

Seton Hall University

From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.

2004

The Death of Jesus and the Death of the Temple

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil., *Seton Hall University*



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PERSPECTIVES ON *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*



RELIGIOUS THINKERS AND WRITERS EXPLORE THE ISSUES
RAISED BY THE CONTROVERSIAL MOVIE

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WHO REALLY KILLED JESUS?

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THE OTHER JESUS: HOW A JEWISH REFORMER

ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LOST HIS JEWISH IDENTITY.

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THE DEATH OF JESUS AND THE DEATH OF THE TEMPLE

In *The Passion of the Christ*, between his scene of Jesus' death and his brief glance at Jesus' resurrection, director-writer Mel Gibson placed two more scenes. This time the violence was directed not toward humans but toward their buildings. A tear, dropped from heaven, causes an earthquake. Suddenly, we are whisked from Calvary back to Jerusalem. We see a worried Pilate glance around: his quarters rattle. We then see the Jewish priests gathered together: their space, by contrast, is devastated. Braziers tip, torches flame crazily, and flagstones rip in two: the priests' space is no more. The earthquake, Gibson invites us to think, is a sign of divine judgment. In consequence of Jesus' death, Rome is shaken; but the Temple is destroyed.

This scene of the destruction of the Temple seems to refer, in Hollywood manner, to an episode mentioned in three of the New Testament's four Gospels: that, whether before Jesus died (Luke), or after (Mark, Matthew), the "curtain of the temple was torn in two." (John has no such scene.) Gibson's movie enlarges the image from a torn curtain to a torn Temple. And this amplified image might seem to carry with it a theological message:

As the priests brought about the death of Jesus, so Jesus' death brought about the death of Judaism, or at least of Temple Judaism.

Whether he knew it or not, Gibson touched on themes long traditional in Christian theology and meditations on these Gospel scenes. Most of these theological traditions, however, were formed long *after* the lifetime of Jesus. To have them shape a movie that purports to tell a story set *during* the lifetime of Jesus—even if only in his last twelve hours—adds a confusing kind of anachronism to Gibson's effort to "tell it like it was." It (the movie) is as it (the history) wasn't.

To understand the place of the Temple in the lifetime and the piety of Jesus of Nazareth, we have to look beyond later Christian traditions, to the religious and cultural context in which Jesus himself lived. In other words, to understand where Gibson's closing images of the Temple's destruction come from, we have to begin where the Jerusalem Temple enters Christian tradition itself: with the religious devotion of Jesus.

THE TEMPLE IN JEWISH LIFE

Photographs of Muslim pilgrims in Mecca can give the modern person a sense of the crowds and congestion that were part of ancient Jewish pilgrimage festivals in Jerusalem. In absolute numbers, of course, first-century crowds in Jerusalem would have been smaller than their modern counterparts in Mecca, though the excitement would have been much the same. We can imagine Jewish men, many with their families, ascending to Jerusalem and gathering at the Temple for their feasts. Once Rome administered Judea as a province of the empire (beginning in AD 6), the governors would weigh in with their troops to help with crowd control. Rome's representative would march up from the seacoast, where he lived, and stay in the city while these holidays ran their course. In holidays such as Passover, which celebrated God's redemption of the people of Israel from oppressive foreign powers,

the Roman presence may have agitated pilgrims as much as it served to keep things calm.

For Jews, Jerusalem was the center of the earth. According to Jewish traditions, the Creator had sealed His own name on the rock that would stand beneath the Temple, in order to keep the waters of the abyss from inundating the world. The prayers and offerings of each generation were linked with the binding of Isaac by Abraham upon this very spot (Genesis 22:1-18; see 2 Chronicles 3:1). The various offerings of animals and other gifts from the land were the means prescribed in Jewish scripture for enacting the people's devotion to God. Temple offerings were accompanied by psalms and other prayers. Pilgrims found that community worship in the Temple elevated their faith and gave them a means of atonement, enabling them to return home with a renewed experience of God's love and mercy. Those many Jews who, by Jesus' day, lived much too far from Jerusalem to make such a pilgrimage nonetheless contributed to the Temple's sacred function. They annually sent contributions from all over the empire and beyond to help with the Temple building and to defray the costs of the sacrifices. In all these ways, even for Jews who were never able to go there, the city and the Temple remained the center of their nation.

