Rituals of Reconciliation? How Consideration of Ritual Can Inform Readings of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue After the Holocaust

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Reconciliation is ... a form of normative theory, being bound up with notions of peace-making, positive transformation, toleration, atonement and harmony, that to critique it risks a charge of illiberalism, if not nihilism.
—Jacques Derrida (2001)

INTRODUCTION

The study of Jewish-Christian dialogue is primarily the study of documents. There is a standard history that is traced from the 1947 Seeligsberg Ecumenical Address to the twin publications, in 2015, of the Vatican document “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable” and the Orthodox Rabbinical statement “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven.” The accepted narrative goes something like this: Jews and Christians have existed for millennia side by side in mutual antipathy until
the Holocaust made clear that a lack of understanding and dialogue between the two religions had led to an unsustainable state of conflict; in the wake of that shattering event, a dialogue was opened up, and slowly Jews and Christians have built relationships of mutual trust that have been beneficial to the understanding of all concerned. When the history is approached in this manner, ritual performances tend to be read as supplementary to, and confirmatory of, the doctrinal positions expressed in the document record.

One advantage of investigating interreligious exchange through the lens of ritual is that it permits attention to a range of extra-textual phenomena such as tone, gesture, pacing, costume, and locatedness, which are capable of adding nuance to, or even subverting, a textual tradition. In the case of post-Holocaust reconciliation, it is worth considering whether and to what degree a consideration of ritual alters the conclusions that can be drawn from the record of church documents. In this chapter, I will explore particular practices that have emerged in the context of post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian dialogue, reading them as instances of interrituality and analyzing the extent to which their interrorting advances the project of reconciliation. I will focus on three key areas of activity: the production of documents themselves, which, according to me, serves to protect the doctrinal position of the Christian churches and bracket ecclesial responsibility; the entry of Pope John Paul II into Jewish spaces (the synagogue in Rome and the Western Wall), during which he employed the ambiguity of nonverbal communication to nuance and potentially subvert the positions articulated explicitly in doctrinal documents; and, finally, liturgy, which carries the outcome of the positions developed through the dialogue process into the day-to-day life of religious adherents. In so doing I will show how ritualization functions, in a previously unacknowledged way, to both advance and constrain the project of dialogue and how greater attention to ritual as a site of specifically interreligious meaning-making is necessary to the further study of the dialogue process.

THE RITUALIZED PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS AND THE PROTECTION OF DOCTRINE

In the wake of the Holocaust, Christian churches in the West began a long process of reflection on what role Christian teachings about Judaism played in enabling, or even promoting, the genocide of European Jews. The first official document addressing the issue of Christian complicity in Nazi rule, the 1945 Stuttgart Declaration, says nothing at all directly about the Holocaust or Jews, but focuses on "the mentality that found its awful expression in the National Socialist regime of violence"; the emphasis of the declaration is on intra-Christian reconciliation between German and non-German churches. The earliest document addressing the Holocaust, the 1947 Seelisberg ecumenical address, went to some pains to bracket the Church from any direct theological responsibility, characterizing the Holocaust as an outbreak of racial violence in clear contradiction to Christian teaching:

"The Christian Churches have indeed always affirmed the un-Christian character of antisemitism, as of all forms of racial hatred, but this has not sufficed to prevent the manifestation among Christians, in various forms, of an undiscriminating racial hatred of the Jews as a people. This would have been impossible if all Christians had been true to the teaching of Jesus Christ on the mercy of God and love of one's neighbour. But this faithfulness should also involve clear-sighted willingness to avoid any presentation and conception of the Christian message which would support antisemitism under whatever form. We must recognize, unfortunately, that this vigilant willingness has often been lacking. (Cited in Rittner et al. 2000, p. 245)"

While the ten points of action that conclude the Seelisberg document address pastoral actions against anti-Semitism (e.g., "Remember that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother ... Avoid using the word Jews in the exclusive sense of the enemies of Jesus"), the framing of the document presents these as doctrinal lapses, points at which certain members of the Church have departed from the purity of Christ's teachings; if the Church as a whole has erred, it is through inattention to such occasional slips. The "notion that the Jewish people are reprobate, accursed, reserved for a destiny of suffering" is marked out as a mere superstition that, again, the recipients of the address are enjoined to avoid.

