

Christians & Jews: Called to be a Blessing to One Another

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Blessing: Blessed are you O Lord, Sovereign of the Universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this time.

What I hope is the success of this evening will really be a hand outstretched in respect and honor to the local Jewish community, which I trust, (because I heard some of it at lunch today with several members of the Jewish community), will reach back and grasp your hand. It won't be without some reticence, and we'll talk a little bit about that tonight. But basically, I want to begin, first of all, with an expression of extraordinary gratitude to my Nashville Dominicans, to express the extraordinary experience I've had in teaching five members of your community.

We are here tonight during a season which is extraordinarily important to Catholics: this is the Lenten season which began on Ash Wednesday. And, this seems to be a kind of journey for me this year because on Ash Wednesday I found myself with my colleague, Professor Matthew Ashley, speaking at Creighton University, where we spoke on "The Holocaust: After Auschwitz, Christian, Jews and Modernity." And here I am during this Lenten season, coming down to give an Aquinas lecture at this august institution, and I know that some of the audience is here tonight as part of their Lenten journey. And if we are to mark this Lenten journey, we recognize that Jews this month are entering a month which is a month of unrestrained joy because we will be focusing soon on the feast of Esther, Purim, which is a festival of our redemption, and then go into the preparation for

our Passover—a feast of our deep thought, our cleansing ourselves from the *hametz*, the Hebrew for “leaven,” which the rabbis interpreted as cleansing ourselves from sin. So, we have some parallel paths that we walk. I want to talk about sharing these paths with integrity because when we talk about blessing, we really are talking about blessing.

Interestingly enough, I want to indicate to you two Catholic stands on this notion of our relationship. The first was delivered in a series of Advent sermons in 1933, by the Cardinal Archbishop of Munich, Michael Faulhaber. Now Michael Faulhaber was a thorn in the side of the Nazi party from the very beginning through the end of the war. And as he watched Nazism grow in Germany, he gave Advent lectures in which he said, “After the death of Christ, Israel was dismissed from the service of Revelation. She had not known the time of her visitation. She had repudiated and rejected the Lord’s anointed, had driven Him out of the City and nailed Him to the Cross. Then the veil of the Temple was rent, and with it the covenant between the Lord and His people. And from that time forth, the wandering Jew goes forever restless over the face of the earth.” Furthermore, he argued, “We must distinguish between the Scriptures of the Old Testament on the one hand and the Talmudic writings of the post-Christian Judaism on the other.” Cardinal Faulhaber said: “I mean especially the Talmud, the Mishna, and the medieval code of laws, the Schulchan Arukh. The Talmudic writings are the work of man; they were not prompted by the Spirit of God. It is only the sacred writings of pre-Christian Judaism, not the Talmud, that the Church of the New Testament has accepted as her inheritance.” The Old Testament was the Jewish inheritance of the Church. The Oral Torah, held to be central and sacred revelation by the Jews, were not part of divine

revelation, but documents exclusively of human authorship. Judaism and the Jewish people, according to Cardinal Faulhaber, were severed from their relationship to God by “divorce.”

But even a divorce did not bring Cardinal Faulhaber to dismiss the continuing reality of the Jewish people. And in that same speech he wrote, “Even after the death of Christ, the Jews remain a ‘mystery.’” As Saint Paul says in Romans; “And one day, at the end of time, for them too the hour of grace will strike.” Quoting this text, Cardinal Faulhaber was following in the footsteps of St. Paul and St. Augustine. “At the end of time, Jews will be brought in to the fullness of belief in Christ. Until then, it was the task of the Church to preach the Gospel to them, to convert them to Catholicism.” Now what’s strange here is, given his opposition to Nazism, it would be difficult to accuse Cardinal Faulhaber of the destructive Anti-Semitism advocated by the Nazis. His theological approach to Judaism, *post-Christum*, after Christ was in the mainstream, not in the margins. Looking back, we can observe the consequences of a Christian theology of Judaism that did not emphasize a continuing relationship between the Jewish people and the God of Israel, who is the God of the People of God in pilgrimage, the Church. The Jewish community of Germany and all of Europe were destroyed—and European Christianity would see its own institutions diminished and its faithful burdened with a growing consciousness of how much they had abandoned the central values of their own faith.

Fifty years later, Pope John Paul II, stood before the Jewish community of Mainz and said the following—and it is the text for this evening: “The first dimension of this dialogue between us, that is the meeting of the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God, not a divorce, but never revoked by God, and that of the New Covenant is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and second part of the Bible. A second dimension of our dialogue—the true and central one—is the meeting between present-day Christian churches and present-day people of the Covenant of Moses. It is important here, that Christians should aim at understanding better the fundamental elements of the religious tradition of Judaism, and learn what fundamental elements of the religious tradition are essential for the religious reality lived by Jews, and here it’s important, according to their own understanding, the Jewish understanding.” And then, John Paul the Pope said, “A third dimension is the task we have in common. Jews and Christians, as children of Abraham, are called to be a blessing for the world, by committing themselves to justice among all peoples, with the fullness and depth that God intended us to have. The more our meeting is imprinted with this sacred duty, the more it becomes also a blessing to ourselves.”

