

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

**Moving the Christian-Jewish Dialogue to a New Level:
Can it Happen?****John T. Pawlikowski, OSM
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In an address to the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1986 the Canadian theologian Gregory Baum, who served as an expert at Vatican Council II and worked on the Council document *Nostra Aetate*, argued that "the Church's recognition of the spiritual status of the Jewish religion is the most dramatic example of doctrinal turn-about in the age-old magisterium ordinarium to occur at the Council." For centuries Western Christian theology, beginning with that of most of the major second century Church Fathers, was infected with a viewpoint which saw the Church as replacing "old" Israel in the covenantal relationship with God. This replacement theology relegated Jews to a miserable and marginal status which could be overcome only through conversion.

Nostra Aetate, together with many parallel Protestant documents, fundamentally changed Christianity's theological posture relative to Jews and Judaism that had permeated its theology, art, and pastoral practice for nearly eighteen hundred years. Jews were now to be seen as integral to the ongoing divine covenant. Jesus and early Christianity were portrayed as deeply rooted in a constructive sense in the religiosity of Second Temple Judaism (particularly its Pharisaic branch). Jews were not to be held collectively accountable for the death of Jesus. Vatican II did not "forgive" Jews of the so-called crime of deicide as some newspaper headlines proclaimed. Rather it argued that there existed no basis for such a charge in the first place.

Certainly the past four decades have seen substantial, even monumental, changes in the way Christians present Jews and Judaism in their educational materials, in understanding and combating anti-Semitism, and in incorporating the reality of the *Shoah* into their religious consciousness. Though the situation is quite different in terms of Jewish perceptions of Christianity, there is no question that many Jews now look far more positively on the Church. The Christian-Jewish relationship today differs greatly from what it was fifty years ago. We must not lose sight of this new reality as we ask what developments are still needed and what obstacles still remain as we prepare to move to the next level in our relationship.

An initial step that must be taken if the thrust of *Nostra Aetate*, §4 is to be advanced is determined opposition to those forces attempting to vitiate the fundamental theological significance of this Council statement on the Church and the Jewish People. Current voices, primarily within conservative circles in Rome, are arguing that *Nostra Aetate* was only a "pastoral document" with no theological implications. The undiluted nonsense of this position must be made clear. In its utter reversal of the classical Christian view of the Jewish People's covenantal exclusion after the coming of Christ, a view that had significant impact on the Church's articulation of Christology, *Nostra Aetate* cannot be seen as anything but theological. To say otherwise is to radically distort the vision of Vatican II.

In recent years in the USA Cardinal Avery Dulles has been asserting that Vatican II never resolved the question of Jewish covenantal inclusion from a Christian perspective. His first strong attack was on those who argued that it did in the context of a study document issued by the ongoing dialogue between the National Council of Synagogues and the Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations in the United States. In a major address at the 2005 Washington conference celebrating the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* he continued and in some ways deepened this attack, maintaining that we need to reintroduce the teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews in which several passages appear to present the Jewish covenant as abrogated after Christ. This presentation subsequently appeared in the conservative publication *First Things*.¹

Certainly *Nostra Aetate* did not resolve all questions regarding a Christian theological perspective on the Church's relationship with Judaism, including the seeming contradiction between Romans 9-11, which it uses as the basic building block for its new view of Judaism. and the texts in Hebrews, which it does not mention. But it brought conciliar and papal authority to its selection of Romans 9-11 with its insistence on Jewish covenantal inclusion after Christ as the prevailing text for understanding Judaism's role today in a theological context. This view has been sustained in subsequent Vatican statements and in several of the late Pope John Paul II's many pronouncements on Christian-Jewish Relations. Dulles stands on very, very shaky grounds in terms of the official Catholic teaching. In his major address at an October 2005 commemoration of *Nostra Aetate* in Rome, Rabbi David Rosen of the American Jewish Committee and currently Chair of the International Jewish Committee for International Consultations (IJCIC) raised serious questions about the Dulles' perspective and its status in contemporary Catholicism. He was assured privately that Dulles was presenting a strictly "personal" position in his presentations and articles. A joint communiqué from the ongoing dialogue between the National Council of Synagogues and the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs also took issue with the Dulles' perspective without, however, mentioning him by name. The problem is that there has been no public challenge to Dulles' views from within the Vatican or from national hierarchies. As a leading Christian theologian many bishops look to Dulles for leadership on theological questions. I myself have been in discussions of Dulles' views where several bishops, along with one Jewish speaker, wholeheartedly endorsed his position. A public – not merely a behind the scenes – reaffirmation of *Nostra Aetate* is needed at a time when many parts of Vatican II are being undermined in certain sectors of the Church. There simply cannot be an advance to a new level if the basic foundation for the new dialogue launched by Vatican II is allowed to crumble.

