

“Who is my Neighbour? Interfaith Dialogue and Theological Formation”: Panel One (Responses)

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“Who is my Neighbour? Interfaith Dialogue and Theological Formation”: Panel One Introduction

As is noted in the introduction to this volume, Levine’s keynote address offers a cautionary, albeit optimistic, account of the task and possibilities of Christian-Jewish dialogue initiatives. Through an examination of the titular concept of the conference – “neighbour” – Levine’s discussion highlighted how the different hermeneutical traditions of Judaism and Christianity have yielded different interpretations of this important biblical concept. In doing so, she draws our attention to how Jewish-Christian dialogue is imperiled if we fail to account for, and attenuate, the dominance of the Christian hermeneutical tradition and lingering attitude of supersessionism that can accompany it.

The panel responses both extend, and provide additional context to, Levine’s concerns. While Levine does not directly invoke the term “supersessionism,” the first panel respondent, Jean Duhaime, addresses this lingering attitude head on in his summary of how Christian-Jewish dialogue has been viewed and theologically negotiated in the Catholic tradition since Vatican II. By also addressing various Jewish reactions to the shift in Catholic attitudes towards the Jewish tradition, Duhaime illustrates the work still needed to be done for the Catholic Church to clarify its understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism while simultaneously highlighting the value of including Jewish-Christian dialogue in the formation and training of religious leaders.

Drawing from her personal experience in the seminary and as a working Rabbi in multifaith contexts, Sherril Gilbert’s response shifts the focus from the dialogue of theological exchange to what interreligious dialogue theorists would call “the dialogue of life” – which is to say, she articulates the wholistic value of interfaith dialogue, and, in doing so, demonstrates why it is crucial to incorporate a concern for interfaith dialogue into modern theological education.

The final response, from Hassan Guillet, discusses his own personal experiences with interfaith dialogue during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a founding member of the *Table Interreligieuse de concertation du Québec*. He explains how this experience opened his eyes to the power of interfaith dialogue and collaboration, and also to the need to expand interfaith dialogue initiatives to include as many faith communities as possible, including Indigenous faith communities that are not as clearly demarcated as, say, Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

Key Words: Interfaith dialogue, Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue, theological education, Vatican II

Christian-Jewish Dialogue and Theological Formation

Jean Duhaime, *Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal*

In the Roman Catholic Church the relationship with Judaism is considered to be a special one, different from the relationship with other religions. As Pope John Paul II noted in his address at the Great Synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1986:

The Jewish religion is not “extrinsic” to us, but in a certain way is “intrinsic” to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.¹

In fact, the Catholic Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism is part of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity rather than the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. So, one may wonder if the Catholic-Jewish dialogue may serve as a paradigm for interreligious relations at large and could inspire relevant reflections on formation in seminaries or schools of theology or religious studies. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring the richness of this experience and to take inspiration from it for other types of interreligious dialogues. This would be coherent with the history of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of Vatican II (1965),² in which is found the main statement of the Council on Judaism. It is well known that this declaration was initially intended to exclusively discuss the relationship of the Church to Judaism, but was expanded very soon to include its relation to other non-Christian religions as well.

In the following remarks, based on a review of Christian (mostly Catholic), Jewish, and interfaith documents, I will address a few points related to the theological dimension of Christian-Jewish dialogue and its implication on the formation of religious leaders. After providing a definition and typology of Christian-Jewish dialogue (1), I will move on to a summary of the most important theological achievements in this area since World War II (2). I will then look at the notion of “people of God” in a recent text issued on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in order to illustrate the work still needed for the Catholic Church to clarify its understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism (3). The work of theologians on a few other key issues will be briefly mentioned, along with Jewish reactions (4). The last part of this reflection draws attention to suggestions for including Christian-Jewish dialogue in the formation and training of religious leaders (5). I am talking from a Catholic standpoint, and I will refer mostly to Catholic documents and scholarly works, but I believe that *mutatis mutandis*, these remarks are appropriate in an ecumenical context such as the one encountered in schools or institutes of religious studies.

1. John Paul II, “*Incontro Con La Comunità Ebraica Nella Sinagoga Della Città Di Roma, Discorso Di Giovanni Paolo II*,” April 13, 1986, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1986/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19860413_sinagoga-roma.html.

2. Vatican II Council, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*,” October 28, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

1. Definition and Dimensions of the Christian Jewish Dialogue

On November 17, 1980, in his speech to the representatives of the Jewish community of Mainz,³ Pope John Paul II addressed the question of Jewish-Christian dialogue by taking up an earlier declaration of the German bishops (April 1980): “Whoever meets Jesus Christ, meets Judaism.” He defined it in three dimensions:

- 1) This dialogue is “the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God cf. Rom. 11:29] and that of the New Covenant; it is at the same time a dialogue within the Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible” and the two Testaments of the Christian Bible;
- 2) It is an encounter “between the present-day Christian Churches and the present-day people of the covenant concluded with Moses”;
- 3) The dialogue invites us to become together, as sons of Abraham, “a blessing for the world” by committing ourselves “together for peace and justice among all men and peoples.”

As other forms of interreligious dialogue, the Christian-Jewish dialogue can take various forms. A current typology circulating among Catholics is the one suggested by the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue in its document “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission,” which distinguishes four types of dialogue:

- 1) The dialogue which occurs in *life* when we encounter our neighbour. It is “a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one’s conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person’s identity, his modes of expression, and his values.”
- 2) The dialogue of “*deeds and collaboration with others* for goals of a humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature which are directed towards the liberation and advancement of mankind.”
- 3) The dialogue “*at the level of specialists*, whether it be to confront, deepen, and enrich their respective religious heritages or to apply something of their expertise to the problems which must be faced by mankind in the course of its history.” This type of dialogue may lead the participants “to mutual understanding and appreciation of each other’s spiritual values and cultural categories and promote communion and fellowship among people.”
- 4) The dialogue of *religious experience*, in which “persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute.”⁴

In my view, contemporary theological formation to interreligious dialogue should address these four forms. But when it comes to Christian and Jewish relations, theological dialogue confronting the religious heritage of Christianity is particularly important.

3. Pope John Paul II, “Address to Representatives of the Jewish Community in Mainz, West Germany” November 17, 1980), https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/john_paulii/Mainz.htm.

4. Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission,” March 3, 1984, Nos. 28–35, <https://www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/dialogue-and-mission-1984/>.

2. Theological Advances in Christian-Jewish Dialogue Since WWII

A lot of progress has been accomplished in this area since WWII, as a quick survey demonstrates.

Documents of the ICCJ

Prior to Vatican II, the current foundations of Christian-Jewish relations were laid in 1947 at the international conference of Seelisberg, convened by the newly formed International Council for Christians and Jews. In “The Ten points of Seelisberg,”⁵ as was called the final statement of the conference, Christian churches were invited to combat anti-Semitism by integrating the following *positive* data into their teaching: “it is the One God who speaks to us all through the Old and New Testaments. Jesus was born of a Jewish mother [...] and of the people of Israel; his eternal love and forgiveness embrace his own people and the whole world. [...] the first disciples, the apostles, and the first martyrs were Jews. The fundamental commandment of Christianity, to love God and one’s neighbour, proclaimed already in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus, is binding upon both Christians and Jews in all human relationship, without any exception” (Nos. 1–4).

