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2010

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Christian-Jewish Relations: Theological Issues

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This article was published in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Supplement 2010, edited by Robert L. Fastiggi, 597 - 605. Detroit: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2010.

CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS: THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell

Introduction: The Root of the Problem

The major disagreements between Jews and traditional Christians (i.e. those who accept the canon of the New Testament and the theological decisions of the first seven ecumenical Councils) focus on the mystery of God and the person of the Messiah. The antithetical approaches to the questions of three persons in one God and the person of the Messiah, believed by Christians to be Jesus of Nazareth, true God and true man, will not be set aside; however, clarification of the Catholic understanding regarding the Jewish stance can remove generalized accusations of blindness and/or malice. A review of key passages of the New Testament will set the stage for presentation of theological issues.

I. The Gospel on Jewish Leaders

The New Testament texts present the public ministry of Jesus as a progressive revealing of his personhood and mission in the context of growing opposition from Jewish leaders and teachers. The religious authorities in the Temple of Jerusalem claimed to be the guardians of proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures (Torah of Moses, Prophets and Writings, the latter not yet a “closed canon”) as well as mediators of sacrificial worship. They were supported by the Sadducees, nobles and others who benefited from a stable relationship with the Roman military presence. During and after the time of Jesus some of those who became high priests were accused by their contemporaries of compromise with the Romans. (Brown p. 315-660). This involved decisions which smacked of expediency rather than the pursuit of justice (see John 11:45-53).

The role of the priests in worship was respected by the Pharisees, but they insisted that Moses had received an oral Torah along with the written Word, which was handed on to Joshua and to succeeding generations of prophets and teachers down to their own time (see Mishnah Abhot 1:1). Through prayerful study these Pharisees learned how to interpret the commandments and apply them to their own time. Jewish life was centered on the Temple where the divine Presence was experienced and this was brought in their daily lives by imitating priestly practices of prayer. Thus, people were encouraged to find meals and the marital relationship as contexts for recognizing that God’s presence imbues all facets of life. People are called to purify themselves in order to be prepared for holiness, i.e. a life separated from sin and oriented forward the coming of the Kingdom of God. These principles, linked to observance of the Decalogue and other commandments governing one’s relationship with God, neighbor and nature, provided a deep spiritual understanding of life (Frizzell, 1994).

The presentation of ideals may lead to fanatical extremes, breeding intolerance of the seeming flawed existence of the uneducated. Jesus defended his disciples when they were accused of laxity and pointed to inconsistency and hypocrisy on the part of some Pharisees (Mt 15:1-20; Mk 7:1-23) (Frizzell, 1980). Unfortunately the evangelists did not distinguish between groups within the Pharisaic movement. The seven woes against “the Pharisees” (Matt 23:1-39) were directed against the strict House of Shammai,

which at that time were more influential than the more tolerant House of Hillel (Finkel, 1974). Jesus was patient with the limitations of the simple folk but criticized his peers, those who claimed to be teachers and protectors of the correct way to keep the commandments (see Mt 22:15-45 par.).

The Gospel in its fourfold presentation became the texts which, for Christians, corresponded to the Torah of Moses as the high point of the early Christian Liturgy of the Word; the Gospel was the prime focus for the homily. By the early second century the majority of Christians were of Gentile origin. They failed to see the debates and accusations in the Gospels as evidence of inner-family quarrels, with the Jewish use of sharp critique and name-calling as a challenge for listeners to examine their conscience. Rather than noting continuity with the role of the Israelite prophet as an admonisher of leaders, these preachers declared that Jesus was expressing total alienation from his Jewish roots. The general tendency of a younger group to protest against the perceived inadequacies (legalism, ritualism, hypocrisy) of the community from which it emerged is evident in much early Christian preaching and apologetics. Use of negative generalizations and applying accusations of malice toward Jesus in his passion (e.g. Mt 27:25) against all Jews of the time and of all Jews in subsequent generations led some preachers to create volatile situations in Christian-Jewish relations in various parts of Europe and the Middle East.

