

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING*The State of the Global Catholic-Jewish Dialogue*

John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, Catholic Theological Union

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Recently the global Catholic-Jewish dialogue has experienced considerable tension, particularly over certain decisions made by the Vatican. While some of these tensions which focused on the Bishop Williamson affair and the Pope's revision of the Tridentine Good Friday prayer have subsided, a residue remains that will require continued frank discussions. This afternoon, in the brief time I have, I will not recite these controversies which have received much press attention. Rather, I will focus on several more positive developments.

The first positive event is certainly Pope Benedict XVI's January 17th visit and address at the main synagogue in Rome this year. Three aspects of his talk are especially relevant for the advancement of Catholic-Jewish relations today.

The first is his emphasis on the ongoing nature of the Jewish covenant. He spoke of the covenant in the present, not the past tense. This is in line with the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* and with several important statements made by Pope John Paul II. It also repeats the basic thrust of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 2001 document, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*. Pope Benedict, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, wrote a very laudatory introduction to this document in his capacity as head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This papal re-emphasis on the ongoing validity of the Jewish covenant is particularly relevant given the perspective advanced over the past several years by the late Cardinal Avery Dulles and his supporters. The perspective of Cardinal Dulles has been that *Nostra Aetate* did not settle the issue of the post-Christ Event status of the Jewish covenant and that we must bring back into play the passages from the Letter to the Hebrews with their apparent invalidation of the Jewish covenant—despite the fact that *Nostra Aetate* ignored these passages, clearly establishing Romans 9-11 as the foundation for a contemporary theology of the Church's relationship with the Jewish People. Cardinal Walter Kasper, in private conversation, has indicated that the Pope's January 2010 remarks definitely show that Cardinal Dulles's view is not the perspective of Benedict XVI.

In this speech at the synagogue in Rome, Benedict XVI addressed another issue that has plagued his papacy. Previous to this address, while he has strongly denounced the Holocaust and all forms of antisemitism, he had been ambiguous at best on the issue of Catholic complicity in the Shoah, tending to describe its ideology as fundamentally anti-religious. In this speech he made his own the often-quoted words of Pope John Paul II first spoken in the liturgical ceremony for the new millennium held in Rome on the first Sunday of Lent 2000 and then repeated that May in a message placed in the historic Western Wall in Jerusalem by the Pope during his visit to Jerusalem. This statement expresses repentance for Catholic collaboration with antisemitism over the centuries, including during the Nazi era. Though it would have been preferable, in my judgment, if the Pope had said this in his own words, particularly given his German background. Nonetheless, his embrace of John Paul's statement of repentance represents his first real step towards acknowledging Catholic complicity in this regard.

Finally, the Pope's positive reference to the 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, along with his citation of Jewish religious sources, helps to restore a positive thrust to the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Those in Catholic leadership who have been espousing the view of Cardinal Dulles have tended to dismiss all documents subsequent to *Nostra Aetate* (i.e., this document from the Biblical Commission, the 1974 and 1985 documents from the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, and the many speeches of Pope John Paul II) as merely pastoral statements and not part of what they term "settled doctrine," a canonically dubious term. By referring to this 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission document, Pope Benedict has given new status to it and, by implication, also to the other documents that have been dismissed by those championing the Dulles perspective. Such documents are clearly important in understanding the basic theological relationship between the Church and the Jewish People in the eyes of Pope Benedict XVI.

The second important development on the international scene is the passage, in July 2009, of a major new interreligious statement by the International Council of Christians and Jews at its conference at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Berlin. This document, several years in the making through international consultations of scholars and people active in the Christian-Jewish dialogue, was signed by representatives from twenty-eight countries in a solemn ceremony in Berlin. It is meant as a further development and updating of the historic document issued in the summer of 1947 by representatives from nineteen countries who met in Seelisberg, Switzerland, to examine the implications of the Holocaust for Christian-Jewish relations. The Seelisberg document had ten major points; the Berlin statement has twelve. Titled *A Time for Recommitment: Jewish-Christian Dialogue 70 Years After the War and the Shoah*, this document also differs from the 1947 text in that it outlines responsibilities for both the Christian and Jewish communities as well as responsibilities incumbent on all religious traditions. The points of the Seelisberg statement addressed only the Christian community.

