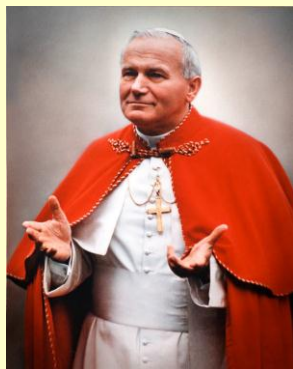


Pope John Paul II on Christian-Jewish Relations: His Legacy, Our Challenges



The Inaugural Annual John Paul II Lecture on Christian-Jewish Relations

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Introduction of John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M.
The Other Polish Priest
March 1, 2012

The entire world recognizes the historic significance of Pope John Paul II's ministry of reconciliation between Christians and Jews, and his pilgrimages to Auschwitz, the Synagogue of Rome, and Israel were among the greatest of the twentieth century's spiritual journeys. No one is surprised that our Center would honor his ministry with a lecture series which we inaugurate this evening. But there is another priest of Polish background whose own pilgrimage has shown the way to friendship between Jews and Christians for me and many others and, of course, that is John Pawlikowski, O.S.M. He will never receive the global acclaim of that Pope, but my guess is that John would be a close competitor for miles traveled in service to the building of that friendship. When recalling John Paul II, I am very conscious of an important question that we should ask if we are to grasp the efficacy of that Pope's ministry: Would he have been able to accomplish what he did without such spiritually energetic and faith-filled leaders as John Pawlikowski? For me, the answer is clearly no and my deeply felt gratitude for that Pope is united with a thankfulness for our other Polish priest who is Professor of Social ethics at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and director of its program in Catholic-Jewish studies. It is a real joy for me that he accepted the invitation to give the first lecture in this series and I cannot think of a better way for it to begin.

I have heard John speak on numerous occasions and I have read many of his writings, and there have been more than a few of those. He is the author or editor of more than fifteen books and of countless articles, and his writings have been translated into at least nine other languages. For many, both Christians and Jews, these published works have been important resources for the navigating of currents in ethics and faith after the horrors of the Shoah. The clarity and forceful expression of his writings accurately reflect the direct

spiritual force of the man who wrote them.

In addition to his academic work, John has been a leader in a broad range of activities and engagements. He served for six years as President of the International Council of Christians and Jews. President Carter appointed him to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council in 1980, and he was reappointed to three successive terms on the Council by Presidents Bush and Clinton. He served for many years on the Advisory Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

And, of course, he has been honored with all sorts of awards, by his home diocese of Chicago, by institutions such as Hebrew Union College, and the American Jewish Committee, as well as by the government of Poland. There was only one recognition that made me raise my eyebrows. John has been officially declared by the Governor of the State of Nebraska to be an Honorary Admiral, but it is in the Navy of Nebraska which, as you know, is a land-locked state. Well I looked it up and it turns out to be the highest honor that the State of Nebraska gives.

In addition to hearing John present formal lectures and to reading his writings, I have received the gift, as so many have, of coming to know him personally. When I first met him, he seemed to take particular satisfaction in pointing out to me that his religious order, the Servites, had already been an actor on the stage of history for two centuries before the Jesuits showed their face. You gave me the sense, John, that there was no need for us to show up at all. I am happy to point out however that, before he went to the University of Chicago for his doctorate, he did his undergraduate studies at Loyola University of Chicago. I have learned much from my conversations with John, but my warmest memory is when we found ourselves together at Notre Dame for an interfaith meeting and, immediately before the discussions began, our beloved host, Rabbi Michael

Signer, was diagnosed with the pancreatic cancer that would soon take his life. John was a spiritual companion and close friend of Michael and he immediately demonstrated leadership and brought together Jews and Christians in a healing service for Michael who was present at it. I was deeply moved by the sense of peace and community that John had created for us and Michael as we prayed for the Rabbi in hope and trust. It is a privilege for me to introduce the other Polish priest, Fr. John Pawlikowski.

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Pope John Paul II on Christian-Jewish Relations: His Legacy, Our Challenges

Without question, the papacy of Pope John Paul II will remain on the historical record as the one in which Christian-Jewish relations became a central papal priority. To put it bluntly, no previous Pope had spoken so forcefully and extensively about the Church's relationship with the Jewish People. His immediate predecessors John XXIII and Paul VI certainly need to be celebrated for the breakthrough actions of their pontificates, especially the development of chapter four of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*. But neither provided the comprehensive vision of Christian-Jewish bonding left by John Paul II.