The issue of responsibility for the condemnation of Jesus cannot be ignored. The Passion narratives describe the involvement of the Temple priests and their collaborators; the final judgment was in the hands Pontius Pilate. “True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in his passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today ” (Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* #4).

II. New Testament Sources

Paul of Tarsus

The Pharisee who received the name Saul at circumcision (Phil 3:4-6) expressed his commitment to God by persecuting the early Jewish Christians (Gal 1:13; 1 Tim 1:12-15). After Jesus was revealed to him (Gal 1:15-16, Acts 9 par) he channeled his zeal in a non-violent service of the Gospel. At times, his defense of the Christian minorities would be expressed in terms that echoed pagan bigotry in assessing that Jews “displease God and oppose all men“ (1 Th 2:14-16). The generalized accusation that they “killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets” should be read in the light of his statement that God’s hidden wisdom was not known to “the rulers of this age, for if they had known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:6-8).

Later, Paul’s Letter to the Romans would discuss Christian-Jewish relations in a more extended and calm reflection. Using techniques from Jewish interpretation of the Scriptures and preaching, he built a case for his analysis of the rejection of the Gospel by many Jews of his time. First, he listed seven gifts of God to the Jewish people (Rom 9:4-5), gifts that endure after the time of Jesus. The mystery of election, typified in the choice of the younger sons, Isaac and Jacob, is derived from divine mercy (9:6-29, 11:30-32) and is linked to righteousness, a divine gift to which the initial human response is faith (3:21-4:25; 9:30-33). The Messiah is the goal of the Torah (10:4), for which Moses ascended and Jonah descended (10:6-8 in light of ancient Jewish tradition on Deut 30:12-13). Paul interpreted Isaiah 65:1-2 as a contrast

between the favorable lot of Gentile converts and “a disobedient and contentious people” (Septuagint) in Rom 10:19-21. However, God has not rejected his people (11:1), but a remnant has always remained faithful (11:2-10). The acceptance of the Gospel by Gentiles should stimulate a holy jealousy among Jews (11:11, 14), for all are consecrated and sanctified by the first fruits of dedication to God and endowed with strength from the root of the cultivated olive tree onto which the Gentiles have been grafted (11:16-24). “A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and so all Israel will be saved” (11:25-26). The Jews are beloved because of the patriarchs, “for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (11:25-29). In regard to such a mystery, Paul’s theological reflection rooted in prayer becomes a doxology (11:33-36). (See Frizzell in Kessler, Romans 9-11).

In the Declaration of the Church’s Bond with the Jewish People (*Nostra Aetate*) the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council drew heavily on Paul’s Letter to the Romans, quoting 9:4-5 . Theologians must continue to draw upon the insights of Paul’s Letters, taking into account the vicissitudes of history and the misuses of the Sacred Scriptures in polemics over the centuries.

Matthew, Mark and Luke

The Synoptic Gospels have been the subject of intense study over many centuries. During the difficult decades from 1920-50, German scholars dominated the scholarly scene. The methods that they promoted were often compromised by their presuppositions, denying miracles and doubting the reliability of oral traditions. In recent decades the contributions of Jewish scholars in Israel and in English-speaking areas, along with the discovery of the Qumran (Dead Sea) Scrolls, have brought new respect for the historical value of the Gospels. The comparative study of sources and the appreciation that each evangelist was a theologian serving the needs of a local church have enabled scholars to explain differences in the records, noting ways in which the narratives provide the basis for ecclesial communities to answer urgent questions and solve disputes. In this way a deeper understanding of Jesus’ teachings and their application to the Christian life contribute to an appreciation of both continuity and new insights in the Gospel.

