JAMES McCARTIN: Good evening. I am Jim McCartin, Director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, and I’m pleased to welcome you all to Fordham University.

We have a sellout crowd tonight, and justifiably so, I would say. We have convened a conversation between two outstanding scholars, two people who I suspect will shed a great deal of light tonight, and you’ll be glad you came.

Before we begin, some very brief announcements.

First, if you are not already on our mailing list, please take the time to sign up at the table on your way out.

Second, please make use of the cards and pencils placed on your seats when you came in. Write out your questions on those cards, and when you do so please try to do so legibly so that we can read them. When you are finished, just hold your card up and one of our student assistants for the night will bring the card up front and we’ll be able to use the cards for the audience question time toward the end of our program.

Third, please take the time now to silence your electronic devices.

Now, two observances make this event especially appropriate tonight. Fordham University is currently observing a Mission Awareness Year, an exercise in renewing our sense of ourselves as a Catholic and Jesuit university. In this particular instance at this particular university, our mission is, in part, to make Fordham a welcome home for all people of faith.

So it is fitting, and I would say it is even necessary, that our critical inquiry into religious topics takes shape in the form of dialogue and conversation — conversations that draw in people and perspectives of variant faith, giving each the opportunity, the space, to make genuine contributions in the always ancient, ever new endeavor to seek the face of God.

Tonight, as we explore how Judaism and Catholicism engaged and interfaced in the 20th century — and perhaps we’ll have time to consider their engagement in the 21st — the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture hopes to give concrete form to this mission — a mission of dialogue, a mission of welcome.
Beyond our attention to mission, people here at Fordham and elsewhere — Catholics certainly, but also Jews as well — have recently been remembering and celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Again, tonight’s event is therefore fitting, because that Council represented the culminating moment in the story we will soon hear, the story of a group of converts to Catholicism who, in carrying their heritage as Jews and Protestants into the Catholic Church, would help transform that Church in a singularly important fashion, by changing how Catholics spoke about and related to Jewish people.

Our conversation tonight will shed light on an under-told — and to a large extent, until now, an untold — story, an element of the larger story of Vatican II. In this way, the telling of that story tonight is a celebration of Vatican II in and of itself.

With that, let me introduce our two distinguished guests.

John Connelly is Professor of History at the University of California at Berkeley. In addition to numerous academic articles, he is the author of Captive University, a book that traces the Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish higher education after World War II. It’s a book that’s available in Czech, in German, and Ukrainian translations, for those who are interested. He is co-editor with Michael Grüttner of a volume of scholarly essays, called Universities Under Dictatorship.

But for our purposes tonight, what is most significant about John Connelly is that he has written From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews 1933–1965, published last year by Harvard University Press. Critics have called it a path-breaking book, a book that tells an extraordinary story, a book that hugely enriches our understanding of the historical record.

You should know that copies of Professor Connelly’s book will be sold after tonight’s conversation, and he has generously offered to stick around to sign your copy. Copies will be available over here, book-signing over here.

I’m also delighted to welcome Susannah Heschel, the Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth University.

Heschel has received seemingly countless honors and has held visiting professorships at Princeton and Tufts, as well as at the universities of Cape Town, Frankfurt, and Edinburgh. She has written scores of articles and three acclaimed books, the most recent of which is The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany. It is also on sale tonight right over here, and again our author has graciously agreed to do some signing.

Heschel is no stranger to interreligious dialogue. Recently she has become an important international force in bridging the fields of Jewish studies and Islamic studies, and is presently at work, I believe, on a book on that topic.

It is our great pleasure, of course, to have both Professor Connelly and Professor Heschel here tonight.

Now, please with me welcome John Connelly.

JOHN CONNELLY: Thank you. Thank you for that very kind introduction, and thank you for the invitation to the Center to speak here tonight. Thank you to Susannah Heschel for coming from New Hampshire to be here.
The book that Jim McCartin just mentioned talks about the change that took place in Catholic teaching on the Jews in 1965 as a revolution, a revolution that probably most of you have never heard of.