So, within 50 years, we went from Jews guilty of deicide, Jews divorced from God, to the Jews as part of an internal Christian discussion. A hope by the Holy Father, that Christians would come, present-day Christians would meet with present-day Jews, and learn from Jews themselves how they understand their practice. And the third thing is that we have common tasks. But in order to achieve those common tasks, we need to become a blessing, first to one another. And my talk tonight is going to focus on two

things. First of all I want to talk a little bit about what a *b'rakha* is. What does it mean when we Jews say a blessing? And then I want to give you a short vocabulary lesson of what I think are the most important terms that constitute our bridge into the future from Nostra Aetate.

So first, from a Jewish perspective, what is a blessing? Now all of you know the famous line from *Fiddler on the Roof* where the question is, "Is there a blessing from the Tsar?" And, of course the answer is, "Of course there is a blessing from the Tsar. May God bless and keep the Tsar far away from us." But when we think about *b'rakha*, what do we mean? The Talmud actually says any blessing which does not include the formula of the name of God and God's sovereignty is not considered a *b'rakha*; that's why, when I introduced the prayer tonight, I said "Blessed are you O God, our Lord, the sovereign of the universe." That's a *b'rakha*. So, for us to become a blessing to one another, we have to introduce God's name into our conversation. And for Jews, according to the *Nudrash*, God says, "My name is 'I Am' known according to deeds. As I am merciful, so you be merciful; as I am compassionate, so you be compassionate; as I judge between good and evil, so you judge between good and evil and do the good; as I am concerned for the poor, the widow and the orphan, so be you concerned for the widow, the poor and the orphan." Now that means we will have to speak to one another, not just in humanistic terms, but in the particular languages that each of us express our faith.

Now you will find that there are going to be some barriers there, because as Jews we do not say "yes and amen" to Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the son of David. But we do

share with you the God of Israel. We do share with you a scripture, which is part of your essential being, the Hebrew bible. This is a world to which you are committed. And as the Pontifical Biblical Commission says Christians should be careful to note that the same concept of God exists in the New Testament also exists in what Christians call the Old Testament. There are not two Gods. There is not the judging God of the Old Testament and the compassionate God of the New Testament. That's a huge difference. So we can find both common ground and difference.

Secondly, what does it mean "to bring God's kingdom?" It means that each of us brings into this shattered world of ours the vision of the Hebrew Prophet, which was a vision of harmony, a vision of peace and a vision of all people coming together praising God each in their own way. It means that difference is also part of God's kingdom, certainly in the time dispensation that we have now. Now, both Jews and Christians believe that there will come a time, which is not like our time, in which the contradictions that we see will be resolved. History has taught us again and again, that no matter how much we want to press for that time, no matter how much we want it to come, no human effort will make it occur.

So I will share with you an ongoing dialogue with a very dear friend of mine, Father Hanspeter Heinz, who is Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Theology at the University of Augsburg, and with whom I have spent many hours over the last twenty years, in prayer and in very serious dialogue. And Hanspeter said to me one day: "Michael, I cannot believe that in the end of time you will not be saved by Jesus." And I said: "Hanspeter, I

cannot believe that in the end of time it will not be *Torah Moshe Rabbenu*, the Torah of Moses our teacher who will save me.” So Hanspeter looked at me with a wry look on his face, and he said, “So what to do? I said yes, you say no.” He said, “Tell me, Michael, do either you or I have responsibility for what goes on at the end?” And I said, “I certainly don’t.” He said, “I certainly don’t.” He said, “So our job is to make sure what happens now and leave those judgments to God. We all have enough to do. We can put a little trust in the hands of God and not mess around with God’s plan which seems to be, no matter how much it sticks in our craw sometimes, that God wants us both around. And our puzzle is to figure out what to do with that.”

Now I want to go to another blessing. It’s a blessing you all know very well. It’s the blessing that Aaron and the Priests are told to bless the people with. Each of the three parts begins with, “May the Lord bless you.” The first blessing is, “May God bless you and may God protect you.” So, if indeed we know God by behaving in divine ways, our two communities ought to be looking for ways to protect one another, to guard one another, so that each of us becomes the best of what we can be. And sometimes protecting someone means you don’t get to protect them your way. I know that is a hard thing for parents to learn. But you protect them as they grow, and you watch them grow; and you create a nurturing environment in which they can grow. Because ultimately, blessing is about fructification. It’s about becoming fruitful; it’s about growing.

