Where to from Here? Continuing Challenges in Jewish–Catholic Conversation

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The decades of fruitful dialogue between Jews and Catholics, also undertaken by many mainstream Christian communities after the Second World War, has transformed a "teaching of contempt" with regard to Jews and Judaism into a "teaching of respect". However, the work is far from done, and a number of challenges continue to provoke Jewish and Catholic theologians and interreligious activists to continue their efforts. In this article, five challenges for Catholics will be enunciated in order to clarify the ongoing agenda for Jewish–Catholic conversation today. These challenges are: (1) reading the Scriptures together; (2) salvation for the Jews; (3) people, land, and state; (4) writing history together; and (5) broadening the conversation.

The attempt to rid Christian theology of supercessionism, the conviction that God has rejected the Jewish people as the chosen people and replaced them with the Church, is not only a theoretical theological enterprise but also profoundly shaped by the dialogue between Catholics and Jews that has evolved progressively since the end of the Second World War. This vibrant dialogue, undertaken by Catholics and many mainstream Churches in Europe and North America, has transformed a "teaching of contempt" with regard to Jews and Judaism into a "teaching of respect" (Neuhaus 2019). However, the work is far from done, and a number of challenges continue to provoke Jewish and Catholic theologians and interreligious activists to continue their efforts towards better understanding. In this article, five challenges will be enunciated in order to clarify an agenda for ongoing Jewish–Christian conversation from a Catholic point of view. These challenges are: (1) reading the Scriptures together; (2) salvation for the Jews (Neuhaus 2020a, 2021); (3) people, land, and state (Neuhaus 2020a, 2020b); (4) writing history together; and (5) broadening the conversation. Catholics have been one of the Christian communities most engaged in the ongoing conversation with the Jewish people, and this article draws almost exclusively on the Catholic experience.

1. Reading the Scriptures Together?

In the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, developing communities of Rabbinic Jews and Christians increasingly read the Scriptures of Israel against one another. Each community attempted to monopolize these Scriptures as the justification for its religious way, replacing Temple Judaism, the way of faith in Jesus Christ, or the way of Torah observance according to post-Temple halakha, Christianity versus Rabbinic Judaism. Each community accused the other of misunderstanding and misusing the Scriptures that were canonized by each community and became an essential reference and authority for their faithful. These ways of reading Scripture against each other became an integral part of the teaching of contempt for the other.

The Christian teaching of contempt with regard to Jews and Judaism was founded not only on select texts in the New Testament, like those describing Jesus's polemical discussions with the Jewish teachers and especially those recounting his passion and death, but also on passages in the Old Testament, where the ancient prophets excoriated the people of Israel for disobeying God. The Church Fathers, pillars of the tradition of the Church, who were close readers and authoritative

interpreters of Sacred Scripture, added new layers to the negative understanding of Jews and Judaism. Especially during Holy Week, commemorating Jesus's passion and death, this discourse was echoed in liturgical prayers, particularly on Good Friday, the day of Jesus's death on the cross. Laws legislated by the Church during the Middle Ages institutionalized the political and social structures that put Christians on guard, ensuring distance from Jews, thus marginalizing them in society or even expelling them. During the twentieth century, particularly after the Second World War and the Shoah, many Christians began to realize that their discourse about Jews, formulated over the centuries, had borne horrific fruit in acts of Christian violence against Jews, partly preparing the way for modern anti-Semitism and Nazi genocide.

The widespread acceptance and application of the historical-critical method in modern exegesis of the Bible, underlining the importance of understanding the texts within the world in which they were written, serves as an important foil for anti-Jewish interpretations that had been current for centuries. Texts about Jews and Judaism composed by New Testament writers who are themselves Jews can no longer be understood as simple and objective historiography but are often expressions of disappointment and anger that most of their fellow Jews have rejected Jesus as Messiah and Lord. With regard to certain New Testament texts, a contemporary Roman Catholic document pointed out: *"it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favorable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community"* (CRRJ 1985, vol. IV, p. 1). Pope Benedict XVI, in his *Jesus of Nazareth*, pointed out, for example, that when the crowd cries out that Jesus be crucified in the Gospel of Matthew, it "*is certainly not recounting historical fact here*" (Benedict XVI 2011, p. 186).

