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September-October 2015 \$1.00

***OUR
RESPONSIBILITY
TO ENGAGE***



NOSTRA AETATE

*Celebrating 50 years of Vatican II's Declaration on the
Church's Relation with Non-Christian Religions*

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Scarboro Missions magazine publishes four editions each year, plus the calendar. The articles published represent the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Society.

Please address all inquiries to: Scarboro Missions,
2685 Kingston Road, Scarborough, ON, M1M 1M4.
Tel: 416-261-7135; Toll-free: 1-800-260-4815;
Fax: 416-261-0820

Email: info@scarboromissions.ca (General)
editor@scarboromissions.ca (Magazine)
mid@scarboromissions.ca (Subscriptions)

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The editorial team, L-R: Héctor Acero Ferrer and Sr. Lucy Thorson, Sister of Sion, both Education and Liaison Development Officers with the Scarboro Missions Interfaith Department; and Kathy Gillis of Scarboro Missions magazine. Sr. Lucy and Héctor participated on the planning committee of *The Global Village: Our Responsibility to Engage* conference of which Scarboro Missions is a sponsor.

NOSTRA AETATE...

The call to interfaith engagement

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time), *Scarboro Missions* magazine worked with an editorial team on this special edition that explores this groundbreaking interfaith document. This edition constitutes one of Scarboro Mission's contributions to *The Global Village: Our Responsibility to Engage* conference taking place this year on October 8 at the University of St. Michael's College. Spearheaded by The Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Toronto, this gathering is inspired by the universal call to engagement outlined by *Nostra Aetate*.

In order to better understand the legacy of this interreligious achievement of the Second Vatican Council, we have compiled a series of articles from accomplished international figures in the field of dialogue. By examining the document from their social context, each writer helps us integrate the teachings of *Nostra Aetate* in our personal, spiritual, and social lives. As Pope Francis reminds us, "either we stand together with the culture of dialogue and encounter (in today's world), or we all lose."

We hope that this issue will help to support and further the work and commitment to dialogue that is taking place within our

communities today. May it also serve as an opportunity to examine the past, present, and future of interreligious encounter in a world with a growing need for peaceful coexistence. In order to accomplish this goal, our authors explore the importance of *Nostra Aetate* in developing a new understanding of interfaith and intercultural dialogue, the significance of such dialogue in the broader engagement between communities, and the pivotal role of interreligious encounter in a world suffering the consequences of fundamentalism and fear of "the other."

The organizers of *The Global Village: Our Responsibility to Engage* conference, and likewise the editorial team of this magazine issue, highlight some of

the engagements that are taking place throughout the world and in Canada. We are being called to broaden that encounter with persons and communities "in our time," as we face the current and ongoing challenges of our society in bringing about a just and peaceful world.

Our authors are conscious of the difficulties surrounding the topic at hand. Instead of giving definite answers to particular problems, they offer reflections that will trigger further dialogue and community engagement, as all of us attempt to respond to the question: "Where do we go in the next 50 years as an interreligious and multicultural community?"[∞]



Sisters of Sion Marie Laurice (left) and Marie Felix with Cardinal Augustin Bea, SJ, president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, one of the preparatory commissions of Vatican II. The Secretariat prepared and presented three Council documents—on ecumenism, on non-Christian religions (*Nostra Aetate*), and on religious liberty. Cardinal Bea said that the Sisters of Sion had a particular vocation that gave them a "special right" to speak of the Church's spiritual relationship with the Jewish People. Because they were ahead of their time in terms of Catholic-Jewish dialogue, the Sisters influenced the thinking of church leaders within the Second Vatican Council and helped give birth to *Nostra Aetate*.

SIDIC ROME



NOSTRA AETATE...

Interreligious dialogue in the global village

By Michael Attridge

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) was called at a unique time in modern history. Little more than a century and a half had passed since the French Revolution, which resulted in the separation of church and state, a reality that had a profound impact on the age that followed. The 20th century saw enormous progress through scientific and technological advancement, such as modern transportation and communication. It also saw political change and deep devastation—two world wars, the emergence of communism, the horrors of the Shoah, nuclear weaponry and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and decolonization that now exposed smaller independent countries to the exploitation of larger ones.

Most of these events were part of the lived experience of those who attended Vatican II. Indeed, the opening words of the council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), “The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties...”, were especially meaningful to the Fathers of the council in the 1960s. It was a time of great change—social, political, economic, and cultural—and the bishops sought to respond and update the church’s teachings in light of these modern times.

Against this backdrop, the council promulgated the declaration on the church’s relations to other world religions (*Nostra Aetate*). Although the shortest document of Vatican II and having the status of a declaration rather than a constitution or decree, *Nostra Aetate* has been one of the most studied texts of the council in the past 50 years. It marks a significant reform in the church’s teaching. The Council of

“Since (Vatican II), little emphasis has been given on the dialogue of the world’s religions within the modern, even post-modern, global context. I am speaking here about the role of religion within the social, economic, and political spheres of the 21st century.”

Florence in the 15th century had condemned other religions, specifically the Jews. Five hundred years later, the church took an entirely different approach. It sought to embrace all that was true and holy in other religions and called on Catholics to promote that which is good in them. With the Jews, the council affirmed that God remains faithful to God’s covenant with the chosen people. In other words, at Vatican II the church invoked what might be called broader or more universal values (such as goodness, truth, holiness) to view its relationships with other religions. In the past 50 years, this has allowed for a deep and fruitful dialogue between the Catholic Church and the major religions of the world.

Looking to the present and to the future

On October 8, 2015, the University of St. Michael’s College will host a day-long conference organized by the Jewish-Christian Dialogue of Toronto. The conference will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the remarkable achievement of *Nostra Aetate*. But unlike many other 50th anniversary celebrations of Vatican II, it will move beyond a retrospective gaze. In the past 50 years, most events have looked back at achievements in interreligious relations since the close of

the council. St. Michael’s itself was host to such an event in 2005. It is time now, though, to look both at the present and towards the future.

The positive relationship of the church to other world religions was a breakthrough at the council. It permitted the possibility of the Catholic Church to speak meaningfully as Christian dialogue partners to the other world religions—to recognize the shared and common values of Christians with other faith traditions. Since then, though, little emphasis has been given on the dialogue of the world’s religions within the modern, even post-modern, global context. I am speaking here about the role of religion within the social, economic, and political spheres of the 21st century. These broader contextual considerations were active and present in the 1960s during the council, but they formed the background for interreligious discussions. Today, it is time to foreground these considerations, to bring them to the table as active voices in the larger discussion. It is time to step outside of an exclusively religious sphere and ask such questions as:

What is the value of Christianity in a world where, for many, the Christian Church, and indeed religion more broadly, is only one cultural option among countless others?



Many perspectives on world peace, terrorism, and religious traditions were shared during an event hosted in Saskatoon by the Islamic Association of Saskatchewan. A diverse panel of speakers addressed the topic from their religious tradition or area of academic expertise. Photo courtesy of the Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon.

What does a religious worldview have to offer current debates surrounding the global environmental crisis?

What can religion say meaningfully and convincingly to contemporary political issues to promote the common good and the flourishing of human society today?

And vice versa:

What do culture, politics, and modern society have to offer constructively to the world's religions?

Where are the points of communication?

What does the space for meaningful dialogue look like and how do we create it?

