

Build Bridges

“A climate of encounter, of a ‘bridge’ that unites and that is a challenge for this world, a world that always runs the risk of becoming atomized, of separating. And when peoples separate, families separate, friends separate, and in separation one can sow only enmity and even hatred. Instead, when people unite there is social friendship, fraternal friendship; and there is a culture of encounter, that defends us from any type of throw-away culture.” —Pope Francis, from an address given in May 2016

In the past few years, I have been blessed to develop a relationship with St Anselm’s. It is, for me, a place of spiritual renewal. I have been fortunate enough to be invited to a few feastday celebrations. When possible, my spouse and I attend a mass or participate in one of the “hours” of the divine office. We like to spend a weekend on retreat at the abbey, staying in the Canterbury suite, sharing meals with the monks. We particularly look forward to joining a round of *lectio divina* on a Saturday evening. We also have attended a number of talks and seminars at the Lonergan Institute with Br Dunstan, listening to various speakers discussing natural law, ethics, and theology. In the process, in the Christian way, we have made friends with many of the monks and found a community. The abbey will continue to play a part in my life and to walk along with me on my faith journey.

I am a parishioner at Our Lady Queen of Peace, in Arlington, Virginia. Our parish is run by Spiritan priests, who first came to Arlington to found a Catholic parish attended by African Americans in the days when segregation was mandated by law. It is a sanctuary dedicated to social justice, with a simple mission statement: “I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me...” (Matthew 25:35). After the rhetoric and divisiveness of the recent campaign and presidential election, at a time when Americans were divided, alienated, and fearful, and at odds over matters of race, it was I suppose only natural that some of us would want to form a ministry dedicated to reaching out to the other, in order to dedicate ourselves to a culture of encounter.

We felt it was necessary to act, to act directly and immediately, as Christ would do. We were concerned about the quality of dialogue throughout the country, the vitriol and polarization of political views. We were concerned about the sudden increase in hate crimes around the country. We would read articles from wire services like Reuters reporting that “hate crimes in nine U.S. metropolitan areas rose more than 20% last year (fueled by inflamed passions during the presidential campaign” and by despair). These same reports would tell us that “among U.S. cities, New York reported the greatest number of hate crimes at 380, a 24% increase since 2015, while

Washington DC, had the largest percentage rise (62% to 107 incidents).” We were concerned about our community, that it was separating, becoming atomized.

So, I sent out an email to my faith community, asking for help. The simple question was this: Is there anybody out there who wants to band together to act? And the response was immediate. One of the monks at St Anselm’s, Br Dunstan, expressed his support, offering to help in any way he could. But, what to do? We were a humble group, equipped with little more than good intent, but I quickly discovered that my faith community extended beyond my parish. The replies also included members of the St Anselm’s worshipping community. These were people I knew by going to an occasional mass at the abbey. It also included several members of a local Episcopal church, Immanuel on the Hill. These were people I knew through a Friends of Benedict group, a group of Christians that meet twice a month to study the Rule of Benedict using a *lectio divina* format. We were humble, but we had a Christian community at our disposal.

We quickly discovered that as Christians we shared a contemplative outlook. Although we had no idea what exactly we wanted to do, we knew we wanted to take a discernment-based approach to developing our mission and charter. We determined to meet once a month. In the interim, some of us, including Br Dunstan, committed to doing a fast once a week—as he put it, “as an act of love.” We thought fasting and prayer would light the way. And it did.

Together, we drafted out a vision. We agreed that we would commit ourselves to performing acts of charity as a response to bigotry in order to transform the hearts of individuals afflicted with hate. We said we would commit ourselves to breaking down ideological divisions through one-on-one dialogue. And we would continue to utilize prayer and discernment to find ways to stand up for the dignity of the human person. As the U.S. Catholic Bishops write in *Economic Justice for All*, “When we deal with each other, we should do so with the sense of awe that arises in the presence of something holy and

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sacred. For that is what human beings are: we are created in the image of God.”

Our immediate mission would be to seek out, engage in, and create opportunities for dialogue with people who might be perceived as “the other,” perhaps people we disagree with or whom we would not normally find in our own circles of community. As we would remain an ecumenical interfaith group, welcoming people of all political persuasions and faiths would be a core value. We would promote acceptance over tolerance. And we would dedicate ourselves to the principles of nonviolence.

importance of relations and community.

From there, we have taken steps to branch out. For example, some in our ministry recently attended a “Solidarity Tea” at a local mosque, Dar Al Hijrah, in Falls Church. We shared tea and pastries and appetizers and listened to presentations about the history of Black Muslims in America for Black History Month.

We also decided to invite the members of Dar Al Hijrah to our parish, Our Lady Queen of Peace, for tea and conversation. The theme of our event is an act of hospitality in the hope of planting seeds of friendship. We plan to continue to work toward building bridges to fraternal



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The Tiber at Rome

Our ministry, Build Bridges, has started out small and slow, continuing to move at the pace of discernment. We worked with Abbot James Wiseman on one of our first activities, borrowing a “Letter from a Trump Supporter” that had been read at an abbey seminar. We read the letter to our group members and performed a prayerful listening exercise, going around the room and asking people to share their thoughts on where they could empathize with the letter’s author. In an act of solidarity we visited the Sant’Egidio Community for a prayer vigil for the victims of gun violence. Later, Br Dunstan hosted a one-day Saturday retreat for members of our group around the themes of becoming aware of our biases, and the

friendship as a form of direct action against hate.