Contemporary readings of the Bible not only insist on understanding the historical context of the text but also insist on the particular context of the readers of the text and their specific hermeneutical assumptions. Christians, for example, see Christ where he is not explicitly mentioned in Old Testament texts because they read the Old in the light of the New. A contemporary Catholic document states, "*Although the Christian reader is aware that the internal dynamism of the Old Testament finds its goal in Jesus, this is a retrospective perception whose point of departure is not in the text as such, but in the events of the New Testament proclaimed by the apostolic preaching. It cannot be said, therefore, that Jews do not see what has been proclaimed in the text, but that the Christian, in the light of Christ and in the Spirit, discovers in the text an additional meaning that was hidden there*" (PBC 2001, para. 21). Jewish readings, which, by definition, are not shaped by the New Testament and Christian faith, should then not be labeled as blind. This conclusion counters Saint Paul's angry condemnation of the Jewish reading in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians: *"their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside" (3:14). The Catholic document continues: "Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible"* (PBC 2001, para. 22).

Furthermore, some Catholics are also more conscious of Jewish readings of the same texts they read, readings that are quite different from how Catholics have understood the texts. There is an increasing effort to bring Jews and Catholics together in the reading of the texts, a fruitful exercise in *hevrutah*, an Aramaic term referring to the study of texts in pairs so that each reader can enlighten the other with his or her insights. Both modern exegesis and joint Jewish–Catholic study of Scripture can transform interpretation, fomenting processes of exchange, reinterpretation, and contextualization in order to establish a teaching of mutual respect. Two Jewish Biblical scholars have formulated well the challenge that is at stake in reading the Bible today in order to foster a different future *"where Jews and Christians come to understand each other's positions and beliefs and, at the minimum, respectfully agree to disagree"* (Levine and Brettler 2020, p. 4).

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2. Salvation for the Jews?

Agreeing to disagree does not touch only on Biblical interpretation; for Christians it also involves the central question of salvation. Traditionally, Christians affirm that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and Son of God and that faith in him is the unique way to salvation. Afterall, Jesus himself proclaims that he is *"the way, the truth, and the life*" (Jn 14:6). Furthermore, Christians believe that Jesus was sent *"to the Jew first and to the Greek also*" (Rom 1:16). The Christian insistence that salvation is only through Jesus Christ understandably arouses a strong malaise among Jews. The great Jewish thinker Abraham Joshua Heschel famously commented, "*If I were asked either to convert or to die in Auschwitz, I'd rather go to Auschwitz*" (quoted in Gamberini 2015, p. 24). Catholics engaged in the Jewish–Christian dialogue are challenged then to negotiate the tension between their commitment to the belief that Christ is the universal Savior and their commitment to enter into authentic dialogue with Jews. In light of the history of two thousand years of Jewish–Christian relations, a contemporary Christian might challenge the whole project of mission to the Jews and, in particular, the coercive strategies that were employed. Recognizing the traumatic history might even suggest that mission is not only futile but also obsolete.[1]

Many Jews reject anything that smacks of Christian mission. Jewish inter-religious activist Alon Goshen-Gottstein has pointed out. "*The most blatant, and hence most offensive, expression of Christian religious exclusivity is Christian mission. Mission is an expression of exclusive truth claims that mandate spreading a particular religious truth, for the sake of the well-being of others. While the motivation of the missionary may be noble, missionary work is received as an assault on the identity of the other. Past history has made the Jewish psyche particularly suspicious of missionary activity. Suspicion of a hidden missionary agenda is probably still the greatest impediment to advancement in Jewish-Christian dialogue. While, theoretically, one might have to consider the missionary drive a legitimate, perhaps even necessary, expression of religious authenticity, past history makes it extremely hard for Jews to recognize missionary work as a healthy form of religious activity. For Jews it is the great obstacle in Jewish-Christian relations*" (Goshen-Gottstein 2002, p. 38).

Some Jews have suggested that Christians can and should accept that Jesus Christ is savior for them as Christians, but that God invites the Jews to live by *Torah*, Jesus and Torah then being parallel paths of salvation (cf. Greenberg 2004). Some Christian theologians, in response, have been proposing a "*two-covenant theology*": Judaism for the Jews, Christianity for the Gentiles (Van Buren 1983; Marquadt 2010).[2] However, this is a radical break with both Scripture and Christian tradition, and the challenge for some is how to hold together the theological datum of universal salvation in Christ with respectful dialogue with the Jewish people (CRRJ 2015).