Today, I would like to highlight several areas in which Pope John Paul II made a decisive contribution not only to a constructive theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship but also to a new sense of solidarity between our two faith communities, a solidarity that held together even in moments of crisis such as the Auschwitz convent controversy. In some areas Pope John Paul II gave us clear directions in which way our mutual relationship ought to move without necessarily offering us a fully substantive perspective. That is where we enter the picture in terms of further clarifying and deepening his perspective. In short, John Paul II left the Church a precious legacy whose outlines require further reflection and implementation on the part of the Church today and in the years ahead.

The first issue I would bring to the surface is antisemitism. I take up this central point from John Paul II's legacy first because he was uncompromising in criticizing this hatred and contempt for Jews and Judaism past and present and because his pontificate imprinted a permanent mark on at least Catholic Christianity—antisemitism can never be tolerated by a committed Christian. John Paul II condemned antisemitism in several key speeches and documents, naming it a

“sin” which is the strongest religious term one could use in such a condemnation.¹ But he did not stop at verbal condemnation of antisemitism. He also called for a joint concerted action by Jews and Christians to combat its remaining presence and any further spread. The fundamental agreement between Israel and the Vatican signed during John Paul II’s papacy includes a provision for such concerted action against antisemitism by the signatories.²

One of the issues connected with antisemitism that John Paul II never discussed and which remains a thorny question in the contemporary Christian-Jewish dialogue is the link, if any, between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Many in the Jewish community today would argue that anti-Zionism is in fact now the predominant form of antisemitism. The counter argument made by some from the Christian side is that any criticism of the policies of the State of Israel is labeled as antisemitism by certain Jewish leaders. Clearly this remains unresolved which has caused increasing tension in the Christian-Jewish relationship, including within the context of the Christian-Jewish dialogue itself. Here is one area where our responsibility takes over from John Paul II’s legacy. I have no easy solution to the current tension surrounding the antisemitism-anti-Zionism debate. Suffice it to say that there can be a direct link between them in some cases as the Pontifical Council on Justice & Peace noted in its document on racism in 1988.³ A subsequent statement from the Council prepared for the 2001 United Nations Conference on Racism mentions the Holocaust and antisemitism but omits any direct reference to anti-Zionism as a possible form of

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

² For the text of the *Fundamental Agreement*, cf. Pope John Paul II, *Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism, 1979-1995*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki. (New York: Anti-Defamation League and Crossroad, 19915), 203-208.

³ Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission, *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*. (Vatican City, 1988).

antisemitism, perhaps as a sign of the tension that developed over this linkage.⁴

Any effort to mitigate such tension must be built upon four premises as I see it. The first is that Israel is a legitimately constituted political state, a viewpoint that John Paul II definitely endorsed. Secondly, there is need for a continuing critique of current Israeli governmental policies as there is equal need for critique of actions by the two governmental bodies on the Palestinian side. Thirdly, such critique must studiously avoid any perspective that would delegitimize the existence of Israel whatever criticisms might be put forward regarding its current policies. And finally, room needs to be made in any discussion of the antisemitism-anti-Zionism connection for an understanding of the spiritual and theological attachment to the land of Israel by many, though not all, within the global Jewish community today. Any effort to delink totally biblical notions of the land and the modern State of Israel ought to be a dialogue non-starter. To be sure, a connection that fails to account for justice for all peoples in the region likewise remains a non-starter in my judgment. Within these parameters hopefully Jews and Christians can pursue a constructive discussion within a dialogical setting.

There is little question that John Paul II's firm commitment to combat antisemitism stemmed from his personal experience of the Holocaust. He saw the face of evil perpetrated by the Nazis in his native Poland. He made the connection explicit in a January 1995 "Angelus" address in Rome on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the release of prisoners from the Auschwitz concentration camp:

⁴ Cf. Pontifical Justice and Peace Council, *Contribution to World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*. (Durban, South Africa: September 7, 2001).