The *negative* elements to be avoided were also targeted: “distorting or misrepresenting biblical or post-biblical Judaism in order to exalt Christianity”; “using the word ‘Jews’ in the exclusive sense of ‘the enemies of Jesus’”; “presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon all Jews or upon Jews alone”; “referring to [...] the cry of the raging mob ‘His blood be upon us and our children,’ without remembering [...] the infinitely more mighty words of our Lord: ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’”; “promoting the superstitious notion that the Jewish people are reprobate, accursed, reserved for a destiny of suffering”; “to speak of the Jews as if the first members of the Church had not been Jews” (Nos. 6–10).

“The Ten points of Seelisberg” were updated by the ICCJ in 2009 in what is known today as “The Twelve points of Berlin,”⁶ a call addressed to Christian and Jewish communities and other people of goodwill. I draw attention to a few points in this document (Nos. 2, 3, 9).

In the first part (Nos. 1–4), Christian and Christian Communities are called “to join us in the continuing efforts to remove all vestiges of contempt towards Jews and enhance bonds with the Jewish communities worldwide.” One of the ways to do this is “to promote interreligious dialogue with Jews” (No. 2), which requires “trust and equality among all participants” and the rejection of “any notion of convincing others to accept one’s own beliefs.” Dialogue also “encourages participants to examine critically their own perceptions of both their own tradition and that of their dialogue partners in the light of a genuine engagement with the other.”

The next point goes in the same direction, and urges Christians “to develop theological understandings of Judaism that affirm its distinctive integrity” (No. 3). This means, among other things, eliminating any idea that Christians “have replaced Jews as a people in covenant with God.” It also implies that the Christian mission is reframed in a way that renounces “organized efforts at the conversion of the Jews” and emphasizes “the common mission of Jews and Christians in preparing the world for the kingdom of God or the Age to Come.” This involves an important change of paradigm, and should impact, not only

5. International Council of Christians and Jews, “The Ten Points of Seelisberg,” August 5, 1947,

6. International Council of Christians and Jews, “A Time for Recommitment: Building the New Relationship between Jews and Christians,” July 5, 2009, https://www.iccj.org/fileadmin/ICCJ/pdf-Dateien/A_Time_for_Recommitment_engl.pdf.

current European and North American Christian theologies, but also “emerging theological movements from Asia, Africa and Latin America, and feminist, liberationist or other approaches” as well.

In the second part (Nos. 5–8), Jews and Jewish Communities are called “to acknowledge the efforts of many Christian communities in the late twentieth century to reform their attitudes towards Jews” (No. 5), namely “by including basic and accurate background information about Christianity in the curricula of Jewish schools, rabbinic seminaries and adult education programs.”

The last section (Nos. 9–12), is a call to both Christian and Jewish Communities, “together with all people of faith and goodwill, always to respect the other and to accept each other’s differences and dignity.” They are urged namely “to enhance interreligious and intercultural education” (No. 9). One part of this task can be achieved by “combatting negative images of others” and “by making the removal of prejudices against the other a high priority” at all levels of the educational process. On the more positive side, interreligious and intercultural education could be enhanced by “mutual study of religious texts, so that Jews, Christians, Muslims and members of other religious groups can learn both from and with each other,” and “by supporting common social action in the pursuit of common values.”

Nostra Aetate (No. 4) and Later Catholic Documents

Among Catholics, the turning point occurred in 1965, with the almost unanimous adoption by the Council Vatican II of a *Nostra Aetate*, which deals with Judaism in section number 4. It can be summarized very briefly around two main ideas, presented below.

There is a *spiritual bond between the Church and Judaism*, between the people of the New Testament and the lineage of Abraham. The Church “received the revelation of the Old Testament from the people with whom God [...] concluded the Ancient Covenant,” from whom Christ was born “according to the flesh” (Romans 9:4–5), and from whom sprang the apostles and many of the first disciples. Despite the refusal of the Gospel by a large number of them, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers” and “does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues” (Romans 11:28–29). The Church shares the prophetic expectation of the day “known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice.” In the name of this common patrimony,” mutual knowledge and esteem are recommended, “*which will arise above all from biblical and theological studies and from fraternal dialogue*” (4, 1–5, my emphasis).

Furthermore, the document of the council rejects Jewish guilt and anti-Semitism, specifying that neither the Jews of Jesus’ time nor the Jews of today can be held responsible for the death of Jesus, since Christ “underwent His passion and death freely” for all humanity. The Jews, therefore, “should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God,” and the Church “decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone” (No. 4, 6–8).

The declaration of the Council has been supplemented over the years, first by two texts⁷ that have clarified its application – one from 1974 and 1982 – and then by two others, one offering a reflection on

7. See Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration ‘*Nostra Aetate*’ (n. 4),” December 1, 1974, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crrr/documenti-della-commissione/en3.html>; Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church,” March 6,

Shoah (1998),⁸ and another on the relationship between Jewish and Christian readings of the Scriptures (2001)⁹. Another substantial document, entitled “The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable,” was published in 2015, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4).¹⁰ Part of it will be discussed in the next section.

Other Documents on Jewish-Christian Relations

Several other Christian Churches have also produced substantial documents on Jewish-Christian relations. Following other texts released since 1966,¹¹ in 2019 the Faith and Order Commission of the Anglican Church published *God’s Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations*.¹² The document has two main parts. The first, “Theological Frameworks,” looks, among other things, at

what might be the ‘Distinctive Relationship’ of Christianity with Judaism from the perspective of Christian theology. What is it that Christians could or should say theologically about Judaism that they would not also say about Islam, or about other faiths more generally? “And what the Christian-Jewish relationship teach us about relationships with other faiths?”¹³

The second part is a study of four “Critical Issues,” “where the theology of Christian-Jewish relations is likely to be directly relevant to how Christians speak, think and interact with their Jewish neighbours”: Mission and evangelism, Teaching and preaching, The land of Israel, Ethical thinking and action.

Likewise, in 2010, the Committee of Church Doctrine of the Presbyterian Church in Canada produced an important reflection on its relationship with the Jewish people entitled “One Covenant

1982, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en2.html>.

8. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” March 16, 1998, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en1.html>.

9. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Vatican City: Vatican Press 2002), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html.

10. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable” (Romans 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra aetate* (No. 4)” December 10, 2015, www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en.html.

11. See Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, “Quelques réponses anglicanes à *Nostra Aetate*,” in *Juifs et chrétiens au Canada 50 ans après Nostra Aetate*, ed. Jean Duhaime and Gilles Routhier (Montréal: Fides, 2017), 77–94.

12. Faith and Order Commission, *God’s Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian–Jewish Relations* (London: Church House Publishing, 2019), https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/godsun_failingwordweb.pdf.

13. Faith and Order Commission, *God’s Unfailing Word*, xxi.

of Grace,”¹⁴ summarized in a statement adopted at the General Assembly of 2011.¹⁵ Here is an excerpt of this statement:

[W]e affirm that the Jewish people have a unique role in God’s economy of salvation and healing for our world. [...] The Jewish people have a pre-eminent place in God’s covenant, John Calvin finely said, for they are “the firstborn in God’s family.