It may appear odd to open a consideration of rituals of reconciliation with this review of church documents, but I propose that the production and dissemination itself of these documents takes on the character of a ritual: at regular intervals, now often linked to particular anniversaries (the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and the 50th anniversary of Nostra Aetate have provided recent examples), a document will be drafted, circulated for comment, and formally released. A distinct set of patterns can be discerned across the corpus of such statements, and there is a decidedly performative element to their drafting, discussion, and
release—although not markedly more so than the ritual surrounding the construction of any other official church document. While the main ritual actors are Christian clergy, in recent years Jewish representatives have been invited, with increasing frequency, to comment on draft versions of such documents, and some aspects of their feedback are incorporated into the final document. If we are able to read the construction of the document within a ritual framework, then such invitations to comment represent a clear introduction of an interreligious element—and, moreover, a case in which the introduction of interreligious practice may actually transform the practice of the churches that embrace it. This transformative potential may be seen in, for example, the 2015 document, “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable: A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of ‘Nostra Aetate’ (No. 4),” which frames the history of Catholic statements about Jews since the Holocaust as a gradual process of reconciliation and repudiates certain aspects of theological anti-Judaism and especially any direct mission to the Jews, while still upholding the importance of Christian witness.¹

It is notable, however, that very few of these post-Holocaust documents—including the ones that have been drafted with Jewish participation—contain any language that might be construed as confession or apology for Church teachings about Jews and Judaism. The question of whether the adversus iudaeos tradition, which presents Judaism as the mirror-twin to Christianity (Levine 2006, p. 12),² is a superstitious outgrowth of Christian doctrine badly understood or an inescapable influence on the formation of Christianity as it exists today (even if Christianity has now developed beyond that foundation) remains a matter of academic dispute, but nearly every official document on Jewish-Christian relations, from Seeligson onward, treats it as a matter so settled it barely bears mentioning: the fault lies in bad actors, not bad doctrine. Instead, they employ the form of a confession in order to subvert it—by “confessing” to the actions of individuals, these documents on the whole serve to shift the focus away from the churches themselves and thereby to avoid any serious examination of problematic doctrine.

“We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” is a particularly apt example of this tendency, presenting the emergence of anti-Semitism in the passive voice (“theories began to appear which denied the unity of the human race, affirming an original diversity of races”), as something that occurred “[d]espite the Christian preaching of love for all, even for one’s enemies.” It follows the pattern of emphasizing individual actions of resistance as representative of the Church as a whole, while recognizing that “alongside such courageous men and women, the spiritual resistance and concrete action of other Christians was not that which might have been expected from Christ’s followers” and “deeply regret[ting] the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the Church.” The possibility of an error in doctrine, rather than in the way that doctrine is interpreted and lived by individuals acting outside the guidance of the Church, simply cannot be admitted.

The main exceptions to this general pattern of deploiring the actions of individuals in order to protect the doctrinal position of the Church as a whole are statements from churches in the Lutheran tradition, although these wrestle very specifically with Luther’s legacy,³ in a manner that enables other denominations to gloss over issues in their own theology by

¹ The issue of mission to the Jews is a useful barometer of Christian post-Holocaust repentance because the repudiation of anti-Semitism as merely a racial crime permits churches to sidestep any reflection on the history of the spiritual violence of forced conversion. As I wrote in Making Memory: “[I]t has become popular for Christian theologians to draw a distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, between objecting to the Jewish faith as incapable of providing redemption, and objecting to Jews as people incapable of being redeemed. However, while the latter leads to Auschwitz, where Jews are permitted their Jewishness—and, indeed, many from assimilated families, whose parents or grandparents may have converted to Christianity, have Jewishness forced, or reinforced, upon them—but can do nothing to save their own bodies, the former leads just as surely to the Inquisition, in which Jews are able, and indeed compelled, to save their bodies at the cost of their souls, through conversion and assimilation. What Rother and others who make this distinction and treat anti-Judaism as the lesser of two evils (though still evil) fail to grasp is that both anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism attack Jews at the very core of their being, and aim to rob them of a vital component of selfhood. The distinction to be drawn, then, is not between what each does, that one is more damaging or less escapable than the other, but rather the way that each does it” (Vincent 2013, pp. 182–83).