The refocus on the Jewish identity of Jesus and the Scriptures that Jews and Christians share have encouraged Christians to reaffirm that "*salvation is from the Jews*" (Jn 4:22), the words Jesus addresses to the Samaritan woman. The traditional position is that both Jews and Gentiles must turn to this Jewish Messiah for salvation. However, the dialogue with the Jews leads Christians to discover a Jewish reality in which religious Jews see themselves in a relationship with God without the mediation of the Messiah known as Christ. This God, Father, Creator, Redeemer, is the same God Christians identify as Jesus's Father. Whereas most Jews refuse to recognize Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), they do read Scriptures that are read by Christians, sharing with Christians an understanding of an ordered creation and an end-of-time restoration. In fact, they might even share a similar vision of what the Kingdom of God looks like without acknowledging Christ's role in bringing it about. A few modern Jews, although they refuse Jesus's Messianic claims, do recognize him as an exemplary Jew of his time, even if this falls far short of Christian faith in him (cf. Klausner 1925; Flusser 1998).

Contemporary Catholic theologians have insisted that a pernicious theological error in the past was

the idea that the Church replaced the Jews as God's chosen people; this idea is termed supercessionism or a theology of substitution or replacement. This mistaken theology implies that God is not faithful to God's promises. At the heart of the revolution in Jewish–Christian relations is the rejection of the idea that God has spurned the Jews. Indeed, the 1965 Catholic declaration at the Second Vatican Council, Nostra Aetate, insisted "*God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; 'He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues'—such is the witness of the Apostle*". The conciliar text cites the eleventh chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Paul's affirmation that God is faithful despite the rejection of Jesus by God's people (Rom 11:29) has become a basic tenet of the teaching of respect. A 2015 Catholic Church document insisted even more categorically: "*The Church does not replace the people of God of Israel, since as the community founded on Christ it represents in him the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel. This does not mean that Israel, not having achieved such a fulfilment, can no longer be considered to be the people of God*" (CRRJ 2015, para. 23).

One eminent Catholic theologian, Walther Kasper, has indeed renounced the word "mission" when it comes to the Jews: "Because as Christians we know that God's covenant with Israel by God's faithfulness is not broken, mission—understood as call to conversion from idolatry to the living and true God—does not apply and cannot be applied to Jews. They confess the living true God, who gave and gives them support, hope, confidence and strength in many difficult situations of their history. There cannot be the same kind of behavior towards Jews as there exists towards Gentiles. This is not a merely abstract theological affirmation, but an affirmation that has concrete and tangible consequences; namely, that there is no organized Catholic missionary activity towards Jews as there is for all other non-Christian religions" (Kasper 2002). This way of thinking has introduced a distinction between "mission" (often conceived as active proselytization) and "bearing witness", more appropriate in a situation of dialogue.

In Christian tradition, Israel as a people constituted the preparation for the coming of Christ and the establishment of the Church. In this view, Israel was a necessary but passing phase because Jesus was the fulfillment of all that Israel had transmitted and it should have disappeared when Jews recognized him. The New fulfilled the Old; the refusal of the New and the stubborn attachment to the Old countered God's plan. However, what Christians discover in the dialogue with the Jews is that although the Judaism of Jesus's time did disappear with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, Jewish tradition was shaped and molded by the Rabbis, leading to the composition of the Talmud and the continuity of Judaism. The great rabbis of the centuries after the destruction of the Temple proposed a fundamentally different dynamic with regard to the Scriptures of ancient Israel, one bringing together a written Torah (materially largely parallel to the Christian Old Testament) with an oral one (the Talmud). Christians open to dialogue with the Jews are challenged to consider that the coupling of new and old was only one possibility, a Christian one, whereas Rabbinic Jews read the written through the perspective of the oral. Whereas historically, Christians saw the Talmud as an obstacle to coming to faith in Jesus (and some worked actively to censor it, ban it, and even burn it), dialogue with the Jews leads Christians to discover in the Talmud a religious and spiritual treasury.

Christians have traditionally looked forward to a time when "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). However, can Catholics formulate this eschatological hope of an end to the separation between Jews and Gentiles without imposing their Christianity on unwilling Jews? Catholic thinking about the salvation of the Jews has been rooted in modern times in a careful reading of the Epistle to the Romans, especially chapters 9 to 11. Paul, already in his own time, confronted the arrogance of believers in Christ coming from the Gentiles who despised Jews who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. In chapter 11, he evoked the image of two olive trees, one wild and one domesticated; Paul wrote, "They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you" (Rom 11:20–21). In strongly rejecting the

arrogance of the Gentile Christians, Paul described Israel's rejection of Jesus as a "mystery" (Rom 11:25), not understandable and yet part of God's design for the salvation of all. This rejection leads to the preaching to the Gentiles, many of whom do believe. However, Paul was confident that God's faithfulness to the promises of old will lead Israel to embrace the new covenant, so that the Jews, cut off from the domestic olive tree in their lack of faith, will be grafted in again in the place that is theirs forever. "For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree" (Rom 11:24).

