

## **Review of John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother. The revolution in Catholic teaching on the Jews 1933-1965***

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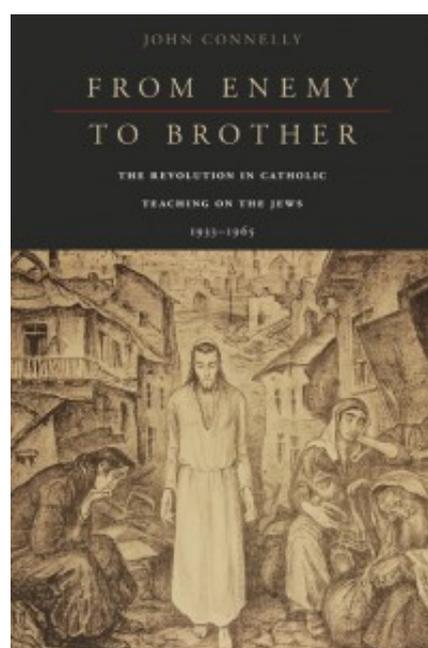
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**Review of John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother. The revolution in Catholic teaching on the Jews 1933-1965* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), Pp 376. ISBN 978-0-674-05782-1.**

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The most significant theological development of the twentieth century was the abandonment of the centuries-old Christian hostility towards the Jews and Judaism. There were two principal causes: the catastrophic annihilation of so many Jews during the Nazi-sponsored Holocaust, and the establishment of the independent State of Israel in 1948. The combination of these two political events, occurring within a few years of each other, profoundly, and it may be hoped permanently, changed the relationship between the Christian churches and the Jewish people. Theologians and scholars were obliged to reassess traditional attitudes that had held sway for many centuries. This revision included the abandonment of the age-long assertion that the Church had replaced the Jews as the Chosen People. Furthermore, the emergence of the State of Israel, where the Jews were again restored to their own homeland, sent a theological shock throughout Christendom, since it questioned the traditional Christian myth about the place of Jews in history.



The subsequent alteration of the Catholic Church's teachings about Jews and Judaism was particularly notable, culminating in the famous declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, made in the context of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. How this was achieved is the main subject of John Connelly's excellent account. He gives principal credit to the small group of theologians, most of whom were from Germany or Austria, and all of them converts. By one means or another, they escaped the Nazis' persecution and were then resolved to challenge the long-standing prejudices about Jews in the Catholic Church, which they were all too well aware had played a significant role in fomenting the Nazi-led Holocaust. Indeed, Connelly is right to stress the fact that the deeply-entrenched anti-Judaic sentiments in the Christian churches only reinforced the wider and more virulent anti-Semitism and racism which had prevailed for many years. As he shows in his opening chapters, there were many prominent Catholics, especially in Germany, in the 1930s who embraced racist ideas. They assumed that Jews were racially inferior, as well as theologically damned for their putting Christ to death. One noted Catholic professor of Tübingen, Karl Adam, for example, held the view that baptism was powerless to cure Jews of their racial taints. Bishop Alois Hudal was not alone in believing that, on racial-biological grounds, Jews could not have the same values and rights as the German people. Nazi Germany was effecting the will of the Almighty through its racial laws. In fact, apart from the handful of emigres, no one rose to challenge such Catholic racial views, neither in the Catholic press, nor among the Catholic bishops. A further difficulty was that, even if the opponents of Nazism so desired, they lacked the language and concepts with which to attack the popular prejudices. Technically, Jews were supposed to convert for the sake of salvation. But in fact many Christians were suspicious, on racial grounds, of the few who tried to take this course. One of the most difficult experiences for Jewish Christians was their rejection by other Christians because of their Jewish origins. Even after Nazism was overthrown, the vast majority of Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, felt no guilt for what had happened to the Jews.