³ For example, Seventh General Convention of the American Lutheran Church (1974; Lutheran World Federation 1975; Lutheran World Federation 1985; Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 2017, pp. 47–48)—though not that this statement represents a massive change of position from the EKD’s earliest statement, the 1948 “Message Concerning the Jewish Question,” reprinted in Hockenos (2004, pp. 195–97), which I might charitably describe as a textbook primer in theological anti-Judaism, and less charitably—and more colloquially—as a hot mess.
perpetuating the narrative of anti-Semitism as a particularity of Lutheranism.\textsuperscript{4} The confession of the churches, broadly interpreted, amounts to this: “We are sorry for what was done by those like us, who share the same beliefs as us, although we maintain that those beliefs were misunderstood and, most importantly, the people who performed the acts for which we now apologise were in fact not us.” The repeated, ritualized repetition of this confession ensures that the emphasis falls not on the guilt or contrition but on the ultimate innocence of the Church.

**SPACE**

In contrast to the ritualized production of documents, which utilizes the forms and language of confession to protect the innocence of Christian doctrine and the power the Church derives from that innocence, there is a set of symbolic actions focused on the occupation of physical space in which the Church can be seen to cede some of that power. In this section, I will focus on two particular performances made by Pope John Paul II in which the placement of his body in space carried symbolic meaning that appeared to cede a great deal of the power that the doctrinal documents are designed to protect.

In 1986, Pope John Paul II delivered an address to the Jewish community in Rome, in which he glossed *Nostra Aetate*, building on its rather lukewarm gestures toward a single-covenant theology\textsuperscript{5} to produce the frequently quoted statement that “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” (Pope John Paul II 1986). Beyond providing a gloss that has colored interpretations of *Nostra Aetate* ever since, the 1986 speech was also a significant ritual gesture. The occasion of its delivery was the first time a Pope visited a synagogue. Hospitality has become a key concept in interreligious dialogue, but it frequently operates on a conceptual, linguistic level (Cornille 2013, p. xiii)\textsuperscript{6} and not much attention is given in the field to the mostly unspoken politics of space. Spatial protocols generally dictate that even in the context of an amicable relationship, the party with greater power is entitled to host the party with lesser power. This ensures that the customs, protocols, and power of the host are foregrounded, placing the guest in the position of a supplicant, dependent on the host’s goodwill in order to navigate unfamiliar territory. And so, the thaw in relations following the publication of *Nostra Aetate* saw an increase in Jewish representatives welcomed to the Vatican, but no practice of mutual visitation.\textsuperscript{7} The 1986 visit represented a symbolic ceding of power on the part of the Catholic Church, in which the Pope relinquished the comprehensive rethinking of Catholic theological attitudes toward Judaism. The idea of a bilateral relationship between Judaism and Christianity is almost entirely absent; *Nostra Aetate* is concerned with making a small adjustment to theology of religion—which had the consequence of making dialogue possible—rather than with setting out a structured program of dialogue to be immediately pursued.

\textsuperscript{4}The problems with treating the Holocaust as a uniquely German sin are discussed in Vincent (2017, pp. 187–204).

\textsuperscript{5} Readers who have been brought up in the tradition of *Nostra Aetate* as representing what Gilbert Rosenthal and others have termed a “Copernican revolution” in Jewish-Christian dialogue (see Rosenthal 2014) are likely to object to this characterization but without wishing to dispute the very wide gap between the theological and social attitudes that preceded the publication of *Nostra Aetate* and those that followed it. I refer these readers to the text of the document itself. It is as much at pains to emphasize the role of “the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead” in the death of Christ as it is to note that “what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today.” The idea of the Church as “the new people of God”—still carrying a whiff of supersessionism, albeit much more faint than that in Faulhaber’s homily quoted below—is given equal weight with the admonishment that “the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accused by God.” One would not wish to underestimate the importance of the statements on Jewish collective guilt in Article 4, and it is these statements that are most frequently cited in discussions of the impact of *Nostra Aetate*. But they occupy a relatively small space within the document as a whole, and even in Article 4 the emphasis falls more on a repudiation of discrimination on the broad grounds of human dignity than on a

\textsuperscript{6}See, for example, Cornille (2013, p. xiii): “[D]ialogue presupposes some degree of humility about one’s own conception of truth and a certain receptivity, even hospitality, to the truth of the other.” Marianne Moyaert has argued for hospitality to extend beyond the conceptual domain and into the practical, but in so doing she acknowledges that its normative use does not refer to an actual practice: “There is also a sense that dialogical openness, or interreligious hospitality, cannot come to full fruition if one is not prepared to receive ‘the other’ in one’s house of worship” (2014, p. 223). See also Moyaert (2011, pp. 95–108; 2008, pp. 337–64).