All of these are big questions with far-reaching consequences. Clearly, not all of them will be raised in the up-coming conference. However, the event will be an opportunity to think about and discuss these larger issues. It is my hope and expectation that this conference will spark insights and inspire further conversations.∞

Dr. Michael Attridge is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theology, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto.

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Our Responsibility to Engage

In celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vatican II Document *Nostra Aetate* (In our time)

Thursday, October 8, 2015

8:30 AM — 4:30 PM

**University of St. Michael's College
81 St. Mary Street (Brennan Hall)
Toronto, Ontario**

Speakers include:

- Sr. Mary Boys**—Union Theological Seminary, New York
- The Hon. Hugh Segal**—Massey College, Toronto
- Justice Peter Lauwers**—Court of Appeal for Ontario
- Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish**—The Interreligious Coordinating Council of Israel, Jerusalem
- Dr. Nevin Reda**—Emmanuel College, Toronto
- Father Timothy Radcliffe, OP**—Blackfriars, Oxford, England
- Dr. Edward Kessler**—Woolf Institute, Cambridge, England

Evening Program: 7:30 PM—9:00 PM

Regis College (100 Wellesley Street West, Toronto, Ontario)

Think Tanks: Do They Help, Hinder or Strengthen the Development of Social Policy?

Moderated by Carol Goar—Toronto Star Columnist

Panellists include **Graham Fox**—President & CEO of the Institute for Research on Public Policy
Donald Abelson—Professor of Political Science at the University of Western Ontario
Sr. Mary Babic—Sister of Our Lady of Sion, Social Justice Ministry

Day Conference (with lunch): \$25 (students: \$5)

Evening Program: \$25 (students: \$10)

Full Conference (Day & Evening): \$40 (students: \$10)

For more information, conference agenda or to register,

please visit www.cjdt.org or email info@cjdt.org

Registration Deadline: September 30, 2015



Conference organized by Christian Jewish Dialogue of Toronto

Conference hosted by the University of St. Michael's College (University of Toronto) on October 8, 2015, and organized by the Jewish-Christian Dialogue of Toronto to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the remarkable achievement of *Nostra Aetate*. Many of the speakers have contributed to this special edition of *Scarboro Missions* magazine.



By Sr. Mary Boys, SNJM

NOSTRA AETATE...

A document that launched a movement of reconciliation

Nearly 3,500 bishops and heads of men's religious orders met in four sessions between 1962 and 1965 to discuss the nature and mission of the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council. Ultimately, the council's participants issued 16 documents that signaled significant changes in the church. The briefest, but arguably one of the most consequential documents, is *Nostra Aetate* (In our Time), issued on October 28, 1965; its full title, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. To highlight its importance as we approach the 50th anniversary of its promulgation, it is necessary to say a word about the drama of the world's largest and longstanding institution wrestling with its identity and mission in the modern world. (Even at the distance of 50 years, the council's significance is debated. See, for example, Massimo Faggioli's *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*, 2012).

Of course, only a brief aspect of this story can be told here: Why the council was convened and in what way it differed from its predecessors. Pope John XXIII, just three months into his papacy, announced in January 1959 his intention to call a council for the universal

church in order to engage in the process of *aggiornamento*; that is, to update the church. In his opening speech to the council on October 11, 1962, he set a new tone:

In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal...can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life...

We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand.

In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by [humanity's] own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable designs...And everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the Church.

To those prophets of doom, *Nostra Aetate* offered a counterpoint. This declaration marked the first time in the history of the Catholic Church that an ecumenical council spoke positively of other religions. From an educational and sociological perspective, the council launched a massive and complex re-educational project. In theological terminology, the council involved a demanding process of conversion to the "providential mystery of otherness" for the life of the church, and as a call to extend and deepen that conversion. (*Michael Barnes, Theology and the Dialogue of Religions, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine*, 2002.)

Five sections

Nostra Aetate has five sections. The initial sections speak more generally of the world's people as looking for an "answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence." While the Catholic tradition differs in many particularities, these religions "nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth that enlightens all men [and women]." Thus, the council encouraged "discussion and collaboration with followers of other religions." (*Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Volume 1, 1984, Fr. Austin Flannery, OP, translation.*)

Sections two and three discuss Hinduism and Buddhism, and section four the church's relationship with Judaism. It is this fourth section that marks the most radical departure from previous church teaching. A concluding paragraph says: "any discrimination against men [and women] or harassment

"Nostra Aetate launched a movement of reconciliation that is fundamental to the church's moral integrity, a catalyst for other Christian traditions vis-à-vis the Jewish people, and a sign of hope to a world in which peace is so elusive."



L'Osservatore Romano

In 1986, Pope John Paul II invited leaders of the world's religions to Assisi, Italy, to pray and fast for world peace. In so doing, he became the first prominent religious leader in history to convene such a gathering.

of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion" is "foreign to the mind of Christ."

The radical nature of the fourth section becomes clear only against the backdrop of centuries of church teaching and preaching that distorted Judaism, disparaged Jews as "Christ killers," and contributed to the rise of antisemitism. At the theological heart of this section is the council's assertion that Jews, whether of the time of Jesus or in any era, should not be blamed for Christ's death. (See my *Redeeming our Sacred Story: The Death of Jesus and Relations between Jews and Christians*, 2013).

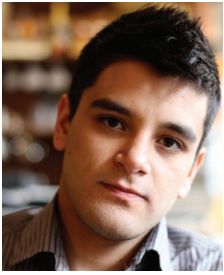
It is helpful to think of *Nostra Aetate* as less a document than the initiation of a process. It provided a foundational, if flawed, text that subsequent statements refined, nuanced, and developed. More importantly, the process of formulating and promulgating *Nostra Aetate* launched a movement of reconciliation that is fundamental to the church's moral integrity, a catalyst for other Christian traditions vis-à-vis the Jewish people, and a sign of hope to a world in which peace is so elusive.

I think even those who drafted *Nostra Aetate* over the course of 1962 to 1965 could not have imagined a conference in Rome 10 years ago celebrating the document's 40th anniversary. Hosted by the Pontifical Gregorian University, the participants included Buddhist scholars from Sri Lanka, Japan, and Turkey; Hindu scholars from India and the United States; Muslim scholars from Egypt, Lebanon, Malaysia, and Scotland; and Jewish and Christian (including Orthodox and Protestant) scholars from Europe, Israel, and North America. The presence of scholars, women as well as men, from diverse religious traditions, engaging one another with respect, seriousness, and sensitivity was a true moment of interreligious hospitality. Similar conferences will happen in many places in the world during this 50th anniversary year.

Since *Nostra Aetate* and its successor documents, no Catholic can claim that antisemitism or disparagement of Judaism is compatible with fidelity to Catholicism. And just as Pope Francis has put environmental justice on the world's agenda with the recent release

of his encyclical *Laudato si'* (Praise be to you), so too did Vatican II serve as a clarion call to a more just relationship with the Jewish people—and with peoples of all religious traditions.∞

Dr. Mary Boys is a Sister of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. She is the Dean of Academic Affairs and the Skinner and McAlpin professor of practical theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York. She is a prolific author and popular speaker in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue.



NOSTRA AETATE...

Reflecting on the practical implications of inviting everyone to the table

Compiled by Héctor Acero Ferrer

Héctor Acero Ferrer is an Education and Liaison Development Officer with the Scarboro Missions Interfaith Department and was on the planning committee of The Global Village: Our Responsibility to Engage conference of which Scarboro Missions is a sponsor.