Eschewing all arrogance, Catholics can and must confess that they are not the witnesses that they are called to be. This failure is especially manifest in their teaching of contempt for Jews and their denial of God's faithfulness. In their witness to Jesus Christ, they need to first and foremost recognize themselves as sinners, knowing that God's faithfulness is at the heart of their renewed discipleship. Here, too, a convergence can be underlined as they remember Jesus's words to a Jewish scribe who professed his Torah fidelity. Like that scribe, they too are "*not far from the Kingdom of God*" (Mk 12:34). In confessing their sinfulness, Catholics admit that they too have not arrived at the final station but are on the way. Both Jews and Christians strive to live by God's Word, the former by way of the Torah, studying it day and night, and the latter by the Torah incarnate, meditating his words and deeds always. The Catholic Catechism lays out the vision of a shared future: "*God's People of the Old Covenant and the new People of God tend towards similar goals: expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah. But one awaits the return of the Messiah who died and rose from the dead and is recognized as Lord and Son of God; the other awaits the coming of a Messiah, whose features remain hidden till the end of time; and the latter waiting is accompanied by the drama of not knowing or of misunderstanding Christ Jesus*" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994, para. 840). The convergence of Jews and Christians at the end of time is fundamental to Christian hope, a convergence in recognizing the Torah incarnate in the Messiah who is to come (again). The challenge is how to formulate that hope consonant with a teaching of respect for Jews and Judaism.

3. People, Land, and State?

Dialogue with the Jews has made Catholics more aware of how Jews frame their identity, life, history, and aspirations. Catholics discover that contemporary Jews see themselves as a people rather than as a religion; many attach themselves to a land they call the land of Israel, known by Christians as the Holy Land, and a state established there in 1948.[3] Jews from various religious strands, many of whom have collaborated with Christians in dialogue, published an eight-point document in 2000, promoting the relationship with Christians, entitled *Dabru Emet* (Speak the Truth). The third point of the document stated, "*The most important event for Jews since the Holocaust has been the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land. As members of a biblically based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised—and given—to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God. Many Christians support the State of Israel for reasons far more profound than mere politics*" (quoted in Sandmel et al. 2001, pp. 12–13).

Dabru Emet suggests that because Christians and Jews employ the same discourse, founded on the parts of the Bible they share, they can also agree on how to understand the question of the land of Israel, promised by God and given to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. God's choice of Israel and the giving of the land are significant elements in the Old Testament narrative. Nonetheless, many Catholics are wary of using Biblical texts today in order to legitimate contemporary ideological and political positions, especially in the midst of a conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in the contemporary Middle East. The shared discourse, rooted in Biblical idiom, does not always produce a common comprehension of what that idiom means, especially as interpretation is rooted in two different religious traditions.

The Catholic understanding of land and peoplehood derives from a particularly Christian approach to the Scriptures (Brueggemann 2002; Marchadour and Neuhaus 2007). Belief in Jesus as the Christ changes the understanding of how land and peoplehood carry over from the Old Testament to the New. In a Catholic reading, God did indeed promise the land to God's chosen people in the Old Testament, leading the people to enter the land and take possession of it in the time of Joshua. This people in this land were to be a "*light to the nations*" (Is 42:6, 49:6), a light to which the peoples of the earth would stream in order to learn the ways of the Torah (Is 2:3). Furthermore, the land was lost due to Israel's breaking of the covenant, as had been foretold by the prophets, and yet God, in faithfulness to the promises, brought the people back from exile in a dramatic act of resurrection, the dry bones of a dead people (Ez 37) returning to rebuild the Temple. The Jewish canon of Scripture in fact ends with the epistle of Cyrus, who permits the return and commands the rebuilding, "*Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up (to Zion)*" (2Chr 36:23).

Consonant with the Catholic understanding of these ancient Scriptures of Israel, the Old Testament is differently organized when compared with the Jewish collection of Scriptures. It does not end with the promise of a return to the land but rather with the promise of a return of Elijah, who "*will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse*" (Mal 3:24). The New Testament then introduces this reborn Elijah as John the Baptist, proclaiming the Day of the Lord, who is identified as Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus transforms land and peoplehood, bringing down the walls of separation and heralding a new creation in which peoples are in communion and lands are sewn together by faith.