The Fourth Gospel

The Gospel according to John is rich in Jewish sources, especially regarding the Temple liturgy. However, the frequent use of the term “the Jews” to designate the opponents of Jesus has led to generalizations that preachers and teachers have applied to all Jews. Careful study has shown that “the Jews” are implicated in all threats against the life of Jesus except in John 11:45-54, where chief priests and Pharisees consult and the reason is political. Elsewhere the motivation is religious (5:18; 8:59; 10:31-33; 19:7), so the phrase “the Jews” designates the Temple leaders and those following them. (Frizzell in Radici p. 127-46)

Off-quoted words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman, “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22) should be understood in relation to the work of the Messiah, whose “hour” will bring people to worship the Father in spirit and truth (4:23-24). Tension between Jews and Christians is described in 9:22 and 16:2-3, the only texts that speak of Christians being put out of the synagogue. “Indeed the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think that he is offering service to God” (16:2). From the Christian perspective this involved an erroneous conscience (see Phil 3:6). Was this text used to offset the charge of deicide?

Rather, the pattern of popular teaching was often to accuse “the Jews” of killing Jesus knowing that he was the Son of God. The ancient concept of solidarity between leaders and the entire community was applied (perhaps unwittingly) to indict all Jews of the time and even those of later generations. However, at the time of Jesus, Jews were scattered widely throughout the Roman Empire and beyond; many did not follow the Sadducean model of adherence to the priests as teachers, so the image of a monolithic expression of Jewish practices is erroneous.

Another stereotype developed from the application of John 8:44; Apocalypse 2:9; 3:9 (“synagogue”, i.e. assembly, of Satan), originally referring to specific groups, to all Jews and synagogues. Thus, in Epistles 40-41 of St. Ambrose and the sermons of St. John Chrysostom, all Jews were depicted in the service of the devil. This judgment, attributing malice and evil to the essence of Jewish prayer has caused grave harm to Jews over the centuries.

The Second Vatican Council

Pope John Paul II repudiated the accusation of diabolical servitude by visiting the main synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1986. In preparation for the Jubilee year he led a penitential service on March 12, 2000 in which God was asked to forgive the sins of Christians against seven groups, including the Jews. Later that month, his pilgrimage to Jerusalem included a visit to the Western Wall, where the same prayer was inserted into a crevice between the stones. In this and many contexts, the Polish Pope set the tone for the Church development in the new millennium.

In discussing the burden of this history, one should distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. The former term describes anti-Jewish prejudice, discrimination and bigotry in all its forms. The rather common tendency to ascribe series of negative characteristics to an entire group in a society can lead easily to generalizations and stereotypes that affect individuals and their group adversely. This has been devastating for the Jewish people, a minority in so many societies.

The term *anti-Judaism* is used increasingly to describe the specific elements of Christian bigotry as a result of “long standing sentiments of mistrust and hostility” (Catholics, 1998, p. 51). The effects on Jews may be the same as other forms of anti-Semitism, but the distinction allows Christians to focus on the precise factors that made *their* prejudice so virulent over so many centuries. Nazi anti-Semitism was “based on theories contrary to the constant teaching of the Church on the unity of the human race and on the equal dignity of all races and peoples.” (ibid). This ideology was combated by Christian leaders but many ordinary people listened rather to the Nazi propaganda that stressed the continuity between their regime’s discriminatory legislation and atrocious attacks on the rights and very persons of Jews and laws, attacks and expulsions of earlier times.

The protean nature of manifestations that anti-Jewish bigotry takes in the present situation should be recognized so that Christians, whose leaders have worked diligently to overcome “the teaching of contempt” for Jews and Judaism, will stand with the Jewish people, both locally and in the national and international arenas, in a concerted effort to unveil and defeat all forms of anti-Semitism. This is a sin against God and humanity and should be recognized by all to be a particularly virulent and longstanding form of intolerance (Church and Racism).

III. Theological Issues

Covenant: Old and New

In his address to the Jewish community of Mainz, Germany on November 17, 1980, Pope John Paul II spoke of “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, which is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and second part of her Bible” (Fisher 1995 p. 15). The reference to “the Old Covenant never revoked by God” has led some scholars to include the Sinai Covenant but others restrict it to the covenant with Abraham (Gen 15) (Lohfink).