A second challenge confronting the new theology of the Jewish-Christian relationship which has been emerging from *Nostra Aetate* and parallel Protestant documents² is the minimal impact these documents have had on Christian internal theological thinking apart from a dialogical setting. Jewish participants in the dialogue with Christians have at times noted this reality with dismay. They are right in expressing their concern. Do these declarations on the Church's relationship with the Jewish people have relevance only when Christians are actually speaking with Jews? Or are they also, with consistency, part of the intra-Christian conversation about Christianity's theological identity? Only if we begin to see the latter development can we say that there has been genuine reception of *Nostra Aetate* and similar Protestant documents.

There is a current ray of hope in this regard. In December 2006 the International Council of Christians and Jews in partnership with the office on interreligious relations at the World Council

¹ See Avery Dulles, "The Covenant with Israel," *First Things*, Nov., 2005.

² There have been no real equivalent Orthodox Christian documents.

of Churches (WCC), then headed by Dr. Hans Ucko, sponsored a consultation on the new WCC Faith and Order statement on the Church which is in process in Boldern, Switzerland. Several of the key leaders working on this document met for several days with a small group of Christian and Jewish scholars to examine thoroughly the current text of this major document which would have significant implication for ecclesiological understanding within all three major branches of the Christian community. They left the meeting with copious notes for suggested changes that would bring far greater congruity between the text of this statement on the Church and the various documents on Christian-Jewish relations issued by various Christian churches over the past four decades, as well as with current scholarly research on Christian-Jewish relations. If in fact they are able to integrate most of these proposed changes into the Faith and Order statement, as they promised they would try to do, this would mark a positive breakthrough in terms of mainstreaming the new theology of the Jewish People which has been developing within the dialogue. Whether their efforts will prove successful remains an open question.

Other rays of hope in terms of bringing the theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship into the mainstream of Church thinking can be seen in the writings of a few noteworthy theologians such as Johannes-Baptist Metz. He has clearly acknowledged the overall theological implications of the documents on Christian-Jewish relations issued by the churches in the last forty years. Metz has insisted that these implications go far beyond the parameters of the Christian-Jewish dialogue. Especially after the Holocaust, Metz argues, they involve "a revision of Christian theology itself." But the list of Christian theologians who share Metz's mindset remains short. Moving to the next level of the dialogue will require many more signatories.

An important European church document that has recognized the validity of Metz's argument is the 2001 statement from the Leuvenberg Church Fellowship, an association of the Reformation churches in Europe. Its document *Church and Israel*, published both in German and English, emphasizes that the relationship between the Church and Israel is not a marginal issue for Christianity. Rather it represents a central dimension of ecclesiology. The relationship with Israel is seen in this document as an indispensable foundation of Christian faith. The Church is required to reflect on its relationship with Judaism because of its profound linkage to the Jewish community in its beginnings. "The biblical texts referring to these beginnings" according to this document, "do not only speak of the historical origin of the Church and thus of the historical relation with Israel; they also form the starting point and critical point of reference (*fons et iudex*) for all theological reflection."³ Such a declaration needs to become the rule rather than an exception in Christian circles. One current effort to help move the church in this direction is the ongoing "Christ and the Jewish People Consultation" co-sponsored by the Catholic University of Leuven, Boston College, Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

As Christianity enhances its global reach, the Christian-Jewish dialogue will have to be brought into a theological context wider than the traditional North Atlantic setting. In response to the recent urgings of a number of scholars, we need to recognize anew the historic theologies of the East where Christian identity has often been expressed in ways quite different from Western Christian theologies which are so often premised on the Church as the replacement for Israel in the divine-human covenantal relationship. Today moving beyond the common dominance of Western theology in the Christian-Jewish dialogue will require extending the impact of *Nostra Aetate* and its sister statements to theological discussions in Africa and Asia. Through a Cameroon conference co-sponsored several years ago by the World Jewish Congress and the World

³ See *Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, June 24, 2001 at: <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=1009> .