Second part, the second blessing is, “May God bless you and lift up His face and be gracious unto you.” Now of course, I don’t need to tell the generation of Catholics who

are all students of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Rahner anything about grace. Grace flows, right? But, what does it mean for us to be gracious? What does it mean for us to protect and guard and expect no reward for that whatsoever? Because if it were for reward, grace would not be grace. But the point is, what does that mean to be gracious and to act in a way of graciousness with those who hold another religious tradition? That's a puzzle. And the truth of the matter is, we're trying to work that out, that's the work of Jewish-Christian relations. This is not a formula that's going to be delivered to us. I told the students in the class I addressed this afternoon that we have had about eighteen hundred years worth of the conflict. We have had only forty years since the Second Vatican Council to begin to figure out what reconciliation between us might mean. And that reconciliation at this stage means taking things into account and telling the story as it is with its pain and its promise, and that's not such an easy thing. But if we know what the goal of the protection and what the goal of the graciousness is, it comes in the third blessing; "May God lift up His face to you and may God give you shalom." May God give you not just peace, but wholeness. And wholeness means wholeness for ourselves, and wholeness for those who differ from us. Now that is a real challenge. I always tell my students at Notre Dame, you know being a parent you want to see your children look something like you, be something like you, with an emphasis on *something* like you, not identity. I said if they are looking for identity, they're going to have a hard time, because you are you, and remember you aren't them. So we are all the creation of difference, and once again in the hallowed halls of the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas; it's analogous—we are analogous to one another, we are not the same as one another. Children are the combination of not just mom and dad, but maybe aunts and uncles, and grandparents, and

relatives, and friends, and influences. So are we, as Christians and Jews, we are very diverse in our communities. One of the things that pains me the most is, sometimes the most difficult conversations occur not across religious lines, but in our own religious community. And if we can't learn how to talk to one another across those lines within our own community, and believe me, I'm not so good at it, it's very difficult to learn how to talk to people in other religious communities. Because for all the stereotypes that Jews have about Catholics working something like the U.S. Marine Corps with the Pope as General, the Bishops and the Cardinals as the Colonels and Lieutenants, the priests as the Sergeants, and the lay people as the foot soldiers, you only need to live a short time with any group of Catholics to learn that that is a very false image. As one of my mentors at the University of Notre Dame, Father Thomas O'Meara (a priest of the Dominican Order) said, "I think what we should do as part of the Rite of Catholic Initiation is to have our Catholics spend a year on a Parish Council to find out what they are getting into, instead of reading Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* and rushing into an image of ethereal of a harmony." We are all human communities. And this is as true in the Jewish community as it is in the Christian community, and within the Catholic community, within the various communions. I had a wonderful occasion this summer to teach in a Four Square Gospel summer school at Oxford University, which was, believe me coming from California and being a child of the sixties, it was quite a trip. After the third student asked me when I became a Christian, I declared for the fourth time publicly, I am not now, have not been, nor do I ever intend to become a Christian. And these people looked at me and said, "But Rabbi, of course you are not, but that's how we start conversations with one another. Because that's what gives us common ground, because our lives

essentially begin with that conversion experience.” So, again, by not becoming upset and not saying: ah, what an ignoramus you are, but saying, treating it with a little humor and again opening up a new possibility, I begin and these people began to appreciate, across lines that are so long divided, a new way of thinking.

Now how do we get there? How do we get to this blessing? Well first is, each of our religious communities has, and we’re already working on this, to learn to value experience. In other words, we are all formed with ideas. But then we go out there and we experience the world, and what happens when our experience contradicts the ideas which have been transmitted to us? The German Catholic theologian, Johann Baptist Metz, talks about the fact that Catholics do best if they would do their theology after Auschwitz, “In the Face of Jews.” And what he means is, not to thinking about Judaism as an idea, but actually experiencing Jews, mirroring what Pope John Paul II said, “To meet Jews.” I’ll give you one example from a summer school. I always ask my class during summer school if they want to attend the Friday night service with me. I never require my students to attend worship. I think that’s a bad idea. I’ve never had in all the years any student who wouldn’t go. And there was a wonderful student that I had who was a professor of engineering in Puerto Rico. And during the service, he whispered to his neighbor, he said, “Why did we have such an awful image of this people? There is so much holiness here in this service, how could we not recognize that God dwells among them?” Now that’s what I mean when experience rushes in, and says, wait a minute, begin an interior dialogue, an interior dialogue of blessing. Does my attitude bring about fruitfulness? Does my attitude like the Psalmist say, I seek peace for you? That’s one

way. So, experience becomes an important part of our theological reflection. We don't just start with what Father O'Meara always used to say, "the big ideas." Of course we need "big ideas," but part of the process of faith seeking understanding is that that understanding comes out of our own human experience.

