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“Our Spiritual Patrimony: a Jewish perspective on the transformation of Jewish-Catholic relations”
Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Jerusalem Lecture
Chicago, Illinois, March 9, 2015

I

In October 28, 1965, the bishops of the Second Vatican Council overwhelmingly approved and Pope Paul VI then promulgated the final text of *Nostra Aetate*, a statement on the Catholic church’s relation to non-Christian religions. The fourth chapter of this brief document addresses Judaism. *Nostra Aetate* dramatically and irrevocably changed the landscape not just of Jewish-Catholic relations, but of Jewish-Christian relations writ large. It inspired substantial and sophisticated Catholic theological reflection, about which I will have more to say later. While it has had a profound effect, I do not think that Catholics in general, and, how much the moreso, Jews, are sufficiently aware of how this document came to be, what it has accomplished, and what challenges and opportunities remain in Jewish-Catholic relations.

In my presentation this evening, I want to address each of these. Before I do so, a few words of background on the Council itself will be, I believe, helpful.

The Second Vatican Council was the 21st ecumenical council of the Catholic Church. In this case, the term “ecumenical” describes an authoritative and definitive council of the entire Church, as compared, say, to a local provincial council or a synod. In modern usage, a “council” is an authoritative gathering of the bishops while a “synod” (like the recent synod on the family) is merely an advisory gathering.¹ Some may be wondering why, if it’s called the second Vatican Council, I just said it was the 21st council. Church councils are named after the location in which they are held. Of the 21, two were held in the Vatican, the first in 1869-1870, the second, the one which concerns us this evening, between 1962 and 1965. Other councils have been held in places like Nicea, Chalcedon, and Trent, and are named accordingly.

The Second Vatican Council was called by Pope John XXIII. Its over-arching purpose was to bring the Church into dialogue with the modern world. John XXIII used the image of throwing open the windows of the Vatican to let in fresh air. In a 2010 article in *L’osservatore Romano*, Pope Benedict XVI, who was present at the Council as a young theologian, wrote:

It was a moment of extraordinary expectation. Great things were about to happen. The previous Councils had almost always been convoked for a precise question to which they

¹ <http://mybhi.org/what-is-an-ecumenical-council/>

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were to provide an answer. This time there was no specific problem to resolve. But precisely because of this, a general sense of expectation hovered in the air: Christianity, which had built and formed the Western world, seemed more and more to be losing its power to shape society. It appeared weary and it looked as if the future would be determined by other spiritual forces. The sense of this loss of the present on the part of Christianity, and of the task following on from that, was well summed up in the word “*aggiornamento*” (updating). Christianity must be in the present if it is to be able to form the future. So that it might once again be a force to shape the future, John XXIII had convoked the Council without indicating to it any specific problems or programmes. This was the greatness and at the same time the difficulty of the task that was set before the ecclesial assembly.²

In the four years the council met,

“some 2,400 bishops from every corner of the world, from traditionally Catholic countries where the Church enjoyed a virtual monopoly over religious and cultural life, from democratic pluralist nations, from the emerging nation states of Africa and Asia, and from behind the Iron Curtain ... representing an enormous range of opinion, met 168 times, heard some 2,200 speeches, submitted over 4,000 written interventions, consulted with 460 officially designated experts, discussed and debated questions ranging from liturgy to nuclear warfare, and in the end, adopted 16 documents – one of them *Nostra Aetate*.”³

John XXIII, who convened the council, died in 1963. Pope Paul VI then continued the work of the Council including its efforts to produce a document on Jewish-Catholic relations. John XXIII was canonized a saint in April 2014, and Paul VI’s sainthood is in process.

I want to end this discussion with a brief, and therefore, inadequate summary of the results of the Council, but it does provide some context for understanding how *Nostra Aetate* fits with its broader agenda.

