jews and Judaism in just fifteen sentences in Latin. It is important to realize that this was the first time any Ecumenical Council of the Church (i.e., a full gathering of the world's bishops in formal assembly) had ever, in fact, asked this question. References in earlier Councils, such as the Fourth Lateran Council (1215 C.E.), were, while negative, merely "disciplinary" in character, and had no doctrinal implications for Church teaching as such. *Nostra Aetate*, distinctively, makes no reference to previous Councils of the Church or writings of the Fathers of the Church. It was a new, fresh look at the question after nearly two millennia of essentially uncontested presumptions, many of them erroneous as Pope John Paul II has noted, going back to second-century polemics against Judaism. Further, *Nostra Aetate* was, in the view of its framers, a conscious attempt to begin the process of discerning the implications of the dogmatic *Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, whose words *Nostra Aetate* echoes and amplifies. Speaking of those who have not

“yet” received the Gospel but who “are “related to” the people of God “in various ways,” *Lumen Gentium* states:

In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.

This calling, *Lumen Gentium* states, is part of “the plan of salvation.”

Nostra Aetate begins by noting that it is when the Council “searches into the mystery of the Church” itself that she encounters the mystery of Israel, acknowledging that the very “beginnings” of the Church’s own faith are to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, and affirms that believers in Christ, far from standing on their own, are rather “Abraham’s sons according to the faith and included in the same Patriarch’s call.” The Church knows no God other than the God of Abraham and Sarah, and no salvation other than that accorded Israel in the Exodus: “The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant” and that to this day the Church “draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.”

The Council then goes on to translate (properly from the Greek) a passage many vernacular translations, including, I must admit, that of my own Bishops’ Conference, had translated in the past tense, the key passage from Romans 9:4-5, “Theirs [i.e., the Jews’] is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises.” That single, present-tense “is,” an accurate translation of Paul’s key caveat on all he says in Romans and all of his other epistles, I would argue, was and remains the most revolutionary tense correction in the history of Christian biblical scholarship and official Church teaching. For it throws on its head the entire ancient “teaching of contempt” by which Israel,

the Jewish people, was to be considered in the past tense, rejected by God for allegedly rejecting “the time of their deliverance,” etc. No, Paul thunders, and the Council nearly two millennia finally repeats. One can bend, one can open God’s Law, the divine Path, to admit gentiles. But in so doing one cannot, ever, for a moment, close what God has promised to keep open, the salvation of the Jews on the basis of the covenant God established with them and which neither the Jews nor God have ever revoked.

I have pondered these fifteen sentences now for over three decades, always wondering at their order. Logically, what comes next in the document should have come first. For what comes next is the rejection of any implication of collective guilt of the Jews for the death of Jesus “then or now” despite the involvement of some (the Latin does not state “omnes”; it has no adjective) “Jewish authorities” for the death of Jesus. Should not the great canard, “deicide,” the “God-killer” charge, have been cleared away before a theological, indeed doctrinal assessment of God’s current and future covenanting with the Jews as a people been approached? Should not one prune away the false detritus of the past before addressing the great hopes of the future? Yet these most elegant fifteen sentences of the Council begin with a huge, doctrinally pregnant, unprecedented (save in St. Paul) affirmation before they go on to rejecting the collective guilt charge and condemning anti-Semitism and mandating radical changes in “catechetical work” and “the preaching of the word of God.”

I think they were right. The Jewish people, God’s people in their own way no less than God’s people in Christ, the Church, need first to be acknowledged as such, human beings, God knows, with flaws and greatnesses, called to be and to continue to be a witness people to all of humanity, and to the Church (as Pope John Paul II said to the Jews of Warsaw in 1987). When this essential fact of salvation history is accepted by Christians, then the involvement of a few Jews and Romans in Jesus’ death is put in proper perspective. From a Christian, a Catholic point of view, Jews are the People of God, to whose everlasting witness to the One God and to God’s plan of salvation for all humanity we join our voices. That

some of Jesus' fellow Jews in the first century collaborate with Rome, as so very many Christians of all persuasions collaborated with Nazism's anti-Jewish and therefore anti-Christian genocidal attack, is a great sin for those who did so. But it is not the guilt, great as it is, then or now that counts. It is the hope for all humanity that our mutual, our joint witness to the One God, the God of salvation for us all, that counts. Is not that what we are about, ultimately, we Jews and Christians: fighting history, sucked into history only to emerge to fight again? Isn't it what God calls us to be, beyond our failing meager selves? Is not that the point?

