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Dialogue with Jews Teaches Us about Ourselves

Thomas Michel, S.J., editor, *Friends on the Way: Jesuits Encounter Contemporary Judaism*

Fordham University Press, 2007

Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert Hofmann, and Joseph Sievers, editors, *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*

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By Eugene J. Fisher

Presented here are two unusually important collections, both of which have an unusually high percentage of significant essays that will add to our understanding of Catholic-Jewish relations today. *Friends on the Way* contains the papers of the Third International Colloquium of Jesuits involved in Christian-Jewish dialogue, held in Switzerland in July, 2005, the first in Krakow in 1998, the second in Jerusalem in 2000. Having been invited to speak at the July, 2007 Colloquium in New York, I can attest personally to the seriousness of the commitment of the Jesuits involved.

If one looks up "Jesuitical" and "Pharisaical" in the Oxford English Dictionary (I have the one many of us have, the huge two-volume edition with the little magnifying glass), one finds virtually the same definition, which is no surprise if one knows the history of Catholics and Jews in not always so very merrie olde Englande.

And Jesuits and Jews, as James Bernauer points out, have been a "tragic couple," both demonized in infamous documents by conspiracy mongers. Yet it is also true, as Bernauer points out, that Jesuits have reason to join the "penitential voice" of Pope John Paul II. This collection goes a long way toward consolidating the hope of Jesuit-Jewish dialogue and at the same time confronting the too often tragic realities of the relationship.

All of the articles in *Friends on the Way* are by Jesuits, save for the Introduction by Rabbi Harold Kasimov, a veteran of the dialogue who ably summarizes the texts, and Rabbi Tovia Ben-Chorin of Zurich, who brilliantly reflects on the Dialogue between Jew and Non-Jew in the Bible and Rabbinic Literature, opening a number of intriguing possibilities for new research in both fields.

Since I started out, as have many of us in Catholic-Jewish relations, as what Fr. Gerard Sloyan would call a "bibler," I was transfixed not only by the Ben-Chorin piece but equally by the two

contributions of Pere Jean-Pierre Sonnet. His first essay, "From Midrash to Contemporary Narrative Exegesis," shows how the innovative, literary analyses of Scripture of R. Alter, M. Sternberger, et al., which have had a major impact on how Christian biblical scholars have perceived anew the stories and narrative techniques of the bible, can best be understood as in continuity with ancient rabbinical tradition. Sonnet's second contribution, on "Inner-Biblical Exegesis," describes how the Hexateuch by reinterpretation, re-contextualization, and a close reading of the originals, was able to update earlier law codes for use in a new context. Since Catholics today are in the midst, since the Second Vatican Council, of just such a period in our own history, learning from the

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Scriptures themselves on how this can be done – innovation within continuity and faithfulness to Tradition – will be of interest not only to biblers but to the larger Catholic community as well. One of the great things about dialogue with Jews is how much we can learn about ourselves and about coping with our own dilemmas.

The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon (Overlook Press, 1998), which contains a chilling and chillingly accurate depiction of the slaughter of the New Christians and any who would assist them.

Christian Rutishauer compares the goals of the Ignatian Exercises with Rabbi Soloveitchik's "Halakhic Spirituality," while Donald Moore offers "An Ignatian Perspective on Contemporary Jewish Spirituality." Both are illuminating, thoughtful, and accurate with regard to Judaism as well as Ignatian spirituality.

Stanislaw Obirek, who offers a well deserved accolade to Fr. Stan Musial, S. J., the pioneer of post World War II Catholic-Jewish relations, reflects quite deeply on the

challenge of the theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel for Catholic theology, noting that *America* magazine, for the first time in the history of Catholic publishing in this country, devoted a full issue to the writings of a Jew. David M. Neuhaus writes trenchantly about "What Might Israelis

Though they eventually caved in...the actions of the first generation of Jesuits toward their Jewish colleagues was nothing less than heroic.

The first essay in the book, by Marc Rastoin, narrates the story of the Jesuits' resistance, under Ignatius, to the *limpieza de raza* laws of Portugal and Spain in the early 16th century. The Jesuits had an unusually high percentage of *conversos* ("New Christians") and tried to protect them as best they could, under extreme pressure, it might be added, by sending them out to the missions, for example. Though they eventually caved in, as was in my view, inevitable, — given the huge antipathy toward Jews, even converted Jews, in that particular time and place, as distinct, say, from Italy which followed papal canon law and protected the Jews — the actions of this first generation of Jesuits toward their Jewish colleagues was nothing less than heroic.

If one wants to gain a concrete sense of what Ignatius was up against in trying to protect his Jesuit Jews, I can recommend, of all things, a novel, Richard Zimmer's



Celebrating Mass of the Holy Spirit at Xavier University.