The Council:

- Modernized the liturgy. For example, the vernacular replaced Latin as the language of worship and altars were turned around so that priests faced the people rather than *ad orientum*, facing east
- Implemented a renewal of the priesthood and religious life, most visibly that men and women religious were permitted to adopt a more modern forms of dress
- enhanced the role of lay Catholics in aspects of the church, including the liturgy

² <http://www.news.va/en/news/it-was-a-splendid-day-benedict-xvi-recalls>

³ <http://www.ushmm.org/research/the-center-for-advanced-holocaust-studies/programs-ethics-religion-the-holocaust/programs/the-interfaith-story-behind-nostra-aetate/the-interfaith-story-behind-nostra-aetate>

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- identified the church as the "people of God" attuned to the problems and hopes of the world (as opposed to the image of a church as a fortress keeping the world at bay)
- opened dialogue with other non-Catholic churches and with non-Christians (this is where *Nostra Aetate* comes in)

In 1965, Judith Hershcof (now Banki), who was present in Rome during the deliberations on behalf of the American Jewish Committee, wrote:

From the overwhelming vote in its favor, future generations might conclude that the declaration was a routine matter, both substantively and procedurally. In fact, it was from the outset a highly charged matter which became one of several key issues dramatizing the split between liberal and conservative viewpoints within Roman Catholicism and the fierce struggle for control between forces representing these viewpoints at the council. Like some of the other controversial subjects on which there was sharp division between a majority of the bishops and a small, but powerful and influential minority, it was subjected to various procedural delays and other tactics designed to prevent it from coming to a vote. Furthermore, the statement on the Jews became involved in political considerations never intended by its authors and the object of intensive diplomatic representations and political pressures.

During the course of its various formulations, it became something of a bone of contention within the Jewish community as well. There was openly expressed disagreement both as to the intentions and value of the declaration and as to the role, if any, the Jews should play with regard to it and to the Council generally.⁴

In a more recent talk, Banki stated: The struggle over the adoption of this relatively brief document proved to be a genuine cliffhanger. Its fate during the four sessions of the Council seemed tied to a roller coaster.” Banki refers to “the ups and downs, the attempts to eviscerate and destroy the document, [as well as] the campaign of vilification it endured.”⁵

For those who are interested in the details, I recommend Judi’s writings. For our purposes this evening, a few comments on the background and history will have to suffice. The broad context for the creation of a statement on Jews and Judaism was clearly the Second World War, especially the Holocaust, and the recognition on the part of many Christians, including leaders in the Church, that it had been carried out in the heart of Christian Europe by people most of whom identified as Christians.

⁴ Judith Hershcoff (Banki), “The Church and the Jews: The Struggle at Vatican Council II,” in *American Jewish Yearbook*, v. 66, 1965. 100-101.

⁵ <http://www.ushmm.org/research/the-center-for-advanced-holocaust-studies/programs-ethics-religion-the-holocaust/programs/the-interfaith-story-behind-nostra-aetate/the-interfaith-story-behind-nostra-aetate>

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Now, Nazi anti-Semitism was not the same as Christian anti-Judaism. Nazi anti-Semitism was based on the pseudo-scientific racial ideology that emerged in Europe in the late 19th century and defined the Jews (and others) as inferior races that were biologically irredeemable and therefore deserving of extermination. Christian anti-Judaism generally affirmed the basic humanity of Jews and ultimately hoped for their conversion. For the Nazis, Judaism was inexorably in the blood, but for the Church it was more akin to blemish that could be removed by the individual through professing belief in Christ. While this distinction is crucial, it also true that centuries of Christian anti-Judaism, expressed in art, liturgy, and law, helped create the image of the Jew in Western civilization that the Nazis adapted and used so effectively.⁶ As Eugene Fisher has written, "... Christian anti-Judaism was a necessary cause of the Holocaust, but not a sufficient cause. Without it, the Holocaust would most probably not have happened. But a number of other causes, sociological, economic, historical and ideological are necessary even to approach a 'sufficient' explanation for what happened."⁷

In the wake of the Shoah, many Christians, including Catholics, came to believe that they had to confront its implications for Christian theology and self-understanding. Some Catholics and Jews saw the Council as an opportunity for the Church to repudiate its negative teachings about Jews and Judaism. Other Jews dismissed a priori anything the church might say or were opposed Jews engaging the church in any way - or both.⁸

Prior to the convening of the council, a number of important meetings took place between Vatican officials and representatives of the Jewish community, perhaps most importantly the audience between French Jewish historian Jules Isaac and John XXIII on June 13, 1960, during which Isaac presented to the pope a précis of his research on what he termed the Church's "teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism."⁹ It was this meeting that is generally credited with motivating the pope to instruct Cardinal Augustin Bea to draft a statement on the Church's

⁶ See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2013)

⁷ "Toward the Healing of Memory: Catholics, Jews and the Shoa" in *The Continuing Agony: From the Carmelite Convent to the Crosses at Auschwitz*, Global Academic Publishing, 2002. 169.

