

**Pim Valkenberg and Anthony Cirelli, Eds.**  
***Nostra Aetate: Celebrating 50 Years  
of the Catholic Church's Dialogue  
with Jews and Muslims***

(Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016),  
xxiii + 312 pp.

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The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Nostra Aetate* in 1965 prompted Catholic institutions around the world to organize symposia considering contemporary Roman Catholic relations with other religious traditions. Some of these proceedings were published, including a volume from my own institution, the Australian Catholic University. I mention this in order to illustrate widespread interest in assessing the impact of *NA*. The current book under review, which is based on a symposium held at The Catholic University of America (CUA) in May 2015, focuses on the United States.

As the editors note, these essays are to be seen as part of an ongoing conversation that began with *NA*. The papers in this volume are not intended to be the last word on *NA* and should be read in this light. The opening address by John Garvey, president of the CUA, highlights this point. In a brief space he explores both the limitations and the potential expansiveness of dialogue opened up by *NA*. This theme runs through the essays included here. Some have a more historical focus, looking at the emergence of *NA* and the role it played in reorienting Catholic relations with other religions. Others are more interested in the future, and in providing guidelines for continuing engagement. But all the contributors, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, see their essays as contributions to a work in progress.

The book is divided into five sections: "Historical and Theological Context," "Asian Religions," "Dialogue with Muslims," "Dialogue with Jews," and "Local Reception in the United States and the Academy." The second, third, and fourth sections correspond to the topics addressed in those chapters in *NA*. The book also includes a new translation of *NA* by Fr. Thomas Stransky, one of those present at the drafting of the original document.

Of the two essays in section one that locate *NA* in its historical and theological setting, the second, by Michael Root, is particularly interesting. He argues that *NA* moved Catholicism from a position of absolute, “nonscalar” judgments about other religions, including Protestant denominations of Christianity, to the use of more nuanced “scalar” categories that in effect allow for an inclusivist approach (p. 30). Nonetheless, he cautions against relying primarily on quantitative over qualitative comparisons with other faiths. For example, he writes, “The Catholic Church shares a greater range of common elements with Presbyterians than with Jews, but Judaism and the Jewish people have a kind of importance for the Catholic Church and Catholic theology that Presbyterian churches and Reformed theology do not.” This is due to “the emphasis on God’s irrevocable commitment to his covenant promises” (p. 31). This theme of covenant, at the heart of the Church’s recent document “The Gifts and Calling of God Are Irrevocable” (December 2015) and surely of interest to readers of this journal, is revisited in several of the essays.

The two sections on Catholic relations with Hinduism and Buddhism and with Islam include essays by practitioners of these faiths as well as Catholic scholars (James Fredericks, Francis Clooney, and Sidney Griffith) and Church authorities (Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, Bishop Denis Madden, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald) who are widely recognised as leaders in this field. These essays raise a wide range of methodological, theological, and soteriological issues. The chapters by Clooney and Fredericks reflect their interest in Comparative Theology, which draws on the insights of other religious traditions as a way to deepen one’s connection to one’s own tradition. As the quotation from Michael Root suggests, there are real questions about whether and how this approach might work in relation to Judaism (though Pim Valkenberg in his essay on “The Academic Reception of *NA*” thinks that it might). It is this area of Catholic-Jewish dialogue that will particularly interest readers of this journal.

The fourth section dealing with Catholic-Jewish relations contains contributions from Kurt Cardinal Koch, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, and Rabbi Noam E. Marans. Concerning the Holocaust, Cardinal Koch acknowledges that “Christian anti-Judaism was, while not the cause, an attitudinal prerequisite for the expansion of neo-pagan anti-Semitism and the lack of resistance of most Christians” (pp. 166-67). He further argues that both Catholicism and Judaism can act as a “thorn in the flesh” of the other, filling in gaps in self-understanding (pp. 176-77, quoting Paul in 2 Cor 12:7).

In a Jewish response, Greenberg carries this argument further, exploring the ways in which the two faiths share core teachings about creation, teleology, and covenant: “It follows that we should give priority to advance the common goal – *tikkun olam*, the repair and perfection of the world – more than we should be concerned to protect our institutions” (p.179). This is a bold claim that he proceeds to substantiate by uncovering the dialectical tensions at the heart of both faiths, tensions that find “rebalance” through dialogue. As an example of rebalancing, he offers *NA* itself, which he describes as an “heroic repentance” on the part of the Church (p. 189).

Cardinal Dolan takes a very different, homiletical approach to Catholic-Jewish dialogue. He puts forward five areas of alliance between Christians and Jews: responding to secularism and irreligion (reminiscent of A. J. Heschel's argument in his influential 1965 essay, "No Religion Is an Island"), pastoral issues, demographic challenges, religious extremism, and restoring a vocabulary of sin and redemption. Significantly, the idea of forming interfaith alliances also occurs elsewhere in the book, notably in an essay on Catholic-Muslim dialogue by Sayed Hassan Akhlaq Hussaini (referring to the Islamic concept of *Wilayat*).

Marans, drawing on the Jewish notion of "Oral Torah," argues that *NA* depended on the emergence of an "Oral Torah" of its own. He discusses the "dramatic gestures" of papal visits over the last few decades to synagogues and to Israel and to Catholic statements and pronouncements (also emphasized by Cardinal Koch). These had to occur before the Jewish community could respond in an open manner (pp. 217-18). He also refers to two "stress points" in interfaith relations from the Jewish perspective: the Shoah and the State of Israel (p. 220). Disappointingly, though the first of these points is discussed in some of the essays, the latter—a consideration of the status of the land and State of Israel in Jewish and Christian theology and its place within their respective covenantal schemes—is almost entirely absent.

This suggests that the process set in motion by *NA* still has a long way to go. These essays are a useful instrument in the dialogical tool-box, a summary of progress made thus far and a signpost pointing to a hopeful future.