We affirm that God has graciously included Gentile Christians, rightly called “posthumous children of Abraham” (J. Calvin), by engrafting them into the one people of God established by God’s covenant with Abraham. This means that Jews have not been supplanted and replaced by Christians in the one covenant. As Paul teaches, God has not rejected or abandoned them: “I ask, then has God rejected his people? By no means!” (Romans 11:1).¹⁶

For the United Church of Canada (UCC), the current reference is *Bearing Faithful Witness*, a text prepared by the Committee on Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations, which includes a statement adopted in 2003.¹⁷ This reflection “seeks to be a faithful expression” of the understanding of the United Church – Jewish relations.” In the introduction to the statement, the UCC acknowledges that “all too often Christian have treated Jews, our sisters and brothers, as enemies” rather than neighbours to be loved. The statement itself, affirms, among other things, “the significance of Judaism as at once a religion, a people, and a covenant community,” the common root of Judaism and Christianity, “the uniqueness for Christianity of the relationship with Judaism,” and “the opportunity for growth in Christian self-understanding that exists through closer dialogue with, openness, and respect for Judaism.”¹⁸

As can be seen in these documents, several Christians Churches have radically changed their view of Judaism since WWII. The first decades of dialogue have allowed Christians and Jews to become more familiar with each other and to begin to develop a relationship of respect and esteem. Great efforts have been made to change the way Christianity understands its relationship to Judaism and expresses this understanding in its teaching and liturgical practice.

A few Jewish statements have been made in response to these important efforts, the most notable being *Dabru Emet*, a document prepared by an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars in 2002.¹⁹ They offered eight brief statements accompanied by a short comment about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another. Several points underscore commonalities between Jews and Christians, who “worship the same God,” “seek authority from the same book,” and “accept the moral principles of the Torah” (Nos.

14. Presbyterian Church in Canada, “One Covenant of Grace,” in *Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Thirty-Sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Sydney, NS: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2010), 291–355, <https://presbyterian.ca/downloads/33240/?tmstv=1666119913>.

15. Presbyterian Church in Canada, “Statement of the PCC on Our Relationship with the Jewish People,” in *The Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Thirty-Seventh General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Sydney, NS: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2011), 42–43, https://presbyterian.ca/wp-content/uploads/gao_acts_and_proceedings_2011.pdf.

16. Presbyterian Church in Canada, “Statement of the PCC,” 43.

17. United Church of Canada, *Bearing faithful Witness: United Church–Jewish Relations Today* (Toronto, ON: United Church of Canada 2003), https://ecumenism.net/archive/docu/1997_ucc_bearing_faithful_witness.pdf.

18. United Church of Canada, *Bearing Faithful Witness*, 9.

19. National Jewish Scholars Project, “*Dabru Emet – A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*,” July 14, 2002, <https://www.jcrelations.net/article/dabru-emet-a-jewish-statement-on-christians-and-christianity.pdf>.

1–2, 4). They leave for the time of the final redemption the “humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians” (No. 6) and urge Jews and Christians to work together for justice and peace (No. 8).

However, in the opinion of many experts, the real theological work has only just begun. And indeed, while the attitudinal shift that has occurred has had a powerful impact on theological issues fundamental to Christianity, these are still debated. In order to fruitfully pursue a dialogue *ad extra* with Judaism, Christians, particularly Catholics, also have to continue an intense dialogue *ad intra*,” as Cardinal Walter Kasper puts it,²⁰ to clarify their own understanding of Judaism and its relation to Christianity and the impact of this change of paradigm on various aspects of Christian theology. Let me explain with an example drawn from the most recent document by the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism.

3. Redefining Christian Theological Concepts in Light of the New Relation to Judaism

The 2015 Catholic document “The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable: A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4)” (henceforth “Gifts and Calling”), was intended, as the subtitle indicates, as *a reflection on theological questions pertaining to Catholic-Jewish relations*. It provides a significant overview of major points which Catholic theology has to reconsider or reformulate in the light of the new relationship with Judaism. A close reading of this text shows how difficult this task may be. Let me illustrate this with the way the document addresses the so-called replacement theory, or supersessionism, and the related notion of “people of God.”²¹

According to “Gifts and Calling,” the doctrine of supersessionism can be defined as follows:

[T]he promises and commitments of God would no longer apply to Israel because it had not recognised Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, but had been transferred to the Church of Jesus Christ which was now the true ‘new Israel,’ the new chosen people of God. (No. 17)

Some trace this teaching back to the Epistle to the Hebrews, which contrasts the “old covenant” with the “new” one (Hebrews 8:6–13), but, according to “Gifts and Calling,” it should rather be attributed to the Fathers of the Church. For centuries, it represented the standard theological foundation of the relationship with Judaism until Vatican II, which clearly rejected it, as “Gifts and Calling” points out (No. 17).

If she takes seriously Paul’s affirmation that “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable,” the Church can no longer define herself as the new Israel replacing the old. Yet, in *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4) the Church is called “the new people of God.” “Gifts and Calling” takes up this statement and seeks to qualify it by distinguishing between “the people of God of Israel” and the “new people of God”:

The Church is called “*the new people of God*” (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4), but not in the sense that the people of God of Israel has ceased to exist [...]. The Church does not replace *the people of God of Israel*, since as the community founded on Christ *it represents in him the fulfilment of*

20. Walter Kasper (Cardinal), “Preface,” in *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*, edited by Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert Johannes Hofmann and Joseph Sievers (Ashland, OH: Fordham University Press, 2007), ix–x.

21. This section is partly based on Jean Duhaime, “Quelques défis théologiques actuels du dialogue judéo-chrétien,” *Jewish Christian Relations*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.jcrelations.net/fr/articles/articles/quelques-defis-theologiques-actuels-du-dialogue-judeo-chretien.html>.

the promises made to Israel. This does not mean that Israel, not having achieved such a fulfilment, can no longer be considered to be the people of God. (No. 23, my emphasis).

This formulation may perhaps seem satisfactory from a Christian point of view. But it still leaves room for supersessionism: the people of God are not rejected, but did not reach “fulfilment.” Moreover, to claim that Christ represents the “fulfilment” of the promises to Israel must be qualified by the New Testament distinction between what is “already there” in Jesus Christ and what is “not yet,” i.e., the full unfolding of God’s Reign inaugurated in Jesus’ ministry.

Further on, “Gifts and Calling” speaks of “the people of God” as a single reality which includes Judaism and the Christian faith: “Judaism and the Christian faith as seen in the New Testament are two ways by which God’s people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own” (No. 25). Finally, “Gifts and Calling” recalls that the Church has a Jewish component and presents the Church and Israel as two complementary entities in God’s plan of salvation:

It is and remains a qualitative definition of the Church of the New Covenant *that it consists of Jews and Gentiles*, even if the quantitative proportions of Jewish and Gentile Christians may initially give a different impression. [...] [T]he enduring role of *the covenant people of Israel* in God’s plan of salvation is to relate dynamically to the *“people of God of Jews and Gentiles, united in Christ.”* (No. 43, my emphasis)

As can be seen from these diverse and somewhat hesitant formulations, the articulation of Israel and the Church as “people of God” is a question on which Catholic theology has yet to reflect. It will perhaps do so by returning to Paul’s metaphor in Romans 13 (the image of the grafting of the Church onto the olive tree of Judaism) or by taking up the expression of Pope John Paul II in Mainz, “the people of God of the Old Covenant and the people of God of the New Covenant” (quoted in “Gifts and Calling” No. 39). This remains to be seen.

Section 4 of “Gifts and Calling” (Nos. 27–35), also shows a real effort to situate the “new” Christian Covenant in relation to the “old” Jewish one without denying the continuing validity of the latter for Israel. But this part is not very satisfactory either, for several reasons. On the one hand, the expression “old Covenant” lacks precision and sometimes designates a certain number of Old Testament covenants, sometimes one or another of them (with Abraham, with Israel through Moses, etc. See No. 32). On the other hand, this development ignores Israel’s conviction that its own mission is not only to be faithful to the Torah and the Sinai covenant, but also to be “a light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). Thus, there is still work to be done to achieve a satisfactory articulation of the relationship between the “old” covenant(s) and the “new” covenant in Christ.