Another central concept of blessing is the notion of *kavod*, of respect or honor. Literally, the Hebrew root for *kavod* means weight, to give weight to something. But that weightiness also translates in the Book of Ezekiel and in the 24th chapter of the Book of Exodus to *kvod—doxa* or glory. So it means that we give honor to one another, to our tradition. We recognize that in our past, people were ready to give up their lives for the Faith. One of the things when I worked on this Jewish statement about Christians and Christianity that Rabbi David Novak always said to us is, we can't take the easy soft way. We can't make any statement that would dishonor the past, but we can't remain mired in the past. And that means approaching the other with a sense of honor. A sense that their religious tradition reflects the glory of God. It may reflect it or refract it very differently from ours. And that's not easy. Because, as my friend, John Levinson, always says to me, "But Michael, if we take your way, what's the sense in my remaining a Jew? Why don't I just go marching over to the other side and take up the cross?" And I said, "Because John, honoring someone, giving weight to their point of view, doesn't mean surrendering yourself to that point of view. It means, trying to find something that enriches me in what they have." I guess I am too old and too stubborn now to cross any bridges between communities. But I've also found throughout my life, I really wasn't always old. Although you know, once you cross that big 60, it does seem as if there is a

little triumphalism in reaching it. But the truth of the matter is, no matter how deeply I've investigated another tradition, and there have been moments of holy envy where I found something in a Catholic teaching or in a Lutheran teaching which I think is absolutely beautiful, but it's never been enough to uproot me from the honor and depth of my own tradition. In fact, what it often does, it shines light on a part of my tradition that I don't think about very much. That's what it's brought to me, and hence, do not be afraid. Or, as John Paul II always said, *corragio*—courage. I think that's terribly important.

Now I promised you in the last part of my talk, that I would give you certain key vocabulary words that come out of *Nostrae Aetate*. The first word that's important that I think *Nostrae Aetate* really moves forward is the word “patrimony,” *patrimonian*, which in Latin means an inheritance. Now we all know, whether we are young or old, that an inheritance is not necessarily a blessing amongst children. As one very wonderful rabbi, Rabbi David Hartmann in Jerusalem, said to me, “Michael, don't give me this business of Jews and Christians are siblings, siblings murder each other, siblings fight with one another. I don't want to be anybody's brother.” And I said, “I'm sorry David, the only people who get that privilege are only children like me.” And the truth of the matter is, it looks pretty good being an only child until you are about 40. And then when you realize that you're facing the rest of your life with no sibling, even those fights start looking good. Now of course, *Nostrae Aetate* uses this term “common inheritance” and how can, and indeed many theologians are, investigating the emphasis moving from the Epistle to the Galatians, which focuses on the notion of law to the Epistle to the Romans which

focuses on the Glory of God inheritance, and Paul in the Epistle to the Romans is very concerned that nobody's boasting. Nobody gets a privileged position. God is no respecter of persons. So, you can listen to Paul, he's got something to say. How can Jews, who have developed the tradition with the blessings and the merit of the ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, mean the continuity of the people of Israel and their ultimate inheritance of the land of promise, open to the possibility that blessings of this God are mutually and may be mutually shared. I think, that maybe talking about blessings at the beginning of the conversation may be a little difficult. Maybe if we step back a little bit, and instead of talking about a *patrimonia*, a shared inheritance of blessings, we talk about a shared inheritance of responsibility.

Martin Buber once said in one of the darkest moments of the Jewish people's history, where believe me it was courageous to say this, he said, "Jews and Christians share two things, we share a book and we share a hope." And that may be what we need to do. That responsibility is to be the blessing that Abraham was designated to be. And responsibility is indeed a blessing. And that is something that John Paul II repeated throughout his pontificate. It has been reinforced by statement after statement.

Now, second word that's very important in *Nostrae Aetate*, is the word mystery, or *mysterium*. Those of us, or those of you I should say, who are Christians out here and especially Catholic Christians know that the notion of *mysterium*—the mystery, the Paschal mystery is absolutely essential to the Christian confession of faith. And yet, when we look at *Nostrae Aetate*, this document written with great struggle because the

Council Fathers also didn't want to give up a lot of fame, they ultimately said that as the Church contemplates its mystery, it thinks about its relationship to the people of Abraham's stock, Abraham's tribe. This means that it is a central issue, this relationship as John Paul used to say, "This is not extrinsic." It's not something outside and something inside. How is this statement helpful to Jews? If we learn more about this, we learn that the possibility is that the topic of relations with the children of Abraham's stock cannot be exhausted by any single era of history. Because in Catholic Theology, it is the very nature of a mystery that it continues to disclose itself. A sacrament is a sign, which always has more meaning. Pope John Paul II emphasizes desire for Christians to gain a better knowledge of Judaism and the Jewish tradition from Jews. Why? Because they then discover more about the mystery of their Church. For Jews to learn what Christians think is to learn about roads we have not taken and may never take, but may also enrich us in many ways. It is in its own way, what Jewish-Christian dialogue becomes, is a constant exchange of translation. And we all know that when we translate from one language into another, something is lost but insight is also gained.