Judaism in Jesus' lifetime was far from uniform. Different Jews had different opinions on what constituted the right way to be Jewish, and sometimes these clashed. The Sadducees, for example, were priests and aristocrats whose attention focused on keeping international relations positive, so that they could ensure the smooth operation of the Temple. It was from these aristocratic families that the high priest was appointed. When Rome administered Judea, this meant that the high priest had to cooperate with Rome. Another Jewish group, the Pharisees, were educated laymen who honored the priestly functions in the Temple but declared that they too could interpret and apply the commandments to daily life. (We also know of some priests who were Pharisees.) A third group, associated with the people of Qumran (whose

library, the Dead Sea Scrolls, was recovered in 1947), declared that the wrong priesthood was in office, and that the current priests used the wrong calendar. These Jews held the Temple in such high esteem that they would not worship there while the Sadducee priests ruled. These groups that we know about comprised a tiny fraction of all the Jews living at the time of Jesus. The vast majority of Jews belonged to no one "party," but all (except the Jews of Qumran) nonetheless came together at the Temple. According to the Gospels, among these Jews were Joseph, Mary, and Jesus; according to the Acts of the Apostles, many of Jesus' later followers worshiped there too.

JESUS AND THE TEMPLE

Jesus of Nazareth participated in these traditional pilgrimages, and the Gospel accounts present many of his teachings within that context. According to the first three Gospels, Jesus went to Jerusalem only once, and the culmination of his public mission was his journey for the festival of Passover. The evangelists saw this last pilgrimage as Jesus' conforming to the will of God the Father. According to the Gospel of John, by contrast, Jesus made several trips to Jerusalem, and taught frequently at the Temple. Given that these equally canonical traditions tell stories that differ, we need to study each separately in order to understand their differences before we can take them together to try to understand what Jesus himself did and taught.

Despite their disagreement about how many times Jesus taught in Jerusalem, all four Gospels relate a scene known in tradition as "the cleansing of the Temple." The first three Gospels use this scene to begin the events that will lead to Jesus' Passion. The evangelists present Jesus as overturning the tables in the Temple courtyard where pigeons were sold and money changed. Jesus, they say, did so quoting the prophets: "My house shall be a house of prayer..." (Isaiah 56:7) "but you are making it a den of thieves" (Jeremiah 7:11). The fourth Gospel placed this encounter between Jesus and

the Temple authorities in the first of Jesus' visits to Jerusalem (John 2:13-21). Politely, the authorities asked for a sign to explain this bizarre action. His reply was enigmatic: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The evangelist notes: "He was speaking about the temple of his body." This identification is consistent with the biblical message. Besides the Tabernacle (and Temple), the only other earthly reality made according to the heavenly model is the human being (see Genesis 1:26-28; Exodus 25:40). Of course, John and his community understood the exchange presented here in the light of the resurrection (2:22).

The Gospel writers thus have two different perspectives on Jesus, and also on the Temple. They know something about Jesus that the people in the story they tell about Jesus do not know: Jesus will be raised. And they know something about the Temple that people in the year AD 30 did not know: that the Romans would destroy the Temple in AD 70. They indicate that Jesus, like the prophet Jeremiah, manifested a deep affection for Jerusalem and lamented its impending destruction. "Behold your house will be abandoned, desolate" (Matthew 23:37-38; see Luke 13:34-35 and 19:41-44). When the disciples marveled at the beauty of the Temple, Jesus remarked: "Amen, I say to you there will not be left here a stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2 and parallels). The evangelists also presented such prophecies as figuring in the trial of Jesus, where they are interpreted as threats: "This man said, 'I can destroy the Temple of God and within three days rebuild it'" (Matthew 26:61; see Mark 14:58).

The Temple is associated with the death of Jesus again in the first three Gospels. Whether just before (as in Luke) or just after Jesus' death (Matthew, Mark), "the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom." Matthew alone went on to tell, immediately after his statement about the Temple's curtain: "The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised" (27:51-52). These additional elements in Matthew's story seem drawn from his under-

standing of traditions concerning the resurrection of the saints, an event that Jews associated with the establishment of God's Kingdom. So too, for example, in the visions of Daniel, a book written some two centuries before Matthew's gospel, the prophet foresees that "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (12:2).