At Auschwitz, as in other concentration camps, innocent people of various nationalities died in great numbers. In particular, the children of the Jewish people, whose extermination had been planned by the Nazi regime, suffered the tragic experience of the Holocaust. Recalling the triumph of evil cannot fail to fill us with deep sorrow, in fraternal solidarity with all who bear the incredible scars of those tragedies.

Unfortunately, however, our days continue to be marked by great violence. God forbid that tomorrow we will have to weep over other Auschwitizes of our time.

Let us pray and work that this day may not happen. Never again anti-Semitism! Never again the arrogance of nationalism! Never again genocide!⁵

In his September 1987 visit to the United States John Paul II promised, in a meeting with the American Jewish leadership, that a document would be forthcoming on antisemitism and the Shoah. For a variety of reasons, including premature leaks of the proposed document and disagreements among Curial Cardinals about certain parts of the draft texts, its appearance was considerably delayed. There was hope within Catholic and Jewish circles that the eventual document would have the status of a papal encyclical. But this regrettably was not to be. Instead, in 1998, the Vatican's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews then headed by Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy issued the important document *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*.⁶ To upgrade the status of this

⁵ Pope John Paul II, "No More Anti-Semitism or Arrogant Nationalism," Angelus Address, Vatican City, January 29, 1995 in Pope John II. *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, 209.

⁶ For the text of *We Remember*, cf. Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholics*

Commission's document, a papal letter expressing strong support for the text was included with the publication of the document.⁷

The document on the Shoah received both praise and criticism both from Jews and Catholics.⁸ The fact that the Pope and the Vatican document so strongly affirmed the reality of the Holocaust undercut any possibility of Holocaust denial within Catholic circles. The document also mandated education about the Shoah within Catholicism on a global basis. It also acknowledged a measure of complicity on the part of members of the Church, a group that might well have included the highest leaders in the Catholic Church according to Cardinal Cassidy.

We Remember was critiqued on several key points. In arguing that "the Church as such" could not be blamed for complicity in the Holocaust, but only certain wayward Catholics, a distinction was introduced which caused considerable controversy because it tended to separate the Church completely from historical reality, including collaboration and silence during the Shoah. This distinction, we know from the testimony of people who spoke to the Pope about this issue, had his strong personal support. Here is an issue, can "Church as such" ever be culpable for its actions as an institution in the course of human history, that John Paul II failed adequately to resolve. It remains a continuing challenge for the Christian theological community.

Other issues that have plagued this document have been an overly positive portrayal of Pope Pius XII during the Nazi era and an

Remember the Holocaust. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 47-56.

⁷ Cf., *Catholics Remember the Holocaust*, 43.

⁸ Cf. *Ethics in the Shadow of the Holocaust: Christian and Jewish Perspectives*, eds. Judith H. Banki and John T. Pawlikowski, OSM. (Franklin, WI/Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 2001).

exaggerated claim about the number of Catholics who helped save Jews. These two are questions that Catholic historians along with Jewish historians need to continue to probe. It is unfortunate that the joint commission set up by Cardinal Cassidy to respond to these issues in light of the Vatican archives released by Pope Paul VI during John Paul II's papacy broke down in controversy. Perhaps if the Pope himself had taken a greater personal interest in the deliberations of this joint commission, it may have produced a more positive result.

One issue on which John Paul II's stance proved decisive in the end was that of the convent at Auschwitz. This was without question the most serious test of his personal commitment to Catholic-Jewish relations as this deep-seated controversy had the real potential of unraveling the progress that had been made in the Catholic Church's relations with the Jewish People since the issuance of *Nostra Aetate* by the II Vatican Council.⁹

While John Paul II did not act immediately when the crisis first developed and perhaps had to be nudged into direct involvement by important Catholic leaders such as the late Cardinal Lustiger of Paris, he did eventually intervene directly with the cloistered nuns at the convent urging them to relocate to a non-controversial area beyond the perimeter of any official map of the concentration camp site. Once the Pope expressed his view to the sisters the controversy was quickly defused as nearly all of the sisters agreed to move to the new location and the few who still objected to the relocation, including the religious superior, simply left the area for other convents.