Since the Greek term *diatheke* may be rendered as “covenant” or “testament,” the term for Christians has designated the Sacred Scriptures (2 Cor 3:14) as well as the solemn agreement initiated by God in favor of Abraham’s descendants. God’s gift may be unilateral or bilateral. First, God called Abram to respond in faith to the promissory pact wherein God gave the Land to his descendants. Abram’s only response was the act of faith, accepting the gift (Gen 15:1-21). The covenant of circumcision was bilateral, with God’s promise that the patriarch would be the father of many nations, signified by the change of name to Abraham. This would be an everlasting covenant for him and his descendants, with the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession (Gen 17:1-21). The command to walk before God and be blameless (17:2) was completed by the covenantal sign of male circumcision.

The Sinai Covenant, celebrated fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt, was a bilateral agreement whereby the Israelites became a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6) oriented to the service of God in the Land, guided by the commandments (Ex 20-23). They govern the human relationships with God, neighbor, self and nature. Sins of idolatry and injustice were at the forefront of prophetic indictments of the leaders and ordinary people over the generations. The favorite model for these teachers to present the covenant and its demands was marriage (Hos 3:1; Ez 16:15-52). As bride and spouse, Israel was expected to be faithful to her one Lord. Idolatry was called adultery, yet God will forgive and restore her (Jer 3:1-13).

The new covenant promised by Jeremiah (31:31-34) and its analogues in Ezekiel (11:19; 16:59-63; 18:31; 34:25-31; 36:22-28) contains elements that were realized when the people returned from the Babylonian Exile and rebuilt the Temple. However, the hope for restoration of all twelve tribes was not achieved. Instead, prophet and psalmist pointed to the goodwill of people from the nations and the desire of some to unite with the Jews (Zech 2:10-12; 8:20-23; Is 56:3; Ps 87). Both the Qumran texts and the New Testament refer to the “new Covenant” (CD 6:19; 8:21; 20:12; 1 Cor 11:24-25). The renewal of Temple worship under a revitalized priesthood (Zech 3:1-10) gave evidence that God had restored the Covenant bond with his people. Although the Qumran leaders rejected the Hasmonean line of high priests, Jesus and the first generation of his followers frequented the Temple. At the Last Supper Jesus opened the new covenant to believers from among the nations, who were also beneficiaries of divine forgiveness (Mt 26:27-28 and Jer 31:34). The mission to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:6, 23; 15:24) points to Jesus’ expectation for the restoration of the twelve tribes (Jer 31:31; Ez 37:15-28), after the

Church's mission to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20; see 10:23, 19:28). The "Great Commission" should be seen in the light of the demand of Jesus that all Christians be one in service of the Father so that the world will know the mission of Jesus (Jn 17:21-23). Worldwide missionary efforts have been less fruitful because the effort of Christians to become one fold under one shepherd (Jn 10:16-17) has been neglected (Frizzell 1981). Rather than aggressive proselytizing, only the witness of a Christian response to the Gospel's call to imitate God (Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36; Jn 17:21-23) will stimulate a holy jealousy on the part of Jews (Rom 11:11).

The renewal of the bilateral covenant with the reciprocal bond between God and his people (Lev 26:12, taken up in Jer 31:33; 32:38-40; Ez 36:28) is implied by Paul in his list of seven privileges of Israel, especially the covenants (plural in most manuscripts) and worship (Rom 9:4-5). Although the promises to Abraham regarding the nations (Gen 12:3; 17:4) are seldom mentioned by the prophets (see Is 51:1-2), Israel's mission to the nations is an integral part of Temple worship. The role of the Servant to bring justice to the nations will be the result of the divine mission to be "a covenant of the people, a light for the nations" (Isa 42:1, 6; see 49:6). This is a task for the people of God in the context of hope for the Messiah.

