



**Introduction of John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M.  
The Other Polish Priest  
March 1, 2012**

The entire world recognizes the historic significance of Pope John Paul II's ministry of reconciliation between Christians and Jews, and his pilgrimages to Auschwitz, the Synagogue of Rome, and Israel were among the greatest of the twentieth century's spiritual journeys. No one is surprised that our Center would honor his ministry with a lecture series which we inaugurate this evening. But there is another priest of Polish background whose own pilgrimage has shown the way to friendship between Jews and Christians for me and many others and, of course, that is John Pawlikowski, O.S.M. He will never receive the global acclaim of that Pope, but my guess is that John would be a close competitor for miles traveled in service to the building of that friendship. When recalling John Paul II



Signer, was diagnosed with the pancreatic cancer that would soon take his life. John was a spiritual companion and close friend of Michael and he immediately demonstrated leadership and brought together Jews and Christians in a healing service for Michael who was present at it. I was deeply moved by the sense of peace and community that John had created for us and Michael as we prayed for the Rabbi in hope and trust. It is a privilege for me to introduce the other Polish priest, Fr. John Pawlikowski.

James Bernauer, S.J.  
Kraft Family Professor of Philosophy  
Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning  
Boston College



“sin” which is the strongest religious term one could use in such a condemnation.<sup>1</sup> But he did not stop at verbal condemnation of antisemitism. He also called for a joint concerted action by Jews and Christians to combat its remaining presence and any further spread. The fundamental agreement between Israel and the Vatican signed during John Paul II’s papacy includes a provision for such concerted action against antisemitism by the signatories.<sup>2</sup>

One of the issues connected with antisemitism that John Paul II never discussed and which remains a thorny question in the contemporary Christian-Jewish dialogue is the link, if any, between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Many in the Jewish community today would argue that anti-Zionism is in fact now the predominant form of antisemitism. The counter argument made by some from the Christian side is that any criticism of the policies of the State of Israel is labeled as antisemitism by certain Jewish leaders. Clearly this remains unresolved which has caused increasing tension in the Christian-Jewish relationship, including within the context of the Christian-Jewish dialogue itself. Here is one area where our responsibility takes over from John Paul II’s legacy. I have no easy solution to the current tension surrounding the antisemitism-anti-Zionism debate. Suffice it to say that there can be a direct link between them in some cases as the Pontifical Council on Justice & Peace noted in its document on racism in 1988.<sup>3</sup> A subsequent statement from the Council prepared for the 2001 United Nations Conference on Racism mentions the Holocaust and antisemitism but omits any direct reference to anti-Zionism as a possible form of

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope John Pau13wPonbetth-196(o)116(Th(ound)(ench1(l)-440(ld184(p)114)-440(f)-

antisemitism, perhaps as a sign of the tension that developed over this linkage.<sup>4</sup>

Any effort to mitigate such tension





Commission's document, a papal letter expressing strong support for



eventual construction of the Auschwitz Center for Dialogue and Prayer adjacent to the relocated convent has become over time an inspiring center of study and spiritual development in light of personal encounter with the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site. And the relationship between the Center and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum leadership has continued to grow with the Museum now regularly using the Center for some of its programming. To repeat, none of this in my judgment would have been possible, despite the important efforts of leaders both in the Christian and Jewish communities, had John Paul II decided to remain on the sidelines of the dispute.

Another effort by John Paul II related to the long-awaited political recognition of Israel by the Holy See. Anyone involved with Catholic-Jewish relations was well aware that for many in the Jewish community, whether at the level of leadership or the grassroots, such recognition was seen as a litmus test of Catholic credibility in terms of the Church's outlook towards Judaism and the Jewish People.

I have heard from people who were close to John Paul II's papacy that he had on several occasions expressed his sincere interest in upgrading the Vatican-Israel ties to a full diplomatic relationship but also his frustration at being constrained in this regard by the Vatican Secretariat of State. Eventual recognition of Israel by Egypt and Jordan certainly helped John Paul II overcome this internal Vatican opposition. And the Pope's very positive visit to Israel further solidified this recognition.

As early as 1984, John Paul II showed a deep sensitivity for the meaning of Israel to the Jewish People. In a Good Friday address that year he wrote the following:

For the Jewish people who live in the State of Israel and who

and the due tranquility that is the prerogative of every nation and the condition of life and progress of every society.<sup>10</sup>

John Paul II went on to speak movingly of Judaism's spiritual attachment to the city of Jerusalem. And on June 15, 1994, the Holy See and the Israeli government jointly announced the formal establishment of diplomatic relations as a result of ongoing negotiations that began with the signing of the Fundamental Agreement the previous December. Clearly the Fundamental Agreement represented a central success for John Paul II. It should be noted that shortly after the signing of the Fundamental Agreement with the State of Israel, the Vatican Secretariat of State established ties with the Palestinian Authority as well, probably to help mute any continuing opposition to the Fundamental Agreement.

As I wrote in the commemorative volume for the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, this step represented more than merely a diplomatic agreement. It marked in fact the final repudiation of a



Protestant denominations, the language of Catholic leaders has become far more harsh, including recent statements that have used the term “prison” to describe the conditions under which the Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip, are forced to live.

There is no doubt that the Israeli-Palestinian issue is becoming the eight hundred pound gorilla in the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Most of the Catholic criticism is not ultimately theological, even though one can find some strains of the old “replacement theology” within the growing critique, particularly from the Palestinian Christian side. Rather, it concerns concrete actions on the grounds that involve such issues as border crossings and land confiscation.