The direct action on the part of John Paul II actually opened the door for the controversy to evolve into a positive development. The

⁹ For more on this controversy, cf. *Memory Offended: The Auschwitz Convent Controversy*, eds. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth. (New York/Westport, CT/London: Praeger, 1991).

eventual construction of the Auschwitz Center for Dialogue and Prayer adjacent to the relocated convent has become over time an inspiring center of study and spiritual development in light of personal encounter with the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site. And the relationship between the Center and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum leadership has continued to grow with the Museum now regularly using the Center for some of its programming. To repeat, none of this in my judgment would have been possible, despite the important efforts of leaders both in the Christian and Jewish communities, had John Paul II decided to remain on the sidelines of the dispute.

Another effort by John Paul II related to the long-awaited political recognition of Israel by the Holy See. Anyone involved with Catholic-Jewish relations was well aware that for many in the Jewish community, whether at the level of leadership or the grassroots, such recognition was seen as a litmus test of Catholic credibility in terms of the Church's outlook towards Judaism and the Jewish People.

I have heard from people who were close to John Paul II's papacy that he had on several occasions expressed his sincere interest in upgrading the Vatican-Israel ties to a full diplomatic relationship but also his frustration at being constrained in this regard by the Vatican Secretariat of State. Eventual recognition of Israel by Egypt and Jordan certainly helped John Paul II overcome this internal Vatican opposition. And the Pope's very positive visit to Israel further solidified this recognition.

As early as 1984, John Paul II showed a deep sensitivity for the meaning of Israel to the Jewish People. In a Good Friday address that year he wrote the following:

For the Jewish people who live in the State of Israel and who preserve on that land such precious testimonies to their history and their faith, we must ask for the desired security

and the due tranquility that is the prerogative of every nation and the condition of life and progress of every society.¹⁰

John Paul II went on to speak movingly of Judaism's spiritual attachment to the city of Jerusalem. And on June 15, 1994, the Holy See and the Israeli government jointly announced the formal establishment of diplomatic relations as a result of ongoing negotiations that began with the signing of the Fundamental Agreement the previous December. Clearly the Fundamental Agreement represented a central success for John Paul II. It should be noted that shortly after the signing of the Fundamental Agreement with the State of Israel, the Vatican Secretariat of State established ties with the Palestinian Authority as well, probably to help mute any continuing opposition to the Fundamental Agreement.

As I wrote in the commemorative volume for the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, this step represented more than merely a diplomatic agreement. It marked in fact the final repudiation of a theology of perpetual wandering for the Jewish community on the part of Christianity that began with the Church Fathers. That theology argued against any possibility of a restored, sovereign Jewish state as part of the punishment Jews incurred for rejecting Jesus and supposedly putting him to death.¹¹ This theology remained front and center in the official papal response to Theodore Herzl when he appealed to the Vatican for support of the Zionist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹⁰ Cf., *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, 34.

¹¹ John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, "The Vatican-Israeli Accords: Their Implications for Catholic Faith and Teaching," in *A Challenge Long Delayed: The Diplomatic Exchange Between the Holy See and the State of Israel*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki. (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1996), 10-19.

Despite the positive accomplishments of John Paul II's papacy with respect to the theological and political implications of Israel for the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue, he left many loose ends in both areas. In the theological realm, considerable reflection is still very much needed on what role, if any, the biblical land tradition can play in Christian self-identity. Does the emphasis on fundamental theological bonding between Jews and Christians that was so much of a hallmark of John Paul II's views on the Church's relationship with the Jewish People extend to notions of the land tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures? Can Christian theology incorporate a notion of the "sacramentality of the land," as Richard Lux has argued,¹² can it appropriate a "landed faith," as Walter Brueggeman has termed it,¹³ or is "land" a theological category that separates Jews and Christians?¹⁴

On the political level I must confess here this evening that I see a rapid and serious deterioration between Jews and Catholics regarding the Israeli-Palestinian situation for which John Paul II's writings provide only minimal help. For a number of years now, tensions have been rising between the Jewish community and many parts of the Protestant/Orthodox world, including the World Council of Churches. Divestment has been a central point of controversy. Most of the Catholic community, including at the leadership level, has stayed apart from this growing tension. But that situation is changing quickly as Catholic leadership, especially the group of bishops who have been given an oversight role in terms of Catholic policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian issue, has begun to speak out ever more critically with respect to Israeli governmental policies. While not embracing the divestment approach advocated by a number of

¹² Richard Lux, *The Jewish People, the Holy Land and the State of Israel*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010).