Council of Churches and through the writings of a few Asian theologians such as Peter Phan, a very modest beginning has been made in this regard. But the Vatican concern regarding Phan's writings, including his reflections on the Christian-Jewish relationship,⁴ coupled with the attitudes of influential Asian theologians such as Wesley Ariarajah, formerly of the World Council of Churches, who belittles any theological significance for Jesus' Jewishness (which he acknowledges) will continue to be a major challenge to such outreach.

As a Christian theologian in the dialogue who has pursued the issues from the Christian perspective I am compelled to assert that Jews also will have to re-examine the classical Jewish theology of Christianity, such as it is. Admittedly, the situation for Judaism in this regard bears little parallel to the challenge faced by Christians. However, the groundbreaking Jewish document *Dabru Emet* will need to gain greater respect within the Jewish theological community along with the writings of such scholars as Irving Greenberg, Elliot Wolfson, Daniel Boyarin, Michael Signer, David Novak, Edward Kessler, Michael Kogan, and Byron Sherwin, all of whom have reflected in new and differing ways on the Jewish-Christian relationship. New joint Jewish-Christian scholarship is also fundamentally reconceiving our understanding of the so-called "parting of the ways" through such projects as the joint Oxford University-Princeton University study group. This poses significant questions for the theological identities of both the Jewish and the Christian communities as it increasingly moves in the direction of showing that Jesus never intended to begin a totally new religious community in his own lifetime and that Jews and Christians remained interlocked for several centuries under a wide Jewish umbrella. If this new scholarship on the first several centuries becomes the dominant interpretation it will pose fundamental challenges especially for Christian theological self-identity and for Jewish identity as well. The open question is whether either or both communities will be able to entertain such challenges or will fearfully retreat to their conventional theological outlooks on the Jewish-Christian relationship on the grounds that "faith" cannot be determined by historical scholarship.

Thus far this increased re-examination of the so-called "parting of the ways" clearly has had little or no impact on theological perceptions of the Jewish-Christian relationship among important religious leaders and scholars. One example of such "non-influence" can be found in the recent theological exchange between Pope Benedict XVI and the renowned Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner which has been highly praised in certain Christian and Jewish circles. It appears that neither contributor to this discussion is aware of this new scholarship. Each continues to perpetuate standard, but increasingly shaky, descriptions of the history and nature of the split between the two faith communities now being relegated to the category of "stereotypes."

One notable exception to this prevailing lack of awareness of the new scholarship was the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago. A genuine pioneer in rethinking Christian-Jewish relations at the episcopal level, Bernardin embraced the views of Dr. Robin Scroggs, an important biblical scholar involved in the new research on "the parting of the ways." Scroggs has taught at Chicago Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary in New York. In his effort to simplify the very complex picture that is emerging of the first several centuries of the common era Scroggs emphasizes the following points: (1) The movement begun by Jesus and continued after his death in Palestine can best be described as a reform movement within Judaism. Little or no evidence exists to suggest a separate sense of identity within the emerging Christian community; (2) Paul understood his mission to the Gentiles as fundamentally a mission out of Judaism which aimed at extending God's original and continuing call to the Jewish People to the Gentiles; (3) It is difficult to speak of a separate Christian reality prior to the end of the Jewish

⁴ Phan was a signatory of *A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People*, the September 1, 2002 statement by the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish relations.

war with the Romans in 70 CE. Followers of Jesus did not seem on the whole to understand themselves as part of a religion separate from Judaism. A distinctive Christian identity began to develop only after the Roman-Jewish war. The research which postdates that of Scroggs tends to push the separation even later, perhaps as late as the fourth century. Certainly there were distinctive identities such as "Jewish," "Jewish Christian," "Christian Jews," "Gentiles," but these groups did not necessarily view their "distinctiveness" as a reason for total separation. Some scholars today would argue that even "Christ worship" did not bring about a total split; (4) The later parts of the New Testament do exhibit the beginnings of some sense of distancing often leading to hostility towards each other (some would argue that "synagogue of satan" language in the gospel of John is the result of such hostility among rival Christian Jewish groups).