A story here is that the rabbis say, "any argument that is for the sake of heaven will endure." This little quote is paraphrased in the book of Acts into the mouth of Gamliel when he says, "If this thing is of God, then it will endure." I am convinced that after 2000 years, this is an argument that's bound to endure. And as Christians and Jews, we then ought to ask ourselves, is becoming a blessing simply to learn not to hate, demean or mock the other? Does it require action? How can we move from tolerance to respect and honor for one another? And that my friends, is a process that is not going to take just 40

years, but may take 400 years. I always tell my students, my generation can't solve it, your generation probably will not solve it. But our responsibility is to make sure that the question continues to be asked because then it becomes part of our internal, and this is the next big word in *Nostrae Aetate*, "dialogue."

Now we all love the word dialogue. Martin Buber was the master of explaining the importance of dialogue throughout his long career. Dialogue allows for a method of exchanging ideas as well as a method. It's not just a product, it's a process. Both sides may assume that their point of view will be heard. Therefore in the process of dialogue, silence and listening become as important as speaking. I'm not sure this is as difficult for Christians as it is for Jews. This whole idea of being silent and listening is rather a new tradition which we Jews are now teaching our people. Silence, thinking, meditation now has become a regular part of a lot of Jewish liturgical life. It was never much a part of Jewish liturgical life when I was growing up. We also have to remember that it was Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Ecclesia Suam* in 1964, who urged the Church to use dialogue as a means of communicating with the world. He promoted dialogue rather than disputation, revealed a profound appreciation for the Creator of the world and relationship of all human beings. Why dialogue? Because dialogue compels relationships. And it is our relationships that help us to get past the bottlenecks in our dialogue. And I can lift a few bottlenecks for you: the beatification of Edith Stein; the Auschwitz convent controversy. Those were huge bumps in the dialogue. And we have had some recent ones: *The Passion of the Christ*, the film by Mel Gibson, and of course, the recent *Motu Proprio*, with the expansion of the possibility of the Latin Mass available

to Catholics, and the new Latin prayer which has just been written. Through relationships and by continued speaking to one another, we get past these blocks in our dialogue. When a problem arises you have need of a dialogue partner. I'll tell you how I began to resolve my own problems about this *Moto Proprio*, and this new text written for the Good Friday intercession by the Pope himself. Father Peter Rocca, who is the director of our Basilica at Notre Dame, called me up to ask me something about Jewish festivals. Now I don't get a chance to talk to Father Rocca every day. But, I thought, OK, I have given you the information you wanted to know, I said, "Father, I have a question for you." He said, "Sure." I said, "Tell me, during Holy Week, but particularly on Good Friday, will the extraordinary liturgy, which is the Latin liturgy, be recited anywhere at Notre Dame?" He said, "Absolutely not, Michael. All Masses at Notre Dame are done by Holy Cross priests. Especially during Holy Week, we do our Good Friday liturgy in the Basilica and we will be praying the 1970 prayer." He said, "Don't worry." He said, "Not only that, I will give you more good news." He said, "No Holy Cross parish across America will be using the extraordinary liturgy." That is enormously reassuring. Because it means that whatever the controversy is, when it comes down to real knowledge of what happened, what's being catechized, what's being taught, Catholics will pray the same prayer they've been praying since 1970. But if you are not able to make those phone calls, and we don't have one another to sort of hold hands during these storms, then we go back and like the people in the great dispute after King Solomon died, and they went to King Rehoboam and King Rehoboam said, "Well I am going to tax you because my little finger is thicker than my father's loins," and that's a little metaphor you can think about for a while, in this age of Viagra. What did the

people say? “What portion have we? Go to your tents. O Israel.” Are we ready to go to our tents now? I don’t think so. I think it’s been a tough time, but this is how we get through it because these dialogues and these friendships bring about mutual respect.

And now, something from the Jewish side. This document that I and four others produced and over 300 Jewish scholars and rabbis signed, *Dabru Emet*, I want to read you a passage that a young woman, a senior at the high school said to me today, “Rabbi, I don’t understand this.” Had she heard my talk tonight I hope she would have understood. We said the human irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in scripture. Now I have given you all that tonight. I am just summarizing it here. “Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition. And that difference will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted scripture more accurately than the other, nor by one community exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians’ faithfulness through their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teachings of the other community.” We do discuss, we can learn but the end result is what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel told us, “Devotion and piety grow in silence and isolation, learning grows in dialogue and disputation.