Contemporary Controversies between Catholics and Jews³

Any discussion of the current controversies between Catholics and Jews over issues related to the *Shoah* (and they are many) must be set within the much larger context of the truly astounding progress in Catholic-Jewish relations in the final third of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. Indeed, I would argue that the current level of high-voltage Jewish criticism of contemporary actions of the Holy See is itself a reflection of that progress. In no previous century since the Church assumed vast political power following the conversion of Constantine have Jews felt secure enough in Christian-dominated societies to speak as freely and frankly as they do today. While the framers of the Second Vatican Council's declaration on the Jews, *Nostra Aetate*, might not have foreseen such a result, this unintended but certainly lively byproduct of the renewal of Catholic teaching on the Church's relationship with the Jewish people is to be welcomed as a sign of a dialogue that is doing what it was intended to do, allow the participants to bare their souls to one another without inhibition or fear of intimidation.

Controversies within recent memory, widely reported in newspapers throughout the world, range from Jewish concerns over who the pope was to meet (Waldheim, Arafat), to where cloistered convents and crosses should be located (Auschwitz, Birkenau), to who the Church should declare saints (Edith Stein, Cardinal

Stepinac, Pope Pius XII). Many Catholics, Jews need to know, are understandably confused as to why some in the Jewish community feel constrained to second guess so many of what are, after all, internal matters in the life of the Church. Catholic confusion is only compounded when we consider that many of these complaints came at a time of rapid progress in the dialogue vigorously lead by a pope, John Paul II, who was deeply committed to it and whose active promotion of Catholic-Jewish relations was unprecedented in the history of the Church. And why beat up on Catholics all the time? Why not go after somebody else once in a while? We don't go around setting up Messianic Jewish "synagogues," or saying that God doesn't hear the prayers of Jews, or opining that the Anti-Christ will be a Jew. Why us? (Many Jews are surprised to learn that there is such a thing as "Catholic paranoia," but there is.)

The answers, on reflection, are not too difficult to discern. First, Roman Catholicism is by far the largest church within the community of the baptized. Its pope, certainly in our time, is thus the most visible single individual within that community. So Jews concerned about what that community might do (and history has taught them all too well that such concerns are not by any means paranoid) will tend to watch very closely, even minutely what the leadership of the Catholic Church does that might affect them. That great pioneer of the dialogue, Msgr. George G. Higgins, once likened the point of view of the Jews in Catholic-Jewish relations to that of a mouse in bed with an elephant. The mouse gets little sleep, watching for any little tremor in the elephant's body that might indicate that it is about to turn over.

Second, in my experience many Jews have a very heightened notion of the power and authority of the papacy. A major Jewish journal not long ago published without comment a letter to the editor that Pope Pius XII could have ended World War II just by telling the troops, most of whom were at least nominally Christian, to lay down their arms and go home. Would that it were so! Popes have not even aspired to that kind of direct political clout over secular authorities and the laity in a long, long time.

Perhaps the single issue underlying all the controversies is memory. How, Jews ask, will the next generation of the world's more than one billion Roman Catholics be taught about Jews and Judaism, about the Holocaust? What is at stake for Jews is not just the past but the remembrance of the past, since they understand very well that how we Catholics define the past for the next generation will deeply influence the fate of future generations of Jews within Western civilization. One great strength of tradition-oriented institutions, like the Church and rabbinic Judaism, lies in their ability to frame the issues of human continuity from generation to generation. Stalin was right: the Catholic Church has no troops. But it has a prodigious memory and a gift (we believe from the Holy Spirit) to interpret for its followers the meaning of human history. It has preachers and teachers. The Jewish community, having lived with and under us for much of the last two millennia, understands quite well the long range significance of Catholic memory. That is why they worry about it so much.

If I were Jewish, I might worry about us, too. Sensitivities on both sides, some spoken, some unspoken, abound in each of the Holocaust-related controversies. Jews for an entire generation hesitated to talk very much even with each other about what had happened to them (two out of every three Jews in Europe murdered, one third of the entire world Jewish population). It was only in the mid-1970s, perhaps in response to the TV miniseries, *Holocaust*, that survivors felt able to talk to their children and to other Jews. And when they did, Holocaust "revisionists" popped up in colleges and on the media to deny that it ever really happened. So began the period of building Holocaust museums and pushing for Holocaust education in public and private schools, twin efforts that have greatly enriched the educational and moral environment of the last remaining superpower (and thus potential world bully). As Pope John Paul II has said, the Jewish witness to the *Shoah* is "a saving warning for all humanity, which shows [them] to be still the heirs of the Prophets."