In my judgment, the degree to which we advance the dialogue in the coming years will be determined by whether and how we incorporate this significantly new understanding of "parting of the ways," in either faith community.. It is never easy for any religious community to readjust its basic faith identity. Most Christian churches took a major step in that direction with their repudiation of theologies of Jewish covenantal displacement which frequently served as an important cornerstone of their Christological affirmations. Only time will tell whether a second step can be taken by the Christian community and a first step by the Jewish community in response to the emergent consciousness that the account of the Jewish-Christian separation is simply not as as it has been presented for centuries.

This new scholarship will certainly have great significance for liturgy or worship, an area still largely untouched by *Nostra Aetate* and the parallel Protestant documents. In 1988 the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Committee on Liturgy in collaboration with the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs issued an excellent document on the impact of the new thinking on Christian-Jewish relations on worship. Regrettably this document, *God's Mercy Endures Forever*, received virtually no promotion and is basically unknown among liturgists. While there has been talk of it being reissued, the current climate in the Catholic Church leaves little room for optimism.

The controversy regarding appropriate prayer for the Jewish people in Catholic liturgy has been with us since the time of Pope John XXIII. Prior to Vatican Council II John XXIII removed the term "perfidious" from the Good Friday prayer. Just before the Council's promulgation of the Declaration on the Church and the Jewish People in 1965, Pope Paul VI eliminated the negative language about the Jews (e.g., their "blindness") from the Good Friday liturgy. However, the prayer's basic conversionist tone was left intact.

The 1970 Missal, the definitive response to the liturgical changes mandated by Vatican II, further revised the 1965 prayer by positively acknowledging the Jewish People's faithfulness to God and by leaving open-ended what might be the eschatological resolution of the apparent conflict between notions of Christ's universal salvific action and ongoing Jewish covenantal commitment. This prayer is clearly in the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* which totally rejected the almost two millennia of Christian theological perspectives on the Jews without offering a definitive replacement. It left that task to subsequent generations of theologians and biblical scholars, a task which they in fact have taken up since the end of the Council.

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 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.

The controversial statement "Reflections on Covenant and Mission"⁵ issued as a study document from the ongoing dialogue between the USCCB's Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues which has drawn praise from Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, Cardinal Kasper's predecessor, and the statement from the ecumenical scholars' group on Christian-Jewish Relations "A Sacred Obligation"⁶ both called for a cessation of missionizing towards Jews. Cardinal Avery Dulles wrote a strong critique of the former.⁷

The discussion about the Good Friday Prayer for the Jews in the context of Pope Benedict's *Motu Proprio* on the Latin liturgy began in the summer of 2007 when word began to emerge that the document was on the horizon. Groups long associated with efforts at Christian-Jewish understanding after Vatican II such as the Committee of German Catholics and Jews, the International Council of Christians and Jews, the Austrian Coordinating Council on Christian-Jewish Relations, and the North American Council of Centers on Christian-Jewish Relations, among others, sent messages to the Vatican urging that the Latin version of the 1970 prayer be inserted into the 1962 Missal for Good Friday. Prominent church leaders such as Cardinal Karl Lehmann of Germany and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops weighed in as well as several Jewish groups including the Vatican's official Jewish dialogue partner, the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), and the Chief Rabbis of Israel. Christians and Jews were equally concerned about the prayer. It was not a one-sided Jewish protest as frequently erroneously presented by the popular press.

In late August the Papal Secretary of State Cardinal Bertone publicly acknowledged these concerns and suggested that the best solution might be to make the 1970 prayer the common text for both missals. This proposal, however, was disregarded with the announcement that the Pope would compose a new prayer. While the papal prayer removes the most offensive language from the 1962 Missal it retains a clearly conversionist perspective. It has engendered much controversy with protests coming from many countries..Jewish groups in Germany, Italy and Austria moved to suspend any Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

Reflection on the current controversy raises several points:

- Dialogue is very much an encounter of people, not merely an academic theological exercise. In the spirit of the Vatican's own 1974 Guidelines on Catholic-Jewish Relations it is vital for Catholics to come to understand, in light of the long history of Christian antisemitism and the Holocaust, why the issue of "conversion" strikes such a raw nerve within the Jewish community. In fairness, Jews will also need to appreciate that "mission" stands at the core of Christian identity and hence cannot be reinterpreted easily. In the end authentic dialogue involves mutual learning. This new prayer conveys no sense of this.
- Jews need reassurance that use of this papal prayer will not generate new concrete pro-

