

CONSULTATION ON CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

Topic: Identity and Difference  
Convener: Todd Walatka, University of Notre Dame  
Moderator: John Pawlikowski, Catholic Theological Union  
Presenter: John Connelly, University of California Berkeley  
Respondent: Aaron Gross, University of San Diego

This session focused on John Connelly's award winning book, *From Enemy to Brother* (Harvard, 2012), which explores the history behind the shift in Catholic thought at Vatican II with regards to the Jewish people. Connelly presented the basic vision of his book, but then focused on the pivotal figure of Johannes Oesterreicher. As with virtually every figure who shaped the shift in Catholic thought following the Shoah, Oesterreicher was a convert to Catholicism. In his presentation, Connelly argued that it was precisely Oesterreicher's dual-identity as Catholic and Jew (a dual-identity that Oesterreicher himself claimed to the end of his life) that enabled him to perceive the anti-Christian character of anti-Semitism in the 1930s and to recognize decades later the ongoing importance of the Jewish covenant. The latter, however, represented a significant shift in Oesterreicher's thought. Connelly showed that Oesterreicher's early thought focused on the need for a mission to the Jews; his condemnations of anti-Semitism co-existed with a deep desire to convert the Jews to Christ. It was around the time of the opening of the Second Vatican Council that Oesterreicher's thought began to shift to a focus on dialogue and collaboration with Jews. And as an influential peritus at the council, Oesterreicher had a significant impact on the development of the text of *Nostra Aetate*. All of this development, Connelly argued, was in large part due to Oesterreicher's dual identity. He was part of a group of border crossers who in some way identified with those who were "other," and thus were able to see the truth of reality in a new way. It was a group of converts to Catholicism who was able to teach us something about solidarity with others.

Aaron Gross offered a deeply appreciative response to Connelly's work, both for its historical depth and its relevance for contemporary dialogue among religions. In particular, Gross noted the importance of recognizing the knotting together of racial and religious intolerance and the impossibility of cleanly separating these from one another. Drawing upon the work of Susannah Heschel and others, Gross argued that one must not underestimate the strength of anti-Semitism in modern thought. Affirming a key argument of Connelly's book, the conclusions of *Nostra Aetate* were not an inevitable consequence of the Shoah; the positive valuation of Jews as Jews was a significant achievement to be celebrated and must now be strenuously supported and developed. In particular, Gross argued that the greater challenge now is for both Christians and Jews to think more deeply about religious pluralism more broadly.

The discussion which followed took up many issues from both presentations, but focused most centrally on Oesterreicher's work after the Council. Oesterreicher developed many friendships within the Jewish-American community and continued his work in Jewish-Christian dialogue. He also became a committed Christian Zionist. John Pawlikowski also reflected on Oesterreicher's role (and eventual

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separation from) the Christian Scholars Group on Jewish-Christian Relations. Oesterreicher always argued after the Council for a positive valuation of Judaism but rejected the need for the Church's teaching of key systematic and dogmatic topics to be reformed in light of the affirmation of the unbroken Jewish covenant.

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