The transformation of understandings of land and election in the New Testament as compared to the Old is notable, as the land and peoplehood are universalized. Although believers in Christ are encouraged to see heaven as their true homeland (Heb 11:13–16), land is present on earth, but the borders that separate one land from another evaporate as the Gospel spreads. This dynamic is described in the Acts of the Apostles, as preaching begins in Jerusalem and moves towards the ends of the earth. The Land of Israel is no longer exclusively the place for covenant fidelity, as wherever the Gospel is preached, disciples enter the covenant. Christ came to bring down the borders that separate, this being central to his mission (cf. Eph 2:14–18).

However, once the Byzantine Empire adopted Christianity during the fourth century, it also baptized its imperial ideology, in contradiction to the teaching of the New Testament. Borders were essential as land was divided between imperial territory and territory awaiting conquest. By the Middle Ages, Christianity had been overwhelmingly militarized, and the concept of "holy war" enabled a campaign to "liberate" Jerusalem from Muslim rule. From the 15th century onwards, Europeans engaged in voyages that brought Christianity to far-flung territories in Asia, Africa, and the so-called "New World", imposing European rule together with the Christian faith. Triumphant Christianity supposedly witnessed to God's blessing, whilst a subjugated Jewish people attested to God's curse, a curse that destined them to wander from land to land, like Cain, without a home. Jesus was even understood to have predicted this as, when weeping over Jerusalem, he said, "*If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God*" (Lk 19:41–44). Tertullian, eminent Church Father, writing at the end of the second century, described the Jews: "*Scattered, wandering about, deprived of land and sky of their own, they roam the earth without man or God as king, a race to whom there is not accorded the right granted to foreigners to set foot upon and greet one land as home*" (Tertullian 1962).

Dialogue between Jews and Catholics has driven home the realization among Catholics that Jews have too often been the victims of Christian empowerment. The Christian embrace of political

power was directly linked to Jewish marginalization. It is this dynamic that must be dismantled in an age of dialogue; the theological principles behind it must be uncovered and transformed. However, beyond the specificities of the relationship between Jews and Catholics, these dynamics must be revealed and rejected in order to prevent the legitimation of any form of marginalization. In fact, there is a danger that the Jewish–Catholic dialogue becomes a new form of exclusion and marginalization for others, particular in relation to the themes of people, land, and state. This is manifest in the demands by some Jewish partners in the dialogue that Christians legitimate exclusive Jewish claims on “the land of Israel” that is also “the land of Palestine” and support the policies of the state of Israel. Uncritical Christian solidarity with and support for the state of Israel is a counter-witness to the necessary reformulation of Christian thought in order to prevent it being used to marginalize and oppress. The contemporary dispossession of the Palestinians, and the continued occupation of their land and discrimination against them in modern Israel must not be overlooked in Jewish–Catholic dialogue.

Jews have the right to express themselves like all other peoples. Many found their self-expression in Zionism, a national movement that refused Jewish marginalization and demanded a place at the table of nation-states. Whereas Catholics must be committed to listen closely to Jewish voices, understanding the Jewish link with the land of Israel and rejecting the teaching of contempt that condemned Jews to be homeless, they cannot justify new forms of discrimination and marginalization, this time of Palestinians. A Zionist insistence on exclusive rights of Jews in the Holy Land condemns others to a fate that can never again be justified theologically. The Palestinian voice must be heard within the conversation between Jews and Christians in order to guarantee that this conversation ensures the wellbeing of all.

4. Writing History Together?

Whereas many Catholics remain ignorant of the history of Jewish–Christian interaction, many Jews likewise are often insensitive to how Catholics understand their faith and identity, seeing Catholics in overwhelmingly negative terms as always and everywhere responsible for their suffering in history. A singularly important element in this mutual ignorance and the formation of negative attitudes towards the other is how history is formulated and taught in each community. Whereas often Jews see Christians as collectively responsible for the suffering of Jews in Christian countries, Catholics have difficulty understanding why Jews do not simply integrate into society, abandoning their specificity. A daunting challenge in the Jewish–Catholic dialogue is teaching the history of Jewish–Christian relations, challenging Jews and Catholics to formulate together the history out of which they emerge. Particularly in countries where there are important communities of Jews and Catholics, it is important to engage in a joint study not only of religious texts and traditions, but also of the history they share.