⁵ See http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ncs_usccb120802.htm

⁶ See http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/sites/partners/csg/Sacred_Obligation.htm

⁷ See Cardinal Avery Dulles, SJ, "Covenant and Mission" in *America*, Oct. 21, 2002.

grams aimed at proselytizing Jews. In recent days Cardinal Kasper and others have attempted to set this prayer in a totally eschatological context. Cardinal Kasper has argued this eschatological perspective in relation to Romans 11 on which the new papal prayer is based. There was hope that clarification of the prayer from the Vatican would explicitly support this eschatological interpretation, but it did not. Whether such a reading endures an open question. There is little hope of changing the prayer at this point. But it is possible to leave it strictly a prayer devoid of any practical missionizing programming.

- A prayer on Good Friday, especially given what this day often entailed historically in terms of Jewish suffering, should not become the occasion for the proclamation of a definitive new theology of the Church and the Jewish people. The 1970 prayer is superior to the new papal prayer because it affirms Jewish faithfulness without settling the question of how this impacts Christian notions of ultimate salvation. That is a task for theologians not for the faithful at prayer on Good Friday. The theology behind this not so new prayer – which could have been written prior to Vatican II – takes no account of what Gregory Baum, one of the drafters of *Nostra Aetate*, has termed this document's radical transformation of ordinary Catholic teaching on the Jewish question which he regards as the most striking turnabout to emerge from Vatican II.
- We need to recommit to the Christian-Jewish encounter at this critical moment. Silence will get us nowhere. Various Christian and Jewish groups, including the USCCB, have spoken out for such continuation despite the pain that the papal prayer has produced. Two special opportunities present themselves in the near-term. The October 2008 Synod of Bishops in Rome will focus on the Bible and has placed the issue of Jewish-Christian relations on its preliminary agenda. And the jubilee celebration of St. Paul offers the possibility of bringing to popular attention the emerging view of Paul as a person quite positive on Judaism rather than merely an opponent of "the law." Both of these opportunities need to be pursued in earnest as a countermeasure to the negative impact of the new prayer.

The situation regarding the prayer for the Jews in the 1962 missal has been handled badly from start to finish. But the controversy may still open the possibility of new learning and renewed commitment to Catholic-Jewish reconciliation.

To advance the dialogue we shall also have to find a way to discuss the issue of the land, including the State of Israel, in a way that does not polarize relations between Jews and Christians. Some years ago in his still important book *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Theological Foundations*,⁸ Peter von der Osten-Sacken, drawing upon a quote from the late David Flusser, put forth the issue as central for any theological discussion within the dialogue: "A Christian theology of Judaism that does not affirm the divinely willed tie between Israel and the Land is impracticable in our day." If von der Osten-Sacken and Flusser are not taken seriously with regard to the inclusion of the land issue we will surely come under the scrutiny of the 1974 Vatican guidelines issued for the tenth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* which rightly insisted that Christians must come to understand Jews as they define themselves. And, as von der Osten-Sacken rightly argues, the vast majority of Jews today see some connection to the land of Israel as integral to their self-identity, as varied as the interpretation of that connection may be. Noted biblical scholars such as W.D. Davies and Walter Brueggemann stood at the core of Israel's biblical tradition. And, while this tradition receives virtually no mention in the New Testament, biblical scholar John Townsend has shown that there is little evidence of its repudiation. In fact, if the emerging biblical scholarship

⁸ Fortress Press, 1986.

that places Jesus and the early Christian community squarely within the setting of first century Judaism continues to gain support, Christians will be forced into recognizing the land tradition as an integral part of early Christian theology.

There is no question that Christianity and Judaism followed separate paths as time went on, even paths marked by inherent hostility. The patristic anti-Judaic theology which stressed Jewish expulsion from the land as a component of the "perpetual wandering theology" of the Jewish People severed Jewish roots to the land in the Christian mind. As Christianity spread into a global setting it tended, particularly in its Catholic and Protestant sectors, to place a high value on "universality" as a vital element of its basic identity, marginalizing ties to the land of its origins. This theology continued to find resonance among influential twentieth century biblical scholars such as Martin Noth. It was this perspective which, for several decades, clearly influenced the initial Vatican and papal position on Zionism and the political state it conceived until the position was formally reversed in the accords signed by the Vatican and the Holy See during the pontificate of John Paul II.