The planning team of *The Global Village: Responsibility to Engage* entrusted youth with the portion of the conference dedicated to the future of engagement in society. The four breakout sessions are to be led by University of Toronto graduate students Ayesha Valliani, Emily Macrae, Jennifer Kolz, and Paul Weitzmann. Collaborating with experts from various disciplines, they have designed these sessions to inspire the audience to stretch their imagination and think of new ways to address some of the most pressing questions of our times.

Without losing sight of the universal call to engagement contained in the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, Ayesha, Emily, Jennifer, and Paul decided to explore the applications of the theory of engagement in concrete societal situations. Each session is an opportunity to delve into a current issue in the Canadian context, creating a safe space for opposing voices to participate.

The content selected by the students extends from the information economy to the boreal forest, including some reflections on cultural allegiances and inequality. Speakers include entrepreneurs, scholars, policy makers, and activists. The emphasis has been placed on the practical significance of engaging all voices in society, a practice embodied so well by organizations dedicated to interfaith dialogue. In fact, one of the most significant outcomes of this planning process has been our discovery of the practical consequences of truly welcoming all voices to the table, something exquisitely outlined by the council fathers in the short but prolific document *Nostra Aetate*.

In the following short descriptions the students highlight the most significant aspects of their sessions, their key questions, and some of the voices present in the discussion.



Emily Macrae, Politics:

Rising Inequality and Voter Apathy: What does it take to put housing and homelessness on the political agenda?

This breakout session brings together community activists, policy leaders and scholars to discuss how the Canadian political system can address rising inequality both within and between urban areas.

The panel explores how civil society and academia can influence the political process so that elected officials are motivated to take action on pressing social issues. As such, the moderator and panelists address the central question: What does it take to put inequality (with a focus on housing and homelessness) on the political agenda?



Jennifer Kolz, Environment:

Sustainability has become a co-opted word and rhetorical tool in the debate on the environment. All sides seem to have their own definition and there is little, if any, crossover. This breakout session attempts to remove some layers of ambivalence on the matters of sustainability while focusing on the specific Canadian example of the

deforestation and conservation of the boreal forest. It will also aim to instill an understanding that cooperation amid all stakeholders (developers, environmentalists, the government, First Nations, religious and spiritual groups, Canadians, and others) is required in order that we live now without jeopardizing the potential for future people to meet their needs.



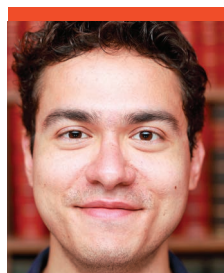
Ayesha Valliani, Culture:

In a time where people have multiple allegiances—to more than one country, to a religious community, to various social groups—how do we ensure a shared sense of belonging to an adopted homeland? This panel, titled **Belief and Belonging: How do we cultivate citizenship in an age of uncertainty?** brings together scholars and

practitioners to share their perspectives on citizenship, the state, and belonging in a time of increasing cultural complexity. Each individual takes a different approach to the question of how best to nurture a sense of belonging in uncertain times. This session is a moderated conversation between four specialists about the multiplicity of ways in which the law either supports or hinders the ways in which individuals are able to manifest various aspects of their identities.



Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem.
Credit: Héctor Acero Ferrer.



Paul Weitzmann, Economics:

The impact of new digital technologies on economic security has recently become a popular topic, as new creative digital technologies are created at a rate never seen before. These creative transformations have given people the opportunity to benefit from accessing digital resources and services from around the

world; however, many Information Technology economists have begun to worry that these digital transformations mark the beginning of a restructuring of the economy, as digital and computing advances do to knowledge work what the steam engine did for muscle power. Academics and business consultants have begun to warn people that the changes brought about by these digital transformations mark a significant economic shift that will likely impact the health of the economy as economic opportunities are reduced for large swathes of people, increasing already fragile rates of economic insecurity seen around the world. In this breakout session we will explore both of the perspectives framing this debate.∞

An interview with Rabbi Erwin Schild



Born in Cologne, Germany, Rabbi Schild was a survivor of Dachau at 18 and eventually interned in Canada. In 1947 he became the Rabbi of Adath Israel Congregation in Toronto where he remains Rabbi Emeritus since his retirement in 1989. He is an author, an interfaith pioneer, a member of the Order of Canada, and was awarded Germany's Order of Merit.

Scarboro Missions: What motivates you to be a builder of bridges and a person of hope and peace?

Rabbi Schild: There is a certain unity of humankind. We are not to be divided by antagonisms, by hatred, by misunderstanding, by lack of communication. That is why I believe in interfaith relations and have a positive attitude, even if in the past we were not successful, we still have some successes to report and to record, and we want to add to those. And that's why, in my own personal life, I have included participation in interfaith relations.

What does *Nostra Aetate* say to you and how have you seen its impact in terms of interfaith relations?

Rabbi Schild: Being a rabbi and being involved in interfaith relations, it is very important to me that *Nostra Aetate* opens the road for conditions of equality, of recognizing each other's validity, and so on. Until *Nostra Aetate* came about, there was always a certain caveat on the part of Christian attempts to establish friendly relationship. They wanted friendly relationships despite the gulf that separates us religiously. And now I think *Nostra Aetate* shows us the way of being truly partners in God's enterprise.

What did you mean when you described *Nostra Aetate* as a revolution?

Rabbi Schild: I meant that, for the first time, the official version of attitude between Christians and Jews does not have conversion as its main objective. So that we can live together and work together and think together without the mental reservations that Christians had and, to a certain extent also, that the Jews had. So it opened the door. In view of our history together, this is a revolution that came very suddenly. And it happened historically so close after the Holocaust; from the lowest moment, coming suddenly to a summit and it was a tremendous experience.

Continued on page 15...



NOSTRA AETATE...

Canada answers the call to engagement

By Murray Watson

Canada today is a country of greater cultural and religious variety than at any period in its nearly 150-year history. That variety also means that Canada is a unique experiment in the ways in which varying faith traditions can live and work together. In the 50 years since *Nostra Aetate* was published, Canada has become a leader in interfaith action and dialogue in ways that continue to blossom and bear fruit today, locally, nationally, and internationally.

Much of the earliest interreligious activity took place at the local level, where leaders of various religions came together in friendship in the 1960s to talk to each other and to work together on issues of common concern, including reducing poverty and addressing issues of racism and discrimination. The tragic events of 9/11 brought home to everyone

the importance of getting to know our religious neighbours, and of working together against violence and stereotypes of “the Other.”

Today many local churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship have strong bonds of friendship and cooperation, offering joint educational sessions, supporting food banks and soup kitchens, advocating for the homeless, running youth programs, and promoting innovative environmental initiatives. In some communities, different faith groups even find creative ways to gather in prayer and reflection for special occasions such as Thanksgiving and Remembrance Day.

On a national level, the Canadian Christian-Jewish Consultation (CCJC)—Canada’s oldest national dialogue—was established in 1977, and today there are national dialogues between Christians

and Muslims (since 1984), and Catholics and Hindus (since 2012). The Canadian Interfaith Conversation has, since 2009, been gathering a broad spectrum of Canadian religious leaders, whose “faith communities believe, in the Name of the Divine Imperative, that all children, women, and men should have the food that they need, housing, education, treatment for health issues, clean water, and a future with a sustainable environment.”

