

## Nostra Aetate after 40 Years: A Decisive Change

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### **Introduction**

One of the easiest ways to assess the difference in relations between Christians and Jews in the forty years since 1965 is to examine a library catalogue. The number of books devoted to the historical, theological and philosophical dimensions of our relationship grows larger every year. Beyond the printed pages there are human encounters which encourage exploration of our religious traditions. There are dozens of symposia and many research centers that focus on the past, present and future of this relationship. If someone were to investigate this topic prior to 1965 they would discover only a few Jewish authors who explored the Christian tradition and even less Christian authors who examined Judaism with a measure of empathy.

What is the basis for this change both in attitudes and in activities? Is the new atmosphere of mutual respect based on sociological grounds alone? Has the awareness of the horrors of World War II and the decimation of the European Jewish population animated the change? Can we say that the end of the war brought about a *kairos* moment among Christians that imposed a deep examination of conscience? After such a period of destruction there would surely be a new optimism about the possibilities for behaving and thinking differently than prior to the war. We might also ask ourselves to what extent the post-war constellation of new centers for the Jewish populations in the United States and Israel have contributed to the growth of these interchanges. It is possible that all of these social and historical developments led to *Nostra Aetate* which was promulgated at the end of the II Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII's experience with helping Jewish communities during the war sharpened his awareness of the development of a new attitude toward Judaism. The meeting with Jules Isaac increased the pontiff's awareness of the connection between the Christian "teachings of contempt" and racial anti-Semitism. These "experiences" animated Pope John to turn to Augustin Cardinal Bea SJ who would become the person who persevered throughout the length of the council to guide the composition of a document on the Jews. By the end of the council and with the encouragement of a different Pope the Church's approach to Judaism had been transformed from a schema *De Judaeis* (On the Jews) to *De Ecclesiae Habitudine ad Religiones non-Christianas* (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions). This declaration is known to us by its opening words, "Nostra Aetate" (In our times).

The title of the schema would seem to reinforce the proposal that *Nostra Aetate* was a product of the "optimism" of the Council Fathers in 1965 and their hopes that the Church could act as an agent of positive transformation in that world. Promulgated along with schemata such as *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae* it emphasized the importance of "our times" in contradistinction to eternal truths. The first sentence affirms the value of the contemporary world where "men are being drawn closer together and the ties between various people are being multiplied." The Church understood its task as "fostering unity and love among men and even among nations."

It might be sufficient to appreciate the benefits of *Nostra Aetate* on the basis of its positive evaluation of human society. Within the Jewish community, we value all efforts to participate in *Tikkun Ha-Olam*. However, we Jews want to repair the world precisely because of our deep belief in a truth expressed by the book of Psalms, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." What animates us as Jews is the ability to restore the divine foundations of humanity and the world by our actions that lead to restoring what has been broken by arrogance or neglect. In writing an assessment of *Nostra Aetate* from a Jewish perspective I hope to demonstrate the combination of social and theological resources that are in that document. As we uncover theological elements in *Nostra Aetate* it will become clearer that the text reveals the tensions inherent in a religious tradition at the moment of *metanoia*, a radical change or re-ordering of its outlook. This change is both the result of the social context in which the text is written, but it is at the same time it provides an opening to theological perspectives that were not previously discerned.

### **Covenants, Relationships, Families: From Divorce to Dialogue**

We begin our discussion of *Nostra Aetate* prior to World War II. Michael Faulhaber, Cardinal of Munich was well-known for his opposition to the Nazi regime. He had contact with Rabbis and members of the Jewish community. His rejections of Nazi ideology were based on his theological understanding of his Catholic tradition. Yet, in 1933 after the Nazi *Machtergreifung*, he wrote, "After the death of Christ Israel was dismissed from the service of Revelation. She had not known the time of her visitation. She had repudiated and rejected the Lord's anointed, had driven Him out of the city and nailed Him to the Cross. Then the veil of the Temple was rent, and with it the covenant between the Lord and His people. The daughters of Sion received the bill of divorce and from that time forth Assuerus wanders forever restless over the face of the earth." Furthermore, he argued that, "We must distinguish between the Scriptures of the Old Testament on the one hand and the Talmudic writings of post-Christian Judaism on the other...I mean especially the Talmud, the Mischna [sic], and the medieval code of laws, Schulchan Arukh. The Talmudic writings are the work of man; they were not prompted by the spirit of God. It is only the sacred writings of pre-Christian Judaism, not the Talmud that the Church of the New Testament has accepted as her inheritance."<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament was the Jewish inheritance of the Church. The Oral Torah, held to be sacred revelation by the Jews, were not part of divine revelation but documents limited by human authorship. Judaism and the Jewish People were severed from their relationship to God by "divorce."