While I totally repudiate the classical "perpetual wandering theology" in Christianity and do acknowledge that the "land tradition" was present within the Jewish-based setting of most of early Christianity, I do recognize validity in the "universality" distinction today. As I have written elsewhere, Berlin, London, Chicago, Sao Paulo, Manila, etc. are as "sacred" for Christianity as is Jerusalem. Christians do not have a sense of living in *diaspora* theologically in the same manner as Jews. But that does not mean that I fail to acknowledge the geographic and cultural diversity within Judaism nor that I regard Jewish "particularity" as automatically inferior to Christian "universality." I would instead see them as existing in creative tension with one another. This is an issue that needs further exploration and development, at least partially in partnership with Jewish scholars. I commend contemporary scholars such as Richard Lux of the Sacred Heart School of Theology in Wisconsin for beginning work on a scholarly effort in terms of the land tradition in Christian theology.⁹

We also cannot avoid the more political discussion regarding the State of Israel. While Christians, given their own failures in the political area, should not preach to Jews from a supposed moral high ground, there is need for the ability to mount a serious discussion about certain policies of the Israeli government. I have tried to do so in connection with the last war with Lebanon and more recently regarding the situation in Gaza. While so-called "facts" are often manipulated by all sides, there is need for a serious conversation about these issues. While full agreement may not be reached, it will at least result in a better understanding of each other's positions. For Christians the Christian "just war" tradition must be drawn in to inform such situations of conflict. Given the long history of this tradition, it may be that Christians can assist Jewish partners in thinking about such questions from a moral perspective. As Jewish ethical and political theorist Michael Walzer argued some years ago, certain pertinent Christian texts such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace (May 3, 1983) may enhance such discussions. A dialogue of this nature may also help Christians better appreciate why basic survival questions assume such stature within contemporary Jewish consciousness.

Any further advance in Christian-Jewish relations will also require that the issue of mission and evangelization be put on the table. Recently Pope Benedict XVI strongly reiterated the central role of evangelization for Christians, a statement similar to those currently coming from various Protestant communities. For example, a major Evangelical Christian statement approved at an

⁹ See, for example in this Volume, the article "The Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisra'el*) in Jewish and Christian Understanding." by Richard Lux.

international conference in Bermuda reiterating a Christian mandate to convert Jews, was seconded in a full-page statement by the World Evangelical Alliance published in the *New York Times* on March 28, 2008.

Nowhere in statements such as these are Jews explicitly exempted. The only exception at the level of Christianity's top leadership is a statement some years ago by Cardinal Walter Kasper in which he argued that there is no need to proselytize Jews because they are already in a covenantal relationship with God. But Kasper has never developed this "theological kernel" and has also spoken of the need to maintain a universal significance for Christ without indicating how such an assertion relates to his "no proselytizing" thesis.

The issue of mission and evangelization has been a difficult issue for some time. The proposed rejection of any notion of mission to the Jews in documents such as the ecumenical theological statement *A Sacred Obligation* and the study document released by the ongoing dialogue between the U.S. Bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues titled *Reflections on Covenant and Mission* has encountered strong opposition in sectors of Christianity. The Southern Baptists attacked these documents as well as the Pontifical Biblical Commission's landmark statement on the Jews and their Scriptures in the New Testament released in 2001. On this point Cardinal Avery Dulles took strong exception to *Reflections on Covenant and Mission* in his essay *Covenant and Mission* mentioned above.

Within Catholicism the concrete effort to convert Jews has never been quite as strong as within Protestantism. Though the issue has been pretty much kept under wraps since Vatican Council II, in my view and the view of others it has remained a central, unresolved question in the Christian-Jewish dialogue which might surface at any moment within Catholicism. As indicated above, Catholic lay scholar Tomasso Federici spoke to it in 1978 in Venice calling for the formal termination of any Catholic mission to the Jews on the grounds that the Jews, in light of *Nostra Aetate*, were now recognized as standing within the divine covenantal framework and as possessing authentic revelation from the Christian theological perspective. These same points have been used by Cardinal Kasper. In fact *Reflections on Covenant and Mission* represents an effort to develop further the ideas Kasper has put forth on mission to the Jews, something he himself urged in talks at Sacred Heart University and Boston College. This effort has also received praise from Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy who served as President of the Holy See's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews prior to Cardinal Kasper.

