

**REVIEW**

John Connelly

***From Enemy to Brother:  
The Revolution in Catholic Teaching  
on the Jews, 1933-1965***

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Connelly writes at the end of his introduction, “The way to *Nostra Aetate* was not straight, but involved bends in the road, snags, and repeated detours along well-worn but ultimately circuitous paths of anti-Judaism” (p. 10). This is exactly what he expertly demonstrates by looking in great detail at the lives and interactions of a host of Jews and Christians in the three decades preceding the declaration’s promulgation. Doing so, he provides the most significant account to date of how the 1965 conciliar text came to say what it eventually said about Jews and their relation to the Church. Connelly’s major, but not only, contribution is bringing to light especially what happened in the circle of German-speaking theologians and Bible scholars. Here he found the debates and then the revolution in seeing Jews not as enemies but as elder brothers, first in the reflections of theologian Karl Thieme as he focused on *The Letter to the Romans*. Connelly tells the story with drama and excitement and makes available much new information for those who cannot access the extensive German sources as well as other archival materials.

An important question for a study of this intensity is where to begin. The roots of anti-Judaism in Catholic teaching and theology run deep into the early centuries. Anti-Judaism is found throughout the Reformation and early Enlightenment. Bruno Bauer published *Die Judenfrage* in 1843, which more accurately translates as “the Problem of the Jews,” but even the

inspirational reformer Edmund Burke offered an anti-Jewish interpretation of the French Revolution in 1790.

Connelly chose to begin his study in 1933, the year Hermann Muckermann, a promoter of eugenics, was forced by Nazis to resign the directorship of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for being insufficiently pro-Nazi. It was also the year Catholic theologian Karl Adam began to consider Adolf Hitler an ally in bringing Protestants and Catholics together in a united Germany. A trail-blazer for a more inclusive Christian church, he earlier had deJudaized Mary from “hateful energies and tendencies that we condemn in full-blooded Jews” (p. 19). (Karl Rahner and Yves Congar later honored him in a festschrift in 1951.) This was the year racism became a doctrine of totalitarian Germany. It was the year Dr. Albert Niedermeyer fled his medical practice after rejecting eugenics and sterilization, but judged the Nazi boycott of Jews a sign of divine justice when Pius XI proclaimed 1933 a holy year of the redemption. In 1933, Bishop Johannes Maria Gföllner declared it impossible to be a good Catholic and a good National Socialist, though mainly because of Nazi radical antisemitism, which he contrasted with a justifiable anti-Judaism. Above all reasons, it was from about 1933 that “a small band of Catholics, mostly émigrés of Jewish or Protestant origin, began staging a vigorous opposition to racism and racist antisemitism” in various places (p. 34). They were soon to be overtaken by Hitler’s legions, and then continued working in concert after the war during the two decades up to and including the Second Vatican Council.

Individuals and groups played a prominent role in changing Catholic views of Jews in the decades before the Council. Connelly describes the road to the “Freiburg Circle,” which began publishing the *Freiburger Rundbrief* in 1948. He also gives some attention to a French-speaking circle that included Paul Démann, a Brother of Sion and originally a Hungarian Jew, who began publishing *Cahiers Sioniens* in 1947 with fellow converts Geza Vermes and Renée Bloch. Vermes and Démann would eventually return to Jewish life, but they first

made contributions to improving Catholic views of Jews right up to the convening of Vatican II. Démann might well have influenced Cardinal Achille Liénart to write a pastoral letter, “*La question juive et la conscience chrétienne*,” for Lent 1960. (Liénart later led the takeover of Vatican II from Curia control by speaking from the board of presidents and making the motion for a point of order at the beginning of the first general congregation on October 13, 1962.) Among French speakers, one must include the converts Jacques Maritain and his wife Raïssa, and their inspiration, the beggar novelist, Léon Bloy (whom Pope Francis is known to quote). French speakers also included the Jewish scholar Jules Isaac and those Christians and Jews in his circle, L’Amitié Judéo-chrétienne de France, founded in 1948 with its journal, *Sens*.

Also, there was a Fribourg / Basel contingent that included Thieme as well as Charles Journet, a regular correspondent with Maritain. Paul VI, pope during the last few years of the Council, acknowledged that both influenced him and asked for their interventions on the text of *Nostra aetate*. In the Swiss circle of those whose views and interventions influenced the deliberations were Protestants Oscar Cullmann and Karl Barth, Jewish philosopher Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, and the Dominican Jean de Menasce, a convert from Judaism. The names are many and the biographies and intersection of lives are complicated. Wandering among these circles and eventually finding refuge from Nazism at Seton Hall University in New Jersey is John M. Oesterreicher, a Jewish convert to Catholicism, who then returns to these circles, first in consultations after the war and then as a *peritus* working on *Nostra Aetate*. Connelly devotes well-spent time tracing the journey of Oesterreicher. It is Oesterreicher’s narrative of the development of the document that most English speakers know. Connelly recounts his flight across Europe and then his radical change from a Jewish convert managing the *Pauluswerk* in Vienna, a missionary outreach to Jews, with its publication *Die Erfüllung*, to his post-conciliar support for Christian Zionism.