This inauspicious climate was to continue in the immediate post-1945 years due to the singular lack of reflection amongst Catholics on the significance of the Holocaust. During all of the 1950s, indeed, the Catholic press, from the Vatican to the local diocesan papers, ignored this issue. Only when Israeli historians published irrefutable evidence of the Jewish sufferings, and the trial of Adolf Eichmann gained world-wide attention, did the situation begin to change. It was left to the small band of intrepid advocates for a different and much improved relationship between Catholics and Jews to take up the challenge of the legacy of Auschwitz. Connelly pays particular tribute to several of the leaders of this cause, all of whom were in some sense "outsiders" but ready to tackle the entrenched prejudices of the Catholic hierarchy and indeed laity also. All of them were converts either from Judaism or Protestantism, and all had experienced at first hand persecution from the Nazis.

Johannes (later John) Oesterreicher was a young Jewish student in Vienna who had been converted in 1922, was later ordained and served in various parishes in the Vienna region until forced to flee when the Nazis seized power in 1938. Thereafter he launched a vigorous campaign to combat Catholic anti-Semitism, broadcasting from Paris with a combination of apocalyptic vision and intense political engagement. But when the German army invaded France, he had to make his escape across the Pyrenees and eventually resettled in New Jersey. There he learnt that both his parents had died at the hands of the Nazis. Oesterreicher was greatly assisted by Karl Thieme, an academic and former Protestant, who also had to take

refuge in Switzerland, but who returned to Germany after 1945 and provided much of the academic theory for the struggle to improve Catholic relations with Jews. In the south German diocese of Freiburg he linked up with the redoubtable figure of Gertrud Luckner, who served as a courier for the bishop during the war, warning those in danger to move into hiding, and supporting those in need. She was eventually arrested by the Gestapo, and spent eighteen months in the women's concentration camp of Ravensbrück. After she was liberated, she resumed her work on behalf of the victims of persecution. Indeed she was to continue to do so for the next forty years. But perhaps more significant was her work in publishing, with the editorial assistance of Karl Thieme, the *Freiburger Rundbriefe* which from 1948 were compilations of sermons, statements, conference reports and other materials relating to Christian-Jewish relations in both the theological and political aspects. These *Rundbriefe* were an important source of information, and soon achieved an international audience, helping to overcome the embedded silence of many in the Catholic hierarchy. A further ally in this cause was another "outsider", the Church of England vicar, James Parkes, whose early study *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* was the first comprehensive analysis of the Christian origins of anti-Semitism. But he was widely shunned by his fellow Anglicans because of his extreme liberal views.

It is to the credit of this group of pioneers that they faced up to the legacy of anti-Judaic hostility in the churches' record, as well as the Catholics' continuing indifference to this issue. Talking to Jewish scholars and rabbis made them all well aware that the teaching of contempt had contributed to making Auschwitz possible. They were all the more zealous to change this pattern of Christian witness. For this purpose they organized a series of international meetings. These were small but crucial gatherings, especially one held in Seelisberg, Switzerland in 1946. The ten landmark theses of this conference are now recognized as the first important fruit of this dialogue between Christians and Jews.

But the impact of such statements was very limited for over a decade. Not until Pope Pius XII died and was replaced by John XXIII did a new climate emerge. It was helpful that Pope John had been Nuncio in Turkey during the war, and had assisted many Jews to flee from Nazi persecution. It was also helpful that he was willing to receive a leading French Jewish scholar, Jules Isaac, who urged the adoption of the Seelisberg programme for better relations with Jews, and the overcoming of the teaching of contempt. It was also helpful that by this time Catholics, especially in Germany, were more fully aware of the Catholic Church's complicity by its silence during the Holocaust. In the shadow of Auschwitz, all ideas of Jewish deficiency or guilt sounded obscene. As a result, Thieme and his colleagues led the way in recognizing that combatting Christian anti-Semitism was not enough. They needed to go further to tackle the equally entrenched anti-Judaism. It was also helpful to this cause that the theological reverberations of the creation of the State of Israel meant that the age-long calumnies about the Jews being condemned to wander the earth could no longer be maintained. Some went so far as to advocate the abandonment of Christian missionary efforts to Jews. Thieme and his friends began to argue that Jews should no longer be regarded as enemies but rather as the Christians;' elder brothers in faith.