\textsuperscript{7} When considering *Nostra Aetate* as a document of Jewish-Christian *reconciliation*, it is important to keep in mind that there was a considerable gap between the liberation of the camps (including the release of photographic evidence bringing the reality of the Holocaust into public awareness) in 1945 and the appearance of the Holocaust as a substantive theme in Christian theology. Notwithstanding the Stuttgart Declaration (1945), the 10 Points of Seeligberg (1947), and the condemnation of anti-Semitism published by the Protestant World Council of Churches (1948), *Nostra Aetate* is still located very early in the development of Christian engagement with Judaism in response to the Holocaust. See also Rittner et al. (2000).
ceremonial authority derived from ownership of the space of encounter—a gesture that has yet to be replicated in any official document of dialogue and which in fact continues to be guarded against even in the most recent documents. Gesture thus opens up a world of significance that verbal discourse cannot entertain.

This symbolism was reinforced by John Paul II’s use of Hebrew in his address. He closed with a formal quotation from Psalm 118, which he deliberately presented in Hebrew, “in [the Psalmist’s] original language which is also your [the Jewish community’s] own inheritance,” emphasizing Jewish co-ownership of the shared scriptural tradition. More interestingly, the use of the Hebrew phrase todah rabah (thank you) in his opening remarks signaled an attempt to engage with Jewish culture on a human level. It was the gesture of the tourist who approaches a foreign city with no command of the language save for a few stock phrases memorized more for the sake of indicating good will than from any hope of fluent communication—it signaled both an awareness of outsideness and a willingness to try to get along.

Rituals derive their power through repetition with variation; often, it is subtle shifts in the staging of a ritual that convey the deepest meaning. John Paul II’s positioning of his body in Jewish space was not a one-time event; he repeated the same ceding of spatial power in his visit to Jerusalem in 2000. Nina Fischer’s contribution to this volume discusses in detail how Pope Francis’s adoption of the posture typical of visitors to the Western Wall at the separation barrier surrounding Bethlehem functions as a signal of political support for Palestine and the extent to which this signal depends on previous knowledge of the posture adopted by Pope John Paul II on his first visit to the wall and repeated by every Pope who has visited since. The adoption of this posture at the Western Wall followed on from the Pope kneeling in prayer during a visit to Auschwitz in 1979. That gesture was, in turn, borrowed from the German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s gesture of penitence at the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1970—although the choices of both Brandt and John Paul II to kneel, performing a traditional Christian bodily posture of prayer and penitence, meant that their gestures on those occasions were much more transparent to Christian audiences. Certainly, Brandt’s kniefall had a much more significant impact on relations between Germany and Eastern Bloc countries such as Poland than on any particular Jewish community (Borneman 2005; Swart 2008).

John Paul II’s repetition of the prayer gesture, with the variation in his choice of a traditionally Jewish (standing) posture, signals an acceptance of Jewish prayer posture—and therefore Jewish prayer—as religiously valid. Moreover, this performance at the location of the Western Wall signals an acknowledgment of the holiness of the place, a gestural repudiation of supersessionist theology that maintained that, at the moment of Christ’s death, “the curtain in the Temple in Zion tore [Matt 27:51] and with it the covenant between the Lord and his people.” The gestural acknowledgment of the validity of Judaism’s view of the holy aligns with John Paul II’s 1986 statement to the Jewish Community in Rome.

**Liturgy**

The documents I considered at the opening of this chapter frame their confessions around a historical failure to recognize the essential bond between Judaism and Christianity, and the rituals of reconciliation that have followed on from these confessions have been targeted at rectifying this failure. This has led to an increased emphasis on a single, coherent salvation story that incorporates both Judaism and Christianity—the “Judeo-Christian tradition.” In this last section, I will examine the way Catholic liturgy has itself been transformed in an effort to embed this single coherent salvation story within the everyday ritual life of the Church. Far more than doctrinal documents that, by their nature, must be presented as the unified position of the Church, or spatial/gestural signifiers that signal an undermining of the doctrinal position while at the same time carrying the potential of plausible deniability, liturgy is a site of overt contestation.

