

Review of Gilbert S. Rosenthal, ed. *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014.

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October 28th, 2015 marked the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. The change in Catholic-Jewish relations in these fifty years has been immense, and this transformation has branched out in many directions, fueling development in Christian-Jewish relations more generally defined and inspiring a range of dialogue and reconciliation attempts between many of the world's religions. The essays in *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations* address this proliferation of interreligious dialogue and cooperation that has flourished in the fifty years following the Second Vatican Council, true to the summons issued by *Nostra Aetate*, and point to the work that still lies ahead. The contributors to this volume provide invaluable reflections on our progress to date. Many share the view that, despite the great challenges still to be met, the transformation has been so sizable that its dimensions are obscured from our current perspective, and “we can easily misconstrue the transformative power of *Nostra Aetate* because we stand in the historical stream of that continuous starlight and don't always see the shadow of its influence on the world.”¹

The twenty-five essays in this volume, from contributors from five different countries, each offer a different perspective or observation on the state of Christian-Jewish relations fifty years after *Nostra Aetate*. In his Afterward, Gilbert Rosenthal takes stock of the contributions of these twenty-five essays in sum, and he notes that the words “revolution,” “transformation,” and “change” occur in great frequency throughout the collection. Many of the essays also acknowledge, and rightly so, that the transformation in Christian-Jewish relations is by no means due only to the Second Vatican Council. This assumption would fail to recognize the role of Jewish experience and would ascribe full credit to the Catholic Church and its tradition of authoritative texts. That this transformation was sparked in large part by the Shoah, and by efforts to understand the underlying causes of such a horror, is expressed by most of the contributors. The promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent authoritative documents, however, marked a moment of radical change in official Church teaching on non-Christian religions and specifically on Judaism. In Philip A. Cunningham's words, the “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4” issued what may be interpreted as a commandment to Catholic theologians: “When speaking of Judaism, thou shalt not theologize without respect for Jewish self-understanding.”²

Many of the essays in this volume share personal reflections and stories, and they relate in engaging language the narratives of individuals involved in the drafting of *Nostra Aetate*, as well

¹ Michael Reid Trice, “*Nostra Aetate*: At Fifty There is Wisdom,” in *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Gilbert S. Rosenthal (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 183.

² Philip A. Cunningham, “God Holds the Jews Most Dear,” in *A Jubilee for All Time*, 52.

as those involved in Jewish-Christian relations in the years before and after the Second Vatican Council. One such essay is Cunningham's excellent contribution on the "intense opposition and parliamentary maneuvering" that almost prevented the completion of *Nostra Aetate*. He shares the engaging narratives of Karl Theime's eventual recognition of Jewish self-understanding through correspondence with Martin Buber, and Cardinal Bea's struggle with the various edits to early drafts of *Nostra Aetate*.³ Susannah Heschel offers a similarly engaging recollection of Abraham Joshua Heschel's work in Jewish-Christian relations, which was rooted in friendships and scholarly sharing. The last section of essays in this volume, comprised of a collection of short memoirs, contributes to the appropriately conversational tone of much of the volume. These last few essays give flesh to this volume, speaking in very human voices and inviting a personal connection to the subject of this volume which, addressing interreligious relations, is ultimately about relationships between people.

While many of the contributions to this volume are told through personal narration, a number are also weighty scholarly pieces, such as John T. Pawlikowski's survey of recent "parting of the ways" scholarship on the historical division between Judaism and Christianity. He supports scholarship that understands the division to be gradual and late, and he notes that such historical views allow us today to re-evaluate what was lost in the division between the two and to recognize anew the debt that Christianity owes to Judaism. Another important contribution comes from a number of essays on the dialogue and reconciliation efforts of other denominations, including the Orthodox Church, mainline Protestant denominations, and Evangelicals, which provide a useful shift of perspective on Christian-Jewish relations. An insightful essay by Deborah Weissman discusses yet another perspective on Jewish-Christian relations, focusing on the attitudes of Israeli Jews. Weissman provides a number of intriguing rationales to explain what she identifies as the general lack of interest amongst many Israelis in dialogue with Christians, as well as the relatively low impact that *Nostra Aetate* has made in Israel.