Finally, I want to give you one more text which comes from my German discussion group of Jews and Christians consisting of Catholics, lay and clergy, and Jewish lay

people and clergy in Germany. In writing a document in 2006, *Paths for the Future: Jews and Christians in the New Germany*, they said the following, “God is faithful to the covenant with the Church but equally faithful to His covenant with the Jewish people. Therefore Christians and Jews are both called to understand themselves as people of the Covenant and to be a light unto the nations. Secondly, no catechesis of the Christian faith without teaching the living tradition of Judaism, no reconciliation with God without acknowledging the history of the Church’s sin toward the Jewish people, and for Catholics, no understanding of biblical revelation without reading the Old Testament and seriously considering the Jewish interpretation.”

We’ve come a long way, and we have a long way to go, because there is a circle of people who’ve experienced this and the people who have yet to experience it. And I hope what I’ve done this evening is to create a little bit of a bridge for you, to learn how we can fulfill this teaching of this amazing Karol Wojtyla, who came out of the fires of German destruction and out of Communist Poland; but because of Wojtyla’s life-long friendship and relationship to Jews, it changed the way he thought the Church should view it. So that is what I have to offer you. And I wish all of you a very, very good reflective and fruitful journey through Lent. The Jews who’ve joined us, I wish you a very, very happy Purim and a very, very blessed kosher and meaningful Passover.

Thank you very much.

Questions and Answers

1. To repeat the question, we're going to say about Abraham that he is the paradigm; he is our model. In essence, the question says: "How is it possible to use Abraham as a model, when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son? And, so, what kind of an example is that?"

Answer

Now the question asked is a question which has puzzled Jewish expositors and Christian expositors throughout the generations. And it has led to endless interpretations. And the interpretation is very rich. One way of looking at it is to frame Abraham, that sacrifice as only part of a larger story of Abraham's journey. And that is to say, Abraham was constantly trying to grow in his relationship to God. And let's remember that the whole story is that Abraham in the end was ready to sacrifice Isaac, but in the end he didn't have to. Why? Because the story says there was another ram in the bush which Abraham then took and sacrificed. So Abraham, therefore, becomes what Soren Kierkegaard called the "Knight of Faith." On the other hand, one of the great things about the text is that many rabbis use that story to show that not everything in Abraham's life was exemplary. And they said let's look at the whole picture. The Abraham who sacrificed Isaac was rather timid compared to the Abraham who wanted to bargain with God to save the city of Sodom. And actually screamed at God and said, "Shall the judge of the whole earth not do justice?" So then we've got two sides to Abraham. What we do is we continue the process of interpretation. And where the rabbis see Abraham being a blessing is first of all in his being willing to offer hospitality in his tent you know when he has the three visitors. The whole notion of Abraham, in rabbinic legend as it were, is

that Abraham and Sarah went; and wherever they went, they taught the God of Israel to the rest of the world; and they brought them, as the rabbis say, under the wings of the *Shakina*. So there are things in Abraham's life, which are exemplary and others which are not. And, you know, Abraham is the one who's commanded to be a blessing. And we actually never get an exposition of what it meant to be a blessing from Abraham. So, we're left with an open-ended question, but I think your question is a very good one. Because as you indicate, out of that story comes our notion that martyrdom, and other aspects of that story Christians from early on read Isaac as a type of foreshadowing of Christ so that the sacrifice of Isaac was simply the shedding of his blood which eventually would be Jesus' blood shed for all humankind. What I would suggest, is that the answer lies in Jews and Christians studying that text together. And seeing from your point of view, and I don't know whether it's your point of view, but the question you've asked, I think would produce some very interesting study together, and that may be the productive side of it.

2. I live on a street where I watch, my background is Protestant and I am indebted to the Jewish people for the scriptures. I've watched what I would call Orthodox Jewish people on the Sabbath walking to the synagogue at the end of my street. And I have wondered before, would this be a practical blessing for them if I'd stop them, and say, "Hey, if it's ever raining or if you ever want a ride, I'll take you." Now is that a practical blessing?

Answer

Actually, what my response to you would be, what you'd want to do before you ask them that, would be to study how and why they observe the Sabbath as they do. In which case, they observe the Sabbath by abstaining from anything where they create something. So, in other words, when you turn on a car, you are creating something. So the idea is that they walk. And, so to offer them that would not be a kindness but would in a way be a kind of contradiction of their faith. There are many other ways you could offer them kindnesses, but the best way to do it would be to ask them. The whole idea is fast and observance for them has to do less with practicality and more to do with a sense of holiness, with a sense that one day a week they are free. They are free to be with their families, they're free from cooking, they prepare their food beforehand, and there's a wonderful book by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel called "The Sabbath." And if you were to read that book, you would understand how they see the Sabbath as a special blessing. And in fact, this is a book, which I put on the recommended list for my Judaism class for my students.