⁸ The best known expression of this is Joseph Soloveitchik's famous article "Confrontation" that appeared in *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*, 1964 volume 6, #2. This article achieved a certain authoritative status among American Orthodox Jews, though more recently there has been a reevaluation of its conclusions. See https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCQQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.bc.edu%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Ffiles%2Fresearch_sites%2Fcj1%2Ftexts%2Fcenter%2Fconferences%2Fsoloveitchik%2F&ei=ljMcVaLsCtixyATL74DYCQ&usg=AFQjCNHKQkvRRdFM4Javjw802HiQidOlw&sig2=s4GuCkWDIKaIoQ4iyuFBtg

⁹ The key points of the teaching of contempt are: 1) Judaism had become ossified upon the coming of Christ. 2) the Jews were a sensual people incapable of spiritual insight. 3) they were the chief persecutors of Jesus, whom they failed to recognize as the Messiah. 4) they have consequently become a reprobate people, rejected and degraded by God. 5) they are a deicide people. 6) they have been justly expelled from the Holy Land, and are justly doomed to wander the world. 7) they are 'a synagogue of Satan'.

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relations with the Jews. Other Jews, most notably Abraham Joshua Heschel also provided the Vatican with valuable assessments of traditional Catholic attitudes toward the Jews.

On the Catholic side, first and foremost John XXIII deserves significant credit. And though the impetus came from the pope, it was Cardinal Bea who did much of the most important work on the document. Others in the Church, among them Cardinal Johannes Willebrands and Fr. John Oesterreicher, were deeply involved. Oesterreicher was one of several converts to Catholicism from Judaism whose contribution to the writing and eventual passage of *Nostra Aetate* are detailed in John Connelly's *From Enemy to Brother*.¹⁰ In addition, the crucial involvement of the American Church has been amply demonstrated by Rabbi A. James Rudin in his book *Cushing, Spellman, O'Connor: The Surprising Story of How Three American Cardinals Transformed Catholic-Jewish Relations*.¹¹ And it would be remiss not to mention the work of the indefatigable Sister Rose Thering, whose dissertation on the presentation of Jews in Catholic textbooks was pivotal in helping the Church take an honest look at its own history and teaching.

The road from the meeting between John XXIII and Jules Isaac to the final vote in favor of *Nostra Aetate* five years later was indeed bumpy. Within the church, opposition came mainly from two sources. There were those within Church who clung to traditional Christian anti-Judaism and in some cases anti-Semitism. During the first session of the Council, every delegate received a privately printed, 900-page volume called "The Plot against the Church" charging that there was a Jewish fifth column among the Catholic clergy conspiring against the Church; it even justified Hitler's actions against the Jews. The reaction of most Council fathers was indignation, but apparently there were those willing and able to pull something that off. At the second session of the Council a document called "The Jews and the Council in the Light of Holy Scripture and Tradition," was distributed. It cited authoritative Catholic sources supporting the deicide charge, that the curse on the Jews could only be removed by conversion to Christianity and that there was a conspiracy in the council by Jews and Freemasons working on behalf of Communism.¹²

The other source of opposition came from the Arab world, which opposed any rapprochement between the Church and the Jews, lest that somehow lend legitimacy to the state of Israel. In 1963, Gamal Abdel Nasser's *Voice of the Arabs* broadcast that there was a "world Zionist plot to capitalize on the Vatican Council to further the oppression of Palestinian refugees." Prelates from the Arab worlds, as well as Orthodox and Coptic leaders, appealed to the pope not to "absolve" the Jews for the death of Jesus. Whether they were primarily motivated by anti-Semitism and objections to the existence of Israel, or by fear for their communities from the

¹⁰ Harvard University Press, 2012.

¹¹ Wm. B. Erdmans, 2012

¹² Banki, op. cit.

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regimes under which they lived is an important question, but the fact remains that their objections contributed to *Nostra Aetate*'s circuitous path to final approval.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the earliest versions of *Nostra Aetate* addressed Judaism alone. It was only later that the document was expanded to include Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. While there were a number of factors that contributed to this change, one was the understanding that a document that discussed Judaism along with other traditions was much more likely to find favor in the council.

So what does *Nostra Aetate* say about Judaism?