Even the divorce did not bring Faulhaber to dismiss the continuing reality of the Jewish people when he wrote, "Even after the death of Christ the Jews are still a 'mystery,' as St. Paul says (Rom. 11:25); and one day, at the end of time, for them too the hour of grace will strike."<sup>2</sup> By quoting this text of Scripture, Cardinal Faulhaber followed in the footsteps of St. Paul and St. Augustine. At the end of time the Jews would be brought in to the fullness of belief in Christ. Until then it was the task of the Church to preach the Gospel to bring them to conversion. Given his opposition to Nazism it would be difficult to accuse Faulhaber of the destructive Anti-Semitism advocated by the Nazis. His theological approach to Judaism *post-Christum* was in the mainstream, not the margins. Looking back we can observe the consequences of a Christian theology of Judaism that did not emphasize a continuing relationship between Jews and the God

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Cardinal Faulhaber, *Judaism, Christianity and Germany* (London: Burns and Washburn, 1934), 5.

of Israel. The Jewish communities of Germany and all of Europe were destroyed---and European Christianity would see its own institutions diminished and its faithful burdened with a growing consciousness of how much they had abandoned the central values of their faith.

Fifty years later, Pope John Paul 2 stood before the Jewish community of Mainz and said, “The first dimension of this dialogue, that is the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God and that of the New Covenant is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible. A second dimension of our dialogue—the true and central one—is the meeting between present-day Christian Churches and the present-day people of the covenant concluded with Moses. It is important here that Christians should aim at understanding better the fundamental elements of the religious tradition of Judaism, and learn what fundamental lines are essential for the religious reality lived by Jews, *according to their own understanding*. ...a third dimension is the tasks we have in common. Jews and Christians, as children of Abraham are called to be a blessing for the world, by committing themselves to justice among all men and peoples, with the fullness and depth that God himself intended us to have. The more our meeting is imprinted with this sacred duty, the more it becomes a blessing also to ourselves.”<sup>3</sup>

In this address Pope John Paul II described Judaism using the image of the Bible as a subject intrinsic to the Church. In contrast to divorce from God offered by Cardinal Faulhaber’s sermon, Judaism remains within a covenant which has never been revoked. He affirmed the value of meetings with present-day Jews so that Christians can learn about Judaism from those who practice it. Both the religion of Judaism and those who live in its covenant now become a source of spiritual sustenance for Christians.

Fifty years stand between these two addresses. The first speech speaks about Judaism as something which has lost its covenant; the other describes ‘a covenant never revoked.’ In Faulhaber’s sermon Judaism is a ‘mystery’ that will regain its value only as part of the Church. The idea that Jews and Christianity have tasks in common and should become a blessing seems to inhabit a world entirely alien from the period prior to II Vatican Council.

When we reflect about the changes in Christian-Jewish relations after 1965, it is important to remember that both Cardinal Faulhaber and Pope John Paul II had friendships with Jews. Both of them were opposed to totalitarian ideologies. They both understood that Judaism and Christianity have a common ancestor and will share a glorious end. Yet, there is a significant difference in their theological framework of the relationship between the Jewish people and the Christian community that II Vatican called, “the People of God in Pilgrimage.”

### **Mystery, Common Patrimony, Dialogue: Elements of Theology in Nostra Aetate**

I would argue that what allowed Pope John Paul a more positive approach to Judaism and the Jewish people were the theological dimensions opened up by Nostra Aetate. Although it is somewhat unusual for a non-Catholic [and a very convinced Jew] to describe the theology of another tradition, I hope to offer a close reading of the text of that document that will emphasize

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<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Address to the Jewish Community—West Germany” November 17, 1980 in *John Paul A Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism, 1979-1995* compiled by Anti Defamation League, edited by Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 15-16.

how the it encouraged Catholics to develop an affirmation of Judaism and urged them to learn about Judaism as part of their lived experience of the faith. Judaism was no longer an object to be observed, but a living tradition—deeply related to the Church---that could provide nourishment for Christian identity.