Yet even though the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the U.S. Conference of Catholic

Bishops (among others) have on numerous occasions condemned Holocaust denial for the “great lie” that it is, still Jews worry. Now, Jewish worry manifests itself a little differently than does Catholic worry. On the one hand, the spokespeople for the worriers tend to have grown up in New York City, which is not as sensitivity-conscious in its public discourse as, say, Virginia, or Michigan, or even California. On the other hand, many of the spokespersons are rabbinically trained, and if not, nonetheless profoundly influenced by the rabbinical style of discourse. Anyone who has read even a few chunks of the Talmud will realize quickly that it is quite a different genre of religious literature than either the protracted ruminations of Augustine or the clipped logical framework of Aquinas. It is argumentative, not only among rabbis (“But, Rabbi X said . . .”) but also with the biblical text itself. “How,” the argument raged among rabbis over the centuries, “could Joseph have been so morally callous? He knew for all those years of his opulent living in Egypt that his father mourned his death. Yet he could spare not one messenger to tell his grieving father that he lived and prospered? What a breach of the commandment to honor your father and mother!” I know of no Christian preacher who has ever raised this question. Yet arguing with the texts and with the most revered of Jewish ancestors is typical of rabbinic discourse.

So when Jews look at a Vatican text which they take seriously, they probe it for weaknesses, dissecting its logical and moral vulnerabilities. Here again they have done us Catholics a great service. The Jewish reception of every one of the statements of the Holy See, beginning with *Nostra Aetate* itself (which none other than Abraham Joshua Heschel panned as too little and too late), has been negative and even fractious. It is what Jews do to their own texts. It is an honor, perhaps oddly enough, when they do it to ours. The service is to hold our feet to the fire; to temper thereby our dross metal statements into solid steel capable of serving the ages. Consequently, one can discern in official Church statements over the years a steady progress in Catholic teaching about Jews and Judaism. Since getting this teaching right has everything to do with authentic Catholic teaching (Vatican II noted wisely that it is when

searching her own mystery that the Church encounters the mystery of Israel), we should, despite the often fractious format in which it is presented to us, be grateful for the honor Jews pay us in disputing on their own terms with us.

Yet dispute is not dialogue. Dialogue seeks to know what is hurtful to the Other and to avoid it. For dialogue is not debate. Its goal is not winning but understanding. It would, therefore, be helpful if our Jewish partners in dialogue would learn that utilizing the level of rhetoric on Catholics that is common within the Jewish community can block understanding as often as it communicates to us legitimate Jewish concerns. This is especially true, I would submit, when the subject is the papacy.

Until quite recently, the history of Catholics, like the history of Jews in the U.S., was one, by and large, of immigration and discrimination, of being excluded from the “better” neighborhoods, schools, jobs, and social clubs. Entire political movements were formed whose primary purpose was to keep Catholic immigrants out, first out of the country and then, failing that, out of the established economic and social system. We were numerous and unsavory. We would swamp and bring down social and educational standards, polluting American culture. Above all, we were dangerous, subjects of blind obedience to the “whore of Babylon,” the pope, and thus at once un-Christian and un-democratic, of uncertain loyalty to the American experiment.

The pope: symbol of what was really wrong with the poor, huddled, teeming, “ethnic” masses of “papists” who swarmed into America, threatening all that was good and sacred about the great “city set on a hill.” If only Catholics would give up the pope, the mantra went, they could be socialized, Americanized, Christianized, sanitized, and made fit for respectable company. But we wouldn’t and, by and large, we didn’t, holding back our assimilation and acceptance in this country for generations for the sin of holding on to the papacy.

The papacy, as the viciously anti-Catholic political cartoons of Conde Nast and his cohort constantly reminded us, was the symbol of what was wrong with us, what was unassimilable. So the papacy,

then and even now when the great century-long wave of nativist, No-Nothing bigotry has subsided to a trickle, remains for Catholics a symbol of who we are as Americans, and what it cost our parents and grandparents to remain Catholic in a land of legal equality and ethno-religious discrimination.

So when Jewish leaders criticize the pope, whether Pius XII or John Paul II, even many of the “progressives” (whatever that actually means) among us find ourselves a bit disoriented, with sensitivities triggered that we may not have known that we had. For Catholics with a historical memory, Jews are fellow immigrants who suffered from much the same set of discriminatory attitudes and systemic exclusions. It is not at all accidental that the names of the leaders of the labor movement tend to be “ethnic,” Jewish and Catholic. Nor is it accidental that Catholics and Jews tended, again until recently, to cluster in the same urban ghettos. So how is it, we ask, when we recognize our American story in the Jewish-American story, that so many Jews seem to miss the, to us, deeply obvious point that to attack the papacy (never mind that we criticize the pope, he is *our* pope to criticize, after all, just as Israel is the Jewish community’s prerogative to criticize) is to raise up for us the specter of the nativist bigotry we thought had been left behind after John F. Kennedy’s campaign for the presidency (when he had to go to Texas to swear loyalty to America).