The Gospel tradition contains a comparison between old and new with images of garments and wineskins (Mt 9:14-17; Mk 2:18-22; Lk 5:33-39). Luke alone includes a comment about old and new wine: "The old is good" (5:39). "This verse is merely another way of commenting on the incompatibility of the 'old' and the 'new'; it expresses the negative attitude of Jesus' opponents" (Fitzmyer p. 597). Rather, this may preserve an acknowledgement that those who were imbued with the spirituality of the Pharisees and had learned only superficially the synthesis of Jesus' teaching would prefer to retain the values of their tradition. Their attitude need not be merely negative, but they may have been testing and holding fast to what they found to be good (1 Thess 5:19-21). The interpretation that their minds were hardened and that a veil remains when they read the Old Testament (2 Cor 3:12-18) is linked to faith in the person of Jesus as the Christ. However, as Paul wrote to the Christians of Rome, these Jews are elect, "beloved for the sake of their forefathers" (Rom 11:28), their continuing role in the divine plan is to be evaluated in a benign rather than judgmental manner. In a spirit of collaboration so that Christians can learn the depths of Jewish insights into *their* Sacred Scriptures, the Christian scribe and teacher should be "like a householder who brings out his treasure what is new and what is old" (Mt 13:52).

The learned treatise known as "The Letter to the Hebrews" contains a lengthy discussion of themes of Christology and ecclesiology related to covenant and tabernacle. As Son of David, Jesus is high priest after the model of Melchizedek, who has entered the heavenly sanctuary after his unique self-offering on the cross. In quoting Psalm 95 in Heb 4:1-11 and in using the Septuagint of Jer. 31:31-34 (in chapter 38:31-34) in Heb 8:7-13 the author refers to the inadequacy of the tabernacle in the wilderness. This reminds the reader of the Damascus Document in the Qumran texts that discuss this community's dispute with the Hasmonean priests and their claim to be "the people of the new covenant in the land of Damascus" (CD 6:19; 8:21; 20:12).

Drawing on Ex 25:40; 26:30, Hebrews rightly notes that the earthly tabernacle is but a copy of the heavenly reality. Just as the mysterious Melchisedek represented the priesthood exemplified uniquely by

Jesus (Heb 5:1-10) so is Jesus “the mediator of a better covenant, founded on better promises” (8:6). The summary review of the Pontifical Biblical Commission document of 2002 understood Hebrews to mean that “the covenant announced and prefigured in the Old Testament is fulfilled. It is not simply a renewal of the Sinai covenant, but the establishment of a covenant that is truly new, founded on a new base, Christ’s personal sacrificial offering” (cf. 9:14-15). (*The Jewish People*, 108). This section concludes with the assessment that “Israel continues to be in a covenant relationship with God, because the covenant-promise is definitive and cannot be abolished. But the early Christians were also conscious of living in a new phase of that plan, announced by the prophets and inaugurated by the blood of Jesus, ‘blood of the covenant,’ because it was shed out of love (cf. Rv 1:5[b]-6) (ibid, 109).

In recent decades a number of Jewish scholars have emphasized the Covenant of God with Noah on behalf of all creation (Gen 9:8-17) and the rabbinical teaching that the nations must observe only the seven Noahide laws to achieve salvation. Thus those among the nations who reject idolatry, murder, adultery, theft, false witness, cruelty to animals and establish courts to achieve justice will be pleasing to God. This approach implicitly dismisses the Christian claim to relate to God through messianic hope rooted in the call of Abraham and the teachings of the prophets. Is the title “righteous of the nations” sufficient from the perspective of Christian self-definition? The Pauline description of Gentile Christians becoming adopted children of Abraham through faith and Baptism (Gal 3:26-29) implies a closer relationship than the common human descent from our protoparents. This should not be interpreted as replacing the Jews but of a collaborative bond that invites Christians to a humble union with God’s people.

The Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) used the image of the Star of David to depict a twofold covenant experience. Israel as “eternal people” is already with God the Father at the center of the star. Christianity and Islam carry its rays of light to the world at large, presenting a witness to the one God so that the nations can overcome idolatry. However, such a dual covenant theory places the Jewish people beyond history and does not take into account the space dimensions of the human situation; this has been added to the scenario through the dramatic creation of the State of Israel. Like other nations, the Jewish state faces the challenge “to uphold and observe the human right to freedom of religion and conscience...” (Fundamental #1).

Salvation of Jews

During the Nazi period Irene Harand, an Austrian Catholic laywoman, challenged her fellow believers to recognize that the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; Rom 13:8-10, etc.) cannot exclude the Jews. The fact that this was not obvious to all constitutes an indictment of preachers and teachers in the Church. Even those Jews who were opponents of the Church and the Christian political parties in European countries should have been viewed from the Gospel perspective (Mt 5:43-48). Unfortunately, the fact that *some* Jews were linked with anti-Christian political groups led many to consider *all* Jews to be dangerous opponents of the Faith. Even in times less politically charged than those in Europe of the 1930s, antipathy and animosity experienced in the home and on the street are difficult to overcome but must be countered by balanced teaching. This means that adult education is of

great importance, founded in the New Testament, “conformed to the truth of the Gospel and the Spirit of Christ” (Nostra Aetate #4), interpreted in the light of guidelines offered by the Holy See (Fisher 1990).

Matthew recorded the Gospel challenge to Christians: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (5:20). Examples follow that give the insights of Jesus into the commandments and their observance (5:21-48). Some teachers were criticized by Jesus for laxity (5:19) or hypocrisy (15:3-9), yet others were commended. Thus a rich young man was told to keep the commandments in order to gain eternal life (19:16-22). The parable of the sheep and goats introduces corporal acts of mercy as the basis for gaining entrance into the kingdom (25:31-46). The commandments must be observed; this obedience and the service of others in need will be the basis for hearing the Lord’s welcome into eternal life. Christians might emphasize the importance of faith but this must lead to deeds that respond to the heavenly Father’s will (7:21-23, see James 1:22-25). Surely Judgment Day will bring a big surprise to those who deny that observant and charitable Jews will enter the Kingdom!

Just as John the Baptist exhorted Jews who were proud of their Abrahamic pedigree to “bear fruit that benefits repentance” (Mt 3:8), so Christians in every age should focus on a life of good deeds, responding to the covenantal gifts that provide the basis for a life of service. The Decalogue and the call to imitate God’s holiness by acts of mercy have been presented by prophets and teachers in both traditions.

Those Christians who badger Jews to accept Jesus as their personal Savior fail to grasp the biblical message about judging (Mt 7:1-2; James 4:11-12). The burden of European history weighs far more heavily on Jews than on others. The explicit invitation to become a Christian led Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a theologian much appreciated by Pope Paul VI, to reply: “I would rather go to Auschwitz.” Although forced Baptism during the First Crusade was repudiated by the Pope, this memory comes to mind immediately for those who knew Jewish history. What Christians see as fulfillment, many Jews call apostasy.

The philosophy of dialogue, developed by Ferdinand Ebner, an Austrian Catholic, and applied by Martin Buber to Jewish-Christian relations, calls for each partner to respect the personal self-understanding of the other (Stahmer). Each should stand open to learning from a person of similar background in the other faith. Any intention in this context to change the other’s faith involves a betrayal of trust and tends to make the other person an object to control or manipulate. In dialogue there may be change on both sides, but the insights would usually be integrated into each person’s developing synthesis of the principles and values deriving from his or her own heritage. All partners should witness to their faith and practice in an exemplary fashion, which should stimulate all to excellence.