In the very first sentence of paragraph 4 where *Nostra Aetate* speaks about Judaism we can observe a change of framework from the previous paragraphs. There are significant ideas put forth about other religions. Hinduism and Buddhism are “viewed with respect.” The Church looks upon Islam “with esteem.” However, in approaching the discussion of Judaism there is a shift of tone when we read the words, “As this sacred Synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it recalls the spiritual bond linking the people of the new covenant with Abraham’s stock.” The words “*Mysterium ecclesiae*” imply that the Council Fathers enter their discussion of Judaism as part of a theological search internal to the Church. The “spiritual bond” between Judaism and the Church is not an object fully known at the outset, but part of a continuing search of a “mysterium” a reality that is constantly open to the process of discovery. The new relationship between Judaism and Catholics is born in the Church’s own theological search for its identity.

In the discussions after the Council there has been much attention to the later parts of the document that restrain Catholics from anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism. This is very important from perspective of the Jewish people who view the Catholic Church from the outside. However, these discussions have at times obscured the profound significance of the opening words, “*Mysterium ecclesiae*.” These words open up the possibilities for Christians that a continuing relationship to Judaism is a positive and nurturing value and not only the removal of something negative. It provides them with an affirmation of Judaism as well as an injunction against anti-Semitism and hatred.

This distinction is re-enforced if we note the difference between the use of “mysterium” in *Nostra Aetate* and in Cardinal Faulhaber’s advent sermon. The words *mysterium Israel* are used by Faulhaber to indicate the future integration of Israel according to the flesh into the Church. Put another way, “mysterium” is what will be disclosed in the future. In *Nostra Aetate* where the Jewish people are discussed as part of the “*mysterium ecclesiae*” the idea of *mysterium* looks back into Scripture. There is no “divorce” of the Jewish people from God. It was these inaugural words of “mystery” which animated Pope John Paul II to proclaim during his visit to the synagogue of Rome in 1986, “The Jewish religion is not extrinsic to us, but in a certain way is “intrinsic” to our own religion... You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.”<sup>4</sup>

The turn to Scripture is emphasized by the next phrase which emphasizes the importance of memory. “The Church cannot forget (*nequit oblivisci*) she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexhaustible mercy deigned to establish the eternal covenant.” The description of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament as revealed in “inexhaustible mercy” subverts a tendency by the Christian tradition since the Epistle of Barnabas to read the covenant with the Jewish people as one of judgment rather than mercy. The memory of a merciful covenant between God and the Jews moves the Council Fathers to warn

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, “Historic Address to the Synagogue of Rome,” 62-63.

that the Church cannot forget that it has been grafted as the wild olive branches into the good olive tree.

Through these two admonitions of memory, *Nostra Aetate* places Paul's Epistle to the Romans, ch. 9-11, as the foundational text of Scripture rather than the Epistle to the Galatians that emphasizes the contrast between the "Law" and the experience of Jesus as the Christ. The latter chapter of Romans moves in the direction of reconciliation far more the emphasis on confrontation in Galatians.

However, the message or, perhaps better said the messages in this part of the Epistle pose many challenges of interpretation. Jews surely might have hoped for a more explicit endorsement of their permanent relationship with God than the concluding sentence of this paragraph which describes Jesus as the reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles. However, once again when we consider that *Nostra Aetate* emphasizes "reconciliation" rather than rebuke the potential for the document to move in a new direction is clear.

The moment of separation between the Church and the Jews is described by Luke 19:44 where Jesus indicated that "Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation," and acknowledges his mixed reception by the Jewish community in Judea. These two statements draw upon the Gospels and would appear to support pre-II Vatican attitudes toward Judaism as a people rejected.

However, the document then makes a decisive move in the opposite direction by quoting from the Epistle to the Romans that "Jews remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues." [Rom. 11:28-29] The eschatological vision of all peoples addressing God in a single voice might also be understood as a shared hope of Jews and Christians.

However, these sentences also allows for an interpretation where Judaism might be subsumed into Christianity. Yet, the Council Fathers did not close this issue to different understandings. The Council opens a new horizon by encouraging "mutual understanding and respect" through the process of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues." These dialogues are important because of the "common patrimony" of Christians and Jews.