You have to wonder, *How could it be that there would actually be a revolution that people wouldn't know about?* You usually think of revolutions as being events that bring lots of people into the streets. If you think of the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution, you think of a revolution as being something that brings a regime down, leads to regime change. But here, curiously, we have what I am calling a revolution that probably wasn’t even noticed as such, and people don’t think of as such, looking backward.

Just to refresh your memories, the event, Vatican II, was a council that took place in the Catholic Church, a synod of the Church, for three years, 1962–1965, bringing bishops from all over the world, about 2,000 in number, and it ended in the fall of 1965 with a series of statements, one of which was on non-Christian religions, and Part 4 of that statement is on the Jewish people. That statement is called *Nostra Aetate*, which is Latin for “In Our Time.” It involved a lot of hard work.

A question to be asked is: Why don’t we know about this revolution? I can’t give you a full answer. But I think two partial answers to the question would be that the Catholic Church was, perhaps to some extent still is, an institution that claims to be an institution that doesn’t change. Therefore, even if revolution actually happened in the Church, the Church itself wouldn’t call it a revolution; we wouldn’t know it as such.

The second thing is if you look at the statement *Nostra Aetate*, a lot of what it says actually seems quite commonsensical from today's perspective. It says, for example, that Christ and his followers were Jews, that Christianity comes from Judaism, that Jews cannot be charged with the death of Jesus. This all seems pretty commonsensical from today’s perspective.

However, if you look carefully at the document and think about it historically but also comparatively, you’ll notice that it is actually pretty remarkable, because — and I’ll tell you about this in a moment — it did differ from everything that was said about the Jews before that time, and it’s different from what the Church says about any other religion.

Two aspects that I’ll read to you now from the text. This is from the second paragraph. There are only four paragraphs. This is very easy to read.

“The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: ‘theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises.’” That is the first thing.

The second thing is from the third paragraph: “God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues — such is the witness of the Apostle.”

What the Church did here, in a statement voted on by over 2,000 bishops in the fall of 1965, was affirm the core teachings of another religion about itself as correct.

We often think of religious tolerance as a virtue, and religious tolerance is a virtue. Intolerance has caused humanity immeasurable suffering throughout history. But this new teaching was about more than tolerance; it’s about recognition, even reverence. And it wasn’t a gift or a favor bestowed upon the Jews by the Church; this was not an act of
charity, but rather it was a result — and I would say as a historian a necessary result — of careful and faithful reading of Christian Scripture.

Both of the sections that I cited to you refer to the teaching of an Apostle, and the Apostle is the Apostle Paul. I thought actually it was fitting that we have the Church of the Apostle Paul right next-door here tonight.

*Nostra Aetate* signaled a new reading of Saint Paul, one that was little known, almost unheard of, before 1965. The Church had never before based its thinking on the Jews on the Apostle Paul, in particular on his Letter to the Romans.

What I want to do tonight briefly is three things: I want to consider what the teaching was like on the Jews before this point, before the revolution of 1965; then I want to ask how and why did this teaching change; and then, finally, offer some reflections on what we might make of this revolution fifty years after the fact.

The old view can be summarized pretty quickly in three points. First, Christ was the Jewish Messiah; yet, the Jews failed to recognize him as such and brought disaster upon themselves. Second, Jews of the post-Biblical age lived under a curse for killing Christ (this is the so-called crime of deicide, killing God). Third, the history of misfortune would continue to haunt the Jews until they recognized Christ. In direct opposition to Vatican II teaching, the idea before 1965 was that any people so faithless to God’s designs as to kill his only son was a source of trouble and poisonous beliefs, to be kept at arm’s length. It was as though Jews lived under a second Original Sin.

I don’t maintain in the book that all Christians were affected equally by this legacy, sometimes known as anti-Judaism, but when Christians had occasion to think about Jews in theological terms, the terms of their time, even those with the best of intentions — and I talk about the Jesuit Jean Lafarge in my book, an anti-racist of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s — they were drawn to this legacy of anti-Judaism with something like gravitational force.

So what happened to change all this? In the book, I argue that the movement of the Church away from anti-Judaism began in the 1930s, though the dynamic that this took may seem a bit unexpected for those of you who know about the struggle of the Church, and the Vatican in particular, in this period against racism. I say in the book actually that the Church, and the Vatican at the center, was perhaps the international institution most opposed to racism in these years, especially to biological racism and eugenics, for example.