None of us know where our current political climate is going. Despite our prayers, we tend to sense that bigotry and hate are expanding, sinking in. We know, like Pope Francis, that we live in a throwaway culture. But, as a person of faith, I have to believe that the dignity of the human person is rooted in creation. Any action must be grounded in that fundamental premise. So, for now, we will work to try to unite people from different backgrounds in social friendship so that peoples, families, and friends do not separate and become lost in hate. We will proceed with hope.

RICHARD KRAL

Prayerful Meditation

A stereotypical image of a Benedictine monk might show him with his hood over his head, seated on a bench and gazing at a crucifix or statue of some holy person. Even if you might seldom see a monk doing exactly that, nevertheless quiet, prayerful meditation is definitely a central part of Benedictine life, including the life of oblates. The constitutions of our own congregation specify that members of our communities are to spend at least a half-hour each day in this kind of religious practice.

While this might seem normal and proper for those who are well-disposed toward monastic life, that is certainly not clear to everyone. Some months ago a friend gave me the book *Lost Christianity* by the religious scholar Jacob Needleman, who felt the need to advocate “contemplative Christianity” in a world where many people think it has no place “when measured against the massive, external crises of our culture: the threat of nuclear war, ecological catastrophe, famine, economic collapse, the injustices of class, race and caste.” He went on to surmise that “there may be those who even feel ashamed to speak of it in the same breath with these crises, as though the quest for contemplative Christianity were a self-indulgence, a refusal to face the real problems of the world.... However, such an attitude rests on a profound misunderstanding both of the nature of these massive problems and the nature of the inner search.”

Needleman did not go into further detail about such misunderstanding, but it surely means that if people simply try to do things that they think will improve a situation on a local, national, or global level without having the inner resources to see the situation as it really is, they will almost always just make matters worse. I am not alone in thinking that some of our country's military misadventures in recent decades were due to this lack of “inner resources.” This is among the reasons why Congressman Tim Ryan of Ohio has not only become convinced of the importance of daily meditation in his own life but meets with some of his colleagues for regular meditation sessions in one of the office buildings down on Capitol Hill. As he writes in his book *A Mindful Nation*, such practice has many benefits: “It quiets the mind. It helps you harness more of your energy. It increases your focus and allows you to relax and pay better attention to what you are doing and to those around you.”

What he and other contemporary authors, such as Robert Wright, are advocating does not have a specifically religious focus and so could be called “secular meditation.” The kind of alertness and “awakening” that it effects is much needed in our time, but what Benedictines are called to practice is of a somewhat different order and can rightly be called prayerful. Our entire Christian tradition offers a number of ways in which this kind of prayerful meditation (or meditative prayer) can be practiced, so much so that the very

multiplicity can seem baffling. In the rest of this article, I will simply summarize some of the better-known ways, emphasizing right at the start that there is no point in trying to determine which might be objectively best. John Chapman, a former abbot of Downside Abbey, constantly urged his spiritual directees to “pray as you can, not as you can't,” advice that is perennial in its wisdom. Having found a method that seems fitting, a person would do best to stick with it for at least a substantial period of time before possibly turning to some other way.

One of the best-known works of medieval spirituality is an anonymous treatise from fourteenth-century England, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, readily available in several modern English translations. Its seventy-five short chapters contain much practical advice, but the most succinct statement of the kind of prayer it teaches comes at the beginning of chapter three:

Lift up your heart to God with a humble impulse of love, and have himself as your aim, not any of his goods. Take care that you avoid thinking of anything but himself, so that there is nothing for your reason or your will to work on, except himself. Do all that in you lies to forget all the creatures God ever made, and their works, so that neither your thought nor your desire be directed or extended to any of them.... This is the work of the soul that pleases God most.... When you first begin to undertake it, all that you will find is a darkness, a sort of cloud of unknowing.... This darkness and cloud is always between you and your God, no matter what you do, and it prevents you from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your reason.... So set yourself to rest in this darkness as long as you can, always crying out after him whom you love.

The author later recommends the use of a short word such as “God” or “love” that will help one return to a simple, loving longing for God if other thoughts arise during this period of prayer. He does not at all disdain such thoughts at other times and even encourages thinking of all the good things God has done, but such thoughts are not to intrude during the time one gives each day to “resting in this darkness” and “crying out after him whom you love.”