Similar difficulties are encountered when discussing the impact of the new relation of the Church with Judaism on two other concepts, “The universality of salvation in Jesus Christ” (Nos. 35–39) and “The Church’s mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism” (Nos. 40–43). One must remember, however, that “Gifts and Calling” was not intended as the final word on these issues, but as “a reflection on theological questions pertaining to Catholic-Jewish relations.” It has the merit of identifying a few critical areas where further study and reflection are needed, and to illustrate how complex they are from a Catholic point of view.

4. Theologians, Scholars, and Jewish Partners

Besides “Gifts and Calling,” theologians and scholars have also discussed several theological issues which deserve attention. The collected studies by Philip Cunningham in *Seeking Shalom* (2015) provide a good sample of Catholic scholarship on topics like “Mattean Christology in a Post-*Nostra Aetate* Church” and “Biblical Land Promises and the State of Israel: A Challenge for Catholic (and Jewish) Theology.”²² Recent publications resulting from Christian-Jewish dialogues or consultations include titles such as *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (2011),²³ *The Pharisees* (2021),²⁴ and *Contemporary Catholic Approaches to the People, Land, and State of Israel* (2022),²⁵ which includes several theological essays by Catholic scholars with two responses by Jewish ones. These are only a few.

The task of rethinking key theological issues in the light of Christianity’s profound change of attitude towards Judaism falls primarily to Christian theologians and to Jewish colleagues open to discussions with them. These Jewish partners, like those who authored *Dabru Emet*, are found mostly in the more liberal branches of contemporary Judaism.

In 2017 a large group of orthodox rabbis published a statement called “Between Jerusalem and Rome – Reflections on 50 years of ‘*Nostra Aetate*,’”²⁶ in which they clearly indicate their view that “the doctrinal differences are essential and cannot be debated or negotiated; their meaning and importance belong to the internal deliberations of the respective faith communities” *i.e.*, to the dialogue *ad intra* between Christians or Jews. But they immediately add that this should not prevent cordial relations and collaboration between Jews and Christians:

However, doctrinal differences do not and may not stand in the way of our peaceful collaboration for the betterment of our shared world and the lives of the children of Noah. To further this end, it is crucial that our faith communities continue to encounter and grow acquainted with one another, and earn each other’s trust.

Noting that “Christian doctrines, rituals and teachings that express negative attitudes toward Jews and Judaism do inspire and nurture anti-Semitism” and cause “real suffering,” they express hope that this will change:

We call upon all Christian denominations that have not yet done so to follow the example of the Catholic Church and excise anti-Semitism from their liturgy and doctrines, to end the active mission to Jews, and to work towards a better world hand-in-hand with us, the Jewish people.

22. Philip A. Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom: The Journey to Right Relationship between Catholics and Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2015).

23. Philip A. Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary C. Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix, and Jesper Svartik, eds., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011).

24. Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Pharisees* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021).

25. Gavin D’Costa, Faydra Shapiro, and Pierbattista Pizzaballa, *Contemporary Catholic Approaches to the People, Land, and State of Israel* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022).

26. Conference of European Rabbis, Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and Rabbinical Council of America, “Between Jerusalem and Rome – Reflections on 50 Years of *Nostra Aetate*,” August 31, 2017, <https://www.ccejr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/jewish/cer-cri-rca-2017>.

Without neglecting the other forms of dialogue mentioned above (the dialogue *in life*, the dialogue *of deeds and collaboration*, the dialogue *of shared religious experience*), the dialogue *at the level of specialists* constitutes a major component of Christian-Jewish dialogue. And within this dialogue, the reassessment of Christian theological issues in the light of the new understanding of the relation between Christianity and Judaism is and will continue to be an important task.

5. Implications for Theological Formation

In order to produce lasting results, the change of paradigm in the relations of the Catholic and other Christian Churches to Judaism must find its way in theological formation. A few suggestions on how this could be done are presented in a 2001 document by the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC). Entitled “Recommendation on Education in Catholic and Jewish Seminaries and Schools of Theology,”²⁷ this document offers suggestions which can still serve as inspiration for theological formation in the area of Christian-Jewish dialogue.

Member of the ILC first note that “relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People have improved significantly in the last half-century” and that “the education of future clergy and lay leaders in both [...] communities is crucial if coming generations are to sustain and further this progress.”

They then make their recommendation for both communities, starting with the curricula of Catholic seminaries and schools of theology, which “should reflect the central importance of the church’s new understanding of its relationship to Jews.” They recommend particularly that “Courses on Bible, patristics, early church history and liturgy should incorporate recent scholarship on Christian origins,” and that “courses dealing with the biblical, historical and theological aspects of relations between Jews and Christians should be an *integral* part of the seminary and theologate curriculum, and not merely electives.”

They also recommend that the Jewish community undertake a similar effort to promote a basic understanding of Christianity:

Such knowledge does not mean Jewish acceptance of Christianity’s theological tenets. Encouragement of dialogue between the two faiths does involve recognition, understanding and respect for each other’s beliefs, without having to accept them. It is particularly important that Jewish schools teach about the Second Vatican Council and subsequent documents and attitudinal changes which opened new perspectives and possibilities for both faiths.

Finally, in terms of means of formation, they suggest that

Educational institutions in both [...] communities should make every effort [...] to expose students to living Jewish or Christian communities through guest lecturers, field trips, involvement in local, national and international dialogue groups and conferences. The resources of the Internet should be utilized, especially sites such as www.jcrelations.net and the sites of various centers for Jewish-Christian understanding.²⁸

27. International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee “Recommendation on Education in Catholic and Jewish Seminaries and Schools of Theology,” May 4, 2001, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/ilc---international-catholic-jewish-liaison-committee-/incontri/en8.html>.

28. See, for example, *Dialogika*, an online library maintained by the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations: <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources>.

Conclusion

On October 28, 2002, in a short address marking the 37th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Cardinal Walter Kasper stated that through various events and encounters which have occurred since 1965, Catholics have changed their understanding of Judaism:

We Catholics became aware with greater clarity that the faith of Israel is that of our elder brothers, and, most importantly, that Judaism is as a *sacrament of every otherness* that as such the Church must learn to discern, recognize and celebrate.²⁹

The qualification of Judaism as “a sacrament of every otherness” is a striking formula. Although Cardinal Kasper’s short address does not expand on its meaning, the rich signification of this finely crafted expression is explored by Philip Cunningham in his address to the annual conference of the ICCJ in 2003.³⁰

First, explains Cunningham, describing Judaism as a “sacrament” means that Judaism may be understood as a mediation of God’s grace to the Church:

[I]n the Catholic tradition [...] a sacrament can be defined as an outward sign that gives grace or that mediates the life of God to the church community. The application of the distinctively Catholic term “sacrament” to Judaism therefore means that Christians are graced by a mediation of God’s presence when they spiritually engage the Jewish community and tradition.³¹

Second, encountering the Jewish community as a distinct “other,” Christians are to learn that “God’s holiness is not restricted to the baptized” and goes against “an inherited tendency toward exclusivism.” Judaism and Christianity are living side by side as two communities “intimately related to God through covenanting,” and also related to each other. One reason for this, as suggested by pope John Paul II in 1993, may be that they “be a blessing to one another.”³²

Finally, when presenting Judaism as a sacrament of *every otherness*, Cardinal Kasper suggests that, although the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is distinct, the radical transformation that has occurred between these traditions in the last decades – which has resulted in better knowledge of “the other,” in growing mutual appreciation, and in collaborative work between Christians and Jews for the common good – may serve as a model for the relationship between Christianity and other religions:

This suggests that dialogue with Judaism may help Christians to divine the presence of God in other faith traditions than Judaism, or indeed in other groups of humanity who differ from us in any way, such as in terms of ethnicity, culture, or gender.³³

29. Walter Kasper (Cardinal), “Address on the 37th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*,” October 29, 2002, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Kasper_NA37.htm. My emphasis.