Many of Canada’s largest cities have been home to longstanding and creative interfaith partnerships. Montreal has long been a vibrant centre for interfaith and intercultural engagement; informal dialogues in the 1960s led to the creation of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal in 1971. The Montreal Dialogue Group (now more than 10 years old) brings together a cross section



Above left: Trisha Gore, a Saulteaux from the Yellow Quill First Nation (Sask). Right (L-R): Rev. Sirinanda (Buddhist monk), Kim MacAulay, Tom Downey, and Indra Weerasinghe. During the first week of February, the United Nations focuses on World Interfaith Harmony Week, recognizing the imperative need for dialogue among diverse faiths, religions and all people of good will to enhance mutual understanding, harmony, and cooperation. Interfaith Harmony Halifax offers celebration, education and hosted events, such as “Sacred Spaces: Meeting our Neighbours”. This is a series of events in Halifax places of worship, prayer, and practice including Baha’i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Mi’kmaq, Muslim, Pagan, and Sikh communities. At Mount Saint Vincent University, the interfaith program celebrates understanding, harmony, and compassion among all through song, music, prayers, meditation, dance, and displays by people of diverse faiths.



More than 170 volunteers from various faith traditions gathered in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, Montreal, for the fifth annual interfaith Eco-Action Day. Above: Organizing committee and special guests: Lindsay Luc (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Richard Celzi (city councillor), Diane Rollert (co-president of Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal/CJDM), Laura Gallo (Concordia University Multi-faith Chaplaincy), Dr. Catherine Jarvis, Carole Poirier (MNA Hochelaga) and Dr. Victor Goldbloom (co-president of CJDM).

of the city's religious communities to work together on key areas of social justice.

Since 1976, the Christian-Jewish Dialogue

of Toronto (CJDT), a consortium supported by major faith communities, has been sponsoring lectures, conferences, and festive meals, highlighting what these two faiths share in common and where they differ, and how they can join hands in areas of education and human rights promotion. The University of Western Ontario (in London) is home to two affiliated centres for Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Western Canada

The diversity of Western Canada, with its numerous immigrant populations, has provided fertile ground for interfaith endeavours. The Manitoba Multifaith Council centred in Winnipeg brings together a dozen of that province's spiritual paths to educate the public about their beliefs and practices and to promote collaborative work for the sake of the common good. Both Saskatoon and Regina have multifaith organizations, and their provincial organization (Multi-Faith Saskatchewan) recently published an overview of the history of those religious



Above left: Jennifer Galley chats with Sr. Lucy Thorson at the Engaging the World Series at the Multi-Faith Centre, University of Toronto. The Centre regularly hosts educational and cultural events uniting a cross section of traditions, including a weekly study of Abrahamic sacred texts, a lecture series, and environmental projects.

Left: Fr. Dave Warren participates in a multifaith sharing organized for high school students by the Scarboro Missions Department of Interfaith Dialogue.





LONDON



Christian, Jewish, and Muslim children come together at King's University College (University of Western Ontario) in London for the third annual five-day interfaith peace camp. August 2015.

Top photo: Every year, more than 100 volunteers representing 12 London faith groups gather to naturalize the McCormick Park area by planting native trees and shrubs. The Interfaith Tree Planting is organized by the faith groups and coordinated by ReForest London.

groups in their province. This past summer, Regina played host to the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN)'s annual conference.

Edmonton and Calgary also boast of vibrant interreligious scenes, including organized visits to local places of worship, and Lunch and Learn talks on a wide range of faith-related topics. However, big cities certainly don't have a monopoly on interfaith leadership. It is often in smaller rural areas that communities come together regularly as friends and neighbours to support one another, to address local needs, and to explore each other's religious beliefs.

In all of our communities today, there is tremendous curiosity about our neighbours and fortunately, there are individuals, groups, and organizations who are building bridges, bringing people together, and helping us to

SASKATOON



Lori Petruskevich

Bishop Donald Bolen and Lama Losang Samten, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher and former attendant to the Dalai Lama, at the Diocese of Saskatoon's Conversation on Compassion: A Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue, an evening of conversation and meditation on compassion.



Kiply Yaworski

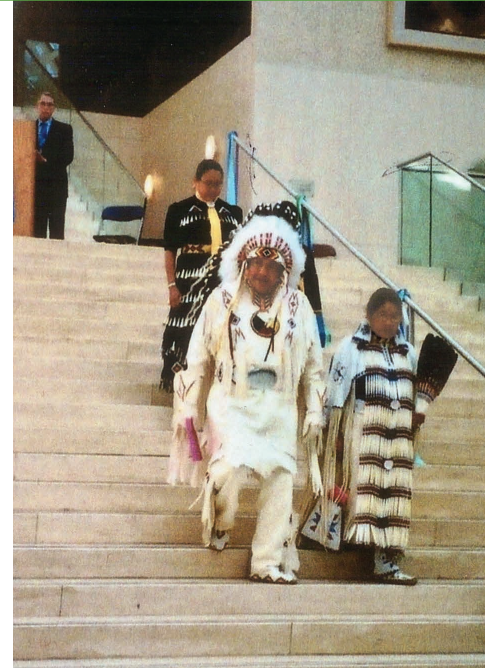
Elders Walter and Maria (hidden) Linklater lead a round dance to end a Festival of Faith, followed by leaders of the multifait event held in October 2011 to mark the 25th anniversary of the first World Day of Prayer for Peace in 1986 when Pope John Paul II gathered 160 religious leaders in Assisi to pray and fast for peace.



EDMONTON

Above left: For the past four years, local interfaith leaders have partnered with Habitat for Humanity-Edmonton to organize an annual interfaith housing build. Some 375 volunteers from 15 faith communities participated this year.

Top right: Four years ago, 23 leaders of faith and spiritual communities pledged their public support for the City of Edmonton's 10-year plan to end homelessness. On November 10, 2014, a celebration was held at Edmonton City Hall to celebrate the interfaith partnership that has come to be known as the Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative. *Angela Robichaud, HFH-Edmonton*



understand each other. Fifty years on, *Nostra Aetate's* principles and vision are thriving in Canada, and Canada remains a global leader in putting its message into practice in ways that other countries look to as an example of what is possible—and a sign of hope in an often sadly fractured world.∞

Dr. Murray Watson is a Catholic theologian, biblical scholar and interfaith activist who spends each year living and teaching in Jerusalem.

Right: At City Hall in 2013, in celebration of Edmonton's centennial, a First Nations religious leader welcomed all faith traditions to their land and said a prayer. This was followed by a marking of the arrival of 13 other faiths. One by one, faith leaders ascended the stairs as the year of their arrival and history of their faith was read to their call to prayer or to music representing their tradition. The interfaith celebration was initiated by Alberta Order of Excellence recipient Sr. Rosaleen Zdunich and acknowledges the rich diversity of the Edmonton community.

SURREY BC



Photos courtesy of David Daley of the Surrey Interfaith Council

Above left: The Surrey Interfaith Contemplative Group creates an environment where persons of various religious, spiritual, and philosophical backgrounds can gather for shared contemplative practice and community building. Many traditions emphasize contemplative practice as a pathway to awareness, compassion, and oneness.

Above right: World Interfaith Harmony Week (UN) events. Surrey is a leader in interfaith activity and a model for communities that wish to build deeper trust and understanding.



NOSTRA AETATE...