None of the other Gospels mentions such an earthquake, nor do the letters of Paul. Nor does any of the other ancient sources we have that describe Jerusalem in this time—Josephus, the Jewish historian; Tacitus, the Roman historian—mention any earthquake in Judea in this period (again, Matthew's unique tradition), or anything occurring to the Temple or its curtain. These stories evidently were also unknown to the fourth evangelist, John. We may appreciate all these different Gospel stories as each writer's way of dramatically expressing his faith that God, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, had in some special way ushered in his Kingdom.

JEWES AND CHRISTIANS IN EARLY CENTURIES

A generation after Jesus' death in Jerusalem, Jews in Galilee and Judea rebelled against the empire. In 70, their defeat was sealed with the burning of the city and the destruction of the Temple. It was in the period following this destruction that the evangelists wrote the Gospels. As we have just seen, they wove statements about the Temple's destruction into their stories about Jesus' life. In a sense, they used the death of Jesus as a way to understand the "death" of the Temple. And, consequently, their retelling of traditions about Jesus' Passion increasingly emphasized a role for the Temple elite, the chief priests.

Jews in Judea rebelled against Rome again in 132, when Hadrian was emperor. The great Rabbi Akiba declared the leader of this revolt, Simon bar Kochba, to be a messiah. This rebellion also met with defeat, and Hadrian built a new pagan city, Aelia, over the ruins of Jerusalem. From this period in the second century onward, we begin to find many different Christian tradi-

tions about the significance of the destruction of the Temple seventy years earlier, during the first revolt. And we also see theologians claiming that (pagan) Rome's defeat of the Jews, twice, said something theologically about Christianity and about Judaism. Some of these Christian authors were also Jews, others were Gentiles.

An apocryphal text, *The Ascent of James*, partially preserved in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* of the late second century, reported that all nature suffered with Jesus. The Temple veil was torn as if in lamentation for the future destruction of Jerusalem. This idea resonates with the Jewish practice of rending garments in mourning: perhaps through the medium of his temple, the Father was lamenting the death of the Son.

Jerome, a fourth-century Latin Christian and translator of the Bible, knew of a "Gospel of the Hebrews" that recorded that the great stone lintel (rather than a curtain) was split in two. This is the only example in ancient Christian literature of a Temple stone being damaged by Matthew's earthquake. Over the centuries, the vast majority of interpreters have understood the torn curtain to symbolize God's abolition of his covenant with the Jewish people. Jerome remarked: "The veil of the Temple is torn and all the mysteries of the Law which were hidden previously are revealed and passed to the people of the nations." In other words, for Jerome, the torn veil becomes a condensed symbol for the shifting of divine favor from Jews to Gentiles in the Church. Through Jesus' death, Jerome said, knowledge of the true God, previously the unique privilege of the Jews, was revealed as well to the Gentiles.

Other interpretations were less benign. In the late second or early third century, a treatise attributed falsely to Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, "Concerning the two mountains Sinai and Zion," linked the tensions between (Gentile) Christians and Jews to the crucifixion.

From the high tree he [that is, Jesus on the cross] watched them both as images of two evil-doing peoples: the Gentiles who do evil deeds in the world and the Jews

who kill the prophets. These are the two evil-doing peoples whose images are the two criminals between whom an innocent man hung: one of them blasphemed, but the other truly confessed that an innocent was suffering injustice. . . . He saved the one who confessed and abandoned the one who blasphemed just as he did in the case of two peoples.

Then the exacerbad Father opened the heavens and there was unbearable thunder, the earth moved, graves opened and released their corpses, the veil of the temple was torn. Such a great roaring in the heaven and the movement of the earth made all who stood before the tree—some of them suffering, but some blaspheming and mocking—lay down prostrate trembling like the dying.

(A. M. Laato, *Jews and Christians in De duobus montibus
Sina et Sion* [Abo, 1998], p. 176.)