30. Philip A. Cunningham, “Judaism as ‘Sacrament of Otherness,’” *Jewish Christian Relations*, February 2, 2004, <https://www.jcrelations.net/article/judaism-as-sacrament-of-otherness.html>. See also his comments in “Celebrating Judaism as a ‘Sacrament of Every Otherness,’” in *The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper: Speaking Truth in Love*, ed. Kristen Colberg and Robert A. Krieg (St. John’s, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 223–240.

31. Cunningham, “Judaism as ‘Sacrament of Otherness.’”

32. John Paul II, “Message of His Holiness John Paul II on the 50th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,” April 6, 1993. Quoted by Cunningham, “Judaism as ‘Sacrament of Otherness.’”

33. Cunningham, “Judaism as ‘Sacrament of Otherness.’”

Given its achievements and potential as a model for other types of interreligious relations, the study of the recent history of Christian-Jewish relations and the exploration of the theological questions still open for discussion seems relevant, not only for the theological formation and practical training of Christian or Jewish leaders, but also for any curriculum or model of interreligious education.³⁴

34. For a presentation and assessment of various models of interreligious education, see Judith Berling, *Report Mapping the Current State of Interreligious Education in U.S. Seminaries and Theological Schools*, 2019, <https://iepp.gtu.edu/report/>.

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Why Training in the Art of Interreligious Dialogue Is Necessary for Theological Education: Thinking About “Who Is My Neighbour?” From a Jewish Perspective

Sherril Gilbert, *ALEPH Canada*

In the early 2000s, during my seminary years, I made the big move from Montreal to St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador. Newfoundland and Labrador is a wilderness province on the far eastern coast of Canada, a good part of it sitting on a rocky, remote island in the North Atlantic Ocean. I moved there because I had fallen in love with a Newfoundlander, but that is a story for another time.

I was a rabbinic student at the time. To be ordained, rabbinic students need to take a Clinical Pastoral Education course. The only seminary in St. John’s that was offering what I needed was Queen’s College, in the Faculty of Theology at Memorial University. Now, Queen’s is an Anglican seminary that ordains Anglican priests. I applied to the College and was accepted. I was likely the only Jewish seminarian there – ever.

Knowing that my teachers would be Catholic nuns and Anglican clergy, I arrived prepared to position myself as an “other” – a stranger, or *ger* in Hebrew. However, I was quickly included in the spiritual and academic life of the college. I was humbled and grateful for this heartfelt welcome. During daily morning prayer, I soon realized that the prayer leaders were *not* mentioning Christ or saying the name Jesus. I learned that this was done to facilitate my integration into the community. While I was touched – and let them know this – I expressed that I wanted the full experience of praying with them, in their ways. It was not long before Rabbi Jesus found his way back into the daily prayer.

In fact, everyone at the seminary went out of their way to make me feel welcome. Their hospitality was outstanding, reflecting both their lived and espoused values. I was treated with kindness, genuine curiosity, and respect. On reflection, I realized of course that these too were values that were *shared* by both of our faith traditions. And these are also the values that are central to *true dialogue*. Looking back, I see that my experience at Queen’s College all those years ago represented my first deeply meaningful experience with Christian-Jewish dialogue. But that does not mean that doing dialogue is easy or simple.

One of the requirements of my Supervised Practice of Ministry program was a field placement. Another student and I were stationed for several months at the Health Sciences Centre, the largest healthcare facility in the province. We worked as student chaplains in the “Multifaith Chaplaincy Department.” “Multifaith Chaplaincy,” at that time, meant clergy from different Christian denominations, plus me. When I asked if I could wear my kippah while visiting patients, the hospital supervisor explained, “it would not be a good idea – it would only confuse the patients, dear.” Again, doing dialogue is not easy or simple.

Dialogue requires that we be open to welcoming and learning from the other. It requires that we replace judgment with curiosity. Dialogue seeks to give dignity to the multiple perspectives from which we perceive reality. And the way we handle that is by meeting intentionally, having a conversation, asking questions, and learning how to disagree and manage differences. We do this so that we might be able to live peacefully together as neighbours in a world where there is an infinity of perspectives.

Dialogue has been described as “the art of thinking together.” The physicist David Bohm traced the roots of the word *dialogue* to the Greek “dia” and “logos.” *Dia* means through and *logos* is translated as “word” or “meaning,” thus, we can think about dialogue as *meaning flowing through*.¹ Dialogue moves beyond any one individual’s understanding to make the implicit explicit and to build collective meaning and community.

In this essay, I reflect on why I think training in interfaith dialogue is necessary for theological education. My thoughts on this stem from my identity and perspective as a Jew, rabbi, chaplain, and social scientist.

Jewish tradition teaches that dialogue is a sacred activity. Jewish tradition calls upon people to participate in the collective work of making sense of the world, both by contributing our ideas and judgments, and by listening openly and carefully to the ideas of others.² Seeking truth is seen as a sacred task, and one needs to listen – as well as speak – in order to pursue that task in the fullest way possible. No *one* individual can know the entire truth, and the mark of a wise person is that they value and understand alternative views. Jewish tradition calls on us to offer our ideas with passion and conviction, but always to recognize our limitations and to seek understanding of other views.

These are the values I try to bring as President of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal, or CJDM.³ The CJDM was formally established in 1971, as an initiative of Archbishop Paul Grégoire, then Archbishop of Montreal, and Rabbi Alan Langner, then President of the Montreal Board of Rabbis. In those early years, appointments to the Christian-Jewish Dialogue were made by the Archdiocese of Montreal and the Montreal Board of Rabbis. Other Christian churches soon joined the CJDM, and the authorities of the sponsoring churches were asked to nominate representatives. Currently, Jewish representatives are identified by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) and are also invited to join by members of the Dialogue.

Building Dialogue Skills

In 2021, CJDM engaged a facilitator with expertise in interfaith dialogue to assist us with building our skills in talking with one another.⁴ Our trainer, Dr. Sandra Sterling Epstein of Pennsylvania, offered us a set of principles, or what she called “Rules of Engagement,” for our work together. These rules included:

- 1) We are here to *converse*, not to *convert*.
- 2) We recognize that we are persons confident in our respective faiths, and are here to learn, to educate, and to share our wisdom with each other.
- 3) We will celebrate what we share, and honour and respect our differences.
- 4) In this interfaith environment, we understand that dialogue may be messy or uncomfortable at times; we are called to acknowledge that this strengthens us and reminds us of God’s purpose.

1. Doug Ros, *A Tao of Dialogue: A Manual of Dialogic Communication* (Blue Hill, ME: Medicine Bear Publishing, 1998), 25.

2. For further discussion see Donovan D. Johnson, *Turning to the Other: Martin Buber's Call to Dialogue in I and Thou* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020) and Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, *Christians & Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub, 2006).

3. For more information on this organization please visit <http://www.oikoumene.ca/faiths-in-dialogue/christian-jewish-dialogue-of-montreal-cjdm/>.