John Paul II’s visit to the synagogue in Rome occurred shortly after the 1985 release of “Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church” by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, which draws heavily on quotations from previous speeches concerning Catholic-Jewish dialogue given by John Paul II. “Notes” makes a particularly interesting move, citing a 1982 address by John Paul II to delegates of the Episcopal Conferences for relations with Judaism:

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5 This quote comes from a homily delivered by Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber in (1933, quoted in Köhler (1998, pp. 139–57).
To assess [the common patronym of Christianity and Judaism] carefully in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practised still today, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church. (Quoted in “Notes” 1.3)

The original address from which this quotation is taken continues on to discuss, in particular, the “Hebrew roots” of the liturgy. “Notes” discusses issues of covenant and biblical interpretation at some length, but eventually returns to the issue of liturgy, both citing a common (biblical) basis for the liturgy of Christianity and Judaism and noting particular Christian liturgical acts—the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Eucharistic blessings, the Our Father—which it considers to “originate in Judaism” (V.3).

“Notes” was not the first publication of guidance regarding the practical implementation of Nostra Aetate. Immediately following Vatican II, the Roman Missal revised the Good Friday liturgy to remove the traditional prayer for the conversion of the Jews (“that almighty God may remove the veil from their hearts so that they too may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord”), replacing it with language drawn almost straight from Nostra Aetate: “Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant.” In addition to such liturgical revisions, the Commission published “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration ‘Nostra Aetate’ (n.4)” in 1974—but it is considerably longer and more detailed than the “Notes.” Both documents foreground the notion of covenantal continuity between Judaism and Christianity, and both emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus—which was once on a time an issue of theological controversy—as a key principle that must guide the teachings and practice of the Catholic Church.9 “Notes” places particular emphasis on the link between Passover—the key pilgrimage festival in Judaism—and Easter—the liturgical center of the Christian year—as a model for the Church’s new understanding of itself through a close encounter with Judaism.10

Beginning in the 1970s, the Catholic Church encouraged participation in “model Seder” during Holy Week “as a way to better understand the Catholic liturgy—particularly the Eucharist” (Athens 2008, pp. 48-58). The practice has since spread beyond the Catholic Church, and by the time David Novak published Jewish-Christian Dialogue in 1991, it had come to be understood at least partly as a means of building interreligious understanding. The conflation of the two aims, however, is problematic, because it seems to suggest that by understanding the historical Jewish roots of the Catholic liturgy one may also come to a better understanding of contemporary Jewish traditions. This suggestion projects an image of Judaism as somehow frozen in time. To advance interreligious understanding, it is important to take seriously both the concern about the erasure of Jewishness in the New Testament that animated Nostra Aetate and its successor documents and continues to animate much contemporary Jewish New Testament and Historical Jesus scholarship as well as the wide gaps in practice between the Second Temple period and the Rabbinic Judaism that developed over the centuries following the Temple’s destruction. Jesus was a Jew, but modern Judaism is not a straightforward path to understanding his religious worldview—nor is the religion of Jesus the measuring rod for faithful Jewish practice today (see also Arnal 2005, pp. 24-54). Instead, when Christian participation in a Seder is premised on its link to the Christian messiah, Christ is placed at the center of the liturgy. Its essential meaning has shifted. While the new, Christ-centered ritual may be a source of rich religious meaning to its participants, what it decidedly cannot be is a means of gaining understanding of Jewish belief and practice. Instead, the apparent ease with which Christians are able to find Christ in the Seder reinforces participants’ belief in Christianity as a “completed” or “fulfilled” form of Judaism—a belief that Jews who are perfectly satisfied with their current religion as a source of meaning are unlikely to be able to recognize.11

9The debates on the Jewishness of Jesus and the political context in which they were framed are recounted in Heschel (1998) and Heschel (2010). More recently, see the dispute on the translation of sukkait as “Judean” in Levine (2006, pp. 159-165), and on the Marginalia Review of Books forum, especially the contributions by Reinhartz (2014), Reed (2014), and Taylor (2014).

10See also the discussion in Moynert (2016, pp. 137-63).