In jumping all over the popes, many Jews do not seem to realize that they are by no means “speaking truth to power,” as they themselves, I feel, sincerely believe. They are triggering the half-buried paranoid of the grandchildren of unwelcomed immigrants. If Jews are to communicate with American Catholics what should be real concerns for both communities, there will need to be a softening of the rhetoric until the volume is turned down enough so that we Catholics can hear what they are saying. Right now, the discourse is too loud to be comprehensible.

The difficulty of communication, of course, is very much two-sided here. If Jewish discourse tends to Catholic ears to be too disputatious, pointed, and at times judgmental, Catholic discourse (especially that of Rome) can strike Jewish ears as too soft, nuanced,

and hesitant on what are, for them, the big issues, especially the Holocaust. The recent statement of the Holy See, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* is a case in point. As the Jewish responses (mostly emanating from the headquarters in New York of national Jewish groups) were, understandably, written in “Jewish,” so the Vatican document, emanating from Rome and addressing at once all of the world’s one billion Catholics, was decidedly written in “Catholic” (or, more precisely, “Vaticanese,” a sub-dialect that many American Catholics have difficulty comprehending sometimes). One of the characteristics of “Vaticanese,” in certain circumstances (not so in others but that is another story) is its desire not to say more than it actually wants to say. This can result in a plethora of caveats and distinctions, a habit with which anyone familiar with medieval scholasticism will find themselves at home, but which in the larger world is, shall we say, an acquired taste.

As I read the document the first time (on a charter bus going into Rome from the airport after a flight from Jerusalem with a distinguished group of U.S. bishops and their rabbinical counterparts from around the country), I could see that what made eminent sense to me was in a number of key areas going to cause my rabbi friends no end of difficulty. In retrospect, I think I underestimated the difficulty, but was not surprised by its intensity.

The points at issue in the Vatican text are essentially related to its perhaps too-brief summary of the history of Jewish-Christian relations in only a few paragraphs. Naturally, things were left out which, from a Jewish point of view, needed to be said, but which the authors may have felt were implicit in the text and thus did not need to be spelled out.

Two key distinctions illustrate both this dynamic and the need for further dialogue. The first is the distinction in the text between “the Church as such,” which is held blameless for the Holocaust and what lead up to it, and “the sons and daughters” of the Church, for whose teachings, actions, and inactions over the centuries and especially during the Holocaust the Church as a whole is called upon by the document to repent. This language struck many Jews as less than straightforward. In fact, it is traditional. Although it is

not the most fashionable ecclesiology in certain academic theological circles today, it cannot be said (as some Jews feared) that it was invented just to get the Church off the hook with regard to its evident historical responsibility for setting the stage for the *Shoah*. Indeed, to the authors of the document, which was after all essentially a ringing statement of repentance for past Catholic sins, the Church's acknowledgment of responsibility was obvious in the statement's structure and very existence. How and why repent if there was no sin?

Cardinal Cassidy, who signed the document as President of the Commission that authorized it, has explained on various occasions that the distinction is made, traditionally in Roman Catholicism, between the Church as a sacramental, saving institution, the Body of Christ on earth, and the Church as a human institution, which includes all levels of "the sons and daughters" of the Church, from popes to newly baptized infants. The latter can indeed be as an institution guilty of sin and therefore needs, constantly to repent ("semper reformanda"). The former sense of "Church," since it refers directly to the actions of Christ in heaven and on earth, and thus to the integrity and validity of the sacraments necessary for salvation, including the sacraments of Eucharist and reconciliation, cannot be said to be "sinful" without impugning the Godhead as sinful and the sacraments as corrupt and ineffective.

So the Church as a human institution and as a whole must repent of its manifold sins against Jews and Judaism, sins which paved the way for something, namely genocide, that the Church at its worst never contemplated as a possibility. This, to me, and taking the validity of the document's distinction into account, is the clear teaching of the Vatican's *We Remember*. Yet in explaining how this is so the document makes a second distinction which again sounded to many Jews as a less than an honest reckoning but which, again, I believe is vital to an accurate historical record of the period and any discussion of the Church's role in it. This is the distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.