¹³ Walter Brueggeman, *The Land*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

¹⁴ John T. Pawlikowski, "Land as an Issue in Christian-Jewish Relations," *Cross Currents*, June 2009: 197-209.

Protestant denominations, the language of Catholic leaders has become far more harsh, including recent statements that have used the term “prison” to describe the conditions under which the Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip, are forced to live.

There is no doubt that the Israeli-Palestinian issue is becoming the eight hundred pound gorilla in the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Most of the Catholic criticism is not ultimately theological, even though one can find some strains of the old “replacement theology” within the growing critique, particularly from the Palestinian Christian side. Rather, it concerns concrete actions on the grounds that involve such issues as border crossings and land confiscation.

I believe this growing controversy has the potential of becoming as serious as the Auschwitz convent controversy and perhaps even more so. I cannot go into details in this presentation. But I am increasingly convinced that a frontal discussion of all the issues must be put on the dialogue table lest all of the half-century of positive developments be undermined. There is much blame to go around in this regard, and I am not prepared to add to the list this evening. I myself have recently argued that all the major religious traditions in the region must begin to create a “theology of belonging” with respect to each other.¹⁵ The most imperative need at the moment is for an honest and open discussion of the situation as it impacts Jews and Christians.

I would now like to turn to more theological issues within the corpus of John Paul II’s writings on Christian-Jewish relations. Let me first highlight a theme that was central for the Pope from early on in his papacy. It is a notion of a deep-seated “spiritual bonding” between the two faith communities, one that exists at the level of their basic

¹⁵ John T. Pawlikowski, “Ethics in a Globalized World: Implications for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Peace & Change*, 36:4 (October 2011), 541-555.

self-identities. He articulated this theme quite clearly in his address during his historic visit to the synagogue in Rome on April 13, 1986.

These are his words:

The Church of Christ discovers her “bond” with Judaism by “searching into her own mystery” (*Nostra Aetate* 4). 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 clearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.¹⁶

While the sentiment behind this particular papal theme is certainly laudatory, as with a number of such themes in the addresses of John Paul II on Christian-Jewish relations, the Pope never offered us a more in-depth reflection on the theological implications of his notion of inherent Christian-Jewish bonding. So we are left with a number of unanswered questions.

The first of these questions is whether a statement on inherent bonding between Jews and Christians can be a one-sided proclamation. Does it require a positive response from the Jewish side? Some years ago I raised this issue in an article in *Moment* magazine.¹⁷ The response in letters to the editor was generally negative from the Jewish side, including from the noted Jewish scholar in the Christian-Jewish dialogue Irving Greenberg who contributed a printed response. The negativity from the Jewish side was rooted largely in the misinterpreted perception that I was asking

¹⁶ Cf., *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, xxiii.

¹⁷ John T. Pawlikowski, “Rethinking Christianity: A Challenge to Jewish Attitudes,” *Moment*, 15:4 (August 1990): 36-39. Also Response by Irving Greenberg “Jews Have Thought Little About Spiritual Dignity of Other Faiths, 39.

for reciprocity as a condition for Christian engagement in the dialogue. Such reciprocity was regarded by many of the Jewish respondents as unwarranted given the long history of Christian theological antisemitism. As far as I know, there is no reputable Jewish scholar who has picked up affirmatively on this fundamental theme in John Paul II's writings.

I still believe the theme has positive possibilities and in no way was I suggesting simplistic reciprocity in raising it. My point was, and is, that if Christians at any level wish to make an assertion of inherent Christian-Jewish bonding, there is need for recognition of such bonding on the part of both faith communities. Otherwise the theme lacks genuine meaning and ought to be dropped from the vocabulary of the dialogue.

I suspect the non-interest of Jewish scholars in such a theme which in fact is a subdued form of rejection, subdued out of respect for John Paul II's overall contributions to the dialogue, is ultimately rooted in the Pope's conception of Judaism as "intrinsic" to Christian identity. Given the theological history of the Christian-Jewish relationship as expressed from the Christian side, this thematic emphasis might well appear to Jewish scholars as a new version of the old theological outlook that anything good in Judaism was in fact absorbed into Christianity leaving Judaism after the Christ Event with no real significant form of independent existence.