- It repudiates the long standing charge of deicide (that the Jews killed Jesus):
- It affirms the religious bond and spiritual legacy shared by Jews and the Church (the spiritual patrimony to which my title refers)
- It implies that God and the Jews abide in covenant, a recognition that was made explicit by John Paul II and subsequent popes (though how covenantal relationship relates to the Church's teaching about the universal salvific nature of the Christ event remains unresolved, and is, as I will argue in a moment, the most important theological issue in Catholic Jewish dialogue)
- It deplores "all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed at Jews at any time or from any source."
- It stresses the need for accurate biblical interpretation and religious education so that negative views of Jews and Judaism are not presented as biblically based or as authentic Catholic teaching
- It calls for respectful dialogue and collaborative biblical and theological inquiry between Jews and Catholics
- It does not call for the conversion of the Jews.

II

In the light of fifty years of Jewish-Catholic dialogue, one might wonder what all the fuss is about. Many Catholics and Jews have no experience of the pre-Conciliar, pre *Nostra Aetate* church. We should not forget that at that time, *Nostra Aetate* was truly revolutionary. It effectively reversed centuries of the "teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism," which held that the Jews were collectively and perpetually accursed for the death of Jesus and that God replaced them with the Church as the new "Israel." *Nostra Aetate* has been described as a "sea-change" and has been called: "the story of the century"¹³ or the "Copernican revolution in Jewish-Christian relations."¹⁴ It would be hard to over-estimate just how important *Nostra Aetate* is.

¹³ Elmer B. Lazar, *The Story of the Century: Jewish Absolved from Jesus' Death*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1978.

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If I were to pick one aspect of *Nostra Aetate* that had most immediate effect on the Jewish community at the time, it is the repudiation of the deicide charge, even though it did not use that term. It states, “True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today.”

The impact of these words may be difficult for those who came of age in the post Vatican II era to appreciate. However, for Jews of a certain generation being called Christ killers was simply part of life in a Christian world. Growing up in St. Louis, my father and his friends had to take a circuitous route home so as to avoid the Catholic school, lest they be attacked, beaten and called Christ killers. Sister Rose’s research documented how prevalent this idea was in Catholic educational materials, but as Philip Cunningham has recently pointed out, “In North America and Europe such assertions have virtually been removed from RC textbooks.”¹⁵

Nostra Aetate was not the first Christian document to address Jews and Judaism after the Second World War. The World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Episcopal Church in the USA and several German Protestant Churches all issued statements prior to *Nostra Aetate*.¹⁶ However, *Nostra Aetate* came with very high teaching authority from the Roman Catholic Church, which in size and influence, especially as seen in the person of the pope, is unequalled in the Christian world; that makes it especially important. Furthermore, the entire Council was closely watched by the religious world and the media, thus magnifying further the significance of this document.

Nostra Aetate did not address all the issues and tensions between the Church and the Jews. Indeed, it is not fair to expect one 15 sentence chapter to resolve all the theological differences or the historical conflicts. *Nostra Aetate* was supremely important, but it was only the beginning of the development of Catholic thinking about Jews and Judaism that continues today. What *Nostra Aetate* started was a new age of respectful interaction in which distorted and polemical claims about each other's traditions have been replaced by a respectful, even appreciative, approach by Jews and Christians to each other’s religious systems. This has found expression in the Church in many ways.

III

The elaboration of *Nostra Aetate* has been on-going within the Church, especially in official documents.

¹⁴ Gilbert S. Rosenthal, ed. *A Jubilee for Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations*, Eugene Oregon, Pickwick Publication, 2014.

¹⁵ (Midstream, Sep/Oct 2005, p.13)

¹⁶ These document can be found in Franklin Sherman, ed. *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*. Vol. 1: The Road to Reconciliation (1945-1985). Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011.

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[Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate, No. 4](#)

(1974) begins to spell out some of the practical implications of Nostra Aetate. After acknowledging the centuries of “ignorance” and “confrontation,” this document challenges Catholics to “strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism,” and, in a key phrase that lies at the very heart of interreligious dialogue, “to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.” This is a profound statement; after 2000 years of defining Judaism as “a failed religion or, at best, a religion that prepared the way for, and is completed in, Christianity,”¹⁷ the Church was now committing itself to allow Jews to define themselves and their tradition, and affirming the value of their religious experience.

The Guidelines endorse interreligious dialogue, calls for Catholic liturgy, including preaching, and education to replace the prejudicial slanders of the past with a positive approach to Jews and Judaism. Key to this new approach is the recognition of the Jewishness of Jesus and the early church, the complexity of Judaism at the time of Jesus, and that Judaism did not cease to be vital religious tradition after the resurrection.