Furthermore, just as they had, as Germans, protested against accusations that all Germans were to be branded as guilty of the Nazis' crimes, so now the argument could be used against

the collective guilt of the Jews for Christ's crucifixion or the Jewish refusal to be converted to Christianity. It was also helpful that Pope John promoted the German Jesuit, Augustin Bea to be a Cardinal, and made him president of the newly-formed Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. In 1961 the Pope charged Bea with the task of formulating a new statement on the Church's relations to the Jews. As Connelly rightly notes, for this new teaching, Cardinal Bea was the engineer, but Thieme and his friends in Freiburg were the real architects.

Connelly skillfully describes the process by which this declaration came through the preparatory stages and then the actual debates of the Second Vatican Council. To achieve this, Cardinal Bea had recalled Oesterreicher from the United States, who brought with him a talented young priest from Canada, Gregory Baum. Baum had been born in Berlin in a family of Jewish origin, had been evacuated as a teenager to Wales in 1939 on one of the *Kindertransporte*, but a year later had been interned by the British authorities as a suspect enemy alien and exiled to Canada. After his internment there, he converted to Catholicism and joined an Augustinian monastery in Nova Scotia.

Oesterreicher's team and Bea's Secretariat labored intensively to draw up a document which would embody the ideas percolating over the previous decade. But they encountered two major obstacles. They were opposed first by the Catholic conservatives, both in the Vatican bureaucracy and amongst the newly-arrived bishops at the Council, who were reluctant to abandon the language and stereotypes about Jews with which they had been brought up. They therefore made frequent efforts to suppress or water down parts of the document of which they disapproved. This defensive reaction was only intensified by the outrage aroused by the publication in 1963 of the play *The Deputy* by the young Swiss playwright Rolf Hochhuth. This drama was a vitriolic attack on Pope Pius XII for his alleged silence during the Holocaust, and by inference was a striking accusation of the Catholic Church's intolerance and insensitivity towards the suffering of the Jews. But Oesterreicher came to believe that, after such an onslaught, the need for a strong pro-Jewish statement was all the more urgent. The bishops could have no illusions about the response of world opinion if the Council was silent on the Jews.

The second wave of opposition came from the bishops of the eastern Catholic Churches in Arab states, who were concerned about the future of their flocks, especially Palestinians, if any statement appeared to favour the Jews. They even enlisted the political support of their governments. The government of Syria, for example, protested plans to free Jews from the charge of deicide, and the Premier of Jordan threatened sanctions against any bishop who voted to absolve Jews from guilt for Christ's crucifixion. But in fact such tactics caused a backlash among the more broad-minded bishops. Luckily in the great debates held over this document in 1964, a consensus rapidly formed that Jews were not to be held collectively responsible for the death of Christ. At the same time, Bea was at pains to make it clear that the document was solely religious in tone and had no political implications at all. The terms Israel and Israeli were avoided wherever possible. Instead Jews were referred to as "the stock of Abraham". On the other hand, it is clear that great pains were taken to assuage the sensitivities of the numerous Jewish observers, both in Rome and elsewhere.

When the bishops finally and overwhelmingly approved *Nostra Aetate* in October 1965,

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Oesterreicher regarded it as a “miracle’. Calling the Jews ‘beloved by God’ put an end to centuries-old harmful teachings of the Church. God’s promises to the Jews were declared irrevocable. The inevitable corollary was to abandon efforts to convert Jews to Christianity but rather to embrace them in an ecumenical fellowship as no longer enemies but elder brothers.

In his concluding chapter Connelly again pays tribute to the handful of outsider pioneers who successfully broke the traditional pattern of Catholic prejudices about the Jews and Judaism. He attributes this success to their personal histories as they mobilized opposition first to Catholic anti-Semitism and then to Christian anti-Judaism. In the end they recognized that it was more opportune to convert Catholics than Jews but to seek to bind both in a more ecumenical relationship which would acknowledge both as God’s chosen people.