Some of the important themes in such a joint formulation, themes which have often contributed to a mutual teaching of contempt, might be:

- The parting of the ways: The first four centuries of Jewish–Christian interaction, as the two communities began formulating their individual identities and religious practices and beliefs, have often served to put the other in a bad light. The extent to which identities, practices, and beliefs were formulated within a polemical relationship with the other should be identified and rejected as not appropriate in an age of dialogue.
- The imperialization of Christianity: Christianity’s embrace of political power in the fourth century led to the establishment of Christian empires and states in which non-Christians were often marginalized, excluded, or even persecuted. This period, reaching a peak in the medieval period, witnessed an institutionalization of Christianity as the dominant partner, entrenching discourse and practice of Jewish marginalization. This period is an important source for attitudes and stereotypes that entrenched themselves for centuries.

- Modernity has introduced a secular public sphere in which Christians and Jews might be treated as equals, but on condition that they privatize their faith and religious practice. They can collaborate as equal citizens, but they also face together the marginalization of religious tradition and the tendency to discard it as irrelevant. The breakdown of religious authority has in some cases seen an intensification of the exclusion of the other. This was dramatically the case in the rise of Nazism and the genocide of the Jewish people. Jews and Christians are invited to study together modern secularism and the political regimes that have emerged from it in order to understand the place of religious commitment.
- The rise of modern anti-Semitism and populist racism are widespread phenomena that challenge both Jews and Christians in their accommodation to modernity. The joint struggle against anti-Semitism, anti-Christian ideology, and racism can lead to close collaboration in envisioning a society that is rid of these scourges.
- Jews and Catholics are also invited to study together the events that have taken place over the past one hundred and thirty years in Palestine, historically analyzing the roots of the conflict in Israel/Palestine today. Jewish–Christian relations in history, particularly modern European anti-Semitism, have been an essential element that led to the formulation of modern Zionism, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the concomitant ongoing exile, occupation, and dispossession of Palestinians.

The challenge of writing history together is to ensure that the study of history is preparation for a better future. This challenge was intimated in a reflection on the Shoah in a contemporary Catholic document, "*(I)t is not only a question of recalling the past. The common future of Jews and Christians demands that we remember, for "there is no future without memory". History itself is memoria futuri*" (CRRJ 1998, p. I). Can a shared understanding of history become the basis for a teaching that sensitizes future generations to both sides of the equation and prepares them to live in a shared world? This challenge is particularly important in countries that have large communities of Jews in the Jewish Diaspora (like the USA, Great Britain, France, Canada, Germany, and Russia) and in Israel, where the Jewish majority dominates and a small Christian population seeks a way to survive.[4] The way history is perceived and taught among some Jews has led to a parallel teaching of contempt towards all non-Jews, including Christians, particularly manifest in certain nationalist Orthodox circles in Israel today (cf. Ben Yohanan 2020). The teaching of contempt for the other must give way to a teaching of respect, and this can only happen if the past is studied both objectively and with a sensitivity to the other.

5. Broadening the Conversation?

In 1986, when Pope John Paul II undertook his groundbreaking visit to the synagogue in Rome, he declared, "The Church of Christ discovers her "bond" with Judaism by "searching into her own mystery". The Jewish religion is not "extrinsic" to us, but in a certain way is "intrinsic" to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers, and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers" (John Paul II 1986). The uniqueness of the relationship of Jews and Christians is undoubtedly due to their shared roots in Scripture and the Jewish identity of Jesus and the early Church. However, rather than proposing a common front in a war against shared enemies, John Paul II understood that the challenge is indeed to broaden the dialogue, using the transformation of the relationship between Jews and Catholics as a model.

The Catholic reevaluation of the relationship with Jews and Judaism impacts the relationship of Catholics with people of other faiths and religious traditions. It is not clear, however, whether the willingness of Catholics to open themselves to a dialogue with Jews motivates them to build positive relationships with the believers of other religions, engaging in dialogue with them too. Contrary to Pope John Paul II, some Christians promote a modern political ideology of Jewish–Christian exclusivism. This is nowhere clearer than in some currents of evangelical

Christian Zionism (Sizer 2006; Shapiro 2015; McDermott 2016), where Islam features as the enemy of both Jews and Christians, who are committed to the supposed defense of the civilized Western world, a defense often seen as beginning with the defense of the state of Israel in the midst of a hostile Middle East. "*Just as evangelicals' political support for Israel comports with their religious convictions, so too is their opposition to Israel's enemies embedded in theology. It is an ancient enmity, rooted in deep spiritual conflict. The struggle, for Christian Zionists, goes beyond terrorism and the wars between Israel and its Arab and Muslim neighbors, and is even more than a clash of civilizations. It is a contest between God and Allah: the Lord God of Judaism and Christianity versus what they view as the dubious supernatural being that Muslims worship. For many evangelical Zionists, this is the divine conflict behind the earthly hostilities in the Middle East. It is the other half of the picture, complementing their scripturally based alliance with the Jewish state*" (Spector 2009, p. 76). Spector (2009) includes two chapters on this theme, Chapter 4: The Arab and Muslim Enemy and Chapter 5: The War with Islam as a Faith.