Each of these points marks a significant shift in Church teaching. For centuries, Christians viewed Jesus as apart from and opposed to Judaism rather than fully within it. Affirming Jesus’ Jewishness not only comports with biblical scholarship but has become a point of connection to Jesus’ people the Jews and an argument for a new, respectful relationship. Acknowledging the diversity of Second Temple Judaism and its ongoing vitality is in marked distinction to the previous teaching that by the first century Judaism was ossified and only survived because of the Jews blind stubbornness. That Jesus was part of a complex, lively Judaism is now viewed as key to understanding Jesus and the entire New Testament. As Pope John Paul II said, The Jewish religion is not extrinsic to us but in a certain way intrinsic to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers, and, in a certain way, it can be said that you are our elder brothers.

[Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church](#) (1985). It picks up the themes in the Guidelines, but provides more substance and details. In the words of the document itself: Religious teaching, catechesis and preaching should be a preparation not only for objectivity, justice, and tolerance but also for understanding and dialogue. Our two traditions are so related that they cannot ignore each other. Mutual knowledge must be encouraged at every level. There is evident in particular of a painful ignorance of the history and traditions of Judaism, of which only negative aspects and often caricature seem to form part of the stock ideas of many Christians. That is what these notes aim to remedy.”

¹⁷ “Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, edited by Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, David Novah, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel and Michael Signer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), xv-xiii.

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In 1998, the Vatican addressed the Holocaust directly in [We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah](#). Note the use of the Hebrew term Shoah; elsewhere the document offers the Hebrew word “teshuvah” as a translation for the English “repentance.” The late Michael Signer referred to this as a “significant linguistic phenomenon.”¹⁸ This presence of Jewish, Hebrew terminology is extraordinary. The decision to use Shoah, I believe, makes it clear that the Church considers the Shoah – that is, the extermination of European Jewry – to be unique and that the Shoah has deep theological significance for the Church.¹⁹ I will return to the issue of the Shoah in a few moments.

Finally, in 2001, the Pontifical Biblical Commission released [The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible](#). This document, written under the leadership of then Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), affirms that the “sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people are a fundamental part of the Christian Bible” and that the New Testament itself acknowledges that the Jewish Scriptures in their own right have a permanent value as divine revelation. This recognition of the value of the Jewish scriptures is a significant change. While Christians have always viewed the “Old Testament” as sacred, there has been a tendency to contrast it to the New Testament, and to contrast the God of the Old Testament negatively to the God of the New Testament. The former was a God of law and judgment, while the latter, a God of forgiveness and love, characterizations that were used to denigrate Jews and Judaism. Affirming the unity of the Old and New Testament has significant implication for the relationship with the Jews as well. One of the most astonishing affirmations of the ongoing relevance of Judaism for Catholicism is the following:

Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. ... On the practical level of exegesis, Christians can ... learn much from Jewish exegesis practised for more than two thousand years, and, in fact, they have learned much in the course of history. For their part, it is to be hoped that Jews themselves can derive profit from Christian exegetical research.

In addition to these major Vatican documents, other church bodies, such as national bishops organizations in the U.S., Germany, Poland, and France, have issued their own statements. Popes have spoken to Jewish delegations at the Vatican, given speeches in synagogues, and addressed Jews and Judaism in theological writings and books. For over 40 years, the Vatican has met regularly with international Jewish bodies. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops meets twice a year with the National Council of Synagogues, and with the Orthodox Union. Chicago has a particularly robust Jewish-Catholic dialogue, including the Jewish-Catholic Scholars Group and this event this evening. My affiliation with the Catholic Theological Union in a chair co-funded by a Jew and a Catholic, of which I am quite proud and which brought me

¹⁸ http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/signer.htm

¹⁹ See Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of heaven and Earth: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 2004).

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great joy, is another fruit of *Nostra Aetate*. Of the 38 regular members of the Council of Centers of Jewish-Christian relations, 24 are housed at Catholic institutions. Finally, we now have several generations of Catholic theologians and scholars for whom delving into the Catholic-Jewish relationship has been a primary undertaking, among whom John Pawlikowski is pre-eminent.

The personal example of the popes has been especially important. John Paul II was the first pope ever to visit a synagogue (or at least since Peter). His trip to Israel in 2000 produced two iconic images. The first was his placement in the Western Wall of a prayer of apology and affirmation of the Jews as a “People of the Covenant.” The second was his greeting six Holocaust survivors, at Yad Vashem, including a concentration camp survivor who credited him with saving her life.