11Note that this critique does not demand that a Seder meal be constrained to a prescribed form in order to pass a test of authenticity; nor am I suggesting that the presence of non-Jews at a Seder invalidates it. An instructive point of comparison is the Freedom Seder, “a multicultural and interfaith celebration” (Goldbaum 2012) that draws a connection between the ritual retelling of the Exodus story and the American Civil Rights Movement, initially celebrated on the first anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (April 4, 1969; see The Shalom Center 2009). While there is room for dispute on the universalization of the Exodus story, the focus of that Seder is on using the liturgy to create a bond of common experience between the Jewish and African American participants, rather than on
While scholarship over the past several decades has opened the historical narrative of the relationship between Passover and the Eucharist to question, this appears to have had little impact on the use of Passover as the ritual lynchpin between the two traditions. In this instance, then, the liturgical remedy for the perceived wrong of erasing Jewishness from the salvation story still perpetuates the unacknowledged wrong of tolerating Jewishness only insofar as it can be instrumentalized in the advancement of a salvation story whose narrative structure is still determined solely by Christians. The attempt at ritual recognition of the religious other ends instead by perpetuating a misrecognition.

projecting a framework of meaning onto the liturgy that one or the other set of participants are unlikely to recognize (see Waskow 1969).

13 The highly ritualized Seder meal that is practiced today did not begin to emerge until after the destruction of the Second Temple. The modern Seder, on which Christian Seder tend to be based, bears relatively little resemblance to the Passover meals of the first century CE, which, in the accounts given by Josephus and Philo, appear to have been centered around the consumption of a sacrificial feast, accompanied by “prayer and songs of praise”; see Philo, Special Laws II:148, cited in Arnow (2008, p. 17). See also Johnson (2006, p. 44).

A more thorough, albeit slighly dated, weighing of the scriptural evidence in the debate may be found in the first chapter of Jeremiah 1966; while the Synoptic gospels suggest that the Last Supper coincided with Passover, the Gospel of John places it prior to the beginning of the feast, and a number of current scholars, including Levine (2006), argue that John should be taken as historically authoritative, especially given that the Pauline texts appear to favor the Johannine chronology. Lathrop (1998, pp. 72–73) notes that there is some evidence of Christian communities beginning to celebrate Passover “at least by the mid-second century” but that there is ample evidence that this was a new practice, rather than a continuous observance of the sort that might have been expected to exist had the Last Supper been clearly linked to Passover in the minds of the pre-second-century Christian community. That being said, however, the coincidence in timing of this adoption, however short-lived, and the redaction of the Mishnah (and Tosefta), is highly suggestive. See also Bradshaw and Hoffman (1999).

14 Though it is interesting to note that the two most recent documents from the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “We Remember” (1998) and “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable” (2015), have dropped any explicit discussion of ritual continuity between Judaism and Christianity.

15 This problem is present explicitly in the 2015 “Gifts” document, which recasts the ecclesial theology underlying Catholic-Jewish relations as a fulfillment theology, in which Christ “fulfills the mission and expectation of Israel in a perfect way” but also “overcomes and transcends them in an eschatological manner” (Article 14). What is identified here is not a point of difference between separate religious traditions but rather a difference in the degree to which participants are capable of understanding their own tradition, as Article 20 makes clear: “The faith of the Jews testified to in the Bible, found in the Old Testament, is not for Christians another religion but the foundation of their own faith, although clearly the figure of Jesus is the sole key for the Christian interpretation of the Scriptures of the Old Testament.” The document acknowledges that Jews are unlikely to recognize Christ as the fulfillment of their religion, and the manner in which such recognition will come to pass “remains an unfathomable divine mystery” (Article 36). Nevertheless, the conviction that “[t]here cannot be two ways of salvation...since Christ is also the Redeemer of the Jews in addition to the Gentiles” (Article 37) is clearly identified as the theological basis on which Catholic-Jewish dialogue rests.

CONCLUSION

In a recent review of the multiple ways reconciliation is understood across a range of disciplines, from law to theology, James Hughes detects a certain instability in its application: “Janus-like, reconciliation is backward looking, seeking to rectify the historical grievances of a dystopian past, and forward-looking, aiming to build a new bright future of a shared society” (Hughes 2017, p. 626). Hughes contends that “Although the general goal of reconciliation is to contrive a peace of overcoming antagonistic identities and building a ‘shared society,’ what this entails precisely is not clearly stated” (Hughes 2017, p. 626). Reconciliation is a concept that has transcended its religious genealogy to become one of the basic ritual building blocks of secular society. The ritual rubric remains that of the confessional: a wrong is committed, it is confessed, some form of penance is performed, and absolution is granted. So ingrained is this model that the major theoretical works on post-Holocaust reconciliation—such as those authored by Jankélévitch and Derrida—are framed as treatises on forgiveness, in recognition of the assumption that that is the natural end of any reconciliatory process.