Pius XI released an encyclical, a Letter to the Faithful, in March of 1937 in German, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern), directed at the Church in Germany. He said, among other things, the following: “Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the state, above an earthly scale of values and makes them the highest value, praising them as if gods, distorts an order of the world created and commanded by God.” This statement, and others within this encyclical, infuriated Hitler and actually unleashed a round of violence upon the Church in Germany at that point.

Yet, in my book I argue that the main motive for change involved, not this sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, battle of the Church against racists outside of it — for example, against the Nazi regime in Germany — but, rather, it involved a battle against racists inside the Church, and the Church not just anywhere in the world but the Church in Central Europe, in German-speaking Central Europe — Germany, Austria, Switzerland. One of the points of my book is that Catholicism is actually quite variegated across national boundaries.
I argue that the change began as a rhetorical struggle between advocates and opponents of racism, all of whom were Catholic. The advocates of racism were influential mainstream theologians of this period, the 1930s, like Karl Adam for example, who said that the Jews’ rejection of Christ, this second Original Sin supposedly that I talked of, made Jews poor candidates for baptism. The Jewish rejection of Jesus hundreds of years earlier had supposedly left a genetic stain of apostasy that was not removed by baptism.

Against this idea rose opposition from tiny groups of Catholic opponents to Nazism, who operated just beyond the boundaries of Hitler’s Reich in the 1930s, in Switzerland, Austria, and France. The leaders, I maintain in the book, were two men, at least intellectual leaders: Karl Thieme (his dates are 1903–1963) and Johannes, then later John, Oesterreicher (his dates are 1904–1993).

Both of these men, like virtually everybody I write about in the book, were converts to Catholicism. Karl Thieme came from a Protestant family in Saxony. He had left the Protestant churches in Germany out of a protest over the discrimination against Protestant ministers who were of Jewish descent. He became Catholic in 1934.

John Oesterreicher, or Johannes Oesterreicher originally, was from a Jewish family in Moravia. His father was a veterinarian. He — I can’t explain it in detail — claimed much later in life, at one point around 1919, after reading excerpts from the Gospels, to have fallen in love with Christ, and he became Catholic, and then very soon a priest.

Neither of these men did anything by half measures.

The book traces several episodes in their collaboration from 1935 until the early 1960s, to Vatican II. I’m going to give three episodes and then a brief epilogue on what they did. It’s the heart of the book. Still, the book is worth reading at length. [Laughter]

The first episode takes us to the Austrian capital of Vienna and the large Swiss city Basel in 1936. Oesterreicher at this point was a young priest in charge of the Diocese of Vienna’s mission to the Jews. Karl Thieme was living in Basel as an exile from Germany, writing works directed against Nazi thinking.

Deeply disturbed by the influential view among German Catholic theologians that Jews were unfit for baptism, Johannes Oesterreicher asked Karl Thieme to refute these arguments for an anti-Nazi journal that he was editing in Vienna, called Die Erfüllung (Fulfillment). Oesterreicher couldn’t do this directly because one of the most prominent exponents of this Catholic racism, as I call it in the book, was a Jesuit who was the main preacher in Vienna in the 1930s, named Georg Bichlmair. So influential was Bichlmair that he became head of the Jesuit order in Austria after World War II.

Karl Thieme did something at this point that was theologically bold. For inspiration against racism entering the Church from people like Georg Bichlmair, like the authors of Nostra Aetate thirty years later, he turned to a neglected passage of Saint Paul’s last letter, his Epistle to the Romans, where, in a sense, anticipating modern racism, Paul had argued: “If one wants to speak of nature as racist, even if the Church insisted one must, then one must see Jews as specially gifted because of their forebears, because of their heritage, because of promises made to Jews and carried by Jews in their lives through the ages.” Paul in his Letter to the Romans likened Judaism to a healthy olive tree into which Gentiles, which he called “wild branches,” had been grafted, in his words, “against all nature.”

Still, this argument did nothing to alter the assumption held by both Karl Thieme and
Johannes Oesterreicher, and shared with all major Christian thinkers at this point, that Jews remained deeply deficient until they accepted Christ. They were arguing, in essence, that Jews should still be baptized, and also that they could be baptized.