Much closer to our own time, *The Cloud of Unknowing* had a direct influence on what has come to be known as Centering Prayer. This originated at the Trappist abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts when some of the monks were concerned that many young persons were traveling to Asia in search of genuine spirituality, unaware of the riches available in the Christian tradition into which they had been born. This method has been taught in a number of articles, books, and conferences, one good source

being the volume *Open Mind, Open Heart* by Fr Thomas Keating, OCSO. Its provenance in medieval England is obvious in the four steps that summarize the basics of such prayer:

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

What might at a quick glance appear very similar, but is in fact quite different, was taught by the Benedictine monk John Main, who resided here at St Anselm's for several years before returning to his own monastery, Ealing Abbey in the UK, and eventually founding a priory in Montreal. John was first introduced to meditation before he ever considered monastic life. While serving in the British colonial service in Malaya, he came to know a Hindu swami who taught him a way of meditation that was based on the constant repetition of a sacred word or phrase for a certain period of time, perhaps thirty minutes. After becoming a monk at Ealing Abbey, he was discouraged from practicing such prayer, but he resumed it while living among us and eventually wrote a number of books explaining what he simply called "Christian meditation." The movement he began, the World Community of Christian Meditation, has continued after his death in 1982 under the direction of his former student, Fr Laurence Freeman, OSB, with centers in many parts of the world, including one at Georgetown University here in Washington. A useful resource is John Main's book *Word into Silence: A Manual for Christian Meditation*. The core of this method is to sit still for a period of between twenty to thirty minutes and silently recite one's chosen prayer-phrase, the recommended one being the Aramaic word *Maranatha* ("Come, Lord") found at the very end of the New Testament's Book of Revelation.

Those familiar with the writings of early Christian monks will immediately recognize similarities between this way of prayer and what was taught in the fifth century by John Cassian in the tenth of his twenty-four *Conferences*, a work recommended by St Benedict in the final chapter of his monastic rule. Cassian writes that he and his companion Germanus learned from a hermit of the Egyptian desert that the common prayer of those hermits was to recite silently throughout the day the first verse of Psalm 70, "God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me," words that are still used throughout the monastic world at the beginning

of various parts of the Liturgy of the Hours. According to Cassian, "This verse has rightly been selected from the whole Bible for this purpose: It fits every mood and temper of human nature, every temptation, every circumstance. It contains an invocation of God, a humble confession of faith, a reverent watchfulness, a meditation upon our frailty, a confidence in God's answer, an assurance of his ever-present support."

This, in turn, is clearly similar to one of the best-known ways of praying in Eastern Orthodoxy, the Jesus Prayer, often called the Prayer of the Heart. As with Cassian, the one praying keeps lovingly repeating a sacred phrase, this one a combination of the words of the tax-collector in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector, and of the blind man calling out to Jesus as he was leaving Jericho, thereby giving us the verse: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." This became widely known in the West through *The Way of a Pilgrim*, a short work from nineteenth-century Russia in which a simple pilgrim describes the way he learned to fulfill St Paul's exhortation to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Those who saw the segment of the television program *Sixty Minutes* filmed at Mount Athos several years ago may recall that at one point a Greek Orthodox monk was shown watering plants, all the while moving his lips. This was not explained or commented upon during the program, but I have no doubt that the monk was praying this particular prayer, which ideally moves "from the mind and lips to the heart" and there becomes part of one's very being. Henri Nouwen, in his *Genesee Diary*, also came to love this way of praying, but he made its meaning more universal by changing "have mercy on me" to "have mercy on us"—just one example of the way gifted spiritual writers avoid being tied down to any single formula. Another example of such freedom is the way St Philip Neri, the sixteenth-century "Apostle of Rome," would often pray the rosary by abbreviating the prayer on each bead to something shorter, such as "Hail Mary, full of grace" or "Holy Mary, mother of God," or "Pray for us sinners."

At least as prolific an author as Nouwen was Thomas Merton, many of whose books have the words "contemplation" or "contemplative" in their title. Often in these works Merton discusses the way other authors wrote about prayer and contemplation, but in one of his many published letters he described the way he himself regularly prayed. This was a letter to a Pakistani Sufi, Abdul Aziz, whom he had never met in person but with whom he regularly corresponded. In one of those letters Merton included the following passage, which significantly uses the terms "meditation" and "prayer" interchangeably:

Now you ask about my method of meditation. Strictly speaking, I have a very simple way of prayer. It is centered entirely on attention to the presence of God and to His will and His love. That is to say that it is centered on *faith* by which alone we can know the presence of God. One might say that this gives my meditation the

character described by the Prophet as 'being before God as if you saw Him.' Yet it does not mean imagining anything or conceiving a precise image of God, for to my mind this would be a kind of idolatry. On the contrary, it is a matter of adoring Him as invisible and infinitely beyond our comprehension, and realizing Him as all.... There is in my heart this great thirst to recognize totally the nothingness of all that is not God. My prayer is then a kind of praise rising up out of the center of Nothing and Silence.... If He wills He can then make the Nothingness into a total clarity. If He does not will, then the Nothingness seems to itself to be an object and remains an obstacle. Such is my ordinary way of prayer, or meditation. It is not 'thinking about' anything, but a direct seeking of the Face of the Invisible.