Pope Francis, however, has particularly emphasized the need to broaden the dialogue to include Muslims and Islam. Contemporary Jewish–Catholic dialogue has been forged within the North American and European context. The dual heritage of the Enlightenment, establishing a secular culture rooted in Jewish–Christian tradition, and the Holocaust, which sought to eradicate the Jewish element in that culture, have molded contemporary Catholic attitudes to the Jewish people. The Jewish–Christian tradition, emphasizing the common Scriptures and Jesus's Jewish identity, helps promote a shared value system and a vision of society. This can be formulated in such a way that Muslims are seen as beyond the consensus, newcomers at best if not complete outsiders to the relationship shared by Jews and Christians. Within the newly perceived Jewish–Christian comfortable consensus, dialogue with Jews is now seen as natural, whereas dealing with Muslims in society is accepted only as a practical necessity to keep the peace.

This difference in dealing with Jews and with Muslims is deeply rooted in a certain Christian tradition, distinguishing between them. Judaism, narrowly associated by many Christians with the Old Testament, has been seen as a necessary "preparation for the Gospel", whereas Islam has been seen as a "deviation from the Gospel". Judaism, identified with the Old Testament figures of the well-known patriarchs, kings, and prophets, leads to Jesus; however, Islam, with its "false" prophet and "deviant" holy Book, leads away from Jesus. Upon the root of Judaism sprouts the tree of the Church, whereas Islam diverts the Jesus story to deny Christ's divinity, referring to him as the Word of the God but demoting him to just one more in a line of prophets leading to Mohammed. Although today many Catholics embrace an ideology of the Jewish–Christian heritage, Catholics must not forget that parallel to their teaching of contempt for Muslims was a teaching of contempt for Jews, the former seen as an enemy from without and the latter an enemy from within. The expressions "perfidious Jews" and "heretical Saracens" were mouthed in the same breath in the writings of pre-modern Catholic thinkers, ridiculing both the Talmud and Quran.

Furthermore, in modern times, an important part of the modern reformulation of Christian identity in a secular world has been to shed the role of triumphalism and don the garb of victimhood. Jews are seen by many Catholics as fellow victims in a secular world, where Jews and Catholics suffered persecution at the hands of Nazis and Communists. Jews and Catholics are often portrayed as fighting together against the forces of modern totalitarianism. Some propose that Jewish–Christian dialogue should serve the purpose of building a common front against shared enemies. Editor-in-chief of a conservative Jewish journal, *Azure*, Assaf Sagiv enunciated this common front in clear terms: "*The challenges we face, now and in the future, require both Jews and Christians to set aside their theological differences, even ones that are ultimately irreconcilable. Reality demands that we try to forge unity wherever possible*" (Sagiv 2009, p. 32). After explaining Jewish reticence with regard to Christianity, Sagiv proposes that two principal enemies impose this common front. "*Today, both religions are on the same front of an all-out war that radical Islam has declared on the West and its values*" (Sagiv 2009, pp. 30–31). In this same journal, conservative British philosopher Roger Scruton laid out the struggle in lyrical form, calling

on Jews and Christians to fight Islam: "*That means making no concessions to those who wish us to exchange citizenship for subjection, nationality for religious conformity, secular law for shari'ah, the Judeo-Christian inheritance for Islam, irony for solemnity, self-criticism for dogmatism, representation for submission, and cheerful drinking for censorious abstinence*" (Scruton 2009, p. 48).

The ideology of a common front against Islam is especially prominent in the Middle East today, where Israeli leaders mobilize allies against Islamic terrorism or the nuclear threat of Islamic Iran. According to this ideology, Muslims are those who persecute both Jews and Christians in the contemporary Middle East. Decades of European colonialism and the present reality of Israeli military occupation and state discrimination are conveniently ignored as the aggressors are depicted as Muslims. Islamic political resurgence, often characterized as extremism, and caricaturized as particularly violent when it comes to non-Muslim minorities, is presented without historical context. Rather than reaction to colonialism and occupation, the violence is understood as intrinsic to Islam itself, presented as essentially intolerant, even genocidal. Whereas today Christians can treat Jews as brothers and sisters in a new age of dialogue and collaboration, having liberated themselves from stereotypes and caricatures, Muslims are often still perceived, because of stereotypes and caricatures, to be in a different playing field.