The distinction as made in the Vatican document has clear, logical merit. The Church's traditional polemic against Judaism,

which was aptly named “the teaching of contempt” by Jules Isaac, whose theory was accepted by Pope John XXIII and formed the basis of the Second Vatican Council’s declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, was as it manifested itself in the first and second centuries, intended to show Christianity’s superiority over the then-equally young Rabbinic interpretation of texts common to Jews and Christians. (In the first century, one should recall, virtually all Christians were Jews, so the New Testament is properly read as an internal Jewish document, an argument by Jews directed to Jews about the most authoritative way to read the Jewish Scriptures, i.e., to understand what Judaism should become after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.)

But beginning already in the second century, as the pope trenchantly pointed out in his address to the Anti-Judaism/Anti-Semitism seminar sponsored by the Holy See in November of 1977, the need of Christians (now increasingly gentile) to polemicize against rabbinic Judaism became so strong that a series of “misinterpretations” of the New Testament text were introduced that were, wrongly but ultimately, accepted by subsequent generations of (gentile) Christians as “the gospel truth” about Judaism. These included the nefarious and insidious notion of collective Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus—as if all the Jews spread around the Roman empire in Jesus’ time had somehow (through an early yet undiscovered version of an e-mail chatroom?) learned of the trial of Jesus in time to go to Jerusalem to scream, “Crucify him!” And that they could all have fit in Pilate’s courtyard.

Absurd, of course, but no more absurd than the Scripture-defying notion that such personal guilt could be handed down, collectively, to succeeding generations of Jews, as a people, by birth. Yet most Christians believed it. Perhaps it was comforting. If a Christian could blame “the Jews” for the death of Jesus, then one would not have to take responsibility for the real culprit, one’s own sins. The awesome phrase, “Christ died for *your* sins” could thus be domesticated and put aside (no matter that one thus “put aside” one’s only chance for redemption and salvation, which theologically is dependent upon the extent to which one acknowledges one’s own

responsibility as a sinner for Jesus' death, as the Council of Trent, seemingly in vain, tried to remind Catholics).

Here, however, even more distinctions than are made in the Vatican document become necessary. While the teaching of contempt against Judaism was by the end of the third century so well developed and so widespread as to be uncontested among subsequent Fathers of the Church, it did not (save in far-away outposts such as the Iberian peninsula) result in any large scale violence or even forced conversions of Jews until the eleventh century. In other words, the first millennium of Jewish-Christian relations, despite the accretion of absolute power over Jews by the Church beginning with the conversion of Constantine in the 4th century, did not result in an attempt by the Church to wipe out Judaism. On the contrary, thanks to St. Augustine and to St. Gregory the Great, who as pope instituted Augustinian theory as papal canon law, Judaism alone among the myriad of ancient cults of the Roman empire that pre-dated Christianity was allowed to survive—and accorded legal status (to which it could and did appeal to the popes for protection if and when civil authorities got out of hand.)

So there exists for the first millennium of the Christian era, not an unmitigated “anti-Judaism” (otherwise like paganism it would have been destroyed or absorbed) but a half-anti- and half-philosophical Judaism in Catholic theory and practice. It was protected and denigrated at the same time. What word can we give to this highly ambiguous theoretical and practical posture by the Church toward Jews and Judaism? Ambivalent anti-Judaism? Hesitant anti-Judaism? Certainly, a qualifier is needed.

In the eleventh century, however, as I have already discussed earlier in my essay, things took a decided and unequivocal turn for the worse. At the beginning of the century/millennium, apocalyptic fervor seems to have whipped up a rather large-scale “pogrom” against Jews in France (Jews, of course, being blamed for holding back the coming of the true messiah by not acknowledging that he had already come). In 1096, the third wave of the first crusade, being leaderless (the nobility and the clergy having already gone

with the first two waves) turned into a mob that massacred thousands of Jews in the Rhineland area of what is now modern Germany. This was over the protests of the pope who had launched the crusade and the local bishop/princes who felt an obligation (going back to Augustine and Gregory) to protect the “ignorant” but theologically significant Jews (since they witnessed to the authenticity of the divine revelation of Sinai, without which the “New Testament” makes little sense).

There are a number of theories to explain why, but what is important here is simply to note that things changed radically after the eleventh century. The “ambivalence” on the popular level faded, replaced by an increasingly negative anti-Judaism that began to take on the tinge of an anti-Jewishness. I have noted above a very telling example of this change: Whereas before, as in the classic French cathedral of Strassbourg, the Church and the Synagogue were depicted as two equally beautiful women, with the former resplendent and triumphant and the latter downcast and defeated, with the tablets of the Law falling from her hands, the Cathedral at Regensburg, Germany, has the infamous “Judensau” carved on its facade, with Jews suckling at its teats. This disgusting image is qualitatively different from the theological triumphalism of the French cathedral. It seeks to dehumanize the Jews, not simply illustrate the superiority of Christianity.