Book Review

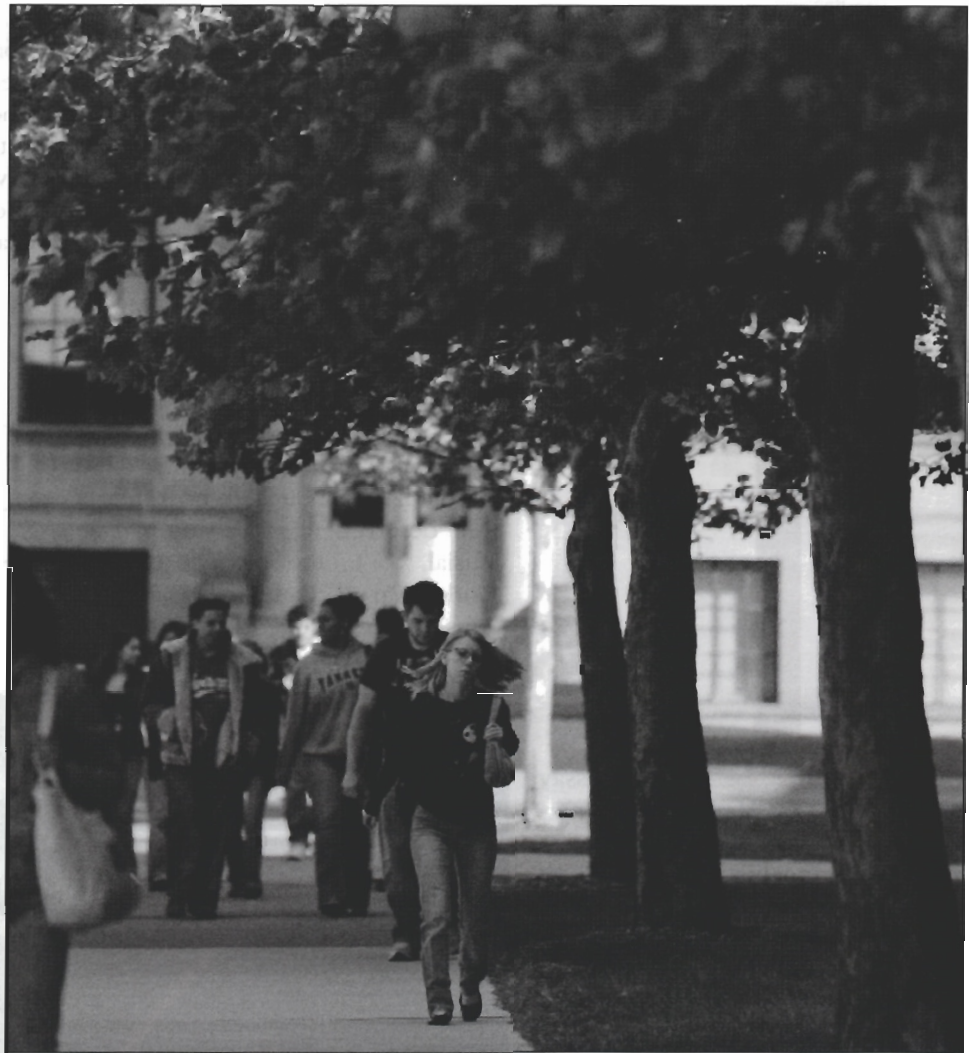
and Jews Learn about Christians and Christianity at Yad Vashem," an essay that will challenge Jewish readers, I believe most appropriately.

Peter Du Brul's essay on Harold Bloom and James Bernauer's on Hannah Arendt were for me the two surprises of this volume, sending me off into some new thoughts on Catholic-Jewish relations.

Cunningham, et al.'s, volume, *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People*, which I have reviewed more fully for a forthcoming issue of *The Catholic Historical Review*, contains the lectures from colloquia sponsored by the Cardinal Bea Center at the Gregorianum in Rome and the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College.

Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews narrates the thirty-year history of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Also giving histories of the Commission, for which each served as Secretary, are Cardinal Jorge María Mejía and Fathers Pierfrancesco Fumagalli and Norbert Hofmann.

This volume is divided into sections. In the first Rabbis Riccardo di Segni and Giuseppe Laras give Jewish perspectives on the relationship, while Cardinal Carlo María Martini provides a Catholic perspective. In the second, Anna Foa and Massimo Guiliani deal with the memory



Students on their way to classes at University of Detroit Mercy.

of the Shoah as "a shadow upon and a stimulus to" dialogue.

In the third section Archbishop Bruno Forte, Erich Zenger, and Peter Hunermann establish foundations for a Christian theology of Judaism. In the fourth section Alberto Melloni, discusses developments in "the Post-Shoah Catholic-Jewish Dialogue." Finally, Vatican diplomat Cardinal Achille Silvestrini and Israeli diplomat Oded Ben Hur discuss the relationship between the Holy See and the State of Israel.

A helpful set of appendices to this volume includes all six drafts of what

became *Nostra Aetate*; Joint Declarations of the International Catholic Jewish Liaison Committee; Joint Statements of the Pontifical Commission and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Delegation from 2003-2006; and the 1993 Fundamental Agreement between Israel and the Holy See. As one who lived through much of the history narrated in these two volumes and participated in many of the theological dialogues reflected in their pages, I can only express my delight in and gratitude for them. ■