So John Paul II has the contemporary Christian and Jewish theologians in a quandary regarding this theme. Should it be dropped as a building block for future theological interpretations between the Church and the Jewish People? If not, how do we advance it in a way that allows Judaism a meaningful separate existence despite a measure of bonding? I tend to favor the second response but only if some recognition of its validity develops on the Jewish side and only if Jewish and Christian scholars working together can clarify the

loose ends that John Paul II left us in terms of this notion of “bonding.”

Two further questions remain in connection with this “bonding” terminology for both communities. If Judaism is to be seen as an “in house” reality by Christianity and vice versa, would this necessitate that engagement within each community on theological identity and moral values take the views of the other community as a fundamental resource? And does the papal insistence on the totally distinctive relationship between Jews and Christians diminish the significance of dialogue with the other faith communities, Islam in particular, far too much?

Another major theme of John Paul II in his many addresses on Christian-Jewish relations is his insistence that the Jewish tradition serves as indispensable *heritage* for Christianity, but a heritage that must be understood as “living” in terms of contemporary Judaism. The Pope was crystal clear on this point on any number of occasions. In many ways, John Paul II, through the theme of a “living heritage,” was repudiating the centuries-long mindset in Christianity epitomized by the depictions of Church and Synagogue in Christian art such as the famous portrayal of their relationship on the façade of the cathedral in Strasbourg, France. In that portrayal, duplicated in many other European churches, the Church is presented as a bright, beautiful young woman holding a book of the gospels while Judaism is depicted as a bent over, blindfolded woman holding a copy of the Torah. The message could not be more clearly stated: with the coming of Christ, Judaism became a “dead” religion whatever its greatness prior to the Christ Event.

But for John Paul II, unlike the artist responsible for the imagery on the Strasbourg Cathedral, the Jewish tradition, biblical and postbiblical, remains a living faith tradition that Christianity can continue to draw from in developing its theology and spirituality. In fact, it must draw upon Judaism if it is to be authentic to itself. John

Paul II spoke in this vein in two major speeches. The first was an address to the Jewish community in Mainz, Germany, on November 17, 1980. In that speech he took up an earlier declaration by the German bishops which emphasized “the spiritual heritage of Israel for the Church” but made a very important addition. The word he added was “living.” Thus in his eyes, the Jewish tradition lives on in the worship and practice of contemporary Judaism.

And in March 1982, speaking to a global meeting of delegates from various episcopal conferences who had come to Rome to discuss Christian-Jewish relations, John Paul II offered the following reflection:

Christians have taken the right path, that of justice and brotherhood, in seeking to come together with their Semitic Brethren, especially and perseveringly, in the common heritage, a heritage, that all so value highly...To assess it carefully in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people *as they are professed and practiced still today*, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church (italics added).¹⁸

Dr. Eugene Fisher, former Director of Catholic-Jewish Relations for the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops and now a Visiting Professor at St. Leo University in Florida, has vividly described this fundamental change of perspective on the part of John Paul II which replaced the old template about Judaism as deceased after the coming of Christ with a new template that affirms the ongoing vitality of the Jewish tradition and vitality that can also energize Christian faith expression in our time.

Fisher describes this new imagery in the following terms:

¹⁸ Cf., *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, xxv.

In the perspective of this renewed papal vision, one can imagine a new statue of the Synagogue on cathedrals, head held high in faithful observance of God's permanent covenant and a new status of the Church, with a look of saving humility mitigating the triumphant expression of the past. The two while remaining distinct, would stand together to proclaim the divine truth that both share and yet interpret in unique ways.¹⁹

Despite John Paul II's strong emphasis on the significance of the Hebrew Scriptures and postbiblical Jewish sources for Christian religious understanding, that emphasis has not carried over very much into Christian theology. Within the field of Christian biblical studies, there has been a considerable shift in the way the books of the Hebrew Scriptures are appreciated and interpreted. The developments are generally positive. This stands in contrast to several decades back when the Old Testament was viewed primarily as a foretaste of Christian belief at best and as the opposite of Christian faith at worst. And the attitude prevailed that only Christian scholars could interpret the full and authentic meaning of the Old Testament texts. Hence, the prohibition against including more than a couple Jewish scholars in the exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures in a major publishing series such as the Anchor Bible. And even the pioneer in improved Christian-Jewish relations, Msgr. John Oesterreicher, who was so influential in the passage of *Nostra Aetate*, did not include any Jewish contributors in the first four volumes of his annual *The Bridge*.