The story and its contemporary significance

By Gregory Baum

When John XXIII convened Vatican II, he appointed theologian Gregory Baum as a *peritus* (Latin for expert) to the Secretariat for Christian Unity, the commission that would draft three council statements: on the Church's relation to Judaism and the world religions, on religious liberty, and on the ecumenical movement. Because of Professor Baum's participation in the council, we invited him to contribute to this special issue.

Judith Cohen Lechter, an opera singer and composer in Montreal, a spiritual Jewish woman, has created a grand oratorio to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. She is grateful for the turning of the Catholic Church to the appreciation of Judaism and the respect for the world religions. Her oratorio will be performed at the Vatican during a conference commemorating *Nostra Aetate* at the end of October 2015. Her composition, involving solo voices and two large choirs, consists of several distinct musical pieces. It is her wish that in the pause between these pieces, texts will be recited that tell the story of *Nostra Aetate* and explain its contemporary significance. Since I was a *peritus* at Vatican II's Secretariat of Christian Unity and participated in the composition of the statement on Judaism and the Jews, Ms. Lechter has asked me to write these texts. This article summarizes the four texts I intend to write for the oratorio.

1. After the Holocaust

After the Holocaust, a few Christians asked themselves with anguish whether the preaching of the Gospel had spread contempt for the Jews and thus fostered an antisemitic culture. Of great help was Jules Isaac's book, *Jésus et Israël*, published after the war. Jules Isaac was a French historian, a secular Jewish scholar whose wife and daughter had been sent to the death camps. Living in hiding in France, Jules Isaac asked himself where the hatred of the Jews came from. Contempt for Jews is much older than the modern racial antisemitism. His study of the New Testament and early Christian preaching showed that the refusal of the Jewish people to believe in Jesus prompted the young church to accuse the Jews of blindness and infidelity and announce their exclusion from salvation. An anti-Jewish rhetoric accompanied the preaching of the Gospel throughout the centuries.

Remarkable is that Jules Isaac did not become hostile to the church. Because Jesus had preached love of neighbour

without exception, the Jewish scholar believed that the church was able to correct its teaching and learn to respect the Jews and their religion. With a few Christian and Jewish friends, Jules Isaac founded the association *Amitié Judéo-chrétienne de France* (Jewish-Christian Friendship of France) to promote friendship and mutual understanding between Jews and Christians.

2. Seelisberg, 1947

At a conference in Seelisberg, Switzerland, in 1947, a group of Christians and Jews, Jules Isaac among them, set themselves a twofold task: first, to examine the New Testament passages that Christian preachers had used to spread contempt for the Jews; and second, to propose a better reading of these New Testament passages, free of anti-Jewish bias. The Seelisberg Conference formulated its proposals in ten points. These points recalled that Jesus, Mary, and the early disciples were all Jews; that the small Jewish crowd that shouted "Crucify him" did not represent the entire Jewish people; that Jesus had forgiven his persecutors, recognizing that they did not know what they were doing; and above all that the fundamental command of the Gospel was the love of God and neighbour, a love that excluded no one. The ten points of Seelisberg later prepared the teaching on Jews and Judaism of Vatican Council II in chapter four of *Nostra Aetate*.

3. Jules Isaac and Pope John XXIII

In 1960, Jules Isaac, an old man at this time, had an interview with Pope John XXIII. The Pope had just convoked the Second Vatican Council. He now assured his Jewish visitor that the council would do something to foster friendship between Catholics and Jews. Soon after Jules Isaac's visit, the Pope asked the Secretariat of Christian Unity to prepare a statement for the council to renew the church's relationship to the Jews. After a long discussion at the council, this statement became chapter four of the declaration, *Nostra Aetate*. The statement recognizes the close bond between Christians and Jews: we worship the same God, we share the same Sacred Scriptures, and we have received the same ethical imperative to love God and our neighbour. Even though the Jews on the whole do not believe that Jesus is the promised messiah, the statement insists that they are not rejected by God. Citing a verse from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, the statement declares that the Jews remain God's chosen people and

“The statement recognizes the close bond between Christians and Jews: we worship the same God, we share the same Sacred Scriptures, and we have received the same ethical imperative to love God and our neighbour.”

that God’s grace continues to accompany them. The church, the statement says, deplores the persecution of the Jews, past and present; it now calls upon Catholics to seek dialogue, cooperation, and friendship with Jews. This call implies that the church no longer intends to convert Jews to the Christian faith: Jews are offered salvation by God addressing them in their synagogues.

4. Asian and African bishops

When the statement on the Jews was debated in the council, several Asian and African bishops said that there were hardly any Jews in their country; if the council says something positive about Judaism, they argued, it should also say something positive about the other religious traditions. While this had not been intended, the secretariat accepted the bishops’ proposal, appointed priest scholars familiar with these religions and with their help, produced the Declaration on the Church’s Relationship to Non-Christian Religions, named *Nostra Aetate*, the first two words of the text. Specific mention is made of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, yet references are made to all religious traditions. Despite the great differences between these religions, *Nostra Aetate* declares that the church shares with them many truths and values. It even adds that these holy religious traditions “often reflect a ray of that Truth, which enlightens all human beings,” a clear reference to John’s Gospel, chapter 1, verse 9, which says that God’s Word incarnate in Jesus is “the light that enlightens everyone coming into this world.” *Nostra Aetate* draws here upon an ancient patristic teaching, retrieved in our day by Karl Rahner and other theologians, that God’s Word, incarnate in Jesus and proclaimed by the church, resounds through the whole of history and is echoed in the religions and the wisdom traditions of the world.

We no longer look upon the plurality of religions as fault lines of history to be overcome by the victory of the all-embracing Catholic Church. We now accept religious pluralism as the work of God’s providence and are grateful for it.∞

Gregory Baum, Catholic theologian and author, is Professor Emeritus at McGill University’s Faculty of Religious Studies. He is the founder and long-time editor (1962-2004) of The Ecumenist, a journal of theology, culture and society.

Interview with Rabbi Erwin Schild

...Continued from page 9

You say that *Nostra Aetate* was important because conversion was not its main objective?

Rabbi Schild: I think that’s only one aspect of it. The theological underpinning—that is the important thing; the pope was able to declare of Judaism that the Jews are the older brothers and sisters (of the Christians). That is very important to me.

Theologically, Jews can feel comfortable in proximity to the Christian community. Some of the attitudes of the past have been revoked or declared to be invalid: that Judaism is not a valid religion; that we are in a certain way infidels. That stain has been removed. The only thing missing, and what many Jews feel, is that while there is now a better understanding between Christians and Jews on a theological level, this hasn’t yet percolated down to the pews and the majority of the Christian population is not aware of these tremendous changes.

What is the importance of *Nostra Aetate* for the Jewish community?

Rabbi Schild: The average member of the Jewish community is not too interested in the theological relationship. Christian-Jewish relations are social, ethical, and economic. And we don’t want to be discriminated against on the basis of our religious faith. So naturally anything that helps to relieve this antagonism would be welcomed. What Jews suffered in the past was not only religious anti-Semitism, but also social and economic anti-Semitism.

Is the church’s changed understanding of Judaism reaching the Jewish people on a wider level?

Rabbi Schild: Not sufficiently and not effectively. It’s very high on my agenda and for those engaged in religious and theological matters, but it hasn’t reached the masses. If the Catholic Church would be more energetic in the promulgation of the changes that have occurred, this understanding would spill over into the Jewish community.

What could the Catholic Church do to help that along?