The situation is different when someone of any or no faith background comes to ask for guidance in a process of personal growth that may involve conversion. For decades the Reform and Conservative movements in Judaism have been engaged in “outreach” programs for the unchurched and for baptized Christians as well. No people from any faith should be expected to “hide their light under a bushel basket” (Mt 5:14-16). Granted that people of a religious commitment dislike hearing of a departure from their “fold,” this does occur and those in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue must acknowledge the fact.

Prayers for the Jews

Over the centuries in Catholic countries Holy Week has been the context for tensions with the Jewish community, resulting at times in persecution. The tragic irony of bad theology and catechesis has led pious people to lash out against their neighbors. On Good Friday the proclamation of the Passion was in Latin, as were the Solemn Orations and the *Improperia* (Reproaches) sung during the veneration of the Cross. Most of the laity would not have understood the prayers, so much depended on the homily as a guide into the spiritual benefits of their participation. Thus the clergy had a serious responsibility as teachers so that the Liturgy would challenge people to acknowledge that *they* are in need of divine mercy. This is clear from the congregation's refrain to the Reproaches: "Holy God, Holy and Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, *have mercy on us.*" The use of Micah 6:3-4 and themes from Israel's wilderness wandering were intended to be typological (see 1 Cor 10:6), but many interpreters focused on "the Jews" in sermons and in learned commentaries (Frizzell and Henderson).

"Lex supplicandi statuit legem credendi (The rule of petition establishes the norm for belief)." This original form of the laconic *"Lex orandi, lex credendi"* focuses on prayer of petition, and rightly so; these prayers should not be mere lip-service but should be reflected in the daily lives of the faithful. The concern of Catholics should not be so much on how our prayers sound to outsiders, but with the integrity of our own life of prayer. Because petitionary prayer is linked to action and Christians wish to prepare the way for the final days by their deeds, praying for "the conversion of Jews" (not merely for moral dimensions of everyone's life but for faith in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God) could lead easily to concrete and focused efforts to convert Jews in their midst. Such was the practice of an annual obligatory sermon for the Jews of Rome in the Middle Ages. The Church now recognizes that such practices are contrary to the dignity of "the other." The advice of Gamaliel might be applied to the survival of the Jews through the ages (see Acts 5:38-39).

Already before the Second Vatican Council the adjective was deleted from the prayer title "Pro perfidis Judaeis" and the deacon was instructed to tell all to kneel for the silent period before the oration as in the other petitions. The English translation "For the perfidious Jews" was changed to "unbelieving", (i.e. to lack of faith in Christ) but the prayer spoke of "Jewish faithlessness" and "the blindness of that people so that, acknowledge the light of your Truth, which is Christ, they may be delivered from their darkness."

The prayer prepared for the 1970 Roman Missal of Pope Paul VI acknowledges in the introduction that the Jews were "the first to hear the Word of God" and asks "that they may continue to grow in the love of his Name and in faithfulness to his covenant." Then the oration recalls that long ago God gave his promise to Abraham and his posterity. "Listen to your Church as we pray that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption." The Christian understanding of the divine plan clearly states the belief that the Messiah to come at the consummation of history is the risen Jesus of Nazareth. Traditional Jewish hope for the coming of the Messiah relates to the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem, the place of divine judgment (Isa 2:1-5; Joel 3:9-12). "The Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and 'serve him of one accord'" (Zeph 3:9) (Nostra Aetate #4). In collaboration facing a secular world of doubts and contrasting opinions, those who adhere to the biblical heritage can work together in mutual respect to prepare for a better

future, within history and ultimately beyond time. “As Christians and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing for the world [cf Gen 12:2ff]. This is the common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, to be first a blessing to one another (Spiritual Pilgrimage, 169).

Christology

Christian faith in Jesus is rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity and in the unique nature of his conception (the Virgin Birth) and in his resurrection from the dead. From the beginning he was a “sign of contradiction” (Lk 2:34) but in early times the older community left a meager record of debates with Christians.