Once again, we observe a significant turn away from the idea that Christians have displaced the Jews. In its place, we discern that the Council emphasizes that Jews and Christians have a common inheritance. After so many years of diminishing the value of the people of the first covenant, the Church now turns toward new possibilities of discovery through dialogue. This sentence encouraging joint study and mutual respect has been called by many scholars the "enabling" portion of *Nostra Aetate* because it opens new possibilities. Many of the most significant developments since 1965 have happened because Jews and Christians have been in conversation with one another. Through work of the Office of Christian Unity and its Commission for Religious Relations with the Jewish People there have been an important series of consultations. Many important organizations participate in these meetings, most recently in South America, and joint declarations are issued at the end of each meeting. Furthermore, many Catholic universities sponsor professorships that focus research and teaching on Judaism. With

this short sentence, *Nostra Aetate* opened the gates to continuing discussions occupy both of our communities for many years to come.

The recommendation for continued study and dialogue may also be understood as a preface to the next section of the document that discusses the role of the Jews in the crucifixion of Jesus. The text of *Nostra Aetate* reflects the consensus of the Council Fathers that some of the Jews did participate in the crucifixion. This opinion, even at the time of the Council, was debated by Christian biblical scholars. Members of the Jewish community were disturbed by what appeared to be a “literal” reading of the Gospels which permitted the continued stereotypes of the Jews as “killers of Christ.”

However, *Nostra Aetate* also suggests an important change in a one-sided view of interpreting the Passion narrative. It enjoins Catholics not to blame all the Jews who lived at the time of the Crucifixion nor upon the Jews of today. Furthermore, “the Jews should not be repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the Holy Scriptures.” To emphasize the importance of this point, the Council Fathers urge those who preach and teach to make every effort not to return to teachings “out of harmony with the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.” Once again, *Nostra Aetate* presents a significant turn toward greater esteem for the Jews. However, without continuing attention to dialogue and mutual respect it is likely that pre-conciliar preaching and teaching will continue. The very ambiguity of *Nostra Aetate* has created profound and honest discussions about the passion narratives between Jews and Christians for more than forty years.

After removing the possibility for Christians to consider all Jews as guilty of Deicide, *Nostra Aetate* turns to address the problem of anti-Semitism. The argument in this paragraph moves from a general condemnation of persecution against any human being to the specific denunciation of anti-Semitism. The basis for the condemnation of Anti-Semitism is two-fold. First, the Church has a “common patrimony” with the Jews. Second, the Council emphasizes that it is motivated by the “gospel’s spiritual love.” The final flourish of this condemnation is that the Church is NOT motivated by “political considerations.” For many readers of *Nostra Aetate* the denunciation of anti-Semitism should have mentioned the historical persecution of the Jews by members of the Church. Surely, some indication that the Holocaust, that ended only twenty years earlier, should have been mentioned. Historians of the Council have outlined the debates on this issue at great length. I would like to point out that the censure of anti-Semitism “at any time and from any source” does cover both historic persecutions---and the problem of the Shoah which more recent theologians such as Pope Benedict XVI have linked to neo-paganism. However, the lack of specific examples of anti-Semitic activities in the text of *Nostra Aetate* invited the need for further clarification.

The final paragraph of section 4 moves entirely away from the relationship between Jews and Christians and moves toward an affirmation of Christian identity. It addresses the issue of the death of Jesus was to liberate all human beings from sin, “so that they might obtain salvation.” *Nostra Aetate* proclaims it the “duty of the Church’s preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s all embracing love.” It seems to me that these final sentences diminish the specific statements appearing earlier in the document. The powerful proclamation of mission ends the discussion of Judaism without any statement of mutual affirmation.

After moving into new approaches toward reconciliation with Judaism, the Council Fathers proclaimed what “the Church has always held and continues to hold” as an assurance of faith to its Christian readers. This affirmation of continuity raised serious questions: If it is the duty of Christians to proclaim Christ, then what is the purpose of dialogue with Jews? Does a continuing “mission” to proselytize the Jews deny the latter their own religious identity? What is the role of the Jewish people in among Christians?

In the forty year since the Council the issues of the autonomy of Judaism and the universal salvation of humanity through Christ have generated significant discussions between our communities.