Equally uncomplicated is praying in one's own words in a church or oratory. For Benedictines in particular—whether monks, nuns, sisters, or oblates—the simple teaching of Benedict's monastic rule will always be normative, and in his chapter on the oratory (chapter 52), the saint wisely avoids excessive detail and simply says that if after the Liturgy of the Hours or at any other time a monk "chooses to pray privately, he may simply go in and pray, not in a loud voice but with tears and heartfelt compunction." The same practice has been followed by countless Christians down the ages. One of the most inspiring examples that I have come across was in a talk given by the Salvadoran bishop Ricardo Urioste on the tenth anniversary of Blessed Oscar Romero's death. Urioste was a friend of the archbishop and recalled the following incident, which took place only three months before the latter was assassinated while offering mass in the very chapel that figures in this account:

I remember one time, in December 1979 at the [Divine Providence Hospital, where Archbishop Romero lived]. It was early in the morning, at breakfast time, and the archbishop was being visited by Cardinal Lorscheider of Brazil and a member of the civilian-military junta which, at that time, was governing El Salvador. At one point, Archbishop Romero got up and left. Now, I knew those men had come there to see him, not me, so eventually I got up and went looking for him. I went to his apartment, but he wasn't there; I went to the visitors' room, the kitchen, and the garden, but he wasn't there either. Finally, it occurred to me to look in the

chapel, and there he was, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament,... I went up to him and said, 'They're waiting for you.' And he said, 'That's okay. They can wait. I'll be coming.'

I think that Archbishop Romero never said anything, never did anything, without first consulting with God. That's why he was sure of what he said.

It would be easy to describe still other methods of meditative prayer, but the ones I have mentioned are certainly among the most widely practiced. For all their differences, what they have in common is *focus*, having one's attention directed to what the Gospel calls "the one thing necessary," the *unum necessarium* (Luke 10:42). The human mind has, over millennia, evolved in such a way that we are almost always thinking of various things, pondering different possibilities, looking this way and that. For our ancient forebears, this was necessary for their very survival: "Might there be a ferocious animal behind that tree, ready to pounce, or a poisonous snake in the high grass alongside this path, poised to strike?" Such shifting awareness led to what some traditions call the "monkey mind," flitting from one thought to another the ways monkeys jump from branch to branch. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with this, but there are also times when the monkey mind should be put to rest, when we focus on the one thing, the one Person, that matters most of all. Such focus may not come easily. St Francis de Sales said that if during a half-hour period of meditation all one did was keep gently moving one's attention back to God, that would still be a worthy period of prayer.

With faithful perseverance, however, a steadier attentiveness to the Lord will come about, especially if at other times throughout the day one has allowed good and noble thoughts to enter one's awareness. Cassian, astute psychologist that he was, rightly noted that "What we wish to be while praying, we ought to be before we begin to pray. The praying mind cannot help being fashioned by its earlier condition, cannot help its earlier thoughts either lifting it upward to heaven or pulling it downward to earth." This helps explain the emphasis that Benedict gives to holy reading, *lectio divina*, in the horarium of his disciples. That, however, would be the topic for a whole new article. For now, may we all take to heart the words of an anonymous Coptic Orthodox monk who insisted: "One must learn how to become quiet in the midst of all the inner movement in our lower nature.... Meditation is the heart of civilization."

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB



Easter vigil at
St Anselm's Abbey

Jews and Catholics, from Then till Now: The Trajectory of Catholic Antisemitism and Recovery

I. The Problem

A. Early History

It is well known that problems existed between the newly emerging Christian movement and the Jewish ground from which it sprang. Leaving aside for the moment the opposition between Jesus and the Jewish officials of his time, we read early of the lynching of Stephen (Acts 7). And though it was Herod who put James to death, we are told that this pleased “the Jews” (Acts 12:2). The early chapters of Acts are too rife with accounts of Jewish officials hassling the apostles for preaching the resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem to require documentation.

When Christian missionaries extended their reach to more distant areas, opposition soon arose. When they had success at Antioch, we are told “the Jews” stirred up a persecution that forced them to leave, and the same scenario is repeated in place after place.¹ It should be noted that those Jews who opposed the Christian movement did not consider themselves fighting a new religion, but rather opposing an aberration within Judaism: a matter of bringing heretics back into line.

Fast forward to a time when Christianity is well established, has even become a *religio licita*. Christians are now in the majority and have control of the power structure; we hear of discrimination against Jews, even pogroms at the hand of Christians. How did this come about, so absolutely contrary to Jesus’ law of love for all?

¹ Acts 9:23; 13:45,50; 14:1-2; 17:5,13.

B. New Testament

Was the New Testament antisemitic? I would hesitate to call it antisemitic as such, but it certainly laid some foundations, planted some seeds from which hatred of Jews grew up.

Paul, the earliest contributor to the New Testament, was certainly not hostile to the Jews. Though in the first of his letters, Paul speaks of the Thessalonians suffering at the hands of Jews “who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us” and claims that “the wrath of God has finally begun to come upon them” (1 Thess 2:14-16), this is not typical of him. Paul boasts of his Jewish ancestry and his training as a Pharisee. In Romans, especially, he exalts the Jewish prerogatives (“Jew first, and then Greek”: 1:16; 2:9); “theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants...the promises; theirs the patriarchs, and from them...is the Messiah” (9:4-5). Although he sees that a “hardening” has come upon Israel, this is only “until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and thus all Israel will be saved.” And he goes on to conclude: “For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (11:25-29).

