

INTRODUCTION

What Happened in 1965?

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A half-century ago, the war in Vietnam was escalating, the space race was in full swing, the Rolling Stones were on a world tour, the bravery of those who marched to Selma led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, and the St. Louis Arch was completed. The United States occupied the Dominican Republic, Malcolm X was assassinated, NASA's Mariner 4 flew by Mars, race riots erupted in Watts, California, and Muhammad Ali defeated Sonny Liston.¹

This pastiche from one year, 1965, sheds light on just how much and how quickly the United States was changing in the 1960s. And religious institutions in that period were not immune to what was happening in the rest of society. The expanding civil rights movement, the developing women's movement, the changing demographics through immigration, and an emerging disenchantment with organized religion all demanded the attention of people of faith and provoked a long and thoroughgoing reassessment of beliefs and practices in many congregations and church bodies. Among Protestants, this process unfolded in as many ways as there were denominations. The Roman Catholic Church was also reassessing long-held practices and positions in light of how much the world had changed since World War II. The Church, however, was working out its decisions on a world stage.

When Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council in 1962, bishops from around the world gathered in

¹ Taylor, Alan. "50 Years Ago: A Look Back at 1965." *The Atlantic*, March 11, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/03/50-years-ago-a-look-back-at-1965/387493/>.

Rome to work through a slate of reforms. In particular, the group took almost four years to hammer out and agree upon a statement that would best articulate a new framework for the relationship between the Church and non-Christian religions. When Pope Paul VI closed the council in October, 1965, this new understanding was set forth in the document, *Nostra Aetate* ("In our times"). While *NA* mentioned other religions by name, the most radical portion (par. 4) focused on the relationship between Jews and Christians. In one very short paragraph, the document revoked the ancient charge of deicide, indicating that the death of Jesus can no longer be "charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today." The same paragraph also said that in teaching and preaching throughout the Church "the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God" and it called an end to all "hatred, persecutions, [and] displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."

In the wake of this major turning point in Catholic-Jewish relations, the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations (CSG) was formed in 1969. Going by a variety of names throughout the years, the CSG has consisted of primarily Catholic and Protestant scholars (as of 2015, the group includes Jewish scholars as well) dedicated to rethinking historical approaches to the relationships between Christians and Jews and producing fresh theologies and hermeneutical strategies that incorporate and build upon the new framework.

Over the last year, in celebration of *NA*'s fiftieth anniversary, the group has dedicated considerable time to thinking about what *NA* has accomplished and what it means today, in a world that is markedly different than the one in which *NA* came about. The CSG also looked to the future, to the challenges and opportunities for inter-religious engagement in the next fifty years. In this special edition of *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations (SCJR)*, current and former members have contributed articles which form pieces of this larger conversation, all the while recognizing that this is just a beginning.

CSG members have also played a role in the development of the sculpture, “Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time” by Joshua Koffman, now installed on the campus of St. Joseph’s University. Reimagining the medieval European image in which “the feminine figures of victorious Church (Ecclesia) and vanquished Synagogue (Synagoga) adorned dozens of cathedrals and churches,” the new sculpture depicts Ecclesia and Synagoga sharing their texts with each other and demonstrating that “both Synagogue and Church experience covenantal life with God.”² The sculpture was inspired by a small brass sculpture which CSG member Mary Boys commissioned for her book, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (Paulist Press, 2000), and created by Paula Mary Turnbull, a member of her religious community. Directors of the Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations at Saint Joseph’s University, Drs. Philip Cunningham and Adam Gregerman, had the opportunity to present miniature bronze replicas of “Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time” to Pope Francis and Rabbi Abraham Skorka in the Vatican during an audience with the International Council of Christians and Jews on June 30, 2015.

In “Protestant Parallels to *Nostra Aetate*,” Franklin Sherman provides a glimpse into how Protestant churches, both before and after 1965, have wrestled with the troubled history of their relations to the Jewish people. Sherman provides a roadmap to the variety of statements that so many Protestant church bodies, primarily in North American and Europe, produced in their efforts to come to terms with their own historical positions toward the Jewish people, affirming new understandings of this relationship, and committing themselves to new relationship. While *NA* doesn’t refer to the Holocaust, many of the Protestant statements do, acknowledg-

² “Sculpting a New Tradition: From Adversaries to Two Peoples in Covenant to Study Partners.” SJU: Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations. September 2015.
[https://www.sju.edu/int/academics/centers/ijcr/archives/Sculpture development.html](https://www.sju.edu/int/academics/centers/ijcr/archives/Sculpture%20development.html).

ing the role Christians played in Hitler's Final Solution. This is likely due to the fact that many of these statements were written many years after *NA*, at a time when people were much more aware of what happened to the Jews during the Holocaust and it was widely discussed in the public square.

Using the concept of “frontlash” as a lens through which to look at the ways anti-Semitism, just like racism or patriarchy, persists today but in new forms, Katharina von Kellenbach in “In Our Time: Civil Rights, Women’s Liberation, and Jewish-Christian Dialogue Fifty Years After *Nostra Aetate*,” points to just how difficult it is to enact real and lasting change in long-held attitudes and behaviors. While many of the overt forms anti-Semitism, such as the charge of deicide, have largely fallen out of favor in the public arena, anti-Semitism itself has not disappeared. In fact, says von Kellenbach, “-isms” simply find new outlets that aren’t perhaps as obvious but are just as pernicious. In particular, von Kellenbach suggests that one of the new outlets for anti-Semitism can be found in anti-Zionism, an ideological position which is being taken up by many progressive Christians.

In “Reading *Nostra Aetate* in Reverse: A Different Way of Looking at the Relationships Among Religions,” Peter Phan argues that in order to truly read *NA* today, for *our* time, the theology that informs the document must be re-evaluated. The dilemma is apparent in the title, *Declaration on the Church’s Relations to Non-Christian Religions*, where the asymmetrical relationship between Christianity and religions of the world is clear in the use of the prefix “non-”. Suggesting something which is inferior or incomplete, the use of “non-” expresses the Church’s conviction that other religions find their purest expression in and through Christianity (fulfillment theology). If the Church is to authentically relate to the religions of the world today, argues Phan, *NA* needs to be read in such a way that Christianity becomes one among, not the pinnacle of, religions. Phan goes on to outline how the Jewish-Christian dialogue of the last fifty years can serve as a starting

point, if not model, for a revised understanding of the Church among religions.

Finally, CSG member Robert Cathey, along with Presbyterian colleagues Jay Moses, Dirk Ficca, and Nanette Sawyer with Jill Folan and Katie Rains, shows us how *NA* still serves as a model and inspiration for Christian churches today. In “Why Would Presbyterians Turn to a Catholic Document?” Cathey and his co-authors reflect on the long process of dialogue, drafting and re-drafting that preceded their official declaration, “...In our time...’ A statement on relations between the Presbytery of Chicago and the Jewish community in metropolitan Chicago.” This contribution allows us to see not just the final product, but also the careful thought and considerable effort that go into the creation of this type of statement in our own time.

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