Obviously there is no easy resolution of this issue of mission to the Jews. Mission has stood at the heart of Christian self-understanding throughout the centuries. To renounce it relative to Jews is to touch the very nerve center of the Christian faith. Some Christians have argued that such a renunciation would represent a failure to love Jews because there is no greater love a Christian can offer anyone than the love made present in the life of Jesus. Certainly we must leave open the possibility of individual conversion in either direction – Jew to Christian or Christian to Jew. But as a theological principle I support Cardinal Kasper's argument that the Church has no formal obligation to espouse the conversion of the Jews to Christianity through organized missionary efforts. Aware that this affirmation can open a Pandora's box in terms of mission and other world religions, this controversial question for Christians needs serious ongoing discussion. We need to ask whether an effort to convert others does not in fact represent an outlook in which non-Christians, including Jews, are perceived as fundamentally inferior and hence is a basic affront to human rights and the freedom of conscience proclaimed as contemporary Catholic belief in Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom. For the moment the best we can say is what *A Sacred Obligation* stated in §7: "Christians should not target Jews for Conversion." The document then adds that "In view of our conviction that Jews are in an eternal covenant with God, we

renounce missionary efforts directed at converting Jews. At the same time, we welcome opportunities for Jews and Christians to bear witness to their respective experiences of God's saving ways. Neither can properly claim to possess knowledge of God entirely or exclusively."

In closing I briefly raise a few additional issues. The first is the need for an outreach to other world religions, especially Islam, without undercutting the special nature of the Jewish-Christian relationship. Two interrelated points must be made in this regard. Firstly, when presenting points of Christian self-understanding in this extended interreligious dialogue, the important changes in the Church's identity emerging from the new biblical and theological insights into the Christian-Jewish relationship must be front and center. This is especially true for the dialogue with Islam (where theological exchange should be encouraged) since it involves inter-covenantal thinking. The Christian-Jewish relationship stands at the core of how Christianity presents itself. Hence this is the second point in terms of the wider interreligious dialogue: Christianity's integral bonding with Judaism, as the late Pope John Paul II often spoke about the relationship, must become central to the way the Church presents itself in these other dialogues.

There is also need to indicate the relevance this emerging theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship has beyond the North Atlantic region. As one of his many efforts to underscore this new, central challenge for the Christian-Jewish dialogue for the twenty-first century, Dr. Hans Ucko, formerly of the World Council of Churches, co-sponsored a noteworthy conference with the World Jewish Congress in the West African country of the Cameroons. Asian scholars Peter Phan and Wesley Ariarajah have also begun to address this question recently, though in quite different ways.

Two somewhat interrelated opportunities currently before us must also be pursued: the October 2008 Roman Catholic Bishops' Synod on the theme of the Bible, and Pope Benedict XVI's proclamation of a jubilee year in honor of St. Paul, to begin in June 2008. The preliminary material developed for the Bishops' Synod includes reference to the Christian-Jewish relationship – a theme which must be sustained in the discussions at the Synod itself and in its final document. Hence, bishops who will be attending the Synod must be made aware of the importance of this theme and urged to speak to it. Suggestions in this regard have already been put forth by the International Council of Christians and Jews and several of its member organizations. The Synod represents a golden opportunity to promote the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 2001 document on the Jews and their Scriptures in the New Testament. This document, which includes several groundbreaking statements such as the argument that Jewish interpretations of messianic passages in the Bible have a validity of their own, must be moved to a central place in Christian consciousness if it is to realize its full potential. The Synod certainly provides such an opportunity.