The case is less clear with the gospels. There was obvious friction between Jesus and his disciples with the Pharisees and other leading Jewish groups, who accused them of not keeping the Sabbath and other Jewish observances, of consorting with sinners, etc. This again could be termed inter-religious dispute; there certainly were other Jews who ate without washing their hands, who were less careful than Jesus and his disciples in keeping the Sabbath, and who deplored hypocrisy and

avarice wherever they saw it. But we are also told that his critics accused Jesus of casting out demons “by the prince of demons” (Matt 9:34; 12:24), and that on occasions they plotted to have him put to death (Matt 12:14; Mark 3:6). And some of Jesus’ criticisms of the Pharisees seem to include all in that group rather than the worst of them. See Matthew 23:13-36, with its five-fold “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,” a passage in which he calls them a “brood of vipers” and says the righteous blood shed upon the earth will come upon “this generation.” Matthew reports Pilate as declaring himself innocent of the blood of Jesus, to which “the whole people said in reply, ‘His blood be upon us and upon our children’”² (Matt 27:25).

John’s gospel comes up for special criticism. It is beyond dispute that only some of the Jewish leaders were complicit in the death of Jesus, as reported in the synoptic gospels, but John’s gospel habitually uses the term “the Jews”³ and thus gives the impression that all Jews were guilty. So also the Johannine Jesus indicates some Jews are children of the devil because they are seeking to kill him (John 8:44). In Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 there is word of some who claim to be Jews and are not, but are members of the synagogue of Satan.⁴ The meaning of the text is unclear. It is suggested that the “Jews” are Christians claiming to be the true Israel, but falsely because of unchristian behavior.

It would be accurate to distinguish between polemic aimed at Judaism (as a religion) rather than at the Jews, but in any case some parts of the New Testament were the seed-bed from which much anti-Judaism sprang.

C. Fathers of the Church and Popes

Most Catholics would be appalled to learn that some Church Fathers and Popes were guilty of antisemitism, but it is true. Without going into detail it can be said that among those who manifest anti-Jewish sentiments can be numbered St Ambrose, St Augustine, St John Chrysostom, and St Jerome. The basis for hostility was the conviction that all Jews bear the blame for the death of Christ (deicide). John Chrysostom is especially known for a series of eight homilies which have been labeled “Against the Jews.” In the first of these he says the Jews have become dogs.⁵ Since they crucified the Son, “Who should not make bold to declare plainly that the synagogue is a dwelling of demons? God is not worshipped.... From now on it remains a place of idolatry.” Without justification, he accuses Jews of his day for the crimes which Jeremiah attributes to his own contemporaries.

² The occasion of the so-called “blood guilt,” to be considered later.

³ Thus some translators would prefer to render the term “Jewish officials.” This would be true to history but not to John’s diction.

⁴ NAB/NABRE translate “assembly of Satan,” though the Greek *synagōgē* they elsewhere translate as “synagogue.”

⁵ This is a reversal from Jesus’ encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), in which he labeled her people “dogs” compared to the Jews, who were “children.”

During the middle ages Jews were the victims of many prohibitions and restrictions, even from trades needed to earn a livelihood. Some of this was incorporated into Church documents, thereby making antisemitism a quasi-official Church position. At the Fourth Lateran Council, Canon 68 required Jews to wear special clothing to distinguish them from Christians, and Canon 69 disqualified them from holding public offices.

In 1555 Pope Paul IV issued the papal bull *Cum nimis absurdum*, which speaks of Jews as those “who through their own fault were condemned by God to eternal slavery.” He placed many restrictions on Jews in the Papal States. Among other measures, he established the Roman Ghetto and required all Jews in Rome to live there. His successors Pius IV and Pius V extended the ghetto system to Italian towns and bordering states. At various times Jews were not allowed to own property and were restricted to the most menial kind of occupations.

On the credit side, Callixtus II issued the papal bull *Sicut Judaeis* (ca. 1120), which was intended to protect Jews; this came after 5,000 Jews had been slaughtered by Christians in the First Crusade. Callixtus emphasized that Jews were entitled to “enjoy their lawful liberty”: it forbade harming them, taking their property, or disturbing their celebrations. It was reaffirmed by almost a score of later popes.

D. “Popular” Antisemitism

However, such decrees could not save Jews from what can be termed “popular” antisemitism, which flourished to a dreadful degree. Jews became the objects of hatred through false accusations, such as spreading plagues, poisoning wells, and drinking the blood of innocent children. This was often on the accusations of deicide or “blood guilt.” Notable are the Rhineland Massacres (1096) which can be characterized as pogroms.

E. Expulsions by Catholic Rulers

Of the many expulsions can be noted the Edict of Expulsion of Edward I, king of England (1290), a result of the Black Death persecutions, as Christians accused Jews of causing or spreading the plague. In 1492 Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castille required all Jews in their dominions either to convert to Christianity or leave.