3. What is the Jewish objection to the Christian message of love, kindness and forgiveness?

Answer

I think that Jews on the whole would have no objection to those whatsoever. They would see them as Jewish values. Where they would object is that the only way you can get them is by accepting Jesus Christ in your heart as your Lord and Savior. So that's a real quick answer. See, the problem is very often Jews and Christians see the world in very

different ways. Christians see American society as secular, or certainly my Catholic students see American society as secular. Jews see American society as Christian. Well, these are important things to know.

4. Jews do not accept Jesus as the Savior that Jesus proposes to be. Did you put it that way? Yes.

Answer

I think that that is a very, very good point. In other words, when Christians talk about Jesus as the Christ, they are talking about the One who is Anointed, the *Mashiah*, the Messiah who is the deliverer of Israel. The person who could really give you the best answer is A. J. Levine, who teaches here at Vanderbilt. She is a real specialist in the New Testament. It's a very complex answer. But the rabbis who were the contemporaries of the earliest Christian churches had a very different notion of who the deliverer of Israel would be, and in many ways, what you have in that era is what happened when the temple was destroyed? When this representation of the Desert Tabernacle, where the sacrifices took place, is gone, what happened? And of course that's why in one of the gospels when Jesus is crucified, the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies is open, it indicates that with the crucifixion of Jesus, the way is open for everyone. Now the rabbis move in very different directions. The rabbis say, "We see from this destruction to the consummation". Instead of saying with this comes the incarnation, the rabbis say, "We have Torah until the consummation and the Torah as taught by the rabbis." So the rabbis push the Messiah to the end of history instead of seeing the Messiah entering history and coming back again. I cannot begin to do your question justice. What the question is,

we're both waiting for something, and what do we do while we're waiting? What keeps us in contact with the Holy, what keeps us in contact with God? As I would put, maybe the worst metaphor in the world, by diving deeply into Christianity; I have found out what that waiting is. And you know, I find at various moments, extraordinary beauty in the way Christians celebrate this world and see its transformation. And one of the things that I think that's important for Jews, remember this metaphor of secular versus Christian? One of the things that we who put *Dabru Emet* together really tried to do was to help Jews understand that it is precisely Christian entity which animates Christians to be compassionate, to be forgiving, and be loving and not simply humanistic values. See what I'm saying? So in other words, it is a process of education. Now why is that process of education so hard? Because there is so little trust that's developed between our communities over the past 2000 years. And it's going to take time; it's going to take patience to build that relationship. And it's not going to happen overnight. And, of course, we're Americans, we're pragmatic people, we want to solve problems. And we think and in many ways it's been our genius that you can solve almost any problem. But, this one is a doozy.

5. Does the new, I think, Latin Mass, what does it say to be offensive to someone, and who created this?

Answer

I think that what has happened is what I call the law of unintended consequences. That Pope Benedict has been desirous of a pastoral approach to those people who think the liturgy has been too banal and insufficiently beautiful. And therefore, he, in consultation with some members of his Curia, said, “OK, let’s expand the possibility of the liturgy into the Latin Mass. Let’s allow it because you could always say the Latin Mass, but you had to get a special permission. Now, according to this *Moto Proprio* produced in this last year, you don’t have to ask permission from the bishop, you can just do it. OK, so far, so good. But then what do you do during Holy Week? The 1970 *Missale Romano*, the universal ordinary liturgy of the Church, has a prayer in Latin written by Pope Paul VI and his Curia, which you all know: “We pray for the Jewish people, the first to see the light of God, we pray that they may come to fulfillment.” Now, when we go back to the *Missa Tridentina*, the earlier prayer, it talks about the Jews, “May God remove the veil of blindness from them.” And you know, it reflects what Cardinal Faulhaber said, we Jews rejected the Messiah; and therefore, we exist in kind of suspended animation until the end of time when everybody comes back in. Now, the problem from the very beginning was, and could have been solved easily from the perspective of those of us who like these things solved easily, why not simply use the Latin prayer from the 1970 service? And for whatever reason, and I don’t ascribe any bad faith to Pope Benedict at all, he said, “No, no, no it doesn’t fit the flow of the liturgy.” So he wrote something, “Let us pray for the Jews that they might come (well depends on how you translate the Latin) that they come to know, or they confess Jesus Christ the Savior of all humanity, let us pray, let us bow.” And then the Collect after that say, “May the Jewish people be

saved with all Israel,” and quotes Romans 11:25. Now, it’s better than the 1962 formulation, but it is not in the spirit of 1970 prayer which acknowledges Israel’s own Covenant. So, many people, and here you see the thing is this should not be considered a Jewish problem. This is an internal Catholic theological problem, and I have many friends who are Catholic theologians say, “Why do we now suddenly have two theologies? The law, the prayer should reflect our belief. Well, what do we believe? Do we believe that the Jews were the first to see the Light of God and they should be fulfilled, or do we only pray for the Jews to come to know Christ?” This is one that I can’t touch, but I do think that many Jews have seen this as a step back. And many Catholics see it as a step back. So that is on one foot, the kind of problem that we’re faced with, and you know, we’ll see. In the meantime, as my German colleagues say, *keine rucktritte*, we’re not stepping back, we’re stepping forward.