But if this is “anti-Jewishness,” a new term needs to be concocted for the next step. Here, the Jews are demonized, considered to be collectively guilty for the death of Jesus and therefore justifiably punished (e.g., through the destruction of the Temple, dispersion throughout the world, etc.), but also imagined as bitter and vindictive over Christian persecution of them, and accordingly out to destroy all of “Christian civilization.” Jews are in league with the devil. Whereas for Augustine and the Fathers of the Church, the Jews were pitiable in their suffering, they are now seen as a threat to Christian society. As noted above, Passion plays beginning in the fourteenth century thus go well beyond the gospels and even the Fathers of the Church in depicting Jews as part of a

cosmic plot, lead by Satan, to destroy Christendom and enslave all humanity.

As I argued in detail earlier in my essay, the Protestant Reformation did not seek to reform this aspect of medieval thinking, and the Enlightenment merely secularized it, the latter taking it to a new and even more insidious stage of development in wedding pseudo-science with greed to create a theory of racialism that supported colonialism and the slave trade. While there were many victims of such theories and practices, within Europe there was one group above all that many in society were predisposed (because of the teaching of contempt) to see as different, inferior and threatening all at once: the Jews. The historical progression is an ominous one: from Voltaire's assertion that the Jews could never assimilate into Western society to the pronouncements of secular Jew-haters such as Chamberlain and Gobineau passing their hatred off as "science" and then to Nazi ideology, casting the now no longer fully human but still demonized Jews in the role of the great polluter of the purity of Teutonic blood lines, destined to rule the world for a thousand years.

The Vatican statement's distinction between the anti-Judaism of the Fathers of the Church and the anti-Semitism that rationalized genocide is thus a quite cogent one. The latter on several grounds rejects theological elements central to Christianity. The one did not simply "slide" into the other. Over a millennium and a half of historical developments intervene between the two. We need, indeed, not fewer distinctions but more to do even basic justice to the complex ambiguities of Western history with regard to the Jewish people. There is patristic anti-Judaism, which is distinct from but related to medieval anti-Jewishness. And centuries later there emerges a distinct new theory (again historically related to its predecessors): modern, racial anti-Semitism, which owes its theoretical essence not to the Christian teaching of contempt, but to the dark underside of an enlightened Europe becoming rich on the slave trade and colonialism.

As Professor Yosef Yerushalmi said a number of years ago, if the logic of Christian anti-Judaism led directly to genocide, that would

have happened many centuries ago when the Church in much of Europe actually had the political power to carry out the logic of its beliefs. It didn't. It only happened in our own secularized century, after the breakdown of the theocentric vision of Christendom, with the moral restraints that vision imposed. Yet it is unlikely that the Jews of the twentieth century could have been so easily pinpointed and scapegoated by Nazi theory were it not for the traditions of Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Jewishness that preceded the nineteenth-century invention of racial anti-Semitism. That Christian tradition of negative teaching about Jews and Judaism is thus a "necessary cause," Yerushalmi argued for the Holocaust. But it is not a "sufficient cause," since much more needs to be said to begin to explain the success of genocidal anti-Semitism in the first half of the century in Europe.

However one defines the distinctions and causal links, the Vatican document's call on the whole Church to repent its role in paving the way for the Holocaust is, at least to this reader, quite clear:

At the end of this millennium the Catholic Church desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age. This is an act of repentance (*teshuvah*), since as members of the Church we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children. The Church approaches with deep respect and great compassion the experience of extermination, the *Shoah* suffered by the Jewish people during World War II. It is not a matter of mere words, but indeed of binding commitment . . . We wish to turn awareness of past sins into a firm resolve to build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians . . . but rather a shared mutual respect as befits those who adore the One Creator and Lord and have a common father in faith, Abraham.

That is the mandate of the Holy See's statement that Catholics need to keep firmly in mind.⁴

Toward the Twenty-First Century

This section of the paper will be of necessity the shortest, for study of the past, even in depth, does not really enable one to divine the future with any certainty. Though it can enable us not to repeat old mistakes, it cannot prevent new ones. Nonetheless, I cannot help but be extremely optimistic about Catholic-Jewish relations in the long term, both here in the U.S. and internationally. The “signals” that I discern are all essentially positive and point us toward a renewed sense of trust and, indeed, shared mission in and for the world. What are some of these?

