

CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM CONSULTATION

Topic: Teaching *Nostra Aetate*  
Convener: Todd Walatka, University of Notre Dame  
Moderator: John Pawlikowski, Catholic Theological Union  
Presenters: Peter Phan, Georgetown University  
Elena Procario-Foley, Iona College  
Joshua Ezra Burns, Marquette University

This session focused on the challenges in interpreting and teaching *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. Peter Phan's paper, "Reading *Nostra Aetate* in Reverse: What if We Look at the Catholic Church from the Perspective of Other Religions?" offered appreciation for the positive impact of *Nostra Aetate* but argued that the ecclesiocentric perspective of the text must be recognized and addressed if the Church is to continue to move forward. Particularly when viewed by adherents of other religions, he argued, the text remains trapped in a theology of fulfillment and adopts a unilateral and patronizing posture towards other religions. He proposed that a Christian theology of other religions must begin from a position of mutual relations and that the model for such a vision is best seen in three positive developments within the dialogue between Christianity and Judaism: 1) the affirmation of the Jewish covenant as irrevocable and thus a rejection of supersessionism; 2) the rejection of the "teaching of contempt" found in much of Christian history; and 3) the reinterpretation of the universality of the work of Christ and the Church in light of a positive reevaluation of Judaism. Phan suggested that these three gains within Jewish-Christian relations should be taken as a model for the general Christian understanding of the relationship between the Church and other religions. Here he appealed to the endurance of the covenant with Noah, the need to reject forms of contempt towards Eastern religions, and a theology that emphasizes the universal scope of the work of the Spirit.

Elena Procario-Foley's paper, "We're Nice? They're Nice?! Undergraduates and the Surprise of *Nostra Aetate*," offered a reflection on teaching *Nostra Aetate* in the context of multiple courses at Iona College. She began with data from recent Pew polls on the religious convictions of college-aged students and then turned to her experience in the classroom. She described how her students are most often surprised by the teachings of Vatican II with regards to Judaism and other religions. Building upon this general reaction, Procario-Foley then worked through a number of her central goals in her teaching of *Nostra Aetate*, including: helping students reflect on why this text would be necessary in the first place; introducing the event of Vatican II so that students can read *Nostra Aetate* in light of other conciliar texts and vice versa; working through the epistemological presuppositions of the opening of *Nostra Aetate*—that truth is one and all are oriented towards God—as key to understanding the text as a whole; providing some sense of the genuine shift in Catholic understanding in relation to Judaism at Vatican II; and contextualizing *Nostra Aetate* in light of earlier documents from the 1940s and 50s as well as later ecclesiastical texts on Jewish Christian relations.

Joshua Ezra Burns offered a reflection from the perspective of a Jewish theologian and historian working in a Catholic University. His paper, "In Whose

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Age? Responses and Reflections on the Teaching of Judaism after *Nostra Aetate*,” began by recounting the lack of an experience of anti-Semitism in his childhood, in large part due to the shift in Catholic thought represented in *Nostra Aetate* and yet also his initial ambivalence towards the text when he first read it as a faculty member at a Catholic institution. He argued—echoing Peter Phan’s paper—that *Nostra Aetate* does not go far enough, but also that it is a great tool for orienting students. His very presence at Marquette and his students’ lack of animosity towards Jews show the clear impact of *Nostra Aetate* on the Church. He then raised a number of challenges in teaching *Nostra Aetate*, including how necessary and helpful it is to detail the dark history of Jewish-Christian relations for students who are unaware of this history. Finally, he concluded with a warning regarding the persistence of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism today, most publicized within movements in Islam but also elsewhere. In particular, he argued that the “Boycott, Divest, and Sanction” movement against the State of Israel is beginning to dangerously transform the way Jews in general are viewed in the United States.

The discussion which followed touched upon many topics including the question of “the Land” within Jewish-Christian dialogue, “soft-supersessionism” in Christian theology and liturgy, and helping undergraduates engage their campus and local communities as a means to effect real change against anti-Semitism and prejudice.

TODD WALATKA  
*University of Notre Dame*  
*South Bend, Indiana*