After the victory of Constantine in 312, attributed to his response to a vision of the cross, some Christians found themselves in a favored position: eventually, their church became the official religion of the empire. Constantine himself began a major building program in the Holy Land, and especially in Jerusalem. There he built the splendid Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which subsequent Christian writers referred to as the "New Temple." A major setback for the newly state-sponsored church occurred when Constantine's nephew, Julian, became emperor. Raised Christian, Julian converted to the religion of ancient Greece and Rome. He revoked Christian privileges, sponsored state paganism, and even tried to initiate a program to rebuild the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. (How the rabbis felt about a pagan emperor trying to rebuild their temple, we may only speculate!) Would this contravene the predication of Jesus that no stone would rest upon another? Some Christian writers told gleefully that the assembled building materials were destroyed in an earthquake. The death of Julian in battle, soon after, enforced the Christians' view that they had been vindicated by heaven.

As the Christian Roman Empire faded, and as Western Christendom itself fragmented, Gentile Christians had their own reasons to lament over

Jerusalem and the "temple." In the seventh century, a new, Eastern monotheism, Islam, conquered the formerly Christian city. Jerusalem was now Muslim. Respecting the Christian sacred space of the grand Constantinian basilicas, the Muslims eventually built a mosque over the older Jewish sacred space, the still-leveled surface on the Temple mount. But Christians in both halves of the old Roman world mourned the loss of Jerusalem. To express their grief, they turned to the Jewish lamentations in the Old Testament that had voiced similar pain over the loss of the city with the ancient Babylonian destruction of Solomon's temple by Nebuchadnezzar (BC 586).

Almost four centuries later, Christians had an even more precise experience of "Jewish" loss. In the year 1009, the Caliph of Jerusalem, Al-Hakim, destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Christendom's Constantinian "temple." European Christians responded by denouncing Al-Hakim as a new Nebuchadnezzar. Some Christians found a way to vent their rage closer to home. Blaming Europe's Jews for the Muslim destruction of Christian holy sites, some communities confronted their Jewish neighbors with a choice of conversion or exile; in some cases, violence led to murder.

The fever peaked, then subsided. Europe stabilized; Al-Hakim repented his action and rebuilt the basilica, and things returned to normal. By the end of the century, however, the Pope called for a Crusade to liberate Jerusalem from the Muslims. Marching along the Rhine, the Crusading army fell upon resident non-Christian communities, this time slaughtering European Jews.

Popular Christian devotion and theology, meanwhile, began to shift in emphasis from Jesus' resurrection as the key moment in salvation history, to the pains that Jesus suffered in the course of his brutal death. This theological shift placed attention less on the narratives of Christ's resurrection and more on the events of his Passion. And in their retelling of the Passion story, medieval theologians came to emphasize the actors in the Gospels' drama: Pilate the (neutral) governor, and the "wicked Jews." But more than the Jews in Jerusalem in Jesus' day were thereby condemned as evil. The community

of contemporary Jews, their neighbors, seemed to medieval Christians to be continuous with the Gospels' actors. As long as any Jew of any generation refused to convert to Christianity, he or she was thought to be as guilty of slaying the Christ as were the Jews of centuries earlier depicted in the Passion narrative.

THIS RAPID REVIEW OF A THOUSAND YEARS of Western theological development might seem to have taken us far from Gibson's 2004 movie. In fact, without these developments, *The Passion of the Christ* would have told a very different story. Only three of our four first-century Gospels even mention the incident with the Temple's curtain. And early Christians, as we have seen, interpreted that Gospel scene in various ways: as the Temple mourning its own future destruction, or of God perhaps tearing his own "clothes" to mourn the death of his Son. Only after the second unsuccessful Jewish rebellion against Rome, in AD 132–135, do we find Gentile Christians specifically arguing that God, through the Romans, destroyed the Jewish Temple to punish the Jews for the death of his Son. Once Constantine favored the Church, and sponsored the building program in Jerusalem, Christians celebrated the new "Christian" temple as further proof that the Jews, in rejecting both Christ and his Church, had doomed themselves to live forever without a Temple. And with the intensification of politics and theology in the Middle Ages, contemporary Jewish communities were telescoped with the ancient one that Christians heard or read about when they heard or read their own Gospels: modern Jews, in declining Christian conversion, were seen as Christ-killers too. Passion plays dramatized this message, and provoked popular violence. The emphasis on Christ's suffering—an emphasis that visually dominates Gibson's movie—intensified Jewish "guilt."