The election of Pope Francis surprised and pleased the Jewish community. Over the past several generations, the center of Catholic life has shifted from Europe and the Northern hemisphere to South America, Africa and Asia. And with this change came the expectation that a new pope would come from one of these communities. For Jews, the idea of a non-European pope brought with it the fear that such a pope would not have a record of experience with the Jewish community and therefore might not be as committed to promoting positive Jewish-Catholic relations as his predecessors. Pope Francis, as it turned out, not only knew Jews but is deeply invested in Jewish-Christian dialogue. His friendship with his co-author Rabbi Abraham Skorka, he repeated statement that “a Christian cannot be an anti-Semite,” and his actions during his trip to Israel are of course welcomed by the Jewish community, but also send a very strong message to Church.

I could give countless more examples; suffice it say that since *Nostra Aetate*, Jewish-Catholic relations at all levels have become part of the fabric of the Church at its highest level and at least in those parts of the world where there are significant Jewish communities. There is no equal to it in breadth or depth in the Christian world.

IV

This does not mean that anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism has disappeared from the Church or that there are no unresolved issues or sources of tension. While the official teaching of the church is that anti-Semitism is a sin, it is unrealistic to expect the elimination, even in 50 years, of centuries of hostility toward Jews among the 1.2 billion Catholics around the world, many in places where there are no viable Jewish communities. Even those actively reject anti-Semitism and are deeply committed to positive Jewish-Christian relations are not immune to the heritage of the teaching of the contempt. One example of how deeply embedded this way of thinking is in the church, is that even Pope Francis, who has demonstrated repeatedly that he is a friend of the Jewish people, has on occasion referred to the Pharisees in a manner that is inconsistent with how Jews and Judaism should be presented in Catholic teaching and catechesis. Unfortunately, examples much more egregious than that are far too prevalent. There is still much work to be done.

Israel

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For the Jewish community, one of the most significant outcomes of Nostra Aetate was the official recognition of the state of Israel and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1993. Less than a century earlier, however, in 1904, Theodore Herzl, credited with founding the Zionist movement, visited Pope Pius X in the hope of obtaining his support. According to Herzl's diary, the pope reaffirmed the theological belief that Jews statelessness was a consequence of their unbelief: "We can't prevent Jews from going to Jerusalem, but we can never sanction it....The Jews have not recognized our Lord and we can not recognize the Jews."

As I pointed out before, 1974 Guidelines on Nostra Aetate teach that Catholics needs to understand Jews as Jews understand themselves – this includes understanding the Jewish connection to the and the state of Israel as understood by Jews themselves. More importantly, the 1985 Notes state: "The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged, not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law." This practical and diplomatic perspective has shaped the way that the Vatican approaches the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and other points of tension between the Holy See and Israel. And it distinguishes the Church from some Protestant churches, both liberal and conservative, who often theologize the state and the conflict in highly problematic ways.

It is unfortunate that more than twenty years after the establishment of diplomatic relations, the two sides have not be able to resolve a handful outstanding problems, primarily involving property and taxes. Despite these administrative issues, when Pope Francis visited Israel, he made a point of laying a wreath on Herzl's grave, an unambiguous repudiation of Pius X's rebuff of Herzl and an affirmation of the centrality of the State of Israel to the Jewish people.

Shoah

Considering how deeply the Shoah affected the Jewish psyche, it should come as no surprise that it continues to point of tension between Jews and Catholics. When John Paul II traveled to Israel in 2000, his visit to Yad Vashem and especially the prayer he place in the Kotel, the Western Wall, provided powerful images of the Church's efforts to come to grips with the Shoah. However, for some critics both within the church and in the Jewish community, the various statements about the Holocaust, including "We Remember", fall short of a full acceptance of the Church's responsibility. For example references to Nazism as a "pagan" ideology are seen to draw too stark a distinction between the Chruch's anti-Judaism and Nazi anti-Semitism.