The Vatican has stressed that the jubilee year in honor of St. Paul should take on an ecumenical dimension. It is important that the issue of St. Paul and the Jews should be addressed both within the Bishops' Synod and in the many conferences and events planned for the jubilee year. A key question confronting us during this jubilee year is: What image of Paul will emerge? Will the dominant emerging image be the Paul in the book of Acts which has often served as a basis for the polarizing theology of law and gospel which has done much harm to Christian-Jewish relations over the centuries? Or will the jubilee replace that image with one based on more recent scholarship which sees Paul as very positive on the Torah and on Judaism while he struggles to find ways to incorporate Gentiles into the covenantal framework, even to the point, which the late Scripture scholar Raymond Brown made, that if Paul had fathered a son he would have had him circumcised as a sign of his continuing high regard for Judaism? Obviously it is my conviction that the second image must become better rooted in Christian understanding if the dialogue is to

take a major step forward.

Finally, the growing complexity of the dialogue due to newly emergent conservative trends within the Christian churches, particularly within Catholicism, must be recognized. The promotion of Jewish-Christian reconciliation was born out of the overall spirit of reform launched by Vatican Council II. If that reform spirit is undermined, as it appears to be in many instances today, it is bound to also specifically affect the Christian-Jewish dialogue. Those who have spent four decades and more promoting *Nostra Aetate* have generally done so out of a more comprehensive commitment to the reforms of Vatican II. If the Jewish partners in the dialogue try to isolate the Christian-Jewish dialogue from the efforts to undo this wider reform movement within Christianity, tensions with those who have been the bulwark of the implementation of *Nostra Aetate* up till now may well arise.

For many who have been deeply involved in rethinking the theology of the Jewish-Christian relationship over the years new models for understanding this complex relationship have begun to emerge. The language of "mother-daughter," "elder and younger brother," single/double covenant now seems inadequate. Among the newly emerging images of the Christian-Jewish relationship is the notion of "siblings" advanced by Jewish scholars Alan Segal and the late Hayim Perelmuter which argues that two new communities – rabbinic Judaism and the Christian church – resulted from the revolution taking place in Second Temple Judaism. Both went beyond former incarnations of Judaism in their basic message. This model stresses continued bonding ("siblings" remain connected no matter distinctive they become) while also allowing for recognition that Christianity is far more than Judaism for the Gentiles. A similar image put forth by Mary Boys in *Has God Only One Blessing?* depicts Jews and Christians as "fraternal twins." Positing a somewhat deeper connection between Jews and Christians than the "siblings" model. Her model may in fact tilt a bit too much towards the "connected" rather than the "disconnected" side of the relationship. While their bondedness needs emphasis and Christianity needs to recover its Jewish roots, it is necessary to stress that Judaism and Christianity over the centuries have become distinctive religious communities. Postbiblical Judaism and Christianity differ in significant ways in their approach to religious understanding and this must not be glossed over.

Theologian Clark Williamson, author of important works on the Christian-Jewish relationship such as *A Guest in the House of Israel*, argues for a basic relationship model of "partners in waiting." This more open-ended image lacks the emphasis on inherent bonding contained in the "siblings" or "fraternal twins" models. but it implies linkage in terms of future hope. There is also a sense of common witness to the world implicit in Williamson's model. The University of California scholar Daniel Boyarin has proposed the thesis that what finally resulted from the complex social and religious revolution in Second Temple Judaism were two, new distinct religious communities known as rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. Thus Boyarin implies that we should image the Christian-Jewish relationship in terms of "co-emergent religious communities" – a perspective which accounts fairly well for the historical evidence now at hand in terms of the multiplicity of "Judaisms" at the time of Jesus and for the gradual process of separation which was outlined above. But it is weaker than the other images in stressing the continued bonding between church and synagogue. It is obvious to all the scholars involved in this rethinking that no simple straight lines connect biblical Judaism to rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. Certainly a connection remains, but it is not as linear as once believed. New models may well appear that will capture more adequately the complexity of the relationship.

Even after more than four decades since Vatican II's and the Protestant community's substantial turnabout on the question, we are still at an early stage in the process of rethinking the Christian-Jewish relationship. It took almost two millennia to forge the negative theology of religious plural-

ism which Vatican II abrogated. As Christians we will likely never come to a point where our Christological affirmations will lead us to a theology of religious pluralism that will be in total agreement with the perspectives of Judaism or any other world religion. Nor will the development of new thinking about Christianity exemplified in the Jewish document *Dabru Emet* resolve all theological concerns about church teachings. But in our globalized world in which interreligious understanding is not merely confined to the realm of theological ideas but directly impacts our life together as a civic community we can ill afford to shrink from the challenge.