First, I would point to the remarkable progress made in the elimination from Catholic teaching of the ancient teaching of contempt against Jews and Judaism outlined above in part one. When Sister Rose Thering, O.P., in the late 1960s first undertook an analysis of the treatment of Jews and Judaism in Catholic religious education materials, the portrait which emerged was grim, indeed, replete with stereotypes and presumptions of the guilt of all Jews, then and now, for the death of Jesus. My own study, undertaken a decade after the Second Vatican Council, found remarkable progress but still a long way to go. The most recent study, done by Dr. Philip Cunningham, concluded that the teaching of contempt has been “entirely dismantled” and as such is no more in Catholic educational materials, though vestiges, theological and historical, can still be found. This positive picture is the result not only of implementing documents promulgated by the Holy See (1974, 1985, 1998) but also the series of statements on Catholic-Jewish relations made by episcopal conferences throughout the world (the earliest being the 1967 *Guidelines* issued by our own conference here in the U.S.) designed to apply the conciliar vision to particular local realities. The U.S. bishops, for example, issued statements in 1975 and 1988 to implement the Vatican documents of 1974 and 1985, and are beginning the process of working on one for the 1998 statement.

Often when I am speaking, a Jewish participant will say something to the effect that the universal statements of the Holy See

are all well and good, but when will it “trickle down” to the grassroots level. In actual fact, it already has, indeed had done so to a surprisingly high level already in the mid 1970s. Stalin may have been right that the Church has no troops. But it has its classrooms and its pulpits, and that is where the battle for future generations is taught. Whether the students have ever heard of *Nostra Aetate* is irrelevant. What they are getting in their textbooks is, in fact, radically different from what previous generations of Catholics, going back to the second century, were getting. Catholicism, like rabbinic Judaism, is a living tradition. Within certain, sure boundaries it can and will change to preserve what is essential to its understanding of revelation.

Necessarily lagging behind the changes in what the Church teaches about Jews and Judaism is Jewish awareness of those changes. Many people in the Jewish community, as I indicated above, seem to think that the Council in fact changed very little, that the portrayal of Jews and Judaism in Catholic classrooms is pretty much the same as one would get, say, out of a sixteenth-century Passion play. This is to underestimate the Church’s delivery system, its official teaching, which is measured generationally in its effect (and may take several generations to produce the desired effect, there being over a billion of us now and of all ages and relative involvement in Church life), but does have a cumulative effect. And a lot has happened. The reason for it to become more widely known and appreciated within the Jewish community that Catholic teaching has definitely and permanently turned away from the ancient teaching of contempt is not that we desire gratitude from Jews. When one comes down to it, the Church has mandated these radical changes not simply out of a neighborly sense of fairness to Jews (though that is part of it) but because it came to be seen that the negative polemics against Judaism over the centuries had so encrusted themselves around our understanding of Sacred Scripture that we were consistently misreading the New Testament itself.

One small example may suffice. If one is engaging in an ongoing polemic against Judaism and the “Old Testament,” one may well miss the point of Jesus’ “Law of Love.” That was not a new

“Law” in any sense, but a brilliant coalescing of two crucial passages from the Hebrew Scriptures (Dt 6:5 and Lev 19:18), both of which are not simply cute sayings but the culmination of major biblical passages. Deuteronomy 6:5 is the paradigm by which the biblical author summarizes the inner meaning of the Ten Commandments (Dt 5) as love of God. It is part of a central Jewish prayer, the *Shema*, which is also commanded in the bible to be placed on the doorpost of every Jewish home (the *mezuzah*), and is to this day. Leviticus 19:18 likewise culminates and distills the entire chapter 19 of Leviticus. It is not simply having nice thoughts about one’s neighbor, but a concrete and surprisingly practical structure for a just society. By ripping these two passages out of their context (a context which Jesus and his hearers would have automatically filled in at the time, so basic are these passages to Judaism), and calling them “new,” Christians for generations deprived themselves of an in-depth understanding of their deep spiritual and social challenge and reduced God’s Word to “feel good” psychology. Jesus’ teaching is not about helping us feel good about ourselves: it is about how to live life at one with the Creator. It is best and most profoundly understood not as “over against” Judaism, but as a striving for the core of the Torah: God’s Teaching, God’s Law. The more we allow the Jewishness of Jesus and the evangelists to permeate our own, Christian understanding of the New Testament, the better we will understand it.