Rabbi Schild: Dialogue is important. Christians have to take the initiative as far as dialogue is concerned. In Jewish history, dialogue between Judaism and Christianity was not really a dialogue. It was a one-sided attempt to improve our understanding and to see the light. And that is no longer the case. The 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* could be an ideal time to start a new initiative. Let’s make the declaration real. Let’s make it well known. Maybe together we can achieve a better relationship, a more meaningful relationship.∞

NOSTRA AETATE...

The spirituality of interreligious dialogue

By Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P.

Interreligious dialogue can take many forms, from experts discussing complex theological concepts to a couple of friends sharing their beliefs over a cup of coffee. All are necessary if we are to build trust and understanding between people of different faiths. At the heart of all dialogue is the art of conversation.

Some fear that conversation may take the place of proclamation. Instead of preaching our faith in its unique beauty and truth, we shall water down our convictions and settle on the lowest common denominator. But there is no contradiction between dialogue and preaching. At the core of our faith is conversation, between God and humanity and between us. In *Ecclesiam Suam*, Pope Paul VI wrote: "That fatherly, sacred dialogue between God and man, broken off at the time of Adam's unhappy fall, has since, in the course of history, been restored. Indeed, the whole history of man's salvation is one long, varied dialogue, which marvellously begins with God and which He prolongs with people in so many different ways."

The only way that our faith can be proclaimed is through courteous, attentive conversation. Jesus was a man of conversation from his chatting with the Samaritan woman at the well until his dialogue with his disciples after the resurrection. Our conversation with God and each other is a participation in the eternal, loving, and equal conversation that is the very life of the Trinity. So the spirituality of interreligious dialogue is the art of making conversation.

Today the world is ablaze with conflicts between religious people.

"Our conversation with God and each other is a participation in the eternal, loving, and equal conversation that is the very life of the Trinity. So the spirituality of interreligious dialogue is the art of making conversation."

Christianity from Nigeria to Mindanao is suffering persecution; in the Middle East, Sunni and Shia Muslims are confronting each other; Hindu and Buddhist fundamentalism are on the rise in India and Myanmar. Conversation will only be possible at all if we understand the roots of this violence.

The globalization of Western culture is experienced by many people as both seductive and destructive. Old wisdoms and customs are eroded. Consumerism consumes local cultures, and the golden M of McDonald's appears everywhere. Money freely circulates, seeking a speedy profit and moving on when more is to be made elsewhere. Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher, has written of the "politics of recognition." Most wars and civil disturbances spring from the demand to be acknowledged. To feel that one is invisible or despised is experienced as a violation. The world is seething with religious violence not because religion is inherently violent but because for many believers, this is their response to a global economic system that is experienced as predatory and destructive. Before any conversation can begin, one needs to open oneself to the pain and dismay of the other and feel it as one's own.

There will only be good conversation if one has something to give and some-

thing to receive. It is animated by our differences. If we only talk about what we have in common, then the dialogue will swiftly become dull and lifeless. Christianity is not a vague spirituality; it is a teaching. We have doctrines that are challenging, hard to grasp but immensely exciting, like the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and the resurrection from the dead. How can I bring these to the conversation so that the other person may glimpse how they are "good news" (gospel), and liberating for the heart and mind? How can we share, for example, the joy of faith in the Trinity? This is hard because our society has a doctrinaire suspicion of doctrine, wrongly believing that it suppresses thought.

A conversation will only take off if I am also open to receive the gifts of the other. Bishop Pierre Claverie, who was murdered in Algeria in 1996, wrote: "I not only accept that the Other is Other, a distinct subject with freedom of conscience, but I accept that he or she may possess a part of the truth that I do not have, and without which my own search for the truth cannot be fully realised."

This does not mean that I accept the doctrines of another faith and end up with a mixed bag of teachings, a bit of Islam here mixed with some Judaism and Christianity. The faith of another can open me to a deeper understand-



Fr. Radcliffe with Muslim women at the Baghdad Academy of Human Sciences where he gave a seminar on January 9, 2015, entitled, "How can we talk about hope today?" The Academy was founded by the Dominicans.

ing of my own faith and its teachings. Buddhism may help me to understand how God is beyond all our words; Hinduism may help us towards a joyful Christian understanding of sexual ethics. In every case we need to be open to the joy of another faith. I began to love Judaism when I glimpsed the joyful dancing of Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem.

An Egyptian Dominican priest, Georges Anawati, said that this dialogue requires a geological patience. It takes

years to learn another language and to grasp the religious imagination of another faith can take even longer. But such patience is a part of our faith. We wait for Christ. We hang in there in dialogue because it is not an optional extra but part of God's promise to gather all into unity.

At its most profound, engagement with another faith transforms my identity. I discover who I am with the other believer. Rowan Williams, the former

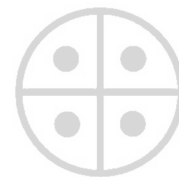
Archbishop of Canterbury underscores the challenge: "My history, my identity, is bound up with yours. I can't be me if you're not you. My security, my well-being, is bound up with yours. I can't be secure without your security. And somewhere in the depths behind this, of course lies that most fundamental of all Christian theological insights, the insight grounded in the life of the Body of Christ. Every member's suffering is everyone's issue. Anyone's failure is everyone's failure. Anyone's well-being is everyone's well-being."∞

Dominican friar Fr. Timothy Radcliffe served as head of the Dominican Order from 1992 to 2001. An author and a renowned spiritual teacher, he gives talks and retreats around the world. Pope Francis has named Fr. Radcliffe a "consultor" of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. The papal council's goal is to promote justice and peace in the world in accordance with the Gospel and the social teaching of the church, and its consultors can be called upon to participate in working groups on specific topics.



NOSTRA AETATE...

Called to journey with indigenous peoples



By Fr. Ron MacDonell, S.F.M.

Over the years, many Scarboro missionaries have felt called to journey with indigenous peoples, both overseas and in Canada. At the last Scarboro Missions Chapter in 2012, we affirmed indigenous rights, along with ecological and economic justice, as our two priorities for concerted action. This is in keeping with the spirit of *Nostra Aetate*, which urges us to recognize, preserve, and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, in other cultures. We are called to be attuned to the

presence of the Spirit in other peoples. "Throughout history, to the present day, there is found among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life."

In serving and sharing life with indigenous communities, Scarboro missionaries witnessed the spiritual and moral values they live out. Lay missionary Carolyn Beukeboom worked on health issues with Quechua communities in Ecuador. She visited a community near the active volcano, Tungurahua: "At our regular meetings with the people, we taught them health prevention to further avoid illnesses in relation to the falling ash. At these meetings I was astonished by the people's faith in God despite all their daily hardships and struggles. With all the problems in relation to the eruption of Tungurahua, the people were thanking God for fertilizing the land. They knew that in the future their crops would be even more abundant because

of the volcanic ash in the soil."

Missionary Susan Keays served in Thailand, at the Camillian Social Centre for children from indigenous hill tribes, such as the Akha: "My days are spent teaching them English at the local school. After supper and on weekends, I put my mothering skills to use. That means sitting nearby as they play or joining in their fun. It means rejoicing with them on their birthday or in anticipation of an older sibling's visit. It also means trying to comfort them and share their sorrow if they tell me about some of the struggles in their little lives. Some children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Many have parents dealing with drug and alcohol addiction, or imprisonment."