We Remember states:

"We deeply regret the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the Church. We make our own what is said in the Second Vatican Council's declaration Nostra Aetate, which unequivocally affirms: "The Church . . . mindful of her common patrimony with the Jewish and motivated by the Gospel's spiritual love and by no political considerations, deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and from any source"

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The “regret for that done by sons and daughters of the church” is not expressed on behalf of the church itself. Furthermore, the document claimed that Nazism “had its roots outside of Christianity.” Some see this as an unwillingness for the church itself to admit its responsibility. Over the years, things like the presence of a Carmelite convent at Auschwitz, the canonization of Edith Stein, the pope’s meeting with Kurt Waldheim, and especially the ongoing controversy over the role of Pius XII during the war and his proposed canonization continue to roil the relationship. Regarding Pius XII, the failure to date to open the Vatican archives is a significant sore point. As long as the archives are closed, there will be doubts and unanswered questions. Pope Francis has on several occasions expressed his desire to see the archives opened, but to date they remain closed. Unless and until they are open for scholarly research, questions and doubts will remain. I personally do not believe that there is anything in the archives that will definitely answer the question of whether Pius was a great hero or a villain; history is not that neat and it is most likely that he was neither. In the interest of transparency, the archives should be made available as soon as possible. It will remove an unnecessary source of conflict.

Covenant and Mission

This brings me to what I believe is the most important remaining issue in Jewish-Catholic relations – covenant and mission. As I mentioned at the beginning of my talk, while *Nostra Aetate* implies that the Jewish covenant with God remains in effect, it is not clear exactly what that means. Does *Nostra Aetate* suggest that the Jewish covenant is fully sufficient for Jews, or do Jews, just like everybody else, need Christ? And what, then, about missionary activity in the Jewish community? The Jewish community is very sensitive about this in light of the history of forced conversions and concerns about Jewish survival; any hint that the Church actively wants to witness to Jews threatens the very foundation of the new relationship.

Earlier drafts of *Nostra Aetate* did call for “the reunion of Jewish people with the Church.” Regarding this issue, Abraham Joshua Heschel famously said “A message that regards the Jews as candidates for conversion and proclaims that the destiny of Judaism is to disappear will be abhorred by Jews all over the world.” He was blunt: “I’d rather go to Auschwitz than give up my religion.”²⁰ According to one report, after making this point to Pope Paul VI, the latter picked up a pencil and struck conversionary language out of the *Nostra Aetate*. However, the question of covenant and mission periodically arises. As John Pawlikowski has pointed out:

In an official international Vatican-Jewish dialogue in Venice in 1977 Professor Tomaso Federici, a lay scholar highly respected in Vatican circles, proposed that in light of *Nostra Aetate* Catholicism should formally renounce any proselytizing of the Jews. The official published version of his paper, which appeared only several years later, was altered to call for a rejection of “undue” proselytizing. Cardinal Walter Kasper, a few years ago, argued in his writings that there is no need to proselytize Jews because they have authentic revelation and in virtue of the perspective of Vatican II remain in the covenant. He did add, however, that

²⁰ <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/beginning-beginning-0>

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Catholicism must retain a notion of Christ's universal salvific work. Unfortunately he failed to pursue further how these two theological affirmations might be authentically integrated.²¹

Similarly, in *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*, a joint project of the USCCB Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogue, Catholic scholars stated that the Church:

now recognizes that Jews are also called by God to prepare the world for God's kingdom. Their witness to the kingdom, which did not originate with the Church's experience of Christ crucified and raised, must not be curtailed by seeking the conversion of the Jewish people to Christianity. The distinctive Jewish witness must be sustained if Catholics and Jews are truly to be, as Pope John Paul II has envisioned, "a blessing to one another."²²

This prompted a strong rebuttal from Cardinal Avery Dulles in *America* magazine that created quite a stir at that time.²³ Curiously, some years later, the USCCB felt it needed to respond to what it viewed as certain "ambiguities" in the *Convenant and Mission*. Not only did it raise the issue anew, it provoked a crisis with the Jewish community by stating

"Reflections on Covenant and Mission proposes interreligious dialogue as a form of evangelization that is 'devoid of any intention whatsoever to invite the dialogue partner to baptism.' Though Christian participation in interreligious dialogue would not normally include an explicit invitation to baptism and entrance into the Church, the Christian dialogue partner is always giving witness to the following of Christ to which all are implicitly invited."²⁴

The Jewish community responded with dismay and threatened that such a stance would make dialogue with the Church impossible. A few month later, under the leadership of Cardinal George, the USCCB issued a revised version of its document on ambiguities, from which those two sentences has been removed, thus ending the crisis.