Broadening the dialogue to include Muslims is an urgent challenge. The good news of the transformation of the relationship between Jews and Catholics must be applied with regard to Muslims too. Catholics are invited to become aware of their negative attitudes towards Muslims, based upon centuries of slanted teaching and hateful discourse. Much work must still be done so that modern Catholic approaches to post-Biblical Jewish tradition in the Talmud and other Rabbinic writings might serve as a model for revaluating the Quran and Muslim tradition. Although neither the Talmud nor the Quran are regarded as sacred by Catholics, both echo the Scriptures held sacred by Jews and Christians. Pope Benedict XVI provided a broadened view of the dialogue when he pointed out in an interview in 2009: "*Islam was also born in an environment where Judaism and various branches of Christianity, Judeo-Christianity, Antiochian-Byzantine-Christianity were present, and all these circumstances are reflected in the tradition of the Quran. In this way, we have much in common from our origins, in the faith in the one God. For that, it is important on one hand to maintain dialogue with the two parts—with the Jews and with Islam—and as well a trilateral dialogue*" (Benedict XVI 2014).

The challenge to broaden the conversation is not restricted to the relationship with Muslims, but within the Jewish-Catholic dialogue, the Muslim is an important foil to preventing the dialogic dynamic becoming an exclusivist ideology for a common front that continues to speak a language of contempt and violence. Whereas religious Jews and Catholics share a sacred Word, Catholics and the members of all religious traditions, including Judaism, share a created world that is no less sacred. Christianity and Judaism do not exist alone as two traditions emerging from one Word, but rather Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and many other religious traditions coexist in one world that groans with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God. Christianity's rootedness in an "other" has implications not only for the relationship with that other, the Jews, but also for the relationship with all others with whom it comes into contact. Rootedness in an "other" brings Catholics to a fuller consciousness that they cannot make their pilgrim journey in the world without the other, whoever he or she might be.

6. Conclusions

The flowering of the Jewish–Catholic dialogue in past decades has transformed a relationship between Jews and Catholics, offering hope for *tikkun olam*—the repairing of a broken world. An important part of this transformation is the rooting out of supercessionist thinking among Catholics. If Jews and Catholics can indeed be reconciled after centuries of hostility, if Jews and Catholics

can join hands and work together for mutual understanding, peace and justice in the world, then indeed they have begun to fulfill a Biblical vision that defines the vocation of Abraham and his seed: to become a blessing for all nations, just as Abraham was told by God: *"I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing… and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed*" (Gn 12:2–3). This blessing is indeed for all.

However, there is much work to be done to ensure that this change in paradigm roots itself within the two traditions that have entered into a new and transformed relationship. Ensuring that the work continues means continuing to face the challenges as attitudes are transformed and trust is built up. The good news of this transformation in relationship can also be carried over to other relationships that are in need of healing, thus creating a ripple effect that can make *tikkun olam* a growing reality.

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[1] Here the extremely complex subject of Jewish believers in Jesus Christ is not discussed. However, the reality of Jews who have received baptism in the traditional Churches as well as communities of Jews who adhere to faith in Jesus as the Christ without joining any Church or ecclesial community but rather gather in Messianic Jewish assemblies is a reality that challenges Jewish–Christian dialogue in itself. Although there have been Jewish converts to Christianity throughout the centuries, many contemporary Jews who have accepted faith in Jesus Christ do not shed their Jewish identity but rather insist that they continue to belong to the Jewish people. Interestingly, some of these figures have played a central role in improving relationships between Christians and Jews like Jean-Marie Lustiger, Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Paris and Russian Orthodox Father Alexander Men (Cf. O'Donnell 2020).
[2] See for example A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People (2002), composed by Catholic and Protestant theologians in the United States, which raised this possibility, "If Jews, who do not share our faith in Christ, are in a saving covenant with God, then Christians need new ways of understanding the universal significance of Christ" (quoted in Boys 2005, p. xvi).
[3] There is opposition to Zionism among diverse currents in the Jewish community. For one classic collection of opponents to Zionism see (Selzer 1970). See also Rose (2005) and Butler (2012).
[4] An important study about teaching Christianity in Israel is (Ramon et al. 2020).

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