### **Nostra Aetate: Significant Concepts for the Road Ahead**

Our careful attention to the structure of Nostra Aetate has revealed significant advances in the approach to the Jewish people since the pre-conciliar period as well as portions of the document that would seem to subvert or undermine these advances. This ambiguity means that the document is read by Jews and Catholics according to their own framework.

Many Jews and some Catholics would emphasize the elements of the document that indicate that all new proposals are overwhelmed by its ambiguities. It is possible to read Nostra Aetate’s treatment of the role of the Jews in the crucifixion as nothing more than a restatement of the Council of Trent. That council proclaimed that the sin of all human beings crucified Jesus. The Jewish role is subsumed into the guilt of all humankind. On the other hand, Nostra Aetate makes it clear that Jews are “not to be portrayed as accursed,” from any period of history. This emphasis on “removing the curse” opens the possibility for encounter with contemporary Jews who are heirs to the covenant of Abraham and share blessings with the Church.

Is it possible to point to specific elements in Nostra Aetate that indicate a coherent approach? I believe that there are four key terms that have animated the continuing work by Catholics reaching out to Jews for the purpose of deeper understanding of their own faith. Members of the Jewish community who appreciate the important role they continue to play in post-conciliar documents such as those published by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, the statements by national bishops conferences, and the documents produced by both communities such as the Jewish-Christian discussion group of the Central Committee of German Catholics or those co-authored under the sponsorship of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Special attention to these concepts will be help those Jews and Christians who want to participate more actively as the dialogue moves from the papacy John Paul II to Benedict XVI.

### **-Mysterium:**

This word is central to Christian identity. By bringing the discussion of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism under the rubric of “Mysterium” (Latin: Sacramentum), Nostra Aetate 4 confirms the reality of Judaism as part of Christian self-understanding. It is helpful for Jews to understand that the notion of mystery assures the possibility that the topic of relations with the Children of Abraham’s stock cannot be exhausted by any one definition or any single era of history. It is the very nature of mystery to continually disclose itself. Pope John Paul II emphasized the desideratum for Christians to gain a better knowledge off Judaism and the Jewish tradition from Jews themselves both in his speech to the Jewish community of Mainz and in his

address to the synagogue of Rome. Benedict XVI framed the question of relationship between Christians and Jews under the rubric of “gifts of Abraham” (December 2000). Many documents produced by Christians reveal the desire to know more about how Jews understand themselves. Of course, there will be problems with translation Jewish self-understanding into Christianity. It is precisely in the development of this “translation” that the term “mystery” is most helpful. Because of the central difference between Christians and Jews in their understanding of how God enters into relationship with humankind there can be no reduction of one religion into the other. As Jews begin to trust Christian inquiry into the practice and celebration of Judaism are designed to deepen Christian faith rather than to convert Jews to Christ, they will enter more easily into dialogue.

### **-Patrimoniam.**

For almost two thousand years the “inheritance” of the blessings of Abraham has been at the heart of a struggle between Jews and Christians. The more Christians assumed the identity that they were “Verus Israel,” the true Israel; Jews resisted and turned the argument around. There was no possibility that the Abrahamic blessings could be shared—or even spread among other peoples---by both communities. *Nostra Aetate* uses the term “common inheritance” of these blessings. This phrase opens new possibilities for profound conversation between our communities. How will Christians interpret St. Paul’s understanding of the two covenants in Galatians 3 and 4? How can Jews who developed a tradition that the blessings and merit of the ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob---mean the continuity of the people Israel and their ultimate inheritance of the land of promise (Eretz Yisrael) open the possibility to a mutually shared series of blessings? Perhaps it is better for now to speak about the responsibilities that we have in common as a result of understanding Abraham as our common ancestor---a patrimony we also share with Muslims. That responsibility is to be a blessing. Pope John Paul II repeated this idea throughout the years of his pontificate. Jews and Christians are inheritors of the blessing of Abraham. First, they must become a blessing to one another—and then, they can become a blessing to all humankind. What is the pathway to becoming a blessing to one another? The Sages of the Jewish tradition suggest that “Any blessing that does not contain the name of God and the Kingdom of Heaven may not be called a blessing.” They further state that, “Any argument that is for the sake of Heaven is destined to endure.” As Christians and Jews we must then ask, “Is becoming a blessing simply to learn not to hate, demean or mock the other? Does it require action? How can we move from tolerance to respect and honor for one another?” The notion that our disagreement may be an argument for the sake of heaven may lead us to understand that *Nostra Aetate* encourages a method of discourse that can lead toward an answer.