6. At the beginning of your talk and you mentioned it again, you made a distinction between what you read about the veil being rent and then you said it was not rent it was torn on the corners, what is the distinction then? Would you see the Christian understanding of the second coming being in union with the consummation, the Messiah?

Answer

I think the image in the Gospel is precisely the opening up of the Temple to everyone, not just to the priests. If you read that in juxtaposition let’s say the Synoptic to the Epistle to the Hebrews with the priesthood of Christ you get that. The only difference between the

beginning and the end of my talk is, I didn't write the whole thing out, so I may have used different terminology.

The second one, is what about this consummation at the end of history? I think we have a lot more to talk about that. I don't think that we have fully understood all the dimensions of Jewish Messianic expectations precisely because Jews for the most part have been very vague about Messianic expectations at the end of time. And the truth is, if you think about it, starting with Augustine, the Roman Catholic tradition has been "let's not speculate over much about the end of time." That is why there is a very big difference between the way Catholics look at the New Testament and the Book of Revelation, and the way many Protestant denominations put a primary emphasis on the Book of Revelation. So, Jews have a whole variety of scenarios; and they sort of let those hang. And the quickest answer to your question is would there be some overlap between those Christian views of the end of days and Jewish views? There might be. There would be two differences. Number one, classical Jewish visions of the end of days call for the restoration of the Temple and Temple sacrifice. Clearly Christians would not. (From the audience: "Some would and some would not.") Let's put it this way and I think you would agree with me, the classical Christian traditions did not. But, Jews certainly do not envision the identity of that Messiah who returns the people to the land, who establishes the new order as Jesus of Nazareth. But, you see this gives my whole point about echo and analogy, there's some overlap there, and what might we learn from that overlap and those differences? But until we study them together, we won't know about them.

Audience: What does consummation refer to?

Answer: Consummation is a theological term, which means the end of the world, God bringing everything together.

7. My question is about cleansing the heart of the secret anti-Semitism or the secret anti-Judaism that's there?

Answer

I thought a lot about that, and the way in which I begin the answer to you is that I think anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism is an irrational disease. There is nothing rational about it. It's a belief that somehow or other, something in Judaism is very, very dangerous. I would put at least two steps, and I may add some if I think about them. The first step for Christians, and this *Nostrae Aetate* does it, is to say as a Christian, Judaism is not only part of my past, but it is my companion people through history. That means that we in one way or another, and believe me it's as hard as I'm sure, Rabbi Oliner would say, it's as hard for Jews to get their minds around that as it is for Christians. So, then the corollary to that, step two is, Christians' need to learn what Judaism is about, independent of Christianity. So that means that a lot of that idea that Judaism is dangerous, or Judaism is conspiratorial, or Jews are only concerned with money, and Jews are concerned with power, because this is what feeds anti-Semitism. You learn that those are, you know, like all stereotypes, there is a little overlap with truth, but it's not the truth. So that would be step two, the actual experience of Jews. The idea that when you go to a Jewish service, holiness is there. You can actually find God there and God worship and that this worship continues on into people's lives. So, you know, that takes effort. You see, one of the things I think about the kind of anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism that you're

talking about is it is a very easy quick answer to a lot of problems. Why are we suffering? Because of the Jews. And why are the Jews making us suffer? Because the Jews want power, they want to dominate the world, and you know, there are people who say, well that's why our American soldiers are dying in Iraq because it's part of the Jewish plot to have the Zionist government rule the world. This is really ugly stuff. Some of my students at Notre Dame have told me that after having my class, they hear stuff that they never heard before. They hear little comments about when somebody picks up a coin, they say, "Hey are you a Rabbi? Why? Because Jews are cheap and Jews are concerned with money. Now I have had students of mine who actually ruined Thanksgiving dinners because they were taking my class and they were at Thanksgiving dinner and a beloved aunt or cousin started talking about some Jewish co-worker and you know the answer was, "Well you know she's just like all of them. You know, she's pushy, she's aggressive, she's disagreeable, and she thinks that she is better than everybody else. That's what Jews are like." And this poor woman almost punched her aunt's lights out and accused her, of course, with all the fury of a college freshman of being an anti-Semite and how dare she, and her aunt ran away from the Thanksgiving table crying, she ran away from the Thanksgiving table crying, and her mother said, "Am I going to blame this on the Rabbi?" But you asked a very serious question, and you know as I said a lot of the conspiratorial theories that are applied to Jews and their secrets have also over the ages been applied to Catholics and to other religious groups as well.