



## **Introduction**

A large enthusiastic audience welcomed our third speaker in the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning's Annual John Paul II Lecture. The event possessed a special dimension because it was held less than three months before that Pope, in company with Pope John XXIII, was proclaimed a Saint by the Catholic Church. The Center's activities are a continuation of their Papal ministry of reconciliation and friendship between Christians and Jews. Father John Pawlikowski of Chicago and Rabbi Michael Cook of Cincinnati had delivered the first two lectures in the series and we thought it time to reach beyond our national borders with our invitation for the 2014 presentation. We were very ple

## **The Jewishness of Jesus: Renewing Christian Appreciation**

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### **I: Rediscovering the Origins of Christianity**

#### **The historical Jesus and his faith**

The Church's image of Jesus has changed greatly over the past 60 years. The Son of God in whom people believed and who was defined by dogmatic theology has increasingly been eclipsed by the figure of the wandering preacher from Nazareth. Historical-critical interpretations have undercut the theological and dogmatic view of Jesus, whom scholars began treating as simply another historical figure from the ancient world. This shift represented liberation from ossified, formulaic articulations of belief and was part of the secularization of faith in modern culture. Jesus the proclaimer of the

In this context, the faith and religious practice of Jesus and his followers began to receive greater attention. Jesus emerged as a devout first-century Jew who was associated with the Pharisaic movement. His relationship with the Essenes of Qumran and with John the Baptist's disciples was debated along with his conflicts with the Jerusalem establishment. Judaism at the time of Jesus was a multi-faceted phenomenon not only in the Promised Land itself, but also among the diaspora communities of Egypt, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia. The Jews were small in number, but their culture and their history and relationship with God had a disproportionately great impact on the dominant pagan Hellenistic society. Historical research has also shown how the new messianic movement spread within Judaism and beyond after Jesus's death and resurrection. Here, too, the attraction of the Jewish messianic movement was universal. But the period was characterized by grave crises, for the Romans destroyed Jewish culture in and around Jerusalem in two wars. The destruction of the temple in 70 AD robbed Judaism of its religious center. The temple was the scene of liturgical and propitiatory rites. Here, Jewish law was interpreted and literature and prayers collected. All Jewish life crystallized here, since the *one* place was meant to be a sign of the *one* God. After two

an entirely new book of revelations. Islam takes up the themes, but not the sacred text. Fundamental categories such as history and liberation, covenant and people, Sabbath/Sunday, and the centrality of Jerusalem are not taken any further, or rather Islam does not lay claim to them in the same way. So while all three faiths are sister religions, it is only Judaism and Christianity that are twins (to extend the sibling metaphor). Only Christians and Jews have sacred texts in common. I shall therefore confine my inquiry to the links between Judaism and Christianity.

## **II: The Fruits of *Nostra Aetate***

### **Christianity in the light of Judaism**

Exactly 50 years ago, Vatican II started to produce a “Decree on the Jews.” The document went through a dramatic process involving multiple revisions, during which its focus was widened. The text on Jews was at one point integrated into the document on ecumenism. Indeed, the separation of Jews and Christians itself can be perceived as an original schism, similar to later divisions within Christianity. David Flusser went so far as to describe Christianity as Judaism for non-Jews. The final result of the Council’s process was the document *Nostra Aetate*, which deals with the relationship of the Church to the non-Christian religions. Its relationship with Judaism was thus subsumed into general

extension, or a shift in its content? What is the relationship of the Church as God's people to the Jews as God's people? 2.) What does it mean for Jesus's status as the universal saviour if Judaism is already in a covenant with God? Is it still necessary for Jews to be converted to Christ, or to the Church? If yes, should they convert in the same way as non-Jews? If no, is there a salvific meaning of the covenant that was never revoked? And what kind of meaning could Jesus have for the Jews? The same as for us Christians, or a different one? 3.) Where do we Christians stand on the issue of the Promised Land? The Torah speaks of the path that leads Israel through the desert, out of idolatry and slavery into the land of freedom and of God's just order. Do we as the Church take this message of the Hebrew Bible seriously? What does it mean for Judaism, for the modern State of Israel, and what does it mean for us? Thus there are three hot issues: the covenant, the salvific mission of Jesus, and the Holy Land. In the United States in particular, the publication of *Dabru Emet* (2000) on the Jewish side and *A Sacred Covenant* (2002) and *Covenant and Mission* (

There can be no objection to this interpretation. But we must take our exegesis one step further. Jacob not only represents Judaism but also the Church. And more important: Jacob and Esau were reconciled. And today, Church and Synagogue should finally learn to live with each other in reconciliation and mutual enrichment. Only in this way can they bear witness, in the Promised Land and throughout the world, to God's willingness to enter into relationships and covenants with man.