While lengthier discussions are included in the latter part of the document, the Twelve Points of Berlin read as follows—

Responsibilities incumbent upon the Christian community:

- 1) to combat religious, racial and all other forms of antisemitism;
- 2) to promote interreligious dialogue with Jews;
- 3) to develop theological understandings of Judaism that affirm its distinctive integrity;
- 4) to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Responsibilities incumbent upon the Jewish community:

- 5) to acknowledge the efforts of many Christian communities in the late 20th century to reform their attitudes towards Jews;
- 6) to re-examine Jewish texts and liturgy in the light of these Christian reforms;
- 7) to differentiate between fair-minded criticism of Israel and antisemitism;
- 8) to offer encouragement to the State of Israel as it works to fulfill the ideals stated in its founding documents, a task Israel shares with many nations of the world.

Responsibilities incumbent upon both the Christian and Jewish communities and others:

- 9) to enhance interreligious and intercultural education;
- 10) to promote interreligious friendship and cooperation as well as social justice in the

global society;

11) to enhance dialogue with political and economic bodies;

12) to network with all those whose work responds to the demands of environmental stewardship.

The ICCJ Berlin document is not intended as a final statement but rather as a stimulus for further discussion around the world. A conference on its implications has already taken place in Latin America and others are planned for Sweden, for Eastern/Central Europe and for here in Chicago next November at Catholic Theological Union.¹

The final global development that I would highlight in this brief presentation is the theological. Several projects are underway to move the discussions in the Christian-Jewish dialogue into the mainstream of Christian theological discussion and hopefully into the mainstream of Jewish religious reflections as well. On the Christian side, several important efforts are currently underway. At the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) a three year project on Paul and Judaism is coming to a close. This project has focused on collecting and integrating the vast amount of new material developed by Pauline scholars over the past several decades which is transforming, in a positive direction, Paul's understanding of Judaism and its Torah tradition. This is a monumental shift in thinking about Paul and Judaism. It is part of the equally groundbreaking scholarship on the parting of the ways that carries great implications for both Christian biblical and systematic scholarship. Its findings will eventually be published in book form.

Another major project was launched following the 2005 commemoration of the fortieth anniversary celebration of *Nostra Aetate* at the Gregorian University in Rome. Co-sponsored by Boston College, the Catholic University of Leuven, Catholic Theological Union and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome²—with the stated support of Cardinal Walter Kasper—this project has been examining a metaquestion entitled: How Might We Christians in Our Time Reaffirm Our Faith Claim that Jesus Christ is Savior of all Humanity, even as We Affirm the Jewish People's Covenantal Life in God.? Primarily a Catholic effort, but with some Protestant and Jewish participation, this consultation will shortly release, in book form, the substance of its discussions held in Italy, Leuven, the University of Notre Dame and the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem.

The World Council of Churches has also launched an effort to examine the implication of interreligious dialogue for Christian theological self-identity. This process will involve a consultation with each of the WCC's major dialogue partners. The consultation with regard to Judaism will take place in late June in Istanbul immediately prior to the annual meeting of ICCJ in that city. The results of this process will be presented to the WCC leadership at its meeting in 2011.

Finally, I would mention the ongoing work of the Central Committee of Catholics and Jews which has met in Germany for over twenty years under the leadership of Professor Hanspeter Heinz. The committee has issued important papers on many key theological issues in the Christian-Jewish relationship, including a 2009 statement against mission to the Jews which has caused considerable controversy in Germany.

All of these efforts, if successful, will change profoundly the Christian theological understanding of Judaism and the Jewish People, and in turn because the relationship with Judaism has been so central to Christian theology (especially Christology), it will also profoundly change Christian

¹ For more details about this ICCJ document see *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, Volume IV, 2009.

² St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia is now also a co-sponsor.

self-understanding. There are also implications for Jewish self-identity, though to a lesser degree, since Judaism has never defined itself as the replacement for Christianity. However, the question of whether Jews, from the Jewish perspective, can affirm a theological validity for Christianity certainly presents a considerable challenge to Jewish scholarship today.