The Reformation was not innocent of this taint. Luther, for example, argued at one point in his life that Jewish synagogues and schools should be set on fire, their money and property should be confiscated, no mercy or kindness should be shown them.⁶

F. The Holocaust (Shoah)

And so we come to Nazi antisemitism, which Hitler justified in part with reference to Catholic treatment of them “for fifteen hundred years, putting them in ghettos, etc.”⁷ The Nazis also cited Luther’s *On the Jews and their*

⁶ *On the Jews and Their Lies (Von den Jüden und ihren Lügen)*, treatise written by Luther in 1543.

⁷ Transcript of his meeting with Bishop Wilhelm Berning, April 26, 1933.

Lies. Hans Küng rightly remarked, "Nazi anti-Judaism was the work of godless, anti-Christian criminals. But it would not have been possible without the almost two thousand years' pre-history of 'Christian' anti-Judaism which prevented Christians in Germany from organizing a convinced and energetic resistance on a broad front."⁸ Thus the hatred, contempt, and stereotyping of past ages bear a responsibility for the "Holocaust."⁹

II. Toward a Solution

(Although other Christian groups have taken steps toward overcoming antisemitism, we will be concerned here only with steps taken by Catholics.)

A. Vatican II: *Nostra aetate*

This document is Vatican II's Declaration on the Relation of the Church with non-Christian Religions. It acknowledges that "the beginnings of [the Church's] faith and her election are already found among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets," that "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or the calls He issues." It is at pains to explicitly reject grounds most often viewed as arguments for hatred of Jews (charge of deicide). It states that while Jewish authorities pressed for the death of Jesus, his death cannot be charged to all the Jews contemporary with him, much less to Jews of succeeding ages. "Although the Church is the new people of God,¹⁰ the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God" (No. 4). It further states that "the Church reproves...any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion" (No. 5).

In 1971 the Church established the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison as a formal structure to promote ongoing dialogues between Catholics and Jews called for in *Nostra aetate*. The group met in 1971, 1972, and 1973, and from those meetings came the suggestion to create in the Vatican a Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, which Pope Paul VI did in 1974.

B. Preaching and Catechesis

One of the important documents to emerge from this commission was "Notes on the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church." It stressed the need for teachers to be well-founded in knowledge of Jews and Judaism, whose presence there is essential and should be organically well-integrated in catechesis. Because of our bond with Judaism, the events of the Old Testament concern not only Jews but touch us personally. The Church and Judaism cannot be seen as two parallel ways

of salvation; the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all.

C. Sacred Scripture

In 2002 the Pontifical Biblical Commission produced "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible," a major work of over one hundred pages. No specific explanation is given for this complex document, but in the Introduction we read: "The question which is asked is the following: What relation does the Christian Bible establish between Christians and the Jewish people?" The answer is "many close relations." The first is that the Christian Bible is composed, for the greater part, of the Hebrew Scriptures; a second reason is that the properly Christian books are themselves formed in close relationship to the Hebrew Bible. There is conformity because the New Testament is written from the conviction that the Jewish Scriptures must be fulfilled because they reveal the plan of God; thus many elements in the New Testament are declared to be fulfillment of the Scriptures. Christianity came to birth in the bosom of the Jewish community. The NT recognizes and accepts the OT as the word of God, builds on it and points back to it.

The document recognizes that the NT contains harsh criticism of some first century Jewish practices but it demonstrates at length that the OT prophets excoriated Israel for similar practices. Of special interest are guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture relevant to Jewish-Christian relations. The "proof-texting" approach is frowned upon because some apologists judge that the Jews who reject conclusions that are obvious to the apologists are in bad faith. In this line: "Christian faith recognizes the fulfillment, in Christ, of the Scriptures and the hopes of Israel, but does not understand this fulfillment as a literal one....[It] is brought about in a manner unforeseen....[Jesus] confers, on the notions of Messiah and salvation, a fulness which could not have been imagined in advance....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" (paragraph 21).

D. A Document from the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews

"'The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra aetate' (No. 4)." This Vatican document, commemorating a great milestone of Vatican II, takes its title from a phrase in Romans which had already been quoted several times in the document just discussed. This one looks more specifically at what might be called the "ecclesial" relationship between the two faiths. It reviews the impact of *Nostra aetate* over the

⁸ *On Being a Christian* (Doubleday: Garden City, 1976), p. 169.

⁹ The term preferred by Jews for Hitler's attempt to obliterate them is Shoah (literally, "storm," "destruction," "ruin"), but here we use the more familiar term.

¹⁰ Such a statement would promote the view called "supersessionism"; see below on the document "The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable."

last fifty years, an impact which it terms “a new direction of the Catholic Church” (par. 1), for “Judaism is not to be considered simply as another religion; the Jews are instead our “elder brothers” (par. 14). “Jews and Christians have the same mother and can be seen, as it were, as two siblings who...have developed in different directions....The first Christians were Jews [it speaks of their observance, including circumcision, and notes that with Paul other horizons were opened up that transcend Christianity’s Jewish origins], therefore there were two groups—the so-called Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, one Church originating from Judaism, the other from the Gentiles—who, however, together constituted the one and only Church of Jesus Christ” (par. 15).

