

CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM/INTER-RELIGIOUS STUDIES—
CONSULTATION

Topic: Conversion
Convener: Elizabeth Groppe, Xavier University
Moderator: Joy Galarneau, Siena College
Presenters: Bridget O'Brien, University of Notre Dame
Mary Boys, Union Theological Seminary

Bridget O'Brien opened this session with her paper "From Christ's Fulfillment to God's Fidelity: The Church's Conversion?" For many centuries, Christians understood their relationship to the Jewish people with a theology of promises made to the Jews and fulfilled in Christ. Should *Nostra Aetate*, she asked, lead to a conversion from this theological paradigm to a new approach? Drawing from the work of Catholic theologian Catherine Mowry LaCugna and Jewish scholar Michael Wyschogrod, O'Brien offered a trinitarian theology of God's irrevocable covenant fidelity as the theological basis for rejecting the position that the covenant with the Jews is fulfilled in Christ. Rather than calling for Jewish conversion to Christianity, she concludes, the Church should instead engage in dialogue with Jews.

In "The Catholic Turn toward the Quintessential Other: A Multi-Faceted Conversion," Mary Boys discussed John Connelly's new book *From Enemy to Brother: The Evolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965*, which traces the paths of Karl Thieme and Johannes Oesterreicher, European converts to Catholicism whose critique of anti-Semitism and denunciation of the Nuremberg Laws originally coexisted with a supersessionist theology that advocated a mission to the Jews. It was post-Holocaust conversations with Jewish thinkers and continuing theological exploration that led them to new approaches that contributed significantly to the theology of the Second Vatican Council.

Does *Nostra Aetate*, Boys asked, call us to an ongoing conversion? Drawing from the writings of Bernard Lonergan, Walter Conn, Robert Doran, and others, Boys noted the multiple dimensions of conversion to which we should attend. Openness to affective conversion requires the development of sustained relationships with Jews, involvement in Jewish life, and listening to Jewish experience. Openness to moral conversion requires that we face the depth of Catholic complicity in the *Shoah*, while intellectual conversion requires continued theological exploration that integrates developments in biblical scholarship.

The discussion that ensued included a reflection on the lectionary, with particular attention to the post-Easter readings from Acts that identify the "children of Israel" as those who crucified Christ (2:22–36, cf. 5:30, 5:51–52, 13:44–46). It was noted that after Christianity's separation from Judaism, texts such as the prophetic critiques of Israel that once called a religious community to conversion easily become for Christians an occasion to deflect our own sin onto others. Catherine Chalker noted how very different the interpretation of Scripture is in Judaism, where biblical texts are never read without many layers of commentary. John Pawlikowski reflected on

the need for Catholic systematic theology to grapple seriously with the theological implications of the church's new relationship to the Jewish people.

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