I believe this growing controversy has the potential of becoming as serious as the Auschwitz convent controversy and perhaps even more so. I cannot go into detailTBT536P8( )-21(ca)-21 .024 [se)-3(r4( a11(r)-3(o)9

self-identities. He articulated this theme quite clearly in his address during his historic visit to the synagogue in Rome on April 13, 1986.

These are his words:

The Church of Christ discovers her “bond” with Judaism by “searching into her own mystery” (*Nostra Aetate* 4). The Jewish religion is not “extrinsic” to us, but in a certain way “intrinsic” to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, 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.<sup>16</sup>

While the sentiment behind this particular papal theme is certainly laudatory, as with a number of such themes in the addresses of John Paul II on Christian-Jewish relations, the Pope never offered us a more in-depth reflection on the theological implications of his notion of inherent Christian-Jewish bonding. So we are left with a number of unanswered questions.

The first of these questions is whether a statement on inherent bonding between Jews and Christians can be a one-sided proclamation. Does it require a positive response from the Jewish side? Some years ago I raised this issue in an article in *Moment* magazine.<sup>17</sup> The response in letters to the editor was generally negative from the Jewish side, including from the noted Jewish scholar in the Christian-Jewish dialogue Irving Greenberg who contributed a printed response. The negativity from the Jewish side was rooted largely in the misinterpreted perception that I was asking


---

<sup>16</sup> Cf., *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, xxiii.

<sup>17</sup> John T. Pawlikowski, “Rethinking Christianity: A Challenge to Jewish Attitudes,” *Moment*, 15:4 (August 1990): 36-39. Also Response by Irving Greenberg “Jews Have Thought Little About Spiritual Dignity of Other Faiths, 39.

for reciprocity as a condition for Christian engagement in the dialogue. Such reciprocity was regarded by many of the Jewish respondents as unwarranted given the long history of Christian theological antisemitism. As far as I know, there is no reputable Jewish scholar who has picked up affirmatively on this fundamental theme in John Paul II's writings.

I still believe the theme has positive possibilities and in no way was I suggesting simplistic reciprocity in raising it. My point was, and is, that if Christians at any level wish to make an assertion of inherent Christian-Jewish bonding, there is need for recognition of such bonding on the part of both faith communities. Otherwise the theme lacks genuine meaning and ought to be dropped from the vocabulary of the dialogue.

I suspect the non-interest of Jewish scholars in such a theme which in fact is a subdued form of *rejeosi lon tsuct*  *fohn*







In the perspective of this renewed papal vision, one can imagine a new statue of the Synagogue on cathedrals, head held high in faithful observance of God's permanent covenant and a new status of the Church, with a look of saving humility mitigating the triumphant expression of the past. The two while remaining distinct, would stand together to proclaim the divine truth that both share and yet interpret in unique ways.<sup>19</sup>

Despite John Paul II's strong emphasis on the significance of the Hebrew Scriptures and postbiblical Jewish sources for Christian religious understanding, that emphasis has not carried over very much into Christian theology.

in the liturgy, the extensive use of the prophetic writings in worship texts and in hymns tends overwhelmingly toward a simplistic “promise/fulfillment” theme. Clearly much work remains if Catholic theology in all its dimensions is to take seriously John Paul II’s legacy in this area.

Let me here mention one area of scholarship that was not taken up by John Paul II himself but which is absolutely critical for the theological dimensions of Christian-Jewish relations today. This scholarship—to which two scholars associated with Boston College, the late Anthony Saldarini and Daniel Harrington, have made important contributions—is decisively transforming how we understand the separation of Judaism and Christianity in the first centuries of the Common Era and how we interpret Pauline texts which have been so prominent historically in forging earlier theological understandings of the Christian-Jewish relationship. While there is hardly full agreement among scholars associated with

Regrettably, I have not yet seen any appropriation of this new biblical scholarship within Christian theology. And in terms of Paul, many, if not most, theologians continue to use him in ways that show no evidence that they are in touch with this scholarship. We cannot argue that John Paul II moved us in the direction of this new scholarship. But if we wish to honor his overall legacy with regard to Christian-Jewish relations, this transformed understanding of the relations between the Church and synagogue in the first centuries must become a mainstay of Christian theological interpretation. Let me add here that these new developments also have significance for Jewish theological expression, but that is something that Jewish scholars will need to pursue.

The final area of Christian-Jewish relations that we need to take up in terms of John Paul II's legacy is the theological understanding of the linkage between the Church and Synagogue. It was a question that John Paul II raised in a number of his speeches. In each instance, his stance was the same: the Jewish covenant remains ongoing and was not abrogated by the Christ Event as most theologians, starting with the Church Fathers, had proclaimed for centuries. Such an affirmation requires a major adjustment in Christian theological self-perception. That is why Canadian scholar Gregory Baum, who was involved in the drafting of *Nostra Aetate*, proclaimed chapter four of that conciliar statement the most revolutionary development in the ordinary magisterium to emerge from Vatican II.<sup>21</sup>

Let me offer a few examples from John Paul II in this area which also highlight the theme of inherent bonding spoken of earlier in this presentation. In these statements, John Paul II was clearly picking up on *Nostra Aetate* and also *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on the Church which affirms the continuity of God's gifts to the Jewish people. In his address in Mainz, Germany, in 1980

---

<sup>21</sup> Gregory Baum, "The Social Context of American Catholic Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 (1986), 87.

where the Pope first showed his hand as it were regarding Christian-Jewish relations, his words were forthright: Jews, he insisted, following St. Paul in Romans 11:29,