By telling and retelling their stories and those of many more, Connelly widens the narrative on how Vatican II came to say what it did about Jews. He begins with early twentieth-century racism and Catholic attitudes toward it, the rise of Nazism among the German people, Catholic efforts to combat racism and antisemitism, and the complicated aspects of the papacies of Pius XI and XII with regard to what was happening to Jews in Europe. Connelly weaves in the story of the attempted 1938 encyclical on racism and antisemitism of Pius XI, telling of the pope's personally enlisting the American Jesuit and champion of interracial justice, John LaFarge, to lead the effort, and then asking Jesuit Minister General Włodzimierz Ledóchowski for additional help. Ledóchowski assigned Austrian Jesuit Gustav Gundlach, an expert on the Church's teachings on the Jews to work with Ryan. One need only consult Gundlach's entry on "Antisemitism" in the 1930 *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* to see the problem. Their only partially enlightened efforts, shaped by an implicitly anti-Jewish theology, were subverted by the ambivalent Ledóchowski. He somehow held up the text and brought in others to revise it, for he feared that it might misrepresent the benefits of National Socialism over communism and anger Hitler. We do not know for sure which draft the ailing Pius XI might have seen, for it was destroyed with his personal papers following the election of Pius XII. Evidence indicates that it would have been an obstacle for the framers of *Nostra Aetate*.

The heart of Connelly's book then comes in the sixth of his nine chapters, "Conversion in the Light of Auschwitz," when he shows that Karl Thieme led the way in giving a positive reading to *The Letter to the Romans*, especially chapters 9-11. This is where Connelly traces the crucial events that put the right people in conversations that yielded insights that later shaped the Council, such as the "emergency" meeting in Seelisberg in the summer of 1947 and a series of other meetings leading to the Dutch Msgr. Anton Ramselaar's convening international symposia at Apeldoorn in the Netherlands. (Ramselaar worked parallel to Msgr. Johannes Willebrands and his Catholic Conference on Ecumenical Questions—both

protected by the Dutch bishops.) What resulted from these discussions were two related insights: a positive insight, that *Romans* affirmed that Judaism still has a role in salvation, and a negative insight, that any distinction between antisemitism and anti-Judaism no longer held after Auschwitz. Thieme's conclusions influenced others, especially Oesterreicher, and would be presented by others because he succumbed to cancer in July 1963, well before a draft made it the Council floor.

A chapter on new Christian understandings of the Jewish covenant with God serves as a prelude to Connelly's chapter on Vatican II. It is here that he identifies the new and contending perspectives with which a growing number of Christians and Jews wrestled in the first two decades after the war. The chapter is relevant to discussions today.

Connelly does not cite Latin sources, and his account of the draft "On the Jews" lacks precision that the *Acta* and other conciliar sources provide, though he had access to the minutes of the Secretariat, usually in French. Even when he cites the 1928 suppression of the priestly organization *Amici Israël* because of its remarkable condemnation of racial antisemitism in a decree issued by Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val, then Secretary of the Holy Office, he uses German sources. (Cardinal Bea would later refer indirectly to this earlier official precedent.) A strength of Connelly's work—providing a solid account of how the conversion both of individuals and of their ideas is revealed by German sources—is a weakness when retelling the conciliar story about the draft that others do more precisely using the *Acta* and other official sources. Some may find his final chapter, on continuing disputes over a Catholic mission to the Jews, the most provocative. It is most current for relations between Christians and Jews fifty years after the Council in naming the lingering problems, offenses, misunderstandings, and unresolved questions from the Council.

*Nostra Aetate* was in many ways the barest of beginnings for the Catholic Church in re-defining relations with Jews. However, the story of the declaration (managed skillfully by

Cardinal Bea and assisted by Jan Willebrands and the bishops, consultants, and staff of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity), as a conciliar exercise, unavoidably took on a life of its own. Before a first draft was shared with the Council fathers there were calls by bishops and theologians, missionaries and others to include others, especially Muslims. While the fourth paragraph on the Jews remains the heart of the final text, the declaration managed to accomplish considerably more for interreligious relations.

With so much detail, so many lives discussed and so many conversations and writings woven into Connelly's narrative, a few mistakes are unavoidable. The Decree of the Holy Office suppressing *Amici Israël* was not a "papal" act, though Pius XI approved it (pp. 96-97, 100). Connelly is under the impression (p. 101) that Pius XII might have published the draft encyclical on the deceased Pius XI's "desk." Precedent not content would have dictated against it. The Benedictine Abbot Leo Rudloff, brought on the Secretariat by Bea to chair a working group, was not a convert (p. 179). Pope John XXIII did not request the draft that would eventually become *Nostra Aetate*. Bea met with him, three months after both had been visited by Jules Isaac, and Bea recommended that the Secretariat facilitate relations of Jews with the Church during the Council preparations (pp. 240-1). Oesterreicher did not author singly any of the Secretariat reports and eventual drafts (p. 243). Actually, Gregory Baum prepared by himself the first report for February 1961. By then, Oesterreicher (not in July 1960 [p. 236]) and Rudloff were appointed to the Secretariat, the latter, being an abbot and thus a Council father, could chair the working group of four, with George Tavard as the fourth. (Tavard once remarked that they were called "the American commission," though none of them were born in America. Rudloff spent half his time at Weston Priory in Vermont and half in Jerusalem as abbot of Dormition monastery.) Others joined in the drafting work as the Council unfolded and the *modi* of bishops were received at various stages.

Most of these are small points. The contribution of Connelly in tracking the evolution and revolution in Catholic thinking in the decades leading up to the Council and *Nostra Aetate*, especially among the German speakers, but also among others, is a great accomplishment. This is a very important book, written with style and insight, and now a valuable resource for understanding the history of Christian-Jewish relations in the twentieth century and *Nostra Aetate*.