By casting his characters as he has, by having Pilate so blameless and Caiaphas so wicked, by presenting a citywide hostility to Jesus, by depicting

both priests and populace as utterly unmoved—indeed, as further incited—by Jesus' extreme suffering, Gibson has indeed given us an extremely accurate historical presentation of Jesus' passion, *as viewed from the high Middle Ages*. Hence his coda at the end of his film: Rome is shaken, but the Temple is destroyed. No Gospel ever stated that. Much later theology read that meaning into the Gospels. And that is the meaning that Gibson gives us. The movie's destruction of the Temple, caused by Gibson's special-effects divine tear, is God's pronouncement against the priests, and in a larger sense against the Jews.

But Gibson drew the elements of his story from a more modern source as well. His medieval heritage filters through the very detailed visions of an early-nineteenth-century nun. I am speaking, of course, of Anne Catherine Emmerich.

VISIONS OF VENERABLE ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICH (1774–1824)
Emmerich was a stigmatic visionary. That is, her piety was aligned with her identification of Jesus' suffering on the cross: she spontaneously exhibited in her own flesh the sorts of wounds that the crucifix depicted on the suffering Christ. Her visions about Christ's suffering were collected and, eight years after her death, written up in a voluminous work by a German poet, Clement Brentano. He entitled Emmerich's visions *The Lowly Life and Bitter Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother*. The quotations below draw on the 1915 English translation of the fourth edition of the German original. By looking at Brentano's work, we can see more clearly that the earthquake Gibson brings us at the close of his movie originates not in the Gospel of Matthew but in the visions of Emmerich.

Terror fell upon all at the sound of Jesus' deathcry, when the earth quaked and the rock neath the cross was split asunder. A feeling of dread pervaded the whole universe. The veil of the Temple was on instant rent in twain, the dead arose from

their graves, the walls in the Temple fell, while mountains and buildings were overturned in many parts of the world (pp. 298–299).

By the earthquake at Jesus' death, when the rock of Calvary was split, many portions of the earth were upheaved while others sank, and this was especially the case in Palestine and Jerusalem. In the Temple and throughout the city, the inhabitants were just recovering somewhat from the fright caused by the darkness, when the heaving of the earth, the crash of falling buildings in many quarters, gave rise to still more general consternation; and, to crown their terror, the trembling and wailing crowd, hurrying hither and thither in dire confusion, encountered here and there the corpses raised from the dead, as they walked about uttering their warnings in hollow voices (pp. 301–302).

The two great columns at the entrances of the Holy of Holies in the Temple, between which hung a magnificent curtain, fell in opposite directions, the left-hand one to the south, the right-hand to the north. The beam which they supported gave way and the great curtain was, with a hissing noise, rent from top to bottom, so that opening on either side it fell. This curtain was red, blue, white and yellow. Many celestial spheres were described upon it, also figured like the brazen serpent. The people could now see into the Holy of Holies (pp. 303–304).

Jeremias appeared at the altar and uttered words of denunciation. The sacrifice of the Old Law was ended, he said, and a new one had begun (p. 304).

The description of widespread damage from the earthquake fills several more pages. The importance for our study is that the work of Emmerich-Brentano emphasizes the devastating impact that the earthquake had on the Temple. The mother of Jesus together with some companions visited the area in the wee hours of the next morning. She wept, "for its ruin and its desolate aspect on that day... bore witness to the sins of her people" (p. 350). Thus the judgment is explicit: the concept of Jewish corporate guilt for the death of Jesus is linked to the cessation of sacrifice in the Temple.

This accusation against all Jews everywhere for the crime of those who collaborated with Pilate is an integral part of the piety of that period in which Sister Anne Catherine lived. We have seen how the idea developed in Western theology. And if we have seen *The Passion*, we know as well how Gibson uses this idea to conclude his movie.

The teaching of the Catholic Church holds that, in the instance of private revelations, such visions may be accepted by Catholics provided they do not contradict the message of the Bible and teaching of the Church. In the case of Emmerich, the question of the authenticity of her visions is compounded by the fact that Brentano, not Emmerich herself, seems to have supplied the detail about Jerusalem that figures so strongly in *The Dolorous Passion*. Much seems to come from Brentano (who availed himself of maps and guidebooks of the Holy Land), and not from Emmerich herself.