4. For more information on Dr. Sandra Sterling Epstein please visit <https://www.eshelonline.org/our-team/>.

The prophet Isaiah (50:4) said: “The Eternal God has taught me how to speak, even to those tired of speech. Morning by morning God awakens me, awakens my ear: teaching me to listen.” This verse from Isaiah highlights the essential connection between speaking and listening. Isaiah, wise enough to pray for the ability to listen as well as the ability to speak, understands that he must listen to people if he is to speak effectively. The skill of listening is learned, and so must be taught. The prophet’s own teacher is God; our teachers can be anyone from whom we are willing to learn. Like Isaiah, we would do well to learn how to listen again each day – we are never finished. The key is that we need to be awake enough and focus with intention on the act of listening.

Dialogue in Higher Education

Dialogue has promise in higher education and adult learning because it challenges traditional hierarchical models and proposes methods for sustaining partnerships between and among all stakeholders.⁵ Dialogue is designed to allow the wisdom within us and in our groups to unfold and be made visible. This process model is particularly valuable in theology and religion departments, where students are encouraged to let go of certainties and wrestle with concepts of divinity, religious pluralism, sacred texts, and tradition.

If interfaith dialogue is to be effective in theological education, then it will foster relationships, overcome stereotypes, and increase appreciation for the inherent value of those others from whom we are willing to learn. In theological education, this means that we would need to engage with *real* people – students and faculty – people who are members of other religions, and not merely encounter their religious traditions as disembodied texts.⁶

We do this through meeting and greeting and engaging with and valuing each other as living, breathing, worthy beings. This is encapsulated in the famous teaching from the Jewish theologian Martin Buber, who said that “all real living is meeting.”⁷ Buber explains that by doing this when we encounter another individual truly as a person and not as an object for use, we become fully human.⁸

The theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel asked the question, “What, then, is the purpose of interreligious cooperation?” He answered:

It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another but to help one another; to share insight and learning, to cooperate in academic ventures on the highest scholarly level, and, what is even more important, to search in the wilderness for wellsprings of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love and care for [humanity]. What is urgently needed are ways of helping one another in the terrible predicament of here and now by the courage to believe that the world of the Lord endures forever as well as here and now; to work for peace, for racial justice in our own land, to purify the mind from contempt, suspicion, and hatred; to cooperate in trying to bring about the resurrection of sensitivity, a revival of conscience; to keep alive the

5. For further discussion see Larry D. Roper, “The Power of Dialogue and Conversation in Higher Education,” *New Directions for Student Leadership* 163 (Fall 2019): 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20344>.

6. Mary Doak, “Quo Vadis Humanity? Reinhold Niebuhr and John Pawlikowski on Social Ethics in a Global Age,” in *Righting Relations After The Holocaust and Vatican II: Essays in Honor of John T. Pawlikowski*, OSM, ed. Elana G. Procaro-Foley and Robert A. Cathey (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2018), 26.

7. Martin Buber, *I And Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970). 62. Note that the actual translated text reads “All actual life is encounter.”

8. Buber, *I And Thou*, 85.

divine sparks in our souls, to nurture openness in the spirit of the Psalms, reverence for the words of the prophets, and faithfulness to the Living God.⁹

Nostra Aetate and Interfaith Dialogue

The introduction of *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time) – the Latin name given to the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions by the Second Vatican Council – was drafted with the intent to facilitate efforts at interfaith dialogue.¹⁰ This Declaration was promulgated by Pope Paul VI in the fall of 1965. *Nostra Aetate* was a significant departure from the religious anti-Judaism that had long served as a foundation for racial antisemitism in the Christian narrative.¹¹ In its fourth chapter, *Nostra Aetate* overturned centuries of what the French Jewish historian Jules Isaac termed “the teaching of contempt.”¹² By this he meant that the Jewish people as a whole were seen to be responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, and therefore they had been rejected by God and their covenant revoked.

The ability to keep Judaism and Christianity together while simultaneously examining each from its respective point of view, is perhaps the great achievement of *Nostra Aetate*. The religious scholar Dr. Susannah Heschel wrote that “*Nostra Aetate* sets forth a goal: to see the sacred in each other’s religious faith. The text speaks of ‘mutual understanding and respect,’ calling into being a religious relationship of an entirely new order, composed not of theological supersessionism, but based on shared ‘spiritual patrimony.’”¹³

In 1986, when Pope John Paul II visited a synagogue in Rome, he spoke of the unique bond between Catholics and Jews. He said that the Jewish religion is not “extrinsic to us, but in a certain way intrinsic to our own religion. [...] With Judaism, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are clearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.”¹⁴

Of course, in the years since the Declaration was introduced, there have been moments of tension and conflict among Catholics, other Christians, and Jews. Today, the hard conversations are about Israel and Palestine, Israel’s right to exist, and antisemitism. But all relationships require hard work, they can be messy, and misunderstandings are inevitable. The commitment of our religious traditions to overcoming the past and working on the present has made constructive engagement and honest exchange possible, even about difficult subjects.¹⁵

9. Abraham Joshua Heschel, “What We Might Do Together,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 300.

10. Vatican II Council, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*,” October 28, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

11. James Carroll, “Afterword,” in *Righting Relations After the Holocaust and Vatican II: Essays in Honor of John T. Pawlikowski*, OSM, ed. Elana G. Procario-Foley and Robert A. Cathey (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2018), 208.

12. Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: The Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964).

13. Susannah Heschel, “Out of the Mystery Comes the Bond: The Role of Abraham Joshua Heschel in Shaping *Nostra Aetate*,” in *Righting Relations After The Holocaust and Vatican II: Essays in Honor of John T. Pawlikowski*, OSM, ed. Elana G. Procario-Foley and Robert A. Cathey (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2018), 152.

14. As quoted in Heschel, “Out of the Mystery Comes the Bond,” 153.

15. Jonathan A. Greenblatt, “How *Nostra Aetate* Transformed Catholic-Jewish Relations,” *Anti-Defamation League*, October 27, 2015, <https://www.adl.org/news/op-ed/how-nostra-aetate-transformed-catholic-jewish-relations>.

Two Great Commandments

Rabbi Jesus taught there were just two great commandments:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is, [thou] shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.¹⁶

We cannot ignore the origins of these two great commandments in the Jewish story. The first commandment, to love God, is found in the Hebrew Bible in Deuteronomy 6:5. Observant Jews say this during prayer three times a day, every single day. This Hebrew prayer reads: *V'ahavta et Hashem Elokecha, b'chol l'vav'cha uv'chol nafsh'cha uv'chol m'odecha*. An English translation would read as follows: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.¹⁷

The second great commandment, to love your neighbour as yourself, is found in Leviticus 19:18. Many Jewish prayerbooks begin with this intention for communal prayer. It reads: *Hareini m'kabel alai et mitzvat ha-borei v'ahavta l'reyacha kamocho*. An English translation would read as follows: Behold, I hereby take upon myself the commandment of the Creator to love my neighbour as myself. In other words, Jews do not even *start* to pray until they set a loving intention.

We might say that, together, these two great commandments act as the *condicio sine qua non* (a necessary condition) – the indispensable, essential ingredient for theological formation. Love God and love your fellow human being. It appears that a dialogic stance is required for both: you must be open, you must listen, you must have empathy, compassion and humility, and you must give *kavod* – honour.

Dr. Edward Kessler is a theologian and leading thinker in interfaith relations. He teaches that the theology of Jewish-Christian dialogue can only succeed when it does justice to more than one point of view. Jews and Christians both proclaim the unity of God and the diversity of human existence. Dialogue should speak to the Other with full respect for what the other is and has to say. But that does not mean that it is easy or simple.¹⁸

The student population at McGill's School of Religious Studies is becoming increasingly diverse, with students gathering there from around the world. But with diversity comes complexity, and greater challenges to loving our neighbour. And yet a dialogic stance requires that we be open to differences, be curious, be inclusive, and be welcoming. How do we achieve all this in a complex academic environment?