Subsequent to *Nostra Aetate*, the Jews were rightly termed the "sacrament of otherness." The Jews are to the Church "the Other." So God, as the Other, can reveal himself in this relationship. This proximity and disassociation, dependency and

## A deeper understanding of the Incarnation

“He who encounters Jesus Christ encounters Judaism,” said John Paul II. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the *Feast of the Circumcision of Christ*. Circumcision marks the Jewish male’s entry into the covenant with God, and the New Testament stresses that Jesus, too, entered into this covenant. Thus Paul’s Epistle to the Romans begins with a brief formula about Jesus: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) concerning his son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” (Rom 1:1-4) “According to the spirit” and “According to the flesh” are paralleled. “According to the flesh,” Jesus is of the house of David, the Jewish royal dynasty. It is more than a statement of biological fact. It identifies Jesus’s cultural and religious origin. The royal dynasty of David embodies the covenant with God and fidelity to the law par excellence. In Galatians 4,4f., Paul mentions Jesus’s birth and entry into the covenant in the same breath, and points out its deep theological significance: “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” The Gospel of Matthew, too, underscores the Davidic lineage of the new-born Jesus in the infancy narrative (1:1-17) and later quotes these programmatic words of Jesus: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, nor the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” (5,17f). This overture to the Sermon on the Mount alludes to Mount Sinai and the Old Testament covenant. Jesus’s disciples are charged with fulfilling the law and preaching the gospel to others. Jesus is a man of Jewish law, and he, according to Matthew, distinguishes between two intended recipients of the good news: in the Mission Discourse, Jesus sends his disciples to the Israelites only (Mt 10); the risen Christ, however, sends them to all nations with the command to baptize (Mt 28:16-20). It might be said that Jews and Christians are addressed in two separate speeches. Thus, the circumcision of Jesus and his entry into the law has crucial theological implications. He has not just one uniform message for all human beings but he respects the structure of the history of salvation, the structure of the covenant, which creates a distinction between the Jewish people and the nations. Luke goes in the same direction when stating that the new born Jesus is a light to the nations and a glory to Israel (Lk 2:32). A group of theologians of which I am a member wrote to Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 and to Pope Francis in 2013, presenting arguments for the introduction of a



of the Council of Chalcedon (431): Jesus Christ is God and man, unconfusedly and indivisibly. Faith in the Incarnation is here cast into axiomatic form in Hellenistic language and Greek thought. It speaks universally and with an awareness of God's salvific action for all mankind. But it does not explicitly state how this salvific action is



and the New Testament texts referring to them (Gal 2; Col 2) must be brought into the discussion. Colossians 2:11–





Nomen sacrum superas.

o sacred name.

Jesu, nostrum pretium,  
 Jesu, spes moerentium,  
 Mentis sana miseris.  
 Quod deest in homine  
 Supple tuo nomine,  
 Quod est salutiferum.

Jesus, our ransom,  
 Jesus, hope of the afflicted,  
 heal our sick souls.  
 What is lacking in man  
 supply by your name,  
 which brings salvation.

Tua circumcisio  
 Cordis sit praecisio  
 Efficax cauterium.

Let your circumcision  
 be a circumcision of the heart  
 and its effective healing.

Sanguis fusus sordidos  
 Lavet, riget aridos,  
 Moestis det solatium.

Let your shed blood purify the unclean,  
 refresh the parched,  
 and give comfort to the sad.

## **IV. The Day of Judaism**

### **Origins and significance**

Let us turn to the *Day of Judaism*. Its commemoration is observed in several European countries. It was introduced in Italy in 1990, in Poland in 1998, in Austria in 2000, in the Netherlands in 2008, and in Switzerland in 2011. It began on the initiative of Catholics engaged in Judeo-Christian dialogue, who wanted to raise public awareness of the redefinition of the Church's relationship with the Synagogue. Thus the *Day of Judaism* was conceived as a day of dialogue. At the same time it is a day for reaffirming the Church's Jewish heritage. Following the example of the original initiative in Italy, January 17 was chosen as the date of it, that being one day before the start of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. The date thus recalls how all ecumenical understanding rests on the relationship of Christians to the Jews.

The *Day of Judaism*

killed in the context of Passover, and the Gospels present his death as a sacrifice on the eve of the Jewish feast celebrating their emancipation from slavery and the forging of a nation. This relationship between Passover and Easter should become conscious on the Day of Judaism.

The choice of a Sunday for the *Dies Iudaicus* is likewise symbolic. Sunday is the Christian day of observance and shows that the Christians derived their seven-day week from Judaism. The Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday are brothers. What Sunday is to the Christians, the Sabbath is to the Jews, namely a day of creation and salvation. The Day of Judaism is not meant to be a theme Sunday in the Church year, but it should underscore the theological meaning of the seven-day rhythm.

On the *Day of Judaism*, the celebration of the Eucharist should illustrate the links and contiguities with Judaism. The Swiss Bishops' Conference provides sermon preparation materials for the *Day of Judaism*. The Old Testament readings – dealing with Abraham in all three reading cycles – along with the New Testament reading and the Gospel of the Transfiguration of Christ are provided alongside commentary by Jewish and Christian exegetes. But we should not forget the Psalm with which the congregation responds to the first reading. The Psalms remain the prayer book that all Jews and Christians share. The homily of the day could center on the Eucharist itself, for example on the prayers of the Offertory which are classical Jewish blessings; or on the Sanctus which echoes the vision of Isaiah in the Temple and the Psalms of the Temple liturgy of Jerusalem; or on the . In addition, the fourth Eucharistic Prayer is particularly suitable for the *Day of Judaism*, since it begins with thanksgiving for creation and then narrates God's salvific action. It should be pointed out, however, that the generalization "Time and again you offered them (the human beings) covenants and through the prophets taught them..." is somewhat lacking in conviction. It would be more precise to say "You made a covenant with Israel". The history of salvation should be made explicit here without suppressing mention of Judaism.

These are some thoughts how to celebrate the *Day of Judaism*, in order to deepen Catholic Faith, to reach out to the churchgoers, and to promote dialogue. I hope together with a restored Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord we can become more and more aware of being Christian as being in dialogue.