And when we move into the fields of systematic theology and liturgy, I see very little evidence of John Paul II's approach to the role of Hebrew Scriptures. This part of the biblical tradition is either ignored or interpreted in classical categories of law and gospel. And

¹⁹ Eugene J. Fisher, "Introduction," in *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, xxv.

in the liturgy, the extensive use of the prophetic writings in worship texts and in hymns tends overwhelmingly toward a simplistic “promise/fulfillment” theme. Clearly much work remains if Catholic theology in all its dimensions is to take seriously John Paul II’s legacy in this area.

Let me here mention one area of scholarship that was not taken up by John Paul II himself but which is absolutely critical for the theological dimensions of Christian-Jewish relations today. This scholarship—to which two scholars associated with Boston College, the late Anthony Saldarini and Daniel Harrington, have made important contributions—is decisively transforming how we understand the separation of Judaism and Christianity in the first centuries of the Common Era and how we interpret Pauline texts which have been so prominent historically in forging earlier theological understandings of the Christian-Jewish relationship. While there is hardly full agreement among scholars associated with the “Parting of the Ways” movement, collectively they have made it clear that our previous notions of ecclesiology rooted in the mistaken belief that by the time Jesus died on Calvary a distinct new religious body called the Church had been fully established apart from Judaism are in fact false history. The actual separation was a process involving several centuries during which Christian ties to Judaism definitely remained in place. And any notion, whether within Christian or in Jewish scholarship, that simplistically presents Paul as the founder of a new religion is hopelessly out of date in terms of what we now know from the new scholarship on Paul.²⁰

²⁰ For one example of the new scholarship of Paul, cf. *Paul and Judaism: Crosscurrents in Pauline Exegesis and the Study of Christian-Jewish Relations*, eds. Reimund Bieringer and Didier Pollefeyt. (London: T & T Clark International, 2012). For an example of the “Parting of the Ways” scholarship, cf. *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Texts and Studies in Judaism #95, eds. Adam H. Becker and Yoshiro Reed. (Tubingen: Mohr Stiebeck, 2003).

Regrettably, I have not yet seen any appropriation of this new biblical scholarship within Christian theology. And in terms of Paul, many, if not most, theologians continue to use him in ways that show no evidence that they are in touch with this scholarship. We cannot argue that John Paul II moved us in the direction of this new scholarship. But if we wish to honor his overall legacy with regard to Christian-Jewish relations, this transformed understanding of the relations between the Church and synagogue in the first centuries must become a mainstay of Christian theological interpretation. Let me add here that these new developments also have significance for Jewish theological expression, but that is something that Jewish scholars will need to pursue.

The final area of Christian-Jewish relations that we need to take up in terms of John Paul II's legacy is the theological understanding of the linkage between the Church and Synagogue. It was a question that John Paul II raised in a number of his speeches. In each instance, his stance was the same: the Jewish covenant remains ongoing and was not abrogated by the Christ Event as most theologians, starting with the Church Fathers, had proclaimed for centuries. Such an affirmation requires a major adjustment in Christian theological self-perception. That is why Canadian scholar Gregory Baum, who was involved in the drafting of *Nostra Aetate*, proclaimed chapter four of that conciliar statement the most revolutionary development in the ordinary magisterium to emerge from Vatican II.²¹

Let me offer a few examples from John Paul II in this area which also highlight the theme of inherent bonding spoken of earlier in this presentation. In these statements, John Paul II was clearly picking up on *Nostra Aetate* and also *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on the Church which affirms the continuity of God's gifts to the Jewish people. In his address in Mainz, Germany, in 1980

²¹ Gregory Baum, "The Social Context of American Catholic Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 (1986), 87.