Are our different faith traditions, our different denominations, ready to face the challenge? Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that the supreme issue is not the religious laws for the Jew, or the Church for the Christian, but the premise underlying both religions, namely, whether there is a *pathos*, a divine reality, concerned with the destiny of humans. "The supreme issue," he said, "is whether we are alive or dead to the challenge and the expectation of the living God."¹⁹ Heschel continues by explaining that "the

16. Matthew 22:37 (King James Version): "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Mark 12:30: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." In addition, in Luke 10:27, the lawyer also includes "and thy neighbour as thyself." This was not included in Deuteronomy 6 but specified in Leviticus 19:18.

17. The translations are those of the author and are not intended to be literal.

18. Edward Kessler, "A Theology of Jewish-Christian Relations: Construction of the Common Good," in *Righting Relations After The Holocaust and Vatican II: Essays in Honor of John T. Pawlikowski, OSM.*, ed. Elana G. Procario-Foley and Robert A. Cathey (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2018), 51.

19. Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 237–239.

religions of the world are no more self-sufficient, no more independent, no more isolated than individuals or nations. No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another.”²⁰

And then Heschel goes on to ask, “Is it not clear that in spite of fundamental disagreements and differences, there is a convergence of *some* of our commitments, of *some* of the evils we fight together, the goals we share, and the predicaments afflicting us all?”²¹ Heschel then responds to his own question in a dialogic voice. He says,

First and foremost, we meet as human beings who have much in common: a heart, a face, a voice, the presence of a soul, fears, hopes, the ability to trust, a capacity for compassion and understanding, the kinship of being human. My first task in every encounter is to comprehend the personhood of the human being I face, to sense the kinship of being human, the solidarity of being. [...] to meet a human being is an opportunity to sense the image of God, the presence of God.²²

“According to a rabbinic interpretation, God said to Moses, ‘Wherever you see the trace of humanity, there I stand before you.’ When engaged in a conversation with a person of different religious commitment, if I discover that we disagree in matters sacred to us, does the image of God before me *disappear*? Does the difference in our commitments *destroy* the kinship of being human? Does the fact that we differ in our conceptions of God *cancel* what we have in common, which is the image of God?”²³

Engaging with Mr. Murphy

I will conclude with a story from my student chaplain days in Newfoundland and Labrador. One time, I was visiting a long-term care facility in a rural region. One of the residents I had the pleasure of meeting was a man I will call Mr. Murphy. Mr. Murphy was a learned and very alert Jehovah’s Witness who had just celebrated his ninety-sixth birthday.

When we met, he asked me what faith I was, and I said I was Jewish. He told me he was a pilgrim, a Jehovah’s Witness pilgrim, and explained that a pilgrim is someone who has given his life to teaching the word of Jehovah. He then told me that this was the reason that he was having all kinds of problems in the residence. He said that no one wanted to talk to him, everyone avoided him, and he had no visitors. I told him that I would be honoured to spend some time with him studying the Bible and learning from him.

He picked up the Holy Book and told me to have a look at Revelation 7. He asked me if I was familiar with it. I said that I was, as a matter of fact. He was surprised and said that he thought my people did not read this part of the Scripture. I told him that was true, but as a ministry student, I had studied it in class. Then he said something that has stayed with me for all these years. He said: “I already know for certain that I will be one of the 144,000 who will get into Heaven, and I want you to know that now, I know that you will be too.”

When I left Mr. Murphy, I felt as if God had truly been in that place. The philosopher Martin Buber developed a theory about the spiritual and practical significance of true dialogue. In his classic work *I and Thou*, Buber suggests that there are two different ways we can choose to relate to the Other: we can see the other as “It” or we can see them as “Thou.”²⁴ In order to experience the sacred, and to bring holiness into

20. Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” 237–239.

21. Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” 237–239.

22. Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” 237–239.

23. Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” 238–239.

24. Buber, *I and Thou*, 53.

the world, we should strive to treat other people, God, and the entire natural world as “Thou.” When we relate to the other as “Thou,” we establish a connection with the whole person. And in doing so, we bring about a change in ourselves, in the person with whom we are relating, and in the entire world. I can’t think of a more beautiful or appropriate way to characterize the art and practice of interfaith dialogue in theological education.

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La Table interreligieuse de concertation du Québec: A Case Study

Hassan Guillet, *Imam and founding member of La Table interreligieuse de concertation du Québec*

My attention, while reading the documentation of this colloquium and listening to the interventions of several speakers who preceded me, was attracted to the concept of Jewish-Christian dialogue. This observation made me realize the path we must take to make the dialogue broader and more inclusive. While the concept of Jewish-Christian dialogue is certainly well established in modern Western culture, historical relations, current demographics, and societal interests demand a broader and more inclusive dialogue. Rather than speaking of a Jewish-Christian dialogue, it would be more appropriate to speak at least of a Jewish-Muslim-Christian dialogue. The dialogue should also include adherents of non-Abrahamic religions and First Nations spiritual traditions. I would like to share with you a recent dialogue initiative that I participated in, namely the creation of La Table interreligieuse de concertation du Québec (henceforth the Table).

The Creation of La Table interreligieuse de concertation du Québec

In March 2020, in order to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Quebec government ordered the closure of almost all places of gathering, including places of worship.¹ Several representatives of different faith communities met to establish an action plan to deal with the situation. We were particularly interested in assessing the order in light of the ideological orientations of the Government of Quebec, orientations which were – and are to this day – very secular and anti-religious. Given these orientations, our fear was that places of worship, which were among the first places ordered to close, would also be the last permitted to reopen. To convince the relevant authorities that religious groups should be able to resume gathering in places of worship as soon as possible, we knew we had to devise a plan to assure the government that these places would be safe and not become centers for the spread of the virus (or disinformation about the virus). This is why the Table – which brought together some twenty representatives of various Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions – was created in April 2020. In the following sections, I will outline the five major challenges faced by the founders of the Table, and explain how we met these challenges.

The Representativeness of the Table

The initial membership of the Table included representatives of the three Abrahamic spiritual families. However, it was soon agreed that, in order to maximize our social and political credibility, the composition of the Table should be extended to mirror the rich religious and spiritual diversity of Quebec society. We thus decided to invite representatives of faith communities from outside of the Abrahamic traditions – such as Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs – to join the group. A challenge arose during the

1. For a full timeline of all the COVID-19 related closures in Quebec, see “Ligne du temps COVID-19 au Québec,” Institut national de santé publique du Québec, accessed October 19, 2022, <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/covid-19/donnees/ligne-du-temps>.

discussion about whether or not to include representatives from First Nations communities, as, while they have spiritual traditions, they tend to not define these as religions. This challenge prompted the founders of the Table to have a profound discussion on the very name of the Table, which defines itself as interreligious. The debate around this topic is still unresolved. There is a common desire to open up the Table to everyone and make room for the spiritual traditions of the First Nations, but it is not yet clear how this will be done.

Establishing Harmony and Cohesion Within the Table

This challenge was relatively easy to meet. The Table was founded specifically to deal with a danger that threatened the Quebec society, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, and to find solutions for a problem common to all faith communities, which was the closure of places of worship.