As the Church grew and encountered established Jewish communities in the great cities of the Roman Empire, St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) postulated that the Jews had a role as “witness people.” If pagan intellectuals questioned the antiquity of biblical prophecies, the Christian teacher could point to the Jews. They would acknowledge that Isaiah and the other prophets were authentic.

Deep devotion can often be accompanied by intolerance and impatience toward the unenlightened, so the commitment of orthodox Christians to the Gospel and the adherence of Jews to the Torah led on occasion to confrontations. In general, polemical literature is destined for the community of the given teacher and/or writer, so members of the other group may receive only garbled versions of various arguments. In both communities the depiction of the other were far from courteous.

In the past century or so have some Jewish thinkers come to a positive assessment of Jesus as a teacher within the great line of Jewish learning (Buber, Borowitz, Flusser). They may not deal with the central questions of Christian faith but do not interpret Jesus in light of the dismal experience of Jewish-Christian encounters over the centuries.

In recent decades Christian scholars have made great progress in their discussion of the varied background to the New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism. The Qumran (Dead Sea) Scrolls and other archeological discoveries have cast light upon the Hasmonean-Herodian period in the Land and comparisons among known texts have given great assurance concerning the antiquity of Jewish pseudepigraphical literature preserved in Greek and other translations. These advances have been incorporated into many commentaries on the Gospels and other New Testament texts. Rather than referring to this period as “Late Judaism” with the impression that the Jewish faith and culture became fossilized after the two defeats by the Roman legions (AD 70 and 135), scholars now speak of “Early Judaism,” depicted as a vibrant and varied development from the time after the Babylonian Exile (586-538 BC).

Jesus is placed fully within the dynamics of the liturgical and intellectual life of the Jews living in the Land; as he moved from Galilee to Judaea he encountered the spiritual leaders of the time in several places and entered into debate with them. Although John differed from the Synoptics regarding the number of visits to Jerusalem, both traditions emphasize the experience of pilgrimage as a key to

understanding Jesus' teaching and actions. Pilgrims adopted simple garments and developed patterns of prayer to prepare for their communal encounter with God in the Temple. They might encounter hostility and danger on the way. When Jesus sent the apostles on their first mission he oriented them toward the Kingdom in their service of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" in an exchange of gifts (healing for hospitality). They would face persecution but the Spirit would inspire their response (Mt 10:5-23, Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-16). The coming of the kingdom through acceptance of God's manifest presence in the works of the Messiah and the collaborators sent in his Name prepared the entire convoked community ("church") for the worldwide commission by the risen Lord (see Lk 9:51-24:49 and Acts 1:3-8 and Frizzell 1982). A number of related themes are presented in essays on the biblical background for reflections on the Mother of Jesus (Frizzell, 1995, 1999).

At times Christian theologians have developed a substantial edifice of doctrine upon New Testament texts that have been interpreted without reference to the biblical culture. For example, the Synoptic Gospels state that "the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45). In the light of Jewish mourning practices this might be seen as the rending of the garment on the death of a loved one. This would be the sign that the Father is mourning the Son's death. Over the centuries many Christian teachers have interpreted this to signify the end of Temple worship, i.e. its validity ceased at the time Jesus died. This interpretation fails to take into account Luke's message that after Jesus ascended, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the Temple blessing God" (Lk 24:52-53); according to Acts this practice continued. Thus, early Christians saw a place for Temple worship, as well as participation in synagogue services, in their life of prayer. The theologian's task should be grounded in a careful analysis of the biblical heritage so that the result of study will be "conformed to the truth of the Gospel and the Spirit of Christ."

Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council recommended the two communities move toward "that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues" (Nostra Aetate #4). This positive development has built on the work of pioneers in Europe during the most difficult period of recent history. The past fifty years have been a time of growth in collaboration on a number of levels. Christians have much to learn from Jewish scholars and, together, leaders of communities can build alliances that unite them "in the face of the evils which are still threatening: indifference and prejudice, as well as displays of anti-Semitism" (Spiritual Pilgrimage, 169).

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