where the Pope first showed his hand as it were regarding Christian-Jewish relations, his words were forthright: Jews, he insisted, following St. Paul in Romans 11:29, were “the people of God of the Old Covenant which has never been revoked by God.” He then went on to acknowledge the “permanent value” both of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jewish community that witness to those Scriptures as sacred texts.²²

Subsequently, John Paul II addressed a group of representatives from various episcopal conferences in March 1982. In his presentation, he turned to Romans 9:4-5, interpreting this central text regarding Jews and Judaism in the present tense. For John Paul II, the Jewish People “have the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the legislation and the worship and the promises.” But he likewise underscored the universal significance of salvation in Christ.²³

He followed up on the same theme in several other addresses, including one to leaders from the Anti-Defamation League in March 1984: “the respect we speak is based on the mysterious spiritual link which brings us closer together, in Abraham, through Abraham, in God who chose Israel and brought forth the Church from Israel.”²⁴ And during a visit to Australia in November 1986, the Pope reiterated his consistent perspective:

The Catholic faith is rooted in the eternal truths of the Hebrew Scriptures and the irrevocable covenant made with Abraham. We, too, gratefully hold these same truths of our Jewish Heritage and look upon you as our brothers and sisters in the Lord.²⁵

²² Cf., *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, xxv.

²³ *Ibid*, xxv.

²⁴ *Ibid*, xxvi.

²⁵ *Ibid*, xxvi.

The theological legacy passed on to contemporary Christianity by John Paul II is quite decisive on one point. Any version of Christology or ecclesiology that tries to ground itself in the notion that the Church replaced the Jewish People in the covenantal relationship with God is totally unacceptable. Judaism and the Jewish people continue to have a deep-seated religious significance internally as well as for the Christian community. Yet only a very few Christian systematic theologians have dared to take John Paul II with seriousness in this regard. This same charge applies to most Christian ethicists and liturgists. Certainly, as we see in the first of my three above examples, John Paul II continued to stress the universal salvation through Christ. Cardinal Walter Kasper, formerly head of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, has also argued in this vein. The challenge for us today is how to put the two assertions together. A group of Christian scholars from Europe and the United States worked for some four years with the explicit support of Cardinal Kasper on trying to respond to the mega-question "How can Christians affirm the continuity of the Jewish covenant while at the same time affirm universal salvation in Christ?" No easy task to be sure but one that needs to be pursued by a much wider group of theologians than has been the case up till now. The results of the four years of reflection, with Jewish responses, has now appeared in book form under the title *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of the Theological Interrelationships*.²⁶ I should mention that Boston College was one of the institutional supporters of this project.

One aspect of the Christian-Jewish relationship for which John Paul II's writings provide little or any help is that of mission. That issue has been the source of considerable controversy in recent years,

²⁶ Cf. *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of the Theological Interrelationships*, eds. Philip Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary C. Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix and Jesper Svartik. (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011).

sparked in part by the writings of the late Cardinal Avery Dulles who tried to resurrect a notion of a mission to the Jews based on texts in the letter to the Hebrews. There is little question that the yet uncompleted theological transformation launched by John Paul II has undercut simplistic approaches to mission and evangelization, especially with regard to Jews. If the Jewish covenant remains ongoing, as John Paul II has asserted, then should Jews remain subjects for the Church's missionary outreach? Cardinal Dulles said a definite yes. Cardinal Walter Kasper and a number of us long involved in the dialogue, including myself, have responded with a decisive no. In my judgment, the pendulum is beginning to shift back to our position after Cardinal Dulles' interventions began moving it to the "continuity of mission" side. But the question is far from being fully resolved and requires considerably more reflection.

In summation, John Paul II has left us a precious legacy in terms of Christian-Jewish relations. Yes, there were a number of controversies in this relationship during his papacy. But all were eventually resolved, including the potentially explosive Auschwitz convent controversy. If there is a lingering impact from his papacy, it would be that John Paul II did not adequately institutionalize a commitment to Christian-Jewish relations within the Church despite his profound personal commitment on this score, nor did he appoint people to the episcopacy who shared his conviction on the Church-Jewish People bonding. Hence, we are today suffering some downgrading of the commitment that he manifested so strongly in many dioceses. The response to such downgrading is not merely to criticize or point fingers but to concretely take up the challenge which he answered only in part. May the Spirit embolden us to renew our commitment to this effort.