

# STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

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## Editors' Introduction

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Welcome to the first volume of STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS. We are delighted not only to bring this new resource to the field of Christian-Jewish relations, but also that it is an “open access” publication that is available to anyone around the world on the Internet. Reflecting this, we are also committed to making its contents as “accessible” as possible in terms of writing style, the clarification of technical terms, and the explanation of concepts specific to an individual religious tradition.

It is appropriate that its first articles are published in the midst of observances around the world marking the fortieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, often known by its opening words in Latin, *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Time”). There were earlier texts that addressed the centuries of Christian contemptuous teaching about Judaism, particularly the 1947 “Ten Points of Seelisberg” prepared by the International Council of Christians and Jews. However, *Nostra Aetate*’s fourth section, issued as it was by a uniquely authoritative ecclesiastical council, sparked an epoch-defining transformation in relations between Jews and Christians that, according to Fr. Edward Flannery, “terminated in a stroke a millennial teaching of contempt of Jews and Judaism and unequivocally asserted the Church’s debt to its Jewish heritage.”<sup>1</sup>

Traditionally, ever since the *adversus Ioudaios* writings of the second through fifth centuries of the Common Era, Christianity had claimed to be the successor covenant people, elected by God to replace the People of Israel because of their faithlessness. This perspective was expressed in a theology of replacement (also known as the substitution theory or supersessionism), which taught that since the time of Jesus, Jews had been replaced by Christians in God’s favor, and that all God’s promises to the Jewish people had been realized, at least embryonically, in Christianity.

Today, however, the covenant between God and the Jewish people is no longer viewed as having been annulled. *Nostra*

*Aetate*, for example, states that God “does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues.” The late Pope John Paul II emphasized time and again that God’s covenant with the Jewish people had never been broken and retained eternal validity. If Jews were not rejected or accursed, as *Nostra Aetate* insisted, then Judaism was not the fossilized faith of long-standing Christian teaching, but a living, authentic religious tradition interacting dynamically with God. The ramifications are manifold.

*Nostra Aetate* provided a clarion call for Christians to develop revised theologies based on the convictions that Jews are beloved of God and have received an irrevocable calling. In a recent address, e.g., Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, suggested that overcoming replacement theology should be the starting point for a renewed Christian theology of Judaism (Cambridge, Dec. 6, 2004). He has also frequently repeated that we are only at “the beginning of the beginning” in this regard (Boston, Nov 6, 2002).

Therefore, the “Feature Topic” articles of Volume One of Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations are studies of subjects and questions that have arisen in the wake of *Nostra Aetate*. The initial contributors, consisting of scholars from many different countries, consider the implications of the sea-change brought by *Nostra Aetate* for questions of Christology, soteriology, theologies of religious pluralism, and later this year, Christian liturgy. In subsequent articles in this volume, other topics will be explored such as the role of the Land and State of Israel in the Jewish-Christian encounter and how one New Testament author may have sought to combat Marcion’s effort to exclude Israel’s scriptures from the Christian canon. There will also appear reviews of recently published works.

We note that building friendship is not simply about abandoning hostilities. True friendship needs to be based on common values and mutual benefits. Similarly, a friendly relationship between the two religious traditions of Christianity and Judaism requires a positive theological foundation. We hope that the launch of this journal will make an academic contribution toward this goal for both communities.

<sup>1</sup>Edward Flannery, “Seminaries, Classrooms, Pulpits, Streets: Where We Have to Go” in Roger Brooks, ed., *Unanswered Questions: Theological Views of Jewish-Catholic Relations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 128-129.