Members of the Table have now been working together for more than two years. During this period, representatives of different faith communities have come to realize that what unites them is far more important than what divides them. From the outset, rules had to be established for everyone to follow. The most important rule was mutual respect. We must respect each other and recognize and respect the specificity of each religion. The role of each representative at the Table was not to convert the other representatives. Rather, it was to learn, with respect and empathy, about the different religions at the Table, in order to better work together and show solidarity in the face of a common problem. As the mission of the Table was socio-political in nature, theological discussions were limited – we weren't gathered to debate, but rather to learn about each other's beliefs and practices and to use this knowledge to better serve our respective communities and Quebec society in general.

Establishing Dialogue with the Provincial Government and Public Health Authorities

From the beginning of the pandemic through to the creation of the Table, the Quebec government and public health authorities did not seem to care about dialogue with religious leaders. We were learning about decisions about places of worship through the Prime Minister's press conferences, rather than from the relevant authorities themselves. Places of worship were not classified as an independent category, but were grouped together with other places of gathering such as performance halls or bars. To be heard and respected by political and health authorities, the Table developed a protocol to establish rules that had to be respected by both the administration of places of worship and the faithful who frequent these places. The Table submitted this protocol to public health authorities and requested its formal approval so that it could become a document providing common guidelines for our religious groups. After several revisions on both sides, the protocol was approved by the public health authorities and could then be used as a reference for the sanitary and safe reopening of places of worship.

In parallel with the development and approval of the protocol, the Table increased contacts with government, political, and health authorities as well as with elected representatives of all political parties sitting in the National Assembly. The objective of this increased communication was to show these interlocutors how important religion is in the lives of believers – even in a society that claims to be secular – the important contribution that communities of faith make to the economy, and, finally, the importance that religions in general give to human life and the importance of preserving it. It was necessary to demolish the myth that believers devote themselves exclusively to spirituality and are not mindful of the necessary regulations established by public authorities. The interlocutors the Table communicated with often had the false idea that the only activities that took place in religious facilities were prayers. And while synagogues,

churches and mosques certainly are places of prayer, we also do other things there as well. These activities include collecting donations and distributing them to people in need, offering spiritual and psychological comfort to fragile people, receiving refugees and helping them integrate into society, offering courses, doing sports, etc. For members of communities of faith these services are essential. The ignorance of political decision-makers about this fact generated a certain level mistrust and fear – in other words, rather than recognize places of worship as facilities that provided these types of essential services, authorities felt they merely represented sites where the spread of the virus could proliferate.

The dialogue with authorities, while often very difficult, has yielded relatively good results. At the start of the pandemic decisions were made by the government without any consultation with representatives of faith communities and without having the necessary knowledge of the realities of these communities. Political decision-makers, because they are generally of, or more familiar with, the Catholic tradition, had some references – sometimes very superficial – to Catholic rites and practices. They tried to apply the same references to other religious traditions. By helping decision makers understand the realities of other faith communities and the contributions they make to society, the Table was able to play an important role in increasing trust between religious groups and policy makers, and, by the end of the pandemic, the power symmetry was relatively attenuated. Rather than learning about changes in health directives from the Prime Minister’s press conferences, the Table was often notified before public announcements and even consulted several times before making decisions; sometimes it even managed to change certain decisions before they were made and announced.

Ensuring the Collaboration of Faith Communities in Respecting Health Directives

The Table thus acted as an important bridge between public health authorities and members of faith communities, which wasn’t an easy feat when mistrust reigned on both sides. La Coalition Avenir Québec (The Coalition for the Future of Quebec), or “la CAQ,” won the Quebec provincial elections in 2018 with a very secular electoral platform and formed a majority government. The adoption and enforcement of “An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State,”² more commonly known as Bill or Law 21, has been met with much opposition from faith communities even though this law is very popular with the majority of francophones in Quebec.³ This law prohibits the use of ostentatious religious symbols by persons who hold positions of authority in public office, such as judges, police officers, prison guards and teachers. This law affects some communities more than others, with the communities most affected being Jews, Sikhs and Muslim women.⁴ This is because the law considers the Jewish yarmulke, the Sikh turban, and the Muslim hijab to be ostentatious. But for the people who wear these items, they are not ostentatious signs, but rather religious obligations and that the law deprives them of; in other words, the law limits their right to freedom of religion as defined by the Quebec and Canadian charters. Accordingly, the law has been challenged in

2. See Bill 21: An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, 42nd legislature, 2nd session (Quebec: Quebec Official Publisher, 2019), https://www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Fichiers_client/lois_et_reglements/Lois_Annuelles/en/2019/2019C12A.PDF.

3. While initial polling done by the Leger for the Association of Canadian Studies showed that 64% of Quebecers were in favour of the bill, more recent polling, from January 2022, showed that this percentage had dropped to 55%. See Morgan Lowrie, “Poll Suggests Support for Bill 21 Provision May have Dropped in Quebec,” *CBC News*, January 16, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/bill-21-support-poll-1.6316859>.

4. See Miriam Taylor, *Law 21: Discourse, Perceptions & Impacts* (Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies, 2022), https://acs-metropolis.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Report_Survey-Law-21_ACS.pdf.

court.⁵ The adoption and application of Law 21, as well as the attempts to challenge it, have created an atmosphere of great mistrust between communities of faith and the CAQ. The closure of places of worship, which occurred after the bill was first proposed, were considered by a good slice of the faithful as another attack on religion under the banner of secularism. Secularists in government and civil society resented demands to keep places of worship open while other establishments were closed, and feared that places of worship would become hotbeds of the spread of the virus. The Table had to work in this very charged atmosphere to bridge the antagonism between both sides. On the one hand, it was necessary to assure the government and the public health authorities that human life is sacred in all religions and protecting it is as sacred as prayer. They also had to be convinced that working together is in everyone's best interest. Finally, as noted above, it was also necessary to make government officials aware that places of worship offer essential services, and that keeping these places open would help people who frequent them reduce the psychological effects of the pandemic.

The representatives of the Table also had to work to guide their own communities to respect the directives established by the public health authorities. Compliance with these guidelines served two purposes. The first is the protection of the health of the faithful and of the people with whom these faithful are in contact. The second objective was to counter, through good deeds, the bad publicity directed against religions in Quebec society, and to contribute to improving the image of religion and communities of faith therein. To maintain the confidence of the faithful and ensure their cooperation, it has been necessary to prove to them that they are being listened to – by assuring faith communities that the Table, is *their* (and not the government's) spokesperson, we have been able to accomplish this.

Ensuring the Sustainability of the Table

Although the Table was created to respond to an emergency imposed by the pandemic, the positive role it played encouraged its members to decide to make its existence permanent. This decision was also encouraged by several stakeholders with whom the Table was in contact. Several ideas were shared to this effect, and several activity project proposals have been presented and evaluated. However, the fatigue caused by the pandemic, as well as the need of members to focus on their own ongoing projects, has meant that the Table has not succeeded in articulating a new *raison d'être*. Accordingly, the Table could become extinct if no post-pandemic action is taken.

Conclusion

The Table was created to face a specific problem: the COVID-19 pandemic. While working together, the founding members realized that what unites them is far more important than what divides them. The Table succeeded, despite the difficulties and challenges it faced in gaining the respect of, and building bridges between, the authorities and various faith communities in Quebec. The Table still faces two challenges for the future: The first is to enlarge its representativeness by adding members of traditions from outside the Abrahamic family. The second is to create projects and activities beyond fighting the pandemic.

5. For a timeline of these legal challenges, see “Bill 21: The Timeline,” Canadian Civil Liberties Association, accessed October 19, 2022, <https://ccla.org/major-cases-and-reports/bill-21/#timeline>.

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