The difficulty Jews have in accepting the fact that Catholic teaching has changed for the better is only one side of the problem to be overcome on the Jewish side. The other is the need to be disabused of a number of misunderstandings of what Christianity is and what it teaches in general. The first article I ever published in the field of Jewish-Christian relations was entitled “Typical Jewish Misunderstandings of Christianity.”⁵ While I was careful to point out that these misunderstandings were by no means equivalent to the systematic contempt of the Christian *contra-Judaeos* tradition of the Church Fathers, they can be quite disconcerting to Christians when confronted with them. In the article, I traced some of the misunderstandings to medieval Jewish apologetics, which were

understandably developed by the rabbis to help Jews fend off all-too-persistent Christian missionaries. (Some of these arguments have more recently been recycled to help Jewish youth today fend off the far-from-tender ministrations of such missionizing groups as the so-called “Jews for Jesus,” which is hardly a Catholic operation and thus another story than the one I am narrating here.)

Other misunderstandings, including those perpetrated in Martin Buber’s one really bad book, *Two Types of Faith*, I traced back to the brilliant nineteenth-century German-Jewish thinkers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement. Thinkers such as Leopold Zunz and Abraham Geiger, I argued, themselves intellectually besieged by Christian polemics that were embedded in the works of German philosophers such as Hegel and German biblical scholars such as Wellhausen, crafted *tour de force* responses that to a great extent utilized Catholic anti-Protestant polemics and Protestant anti-Catholic polemics as truly representative of Christianity. Thus, Christianity is portrayed as placing mediators “between” God and humanity so that God cannot be addressed directly in prayer, and even as “deifying Mary” (two Protestant stereotypes of Catholic beliefs). And at the same time Christians were presented as having a quasi-magical religion in which what one did, morally, didn’t matter so long as one’s faith was pure (“deed” vs. “creed,” a Catholic stereotype of the Reformation).

By accepting as true of all Christians what some Christians were saying polemically about each other, generations of Jewish scholars have erected a (mis)understanding of Christianity recognizable to no Christians. I argued in 1973 and repeat the argument today that while this brilliant strategy might have had its place in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, it is less than helpful for Jews to keep it today when what is needed is not apologetics but understanding and the beginnings of trust.

If the first two “signals” of progress have to do with the admittedly asymmetrical jettisoning of the polemical baggage of the past (Christians having vastly more, and more invidious baggage to deal with), the third is the increasing ability of Jews and Catholics as religious people imbued with an ancient, divinely revealed

wisdom, to speak together to all humanity about humanity's deepest concerns and needs. One can see innumerable instances of cooperation on the social level all around the U.S., ranging from local parish/synagogue soup kitchens to joint lobbying in Washington for the poor and the needy within the U.S. and around the world.

Likewise, we are developing the ability to speak together about issues of common concern. In the U.S., the National Council of Synagogues (and the old Synagogue Council of America) have issued several joint statements in the last decade, ranging from calling for the teaching of values in public education to condemning Holocaust revisionism and pornography, and to joint reflections on the social and religious implications of the (Christian) Millennium/Jubilee Year 2000. On the international level, the Holy See and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations have issued joint statements on the meaning of marriage (and its implications for social policy) and on the environment.

These joint social policy statements and deeds, however, are only the first stage of what I would envision as the possibilities of jointly addressing the world's concerns. Our common goal, *tikkun olam*, calls us to more than that. We need to talk, carefully and non-disputatiously, about what we can say together about humanity's deeper concerns, the meaning of human life, the nature of human history oriented toward a Messianic End, what we are called by God to be and to do in this time of awaiting that End. This latter discussion may one day have fruit in joint reflections on these deeper, yet shared concerns. Both "sides" will be clear that what divides us theologically will always divide us. And yet . . . And yet . . . We should not fear delving a bit into our common biblical heritage to see what we can learn from each other and what we might, in all the integrity of our "otherness" from each other, articulate commonly to a world that needs to hear what I firmly believe God has given us not just to cherish among ourselves but to share with others.

This last task of the dialogue has only just begun, and among individuals, not really systematically by our communities' leaderships as a whole. We here most probably will not live to see its

deepest fruit. But while we cannot finish the task, to paraphrase the rabbis, we cannot desist from it, I believe. For neither Judaism nor Christianity were called into being by God just for the sake of themselves. A larger, redemptive pattern for humanity, both of our traditions attest about themselves, may be discerned in our chosenness.

Notes

1. Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

2. Arthur Hertzberg, *French Enlightenment and the Jews: The Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

3. This section of the paper is a revised version of my essay originally published as "Catholics and Jews Confront the Holocaust and Each Other," *America*, September 11, 1999.

4. The full text of *We Remember*, along with relevant statements from European and U.S. hierarchies, and the statement of Cardinal Edward Cassidy clarifying the intent of the Vatican document, is available in *Catholics Remember the Holocaust*, publication no. 5-290 (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1999).

5. Eugene Fisher, "Typical Jewish Misunderstandings of Christianity," *Judaism* (spring 1973).