Gibson noted in his interview with Diane Sawyer that Emmerich gave him many ideas for his movie that he would not have thought of himself. It is Gibson's prerogative as an artist to draw his inspiration where he will. But we might wish, if Gibson, as he says, knowingly shaped his story by so closely following a nineteenth-century book, that he would refrain from making claims that his movie is true to events in the first part of the first century. He cannot—or should not—be able to have it both ways. And given the sort of anti-Judaism native to Emmerich and Brentano's time and place, we might question Gibson's sense of responsibility. Artists are free, but they are also responsible for the works that they create. In regard to a sacred theme, we would hope that a reflective person would ask, "What are the implications of my choices?"

JUDAISM AS A LIVING RELIGION

The vitality of Jewish faith and practice, despite tragic persecutions in many parts of Europe, has continued across the centuries. Even the horren-

dous attacks of the Nazi period did not prevent the restoration of Jewish communities to vibrant life. Judaism thrives. Christians who might wish that this were otherwise, or who wish that all Jews would convert to Christianity, should consider the instructions of our own New Testament. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Jewish sage Gamaliel argues that the Sanhedrin should leave the early Church in peace. "For if this endeavor or activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy it; you may even find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38-39). Any Christian theological judgment that Jews have ceased to have their own role to play in the divine plan should likewise be put under the scrutiny of Gamaliel's dictum in this New Testament book.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council formally rejected the traditions that held that all Jews of all generations were guilty of the death of Jesus. The following brief statement was not "absolution" (as the secular press has stated ad nauseam), because Jews were not being "absolved" of any sin or crime: the point was that Jews as a people had committed no sin or crime. Rather, the Council Declaration *Nostra Aetate* stated that the general indictment of Jews and of Judaism, a long-standing staple of popular preaching and teaching of Christian tradition, was wrong.

Even though Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (see Jn 19:6), neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the Church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ.

(Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*: Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, October 28, 1965)

This teaching must be reiterated in the religious education of both adults and children. At the same time, the diversity and richness of Jewish spirituality during the Second Temple period should be known. The danger of Christians reverting to old stereotypes of Judaism as a ritualistic, legalistic religion of hypocrites will be offset by the emphasis on the rich context within which Jesus and his followers built their teachings.

The council dealt with the past. Slowly, over the decades, the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews also grappled with questions regarding Judaism contemporary with the Church and the State of Israel. After Rabin and Arafat met in 1993, fears concerning the lot of small Christian communities in Arab lands subsided and the stage was set for the *Fundamental Agreement* between the Holy See ("The Vatican") and Israel (December 30, 1993). This laid the foundation for the exchange of ambassadors, a sign of the highest level of diplomatic recognition of Israel by the Holy See. But this agreement was more than a link between two small states. It was a sign of "the unique nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and of the historic process of reconciliation and growth in mutual understanding and friendship between Catholics and Jews" (Preamble).

No one, whether in symbolic gestures or in words, has done more than has Pope John Paul II to show respect for the Jewish people and their faith. His address to the Jewish community of Mainz, Germany (November 17, 1980), described the encounter between the Church and "the people of God of the old Covenant, *never revoked by God* (see Romans 11:29), and those of the New Covenant" as involving a dialogue with the Church between the first and second parts of her Bible. "A second dimension of our dialogue... is the meeting between present day Christian Churches and the present day people of the Covenant concluded with Moses." From this foundation, the Church in recent decades has developed a series of statements to assist preachers and religion teachers to present a positive vision of Judaism and of the Jewish

people. This vision must reach all parts of the Catholic world, including places without a significant Jewish population. These teachings should inform all artistic work as well, including efforts to dramatize the Passion of the Christ. American bishops have reiterated their commitment to this teaching, specifically on the issue of presentations of the Passion with the promulgation of *Criteria for Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion* (1998).

The words of Pope John Paul present a challenge for both faith communities:

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.

("Reflections on the Fiftieth Anniversary
of the Uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto," April 6, 1993)