A number of essays in this volume address the challenges present in continuing to advance the summons made in *Nostra Aetate*, which is still not complete, and in moving in new directions in Jewish-Christian relations. A strong essay by Eugene Fisher identifies a number of issues surrounding *Nostra Aetate* that need further resolution and clarification, including the omission of mention of the Shoah and the state of Israel from the document, the treatment of anti-Semitism as "deplored" but not "condemned," and the lack of a clear conclusion regarding whether the Church still aims to convert Jews. A diligently researched contribution from Elena Procaro-Foley raises important issues in curricula programs, which are invaluable to the integration and implementation of the summons of *Nostra Aetate* into public awareness. Another important contribution to this volume comes from Michael J. Cook, who makes a sound argument for the inclusion of more historical-critical thought in interpretation of the gospels, rather than the dominant emphasis on doctrinally-guided interpretation. Cook argues that this would increase the interest of lay Jews in Christian-Jewish dialogue, and "Catholic

³ Cunningham, 44.

understanding of how lay Jews self-identify may remain elusive unless we rebalance dialogue on *Nostra Aetate* matters by welcoming historical-critical dimensions on par with those doctrinal.”⁴

A refreshingly new, and very essential, observation is made by Michael Reid Trice, who takes stock of the radically different ways in which communication happens in today’s global environment. He describes the new model of communication and asserts the necessity of working within this model to further the motions taken by *Nostra Aetate*. In today’s age of electronic communication, characterized by the egalitarian format of social media, “[a] younger generation blogs with the assumption that our first descriptor is our shared humanity—not whether one is Jewish, Christian, or Wiccan, for that matter.” He criticizes the “monodirectionality” of the hierarchical, modernist model of authority and transmission on which *Nostra Aetate* is based, in which information trickles slowly down from top to bottom. Describing the new, postmodern model of communication, in which information spreads rapidly across a relatively level playing field, Trice observes, “In a postmodern age, ‘everyone else’ (i.e., the masses) convene, emphasize particularity of perspective, explore plural views, and distribute the results continuously and immediately through social media. Relevant, thrilling leadership today is polydirectional.”⁵

An intriguing perspective on the concepts of *kairos* and mystery comes from Murray Watson. Sharing the experience expressed by many other voices in this volume, he observes, “We may tend to take the past fifty years for granted, but we also recognize that they have been significantly unlike any other fifty-year period that preceded them in the past two millennia. It has been a *kairos* time.”⁶ Watson also makes a wise observation on the use of the concept of mystery in *Nostra Aetate*, formulated as “the salvific mystery of God”: “To speak of God’s salvific plan for humanity as a mystery that somehow incorporates *both* Judaism and Christianity is a word of caution to all those who might be tempted to oversimplify that relatedness for the purpose of catechesis, preaching, or apologetics. Such an over-simplification has often been cast in essentially supersessionist categories.” However, Watson notes that the use of “mystery” in *Nosta Aetate* also “provides a necessary, valuable opening to new models, new concepts, new language—and that is precisely what we have witnessed over the past fifty years, and continue to witness today.”⁷

The essays in this volume represent a wide range of perspectives and concerns, including contributions from scholars who have been instrumental in the analysis of *Nostra Aetate* and the implementation of its aims for many decades, such as Pawlikowski, Fisher, Cunningham, Eugene Korn, and others, as well as those from scholars and religious leaders whose work is more recently or tangentially involved in Jewish-Christian relations. A number of these essays present insights that will be new even to those well-versed in the field, while others are valuable as summaries of the state of the field. The latter would be good for educational purposes and would be adapted well to use in the university classroom. There is a fair amount of repetition of content between the essays, but this is nearly inevitable with a scope such as this, as many of the

⁴ Michael J. Cook, “*Nostra Aetate*’s Processing of Gospel Texts,” in *A Jubilee for All Time*, 253.

⁵ Trice, 187.

⁶ Murray Watson, “*Nostra Aetate*, *Kairos*, and *Mysterium*,” in *A Jubilee for All Time*, 162.

⁷ Watson, 163.

contributors summarize the history and content of *Nostra Aetate* and the advances in Jewish-Christian relations over the past fifty years.

The essays in this volume provide important and insightful reflection on the progress that has been made in the past half-century, and they point to the tasks that lie ahead, serving as a sign that indeed “at fifty there is wisdom” (Mishnah *Avot* 5:21).⁸ We are seeing “modern miracles” today, to borrow Korn’s language to describe the interreligious cooperation and learning he experienced on a recent trip to Israel with a group of Jews and Christians.⁹ We have certainly come a long way, and as Rosenthal observes in his Introduction and illustrates with the following verses, we must continue to go further through listening to each other, through dialogue and open hearts: “Come now let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18), and “Then those who revered the LORD spoke to one another and the LORD took note and listened” (Mal. 3:16).¹⁰

⁸ Cited by Trice, 188.

⁹ Eugene Korn, “On Modern Miracles,” in *A Jubilee for All Time*, 288.

¹⁰ Rosenthal, “Introduction,” in *A Jubilee for All Time*, xxxii.