### **-Dialogue**

By encouraging “dialogue” and biblical studies *Nostra Aetate* provided the golden path toward future blessing. A discourse of dialogue encourages mutual understanding of the other as he or she understands him or herself. In suggesting “dialogue” rather than “teaching,” or “preaching” the framework for communicating between two opposing points of view is changed. Dialogue allows for a method of exchanging ideas as well as a method of transmitting the content of those ideas. Both sides may assume that their point of view will be heard. Therefore, in the process of dialogue silence and listening become as important as speaking. Deliberation, contemplation and critical thinking are part of receiving the content of dialogue. Pope Paul VI’s encyclical “*Ecclesia Suam*” (1964) urged the Church to utilize dialogue as means of communicating with

the world. His promotion of dialogue rather than disputation reveals a profound appreciation for the Creator of the world and the relationship of all human beings in that world. Ultimately, dialogue creates the necessity for relationships—and permits fidelity to relationship to be at the center of all conversations. There have been many disagreements between our two communities during the past forty years: the controversy over the convent at Auschwitz, the beatification of Edith Stein and Pope Pius IX—and the potential canonization of Pope Pius XII. Many of them never have reached ultimate resolution. However, the relationships between individuals maintained the conversation and allowed the disagreement to reach a point of civility and respect.

### **-Mutual Respect**

These two words have shaped the nature of dialogue between Jews and Christians. They have been the animating force behind the transformation of our communities toward collaboration and cooperation. Mutual respect moves beyond the idea of “tolerance.” When we tolerate another point of view or the presence of another human being it means that we “allow” them their place. We “suffer” or “bear” them. Tolerance implies a position of political power. One can choose whether or not an idea or person can be tolerated. However, Jews and Christians both affirm the idea that the Creator made Adam in the image and likeness of the divine. Adam was charged with the care of the earth and all of its creatures. To honor the created human being is therefore to honor the creator. *Kavod*—the Hebrew word means to “honor” or “weight”—but it also refers to “Glory” and is a name utilized for the divine presence. In its call for Christian to “respect” Jews and Judaism there is an explicit rejection of the notion that they are a group whose existence has not religious significance until the end of days. As Fr. Hanspeter Heinz has put it, “It is no longer faith versus ignorance, but faith turning to faith; no longer truth versus falsehood but truth versus truth.” In his introduction to the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document, “The Scripture of the Jewish People in the Scripture of the Church,” Pope Benedict XVI [writing as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger] explains that, the truths expressed in Judaism and in the Jewish witness to their tradition are a source of nurture to Christians. From the Jewish side there is a growing awareness that Christianity may be honored and respected for reasons more than their large numbers or access to political power. Representatives of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel have now entered into a series of meetings with officials from the Curia to discuss issues of mutual concern. Perhaps the clearest articulation of how Christians and Christianity can become partners in a dialogue of mutual respect is to be found in the *Dabru Emet: a Jewish Statement about Christians and Christianity*. One of the most significant paragraphs states:

The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture. Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition. That difference will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other, nor by one community exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians’ faithfulness to their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.

A truly remarkable statement of mutual respect may be found in the statement by the Jewish-Christian discussion group of the Central Committee of German Catholics (2005).

-God is faithful to his covenant with the Church, but equally to his covenant with the Jewish people. Therefore, Christians and Jews are both called to understand themselves as “people of the covenant” and to be a “light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6; Mt 5:14).

-No catechesis of the Christian faith without teaching the living tradition of Judaism.

-No reconciliation with God without acknowledging the history of the Church’s sin towards the Jewish people.

-No understanding of biblical revelation without reading the Old Testament and seriously considering the Jewish interpretations.

These two statements reflect the status of our relations forty years after *Nostra Aetate*. The aporia of that document have been steadily moved forward toward greater mutual respect between our communities. This progress has occurred because the Church set dialogue as the desirable form of discourse with the Jewish people. Through dialogue, a continuous movement back and forth, it has been possible to disclose deeper layers of connection between us and also to maintain respectful boundaries. There are many problems yet to be resolved both within our communities and between them. However, on the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* it is appropriate to celebrate the courage of those who opened new doors and new paths toward a vision of Shalom, the reign of the Holy One among humanity.