It is reasonable, then, to question what the outcome of post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian reconciliation is meant to be: What constitutes forgiveness or the normalization of relations? I have thus far eschewed discussion of state-sponsored reparations, such as those paid by West Germany to Israel beginning in the 1950s, as I have not wished to perpetuate the conflation between religion and nationality that was a key factor in precipitating the genocide. The rejection of such a conflation, however, complicates the discussion of reconciliation because, unlike the case of the Aboriginal Residential Schools that Mark Godin discusses in this volume, no church or church body was a direct participant in or beneficiary of the Holocaust. It is clear that Christian theologies have contributed to the development and sustenance of attitudes that produced, over a long period of time,
patterns of prejudice that enabled genocide. It is considerably less clear what anybody ought to do with this knowledge.

We have seen, in the cases reviewed here, that behind the deceptively straightforward documentary narrative of Christian-Jewish dialogue, there is a world of nuance and contestation carried out in gesture, posture, language, and locatedness. This is evident in the production of the documents themselves, which began by employing the form of confession in order to protect the churches themselves from criticism by focusing on the actions of individuals, and has recently begun to invoke the process of consultation with representatives of the Jewish community as a sign that reconciliation has been accomplished without any actual confession on the part of the churches having taken place. It is evident in the way that John Paul II’s positioning of himself in Jewish holy spaces—the synagogue in Rome, the Western Wall in Jerusalem—was able to signal a vulnerability and contrition that even now the documents of the Catholic Church cannot quite put into words. And it is especially frustratingly evident in the way that attempts to honor Judaism as Christianity’s “elder brother” result in liturgical choices that instead present Jewish practice as a means by which Christians can discover a deeper connection to Jesus and, in so doing, actually promote a deeper erasure of Judaism as a living tradition.

Consideration of interrituality, in the case of post-Holocaust reconciliation, thus yields mixed results. On the one hand, gestural and spatial choices have indicated a more secure acceptance of the legitimacy of Judaism as a religious practice in its own right than the history of church documents might have suggested. On the other hand, the absorption of Jewish ritual into Christian practice, framed ahistorically as a recovery of the roots of that practice, indicates a much greater lack of willingness to consider Judaism as a legitimate religious practice in its own right than the history of church documents concerned with a program of interreligious dialogue suggests. In fact, the ease with which Jewish ritual is encountered as a perfectly preserved artifact of Christian origins suggests that the main object of the reconciliation program is not interreligious but intrareligious. It is a process of Christianity reconciling its doctrines and history to its idealized self-image and precisely not a process of reconciliation between the living, evolving, (diverse and messy) Jewish community and the living, evolving, (diverse and messy) community of Christians. The ultimate outcome of this process of reconciliation is not a shared society between Jews and Christians; it is, instead, the Church constructing and performing a narrative that permits it to forgive itself for its own past.

REFERENCES


Response

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When the philosopher Paul Ricoeur wrote about his journey toward relationship with people from different religious traditions than his own, he described the movement as outward from himself and his own confession, from the familiar to the less familiar. He wrote that "it is only little by little, by approximations, that one can understand a neighbouring confession and, through it, another that is close to it" (Ricoeur 1998, p. 169). We travel from one affinity to the next, only much later realizing that we may be very far from where we started.

The most generous interpretation of Christian attempts to rewrite our relationships with Jews, as charted by Alana Vincent, would have them follow Ricoeur, moving from a Christian's own 'mother tongue' and home rituals toward the thought patterns and body language of others. We could construe the ritual of drafting theological statements about Jews, approaching Jewish communities with confessions, or the appropriation of perhaps the most easily recognizable Jewish rite—the Seder—as efforts to bridge historical gaps between two faiths, steps that turn us toward neighbors.

The same could be said about many other processes of reconciliation on which Christians have embarked, including that between Canadian churches and Indigenous people that I discuss elsewhere in this volume.

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