In the Philippines, Fr. Charlie Gervais shared life with the Manobo people on Mindanao Island. In his friendship with the people, Fr. Charlie discovered their deep spirituality. They believe that each person has a good spirit (*gimokod*) that animates the body, and a shadowy spirit (*angkal*) that can get a person into trouble. After death, the shadowy spirit



Nurse practitioner Carolyn Beukeboom served with the Quechua communities in the mountains of Chimborazo, Ecuador.



Susan Keays with children from the Akha hill tribes in northern Thailand.



For many years, Fr. Charlie Gervais shared life with the Manobo people in the Philippines.



Fr. Joe Curcio served among Canada's First Nations Peoples and enjoyed getting his photo taken with excited Powwow dance competitors.

stays behind and the good spirit crosses the "cleansing river" and goes back to God (*Magbabaya*, "the one who wills"). Fr. Charlie's Manobo friend explained that "if the *Magbabaya* wants to give me more life after my *gimokod* crosses the river, that is fine with me." Many of Fr. Charlie's stories are found in his book, *The People's Revolution*.

In Canada, Fr. Joe Curcio worked among First Nations people in the Diocese of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. He met a Cree elder, more than 100 years old, who lamented the loss of spiritual values in our world: "To whom shall we go or who shall we be when the wind brings sickness, when the water is no longer able to cool and heal us, when the sun hides from us for what we are doing? Has my grandson here reason to honour me or to curse me for what I will leave behind? Even the animals, which long ago were gifts of Manitou, now cry out to us to save them. Indians and white people have lost their sense of worth. The whole world is hurting. I leave it with sadness!" The Elder's concern for creation has now been taken up by the church, as shown by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*.

In Nova Scotia, Fr. Jim Gillis was a friend of the Mi'kmaq people at Afton. One of the Christian leaders has fond memories of Fr. Jim: "Without his help I

don't think we would have succeeded in continuing to build our church. He was always so supportive and encouraging of us." Fr. Jim also suggested that the leader develop his musical gifts, which eventually led to the start of the community's two parish choirs.

In Guyana, South America, lay missionaries Maxine Bell and Barbara White served among the Wapishana communities, visiting the sick and setting up a sewing-machine project for women. This project enabled women to develop their sewing skills so as to make clothes for their families and also for sale.

Across the border in Brazil, I had the privilege of working with Wapishana and Makushi leaders and teachers in language revitalization. Bilingual dictionaries and a collection of traditional legends were published. Radio programs in the two languages were produced to honour and keep alive these indigenous languages. Through learning their languages, I discovered a new way of looking at life and our world.

Scarboro missionaries also journeyed with the Tzotzil people of southern Mexico and with the Zulu people of South Africa.

These many and varied situations of walking with indigenous communities throughout the world opened us to the spiritual values that *Nostra Aetate*



Dancers from the Ngoni tribe lead the procession for all special occasions in the diocese of Mzuzu, Malawi, Africa. Beverley Vantomme (above) and Scarboro missionaries lived among people from several tribes and many of her students were Ngoni.



Barbara White worked among the Wapishana communities in Guyana.

speaks about. Our presence among the people showed them, we hope, our desire to live in solidarity with them, respecting their cultures and working as allies to overcome the suffering, racism, and injustices that many indigenous experience. It is a call to unity, as described in *Nostra Aetate*: "Humanity forms but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth...and also because all share a common destiny, namely God."

Our prayer as missionaries is that one day we may all be one family, brothers and sisters living joyfully together in peace and justice.∞

Fr. Ron MacDonell is a member of Scarboro's General Council.



By Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish

NOSTRA AETATE...

Implications for interreligious dialogue in Israel

There is no question that the document *Nostra Aetate*—promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in October 1965—changed the discourse in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue in particular, and interreligious dialogue in general in the contemporary period. As I stated in a film called *I am Joseph Your Brother* (produced by the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel in 2001), we have moved from persecution to partnership, from confrontation to cooperation, from diatribe to dialogue.

Not only did *Nostra Aetate* open up a new dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People, it also initiated a dialogue between the Catholic Church and other religions, including Islam. Indeed, it made dialogue between leaders and followers of the major monotheistic religions kosher and mainstream. It is now accepted practice for leaders of religious communities at all levels to be in dialogue with each other in many places in the world and to work together in common cause wherever possible to heal the world. It is fair to say that this is a direct result of the major shift in policy of the Catholic Church, which is expressed in *Nostra Aetate*.

This is also the case in Israel where I have lived and worked for the past 36 years. Interreligious dialogue is part of the landscape here, an essential part of our common life. It is vital for our present state of being and for our relations in the future.

Four-step model of dialogue

In this brief article, I will describe the four-step model of interreligious dia-

“...We engage in de-demonizing the other, that is, discovering that the other is not the devil who is out to destroy us.”

logue and action that is taking place in Israel. It is a method that we developed after many years of trial and error.

1. Personal interaction—getting to know each other as individual human beings

The first thing we do when we bring groups together to engage in long-term systematic and sensitive dialogue is to focus on personal narratives. Members of the group learn to listen deeply to each other's stories in order to understand and respect the identity and personal narrative of each of its members. In doing so, many stereotypes are broken down and we engage in de-demonizing the other, that is, discovering that the other is not the devil who is out to destroy us.

Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews who have never met each other before coming to our dialogue groups, usually see the other through the prisms of the conflict and the negative media stereotypes which dominate our print and electronic media. In our dialogue groups, we shatter these stereotypes by asking each person to share their identities and life stories.

2. Interreligious text-based learning

The second thing we do in our dialogue process is to open up the sacred texts of each other's religious/cultural traditions and learn from them with

good teachers. This helps us to overcome ignorance, break down stereotypes about the other's religion and culture, and build trust between members of the group.

Israeli Jews know almost nothing about Islam or Christianity, and what they do know is usually negative, acquired from courses in Jewish History in which they learned that Muslims or Christians either oppressed or massacred Jews throughout the centuries. Nor do Muslims or Christians who live in Israel or Palestine know much about Judaism. Much of what they do know is negative, as they learn it mostly from the media, from the family, and on the street.

Participants who have gone through this process in our dialogue groups learn to recognize that there are common humanistic values shared by the three major monotheistic religions. They can sense a spirit of religious partnership, which motivates them to continue the dialogue and to seek meaningful paths of action together.

3. Discussing core issues of the conflict

We believe that in a genuine dialogue process the core issues of the conflict can be discussed in an open, honest, and sensitive fashion, guided by careful and consistent professional facilitation, without creating animosity or acrimony.



John Carter/SPH

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, a sacred site of great importance to Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

In fact, we have found that participants in our dialogue groups continue to come back to the table year after year precisely because the discussion is frank and forthright.

When significant levels of trust have been developed beforehand, most people find this phase particularly meaningful and enriching as a way to genuinely get to know the other. It leads to deep mutual understanding of the other's religious, cultural, and existential reality, even if it also delineates where people fundamentally do not—and often cannot—agree with the other.

4. Taking action, separately and together... Dialogue is not enough!

As responsible members of society, we must take our learning and create change. We are obligated to work for peace, to influence others, and to cause a ripple effect. As a result, we strive for our groups to experience both dialogue and action. In other words, all of our participants—religious leaders, women, youth, young adults, educators—are asked to take some action, separately or together, as a result of the personal transformational processes that they go through within this intensive experience.

Action can take many forms—personal, social, educational, and/or political, but it is agreed that every person

who is moved by the dialogue process is obligated to share their experiences with others in whatever ways possible. In this way, each person in each dialogue group is a multiplier, one who can spread the message of the possibilities and benefits of peaceful coexistence, and the method of dialogue and education, to many other people in his or her society.