It is of great importance that this document rejects “supersessionism,” the approach that asserts the prerogatives of Israel (promises and commitments from God) have been transferred to the Church of Jesus Christ, which was now the true “new Israel,” the truly chosen people of God. This approach, which sets the Church of the Gentiles against the Synagogue as two separate entities, has been gradually transformed, after Vatican II, into a constructive dialogue relationship (par. 17). The Jewish-Christian dialogue should be regarded as intra-religious or inter-familial dialogue rather than interreligious dialogue, the Jewish religion being, in a certain way, intrinsic to our own religion (par. 20). The Church does not replace the people of God of Israel since as the community founded on Christ, it represents in him the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel (par. 23).

There are not two paths to salvation (e.g., Jews hold

the Torah, Christians hold to Christ), but there are two ways by which God’s people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own. The Church proclaims that Christ’s work of salvation is universal and involves all mankind. God’s word is a single reality, though it takes concrete form in each respective historical context (par. 25). There can be only one single covenant of the history of God with humankind; so in the cases of the covenants of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the new and eternal one promised by the prophets, each incorporates the previous one and interprets it in a new way. This is true also of the New Covenant which, in Christian faith, is the final eternal covenant, fulfilling the promises of the Old Covenant (par. 32).

The Church therefore considers evangelization to Jews differently from that to people of other religions. The Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed toward Jews (par. 40).

Conclusion

If some New Testament passages laid a foundation for antisemitism, succeeding generations exploited them beyond measure. What is evil in human nature seized on these passages as excuses to indulge every kind of hatred and phobia. This was not done by Catholics alone, but Catholics helped spread it to others. We can perhaps conceive of this history “from then till now” as an inverted parabola with the holocaust (Shoah) as the vertex. Perhaps the shock of that helped reverse the direction. With *Nostra aetate* (1965) of Vatican II (1962-65) a new direction was charted, and these later documents strive to lay a new foundation so that any return to the old ways would be inconceivable.

JOSEPH JENSEN, OSB



Annual Meeting of North American Benedictine Superiors

Every year the abbots of Benedictine monasteries in North America, along with the priors of independent monasteries, are invited to a workshop that takes place two weekends before the beginning of Lent, and usually between thirty-five and forty of these superiors are able to attend. The location is regularly at some abbey in the southern part of the United States so as to avoid problems with winter blizzards. This year the meeting was held from February 2-5 at St Joseph Abbey in Covington, Louisiana, about an hour's drive north of New Orleans.

Those attending were housed in the abbey's Christian Life Center, which had recently been thoroughly and attractively renovated after serious flooding in March, 2016 during a period of torrential rains. In fact, that storm did extensive damage throughout the monastery and the college seminary that the monks conduct. The seminary library had been so badly flooded, with thousands of books ruined, that the community has undertaken the construction of a new, three-story library, due to be finished sometime this year. Wisely, all the books will now be kept on the second and third floors, with temporary exhibitions on display on the ground floor.

As usual, the weekend was part-business and part-retreat. Three major presentations were given by Br John Mark Falkenheim, a monk of St Meinrad Archabbey who has a degree in clinical psychology and has in the past served as his abbey's vocation director. His three talks, accompanied by PowerPoint slides that he also distributed as handouts so as to obviate the need for his listeners to take many written notes, all dealt with promoting a "culture of vocations" within our communities. Drawing on research done by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, which is headquartered here in Washington, DC, Br John Mark emphasized that the main things that young people are seeking in religious communities today are clarity and distinctiveness of a community's charism, a strong focus on communal life, priority given to the spiritual life and prayer, fidelity to Church teaching, a "balanced placement" of work in the life of the community, and a strong formation for celibacy.

On Sunday morning, Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, who had been abbot of Conception Abbey in Missouri before being elected primate last fall, gave a very thoughtful presentation on the place of stability in Benedictine life. He subsequently agreed to a request to have this included in an upcoming issue of the *American Benedictine Review* so that many others besides those present that morning will be able to read and ponder his words. His talk was

followed by a report from Fr Mauritius Wilde, the newly named prior at Sant' Anselmo in Rome. Fr Mauritius gave a thorough report on such matters as the considerable progress that has been made on strategic planning for the academic life at Sant' Anselmo and the need for funds both for Benedictine students from developing countries and for renovating the *collegio's* guest wing.

While most of the meals were eaten in the dining area of the Christian Life Center, there was a concluding banquet in the monastic refectory on Sunday evening, featuring world-renowned New Orleans cuisine in a space enhanced by some of the murals of Gregory de Wit,



Gregory de Wit's Good Shepherd presides over the refectory at St Joseph Abbey in Cullman, Alabama.

a monk of Mont Cesar in Belgium who did much artistic work at St Joseph in the 1950s. At past workshops at this abbey, usually held there every three years in rotation with the abbeys in Cullman, Alabama and Oceanside, California, there had regularly been an optional outing into New Orleans, but the previous trip three years ago encountered such horrendous traffic jams because Mardi Gras parades had already begun that it was decided to forgo a trip into the city that Sunday. Those abbots who wished to stay for one extra day had the opportunity to visit New Orleans' World War II museum on Monday, but about half of those in attendance, including myself, chose to return to their own monasteries that day. Next year we will meet at St Bernard Abbey in Cullman, Alabama, a joint meeting with Benedictine prioresses from the four federations of Benedictine Sisters in the United States.