On the subject of the conversion of the Jews, Pope Benedict, in his trilogy on Jesus wrote, "the Church must not concern herself with the conversion of the Jews." And indeed, the Church does not actively seek Jewish converts. The theological question, however, of the nature of the Jewish

²¹ Pawlikowski, *Moving the Dialogue to a New Level* CP5 [http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol3 Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations Volume 3 \(2008\): CP1-12](http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol3%20Studies%20in%20Christian-Jewish%20Relations%20Volume%203%20(2008)%20CP1-12)

²² <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&sqi=2&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.usccb.org%2Fbeliefs-and-teachings%2Fecumenical-and-interreligious%2Fjewish%2Fupload%2FReflections-on-Covenant-and-Mission.pdf&ei=lz0cVb70IpKdygS49oHoCA&usq=AFQjCNGsitGgTa1mcGx-VJ3Cd5ZTG-M6aQ&sig2=xFThFosIgpPyC75xUdIyXIQ>

²³ <http://americamagazine.org/issue/408/article/covenant-and-mission>

²⁴ <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/578-usccb-09june18-1>

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covenant continues remains a topic of debate in Catholic circles and beyond - is there one covenant or two, or one covenant with two parts – something that John has dealt with in some detail. The reason that this question is so difficult is that it touches the very heart of the Jewish-Christian debate - the truth and meaning of the Christ event. This may well be the central “irreconcilable difference” between our two traditions.

And the Jews?

I have focused almost entirely on what the Church has said about the Jews. Does Judaism now have something different to say about the Church? While reciprocity may sound good in theory, the Church and the Jews are not comparable. The Church is a unified institution, while the Jewish community is diverse and fractious. The church has an authoritative voice, the Jews do not. Furthermore, the foundational Jewish text, the Tanakh, is sacred to Christians as is the Old Testament, and Christians encounter Jews – including Jesus, his family and the apostles – in the New Testament as well, Christianity has to explain its relationship to Judaism. Conversely, the New Testament is not sacred to Jews and Jews do not encounter Christians in their scripture or religious life.

Nonetheless, the changes initiated by *Nostra Aetate* have evoked some Jewish responses. The most notable response to this is *Dabru Emet*. On September 10, 2000, a group of four Jewish scholars published “*Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*” as a full-page ad in the *New York Times* and *Baltimore Sun*. In addition to the authors, *Dabru Emet* was endorsed by over 200 rabbis and Jewish academics from around the world. Thus 2015, in addition to marking the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, is also the 15th anniversary of *Dabru Emet*.

The “qualification” is that *Dabru Emet* differs from *Nostra Aetate* in one significant way. *Nostra Aetate* is an authoritative document of the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore can be said to speak for the Church. *Dabru Emet* has no authority other than the reputations of the authors and those who endorsed it. Nonetheless, its publication was heralded as a significant development in Jewish-Christian relations. *Nostra Aetate* was meant to be definitive, *Dabru Emet*, on the other hand, represented only the opinion of its authors and was intended to provoke conversation within the Jewish community, which it certainly did, but that’s a story for another day.

Conclusion

Certainly neither the Jewish nor the Catholic community is sufficiently aware of the profound changes of the last fifty years. Our schools, from the seminaries on down should do more to teach about this revolution so that old images, behaviors and fears can be overcome and new models of mutual understanding and of working together to respond to the needs of our shared community can emerge.

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But even if we accept that Judaism and Christianity have irreconcilable differences and that there will be times when Jews and Catholics will butt heads, the fifty years of Jewish Catholic relations since *Nostra Aetate* are remarkable and worthy of celebration.²⁵ At a time when religion is often seen as a negative force in the world, *Nostra Aetate* and what it set in motion demonstrate that there are other possibilities.

²⁵ In appreciating the significance of NA, here is what Sr. Mary Boys writes in *Midstream*, September/October 2005: “What *Nostra Aetate* actually says is important, but what is launched is far more significant. Religious textbooks underwent significant revisions, subsequent documents extended and deepened *Nostra Aetate*, dialogue groups were formed, and scholarship on Jewish-Christian relations developed. Moreover, structures were put in place: Pope Paul VI established the Vatican’s Commission of Religious Relations with the Jews in 1974; less than a month after the formal closing of Vatican II, the U.S. Catholic bishops opened the staff office of the Commission on Ecumenical Affairs in Washington, D.C. (now the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). Such institutional commitments, combined with the flourishing of scholarship, including chairs in Judaica at many Catholic colleges and universities and recent establishment of centers for Christian-Jewish study, mean that what began with *Nostra Aetate* is firmly embedded in the life of the Church. While some of the far right of the church continue to resist what Vatican II initiated ... and some church officials seem to minimize the significance of *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent developments, the theological advances of Vatican II will not be overturned