What will be needed in the future?

What will be needed in the future is what I like to call “the other peace process”—the educational, religious, and spiritual one, to supplement the political one.

There will be a desperate need for a massive religious, spiritual, educational, and psychological campaign to change the hearts and minds of the people on both sides; a serious and systematic set of programs that will educate the next generations about the existential need to learn to live together.

In the long run, we will have no choice but to bring people together in large numbers to engage in dialogue, education, and action in order to learn to live in peace. This includes rabbis, imams, priests and ministers, as the grass-roots community leaders; teachers, educators, headmasters, assistant principals, curriculum writers,

youth movement leaders, informal educators, in a wide variety of settings, such as community centers, camps, and seminar centers; women from all parts of the Palestinian and Jewish societies—professionals as well as lay-

persons, educators and activists, housewives and mothers, community leaders and laypersons.

I believe that those of us currently engaged in interreligious dialogue and education in Israel and Palestine will have a major role to play in this people-to-people peace process for a long time to come. And religious leaders and their followers from abroad—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—will be called upon to help. This will be a time not to divest of the possibilities of peace but to invest in peace-building programs in Israel and Palestine, across borders, for the sake of all of God's children in the region.∞

Rabbi Dr. Ronald Kronish, has lived in Jerusalem for the past 36 years and is the Founding Director of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI). He has served as Senior Advisor for ICCI since January 1, 2015, when ICCI became a new department of Rabbis for Human Rights. He has recently edited a book of essays entitled Coexistence and Reconciliation in Israel—Voices for Interreligious Dialogue (Paulist Press, 2015), and he blogs regularly for the religion section of The Huffington Post and The Times of Israel.



By Ed Kessler

NOSTRA AETATE...

Broadening the interfaith encounter through education

Nostra Aetate ushered in a new era, fresh attitudes, a new language of discourse never previously heard in the Catholic Church concerning Jews, and respect for the Jewish “elder brother.” The concept of dialogue entered the relationship, seen in such phrases as “God holds the Jews most dear” and “mutual understanding and respect.” *Nostra Aetate* taught Christians that God “does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.” However, the document’s success was dependent upon “things still to be worked out,” including abandoning the teaching of the divine rejection of the Jewish people since the time of Jesus.

As a Jewish teacher of Jewish-Christian relations I am often asked by students to identify how to broaden the encounter with Judaism even further. One troubling question—one of the “things still to be worked out”—is often raised: what replaces replacement theology, which essentially teaches that the church has replaced Israel in God’s plan. There remains a dilemma at the heart of today’s Christian understanding of Judaism, demonstrated by *Nostra Aetate*. On the one hand, the document states that “the church is the new people of God,” while on the other, “the Jews remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.”

The challenge today is to what extent Christianity can consider Judaism as a valid religion in its own terms (and equally importantly for my fellow Jews, vice versa). Directly related to this is the need, from a Christian perspective, for

reflection on the survival of the Jewish People and of the vitality of Judaism over nearly 2000 years—this is the “mystery of Israel” upon which Paul reflected in his Epistle to the Romans.

Similar challenges of course face Jews and questions need to be considered such as, what was the divine purpose behind the creation of Christianity? What are the implications for Jews that as a result of the Jew Jesus, two billion Christians now read the Jewish Bible? Martin Buber offered a famous response to this question when he described Jesus as “my elder brother.”

As a Jewish partner in the dialogue, I suggest that an exploration of the meaning of covenant sheds light on ways in which Christians can witness through word and deed to their covenanting with God through Christ, and likewise Jews through their observance of Torah. This task, I suggest, is a covenantal obligation

relationship with God: “Come now let us reason together” (*Isaiah 1:18*). *Leviticus 19:33-34* states: “When a stranger lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him...Love him as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Dialogue entails a respect that takes the other as seriously as one demands to be taken oneself: an immensely difficult exercise. Only then can genuine dialogue be said to have taken place. It is possible to trace the gradual emergence of dialogue with increasing clarity. So for instance *Nostra Aetate* has a brief paragraph:

“Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this Sacred Synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.”

“Dialogue entails a respect that takes the other as seriously as one demands to be taken oneself: an immensely difficult exercise. Only then can genuine dialogue be said to have taken place.”

for both Jews and Christians, but at the same time it sheds light on the encounter with other faith traditions, notably Islam. *Lumen Gentium*, for example, spoke of Muslims as being part of the “*propositum salutis*” or plan of salvation and, like *Nostra Aetate*, spoke in a positive way about other religions.

The biblical prophets were experts in dialogue. Isaiah in a famous passage urges Israel to enter into a personal rela-

This statement was developed by the Vatican’s 1975 *Guidelines on Nostra Aetate*, which states:

“Christians must therefore strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism: They must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.”



A rabbi in Jerusalem welcomes visitors to his synagogue and speaks to them about the Torah.

The Vatican reinforces this view in its 1985 *Notes* which calls on preachers and catechists to “assess [the tradition of Judaism] carefully in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today.”

In sum, in our times, we are witnessing the occurrence of a demonstrable shift from a Christian monologue about Jews to an instructive (and sometimes difficult) dialogue with Jews. A monologue is being replaced by a dialogue. Its success depends upon education; not only an education of the elite but an education for all.

We Jews cannot escape our obligations in the new framework and this includes an examination of our broader education concerning Christians and Christianity. The yeshiva doors need to be opened to the winds of change blowing through. To achieve this we need Jewish teachers who can offer a theology of Christianity; who are willing to put dialogue back into the mainstream.

On the Christian side, it means that seminaries should not only offer courses in Judaism but should consider rabbinic interpretations of Scripture. The results

of these studies must find their way not only into their classrooms but also in the churches as well as in the synagogues. Only then shall we truly begin to engage in a genuine dialogue.

New attitudes are of little use if they are confined to an elite and the true test is the extent to which they have affected teaching at all levels. The encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* explained how dialogue is integral to the very nature of Christianity. God calls men and women in freedom and they respond in freedom. Dialogue, however, is not something to be imposed on others. Christians and Jews engage in dialogue as a method of rapprochement between different religions in our globalized multifait and multicultural society.

A culture of dialogue will contribute to an environment in which different religions can relate to one another in a spirit of mutual respect. In 2009, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales published “Meeting God in Friend and Stranger” reminding Christians that they are called to engage in dialogue with others, and specifically with people of other religions: “This is part of the Church’s task of continuing the dialogue

that God engages with His Church, and of reading the signs of His will in our times.” The document stresses that dialogue is not restricted to academics but needs to take place where everyday life is shared in an atmosphere of respect and openness.

Similarly, the Jewish statement, *Dabru Emet* (2000), called for Jews and Christians to work together for justice and peace: “Although justice and peace are finally God’s, our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our world.”

Building a friendship is not simply about abandoning hostilities. True friendship needs to be based on common values and mutual benefit. Broadening the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is dependent upon the conviction shared by Jews and Christians that God is faithful and does not abandon those He calls. It requires genuine dialogue.[∞]

Dr. Edward Kessler, a Member of the Order of the British Empire, is Founder Director of the Woolf Institute and Fellow of St. Edmund’s College, Cambridge, UK. He is a leading thinker in interfaith relations, primarily, Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations.

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in our midst; for as we open
ourselves to one another, we open
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