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

The Benedictine Vow of *Conversatio Morum*

I recently read a blog post that stated (in part), “change is the only constant in the universe.” That got me thinking about my vows as a Benedictine monk and about how my vows are different from those of the Franciscans, Dominicans and countless other religious communities who take vows of “poverty, chastity and obedience,” or as a Franciscan long ago put it to me: “no money, no honey, no job.” This article will be the first of three that will unpack what the Benedictine vows are and what differentiates us from our brothers and sisters in consecrated life whose vows are a later development of what St Benedict prescribed for his monks and nuns in the sixth century. The Benedictine vows are obedience, stability and *conversatio morum*, and the topic for this article is the vow of *conversatio* because it lines up well with the idea that “change is the only constant in the universe.”

Change is everywhere but remains a perennial riddle of human existence. The ancient Greeks wrestled with this and in the third century BC, Heraclitus, “the philosopher of change,” opined that permanence is an illusion: “Everything changes and nothing remains still... You cannot step into the same river twice.” You go into a river, come out, and go into it again, but what you are now immersed in is different than what you experienced by your previous foray into the water because what you first walked into is by now already down-stream. I am presently in a different reality than I was in not long before. So, for Heraclitus and to many in our present age, permanence is an illusion. All is change.

One hundred and fifty years after Heraclitus, Aristotle took up this topic in his *Metaphysics*, where he addressed the question, “How much of the acorn is left in the oak tree?” This and similar philosophical questions were addressed by Socrates and Plato, who enlarged on earlier thinkers’ understanding of man’s place in the cosmos. Aristotle’s answer to the “acorn in the oak tree” question employs terms such as “actuality, potentiality, *telos*, material cause and formal cause,” but for our purposes, let us accept that in our own age, we still have to wrestle with the ancient question about man’s place in a world constantly in motion.

If all is change, then on a personal level, one can ask, “Am I the same person I was last year? Five years ago? Ten years ago? At my baptism? Especially for one who professes belief in Jesus Christ: Am I growing in my true identity as a son or daughter of God? Or, am I living a lie, allowing myself to be conformed to every whim and temptation of my fallen nature?” To borrow the marketing slogan for a popular sports shoe and clothing company, do I “Just do it” and then rationalize my actions as not all that bad because everyone’s doing it? Who am I hurting anyway? Don’t be a prude! This isn’t as bad as this, that, or the other that is much worse! But then the Holy Spirit brings to mind the words of St Paul’s letter to the Romans: “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is

what I do.... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:19, 25). These words bring us to pray Psalm 51:4, “Against You alone have I sinned; what is evil in your sight I have done,” and as Catholics we make our way to confession!

What does this tell us about change and St Benedict’s vows? If change is constant, then I, too, can change my ways and strive for holiness. St Benedict knew this and for this reason, he gave us *conversatio morum*, a vow that is less a promise and more of a “rubric.” Because the Latin term does not readily lend itself to a simple English translation, scholars normally say that it simply refers to the way of monastic life handed down by the tradition. It is an act of the will that says, “I want my life to change” by conforming to the disciplines and customs that have developed over the centuries of Christian monastic practice. But *conversatio morum* is not limited to persons living in consecrated religious communities. Anyone who takes the spiritual life seriously can benefit from traditional monastic practices such as praying the Liturgy of the Hours, practicing *lectio divina* (“divine reading”), praying the rosary or setting aside time each day for silent contemplation. Each day I can make a change to go deeper in my prayer life so that I might grow more open to my true self.

Our monastic observances and pious devotions set us apart from “the rest of the world,” and we live a life as is summed up in Acts 2:42, when the members of the early Church were those who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” That aptly describes life in the monastery. Our way of life is distinctive and radically different from what one finds “in the world.” This is why Rod Dreher’s *The Benedict Option* is so popular. David Brooks writing in the *New York Times* describes this book as “the most discussed and most important religious book of the decade.” Dreher, writing about the societal change that has been taking place since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, argues that we are not all that different from people in sixth-century Italy, when Benedict first fled Rome to live in a cave. In this flight from the world (*fuga mundi* in Latin), Benedict was following the monks of the Eastern desert tradition, who were themselves following Jesus, who in John 17:14 said, “I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” St Paul takes up this idea in Romans 12:2 when he says that we must “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of [our] mind[s], that [we] may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

To be transformed, then is to change. But is change indeed the “only constant in the universe?” Before answering that question we will have to reflect on the Benedictine vow of stability. My thoughts on that will appear in the next issue of our abbey newsletter—stay tuned!

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Editorial Board: Abbot James Wiseman, OSB; Matthew Nylund, OSB; Alessandra Styles.*

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