In episode two I examine correspondence between Oesterreicher and Thieme just after World War II, summer and fall of 1945. At this point Johannes Oesterreicher was here in Manhattan, continuing his work with the Jews, hoping to convert American Jews to Catholicism. He had escaped from Europe via Portugal in 1940. Karl Thieme had lived out the war in Basel, just across the border from Germany, literally a stone’s throw.

The Holocaust, of which they were both well informed — Thieme had actually a brother who was an officer in the Wehrmacht who served in Poland; and Oesterreicher had lost both parents, his mother at Auschwitz, his father at Theresienstadt. They both knew about the Holocaust. But the Holocaust had done nothing to change their basic assumption, that Jews must be baptized in order to avoid the wrath of God in this life and the next.

But there were differences in accent. Karl Thieme did not mince words. He wrote to John Oesterreicher — Johannes became John in Manhattan — in the summer of 1945 that “by rejecting Christ, the Jews had objectively become enemies of God.” Oesterreicher, who wanted to conduct missions to the Jews here in Manhattan, pleaded for restraint. “If one called Jews enemies,” he argued, “one cuts off all possibilities of dialogue.” That was obvious for him.

But for Karl Thieme, the zealous convert, the issue was not opportunity for dialogue with anyone, but strict faith. In his view, by rejecting Christ, Jews had become enemies of God. Or, he challenged Oesterreicher, was Oesterreicher denying that Christ was gone? “One could not,” wrote Thieme, “sweeten these elementary facts with pretty words.”

Yet, suddenly — and this is episode three — around New Year’s in 1950 Karl Thieme began writing that Jews did not need baptism; they were pleasing to God as Jews — his word in German was Gott wohlgefällig. He likened Jews to a holy priesthood. He wrote to Martin Buber, one of his many correspondents — he wrote to a lot of people as a German intellectual of the time — that “Israel remains sanctified in a way that is hardly accessible to believers from the peoples of the world” — “peoples of the world” were the Gentiles.

The shift in his views was so radical that he called it “a second conversion.” The German is uhmkaer [phonetic], complete change of way of thinking. This shift is historically important because, as far as I could tell, Karl Thieme was the first major Catholic thinker to claim that Jews did not need baptism to be saved.

So how did he do it? He did it by doing what the Church did at the Second Vatican Council, by seeking inspiration — or, more accurately in his case, by elaborating further his own encounter with Paul’s Letter to the Romans. Three things in particular. These are Chapters 9–11:

• First, that Jews are not rejected by God; indeed, they are the most loved. This is Romans 11:1, Romans 11:21.
• Second, that the covenant with the Jews is still in force.
• Third, that the rejection of the Gospel by most Jews was in fact a blessing, because it meant that the Gospel could spread to the Gentiles. That’s Romans 11:11.

Romans, like Nostra Aetate, says nothing about baptism, conversion, or Jews becoming
Karl Thieme, in my view, was important, not only because he was the first major theologian to make this shift, but because he was a major figure in these years in European efforts to forge reconciliation between Christians and Jews. For example, the American occupation forces in Germany put him in charge of societies for Christian-Jewish understanding in the late 1940s. He also had the role of serving as an editor for a major journal that appeared in Germany, the so-called *Freiburger Rundbrief*.

Therefore, he had to explain publicly and privately throughout the 1950s why Paul’s Letter to the Romans should be the main way that Catholics, and indeed Christians — he was ecumenical; he was in full conversation with Protestants at this point, as well as Jews — he had to explain why Romans should be the source of inspiration for thinking about Jews. Indeed, if you think about it, it’s not really evident why Catholics would think about one of Paul’s epistles as the source for any kind of inspiration. We generally think of our inspiration as coming mainly from the Gospels.

So why did Karl Thieme, and then why did the Church at Vatican II, more or less ignore the Gospels and ignore all other writings in the New Testament in favor of Paul’s Letter to the Romans? Karl Thieme in his arguments with a lot of opponents — he faced a lot of opposition from Christian theologians in these years — argued that there were two reasons.

First, in his view, Romans was Paul’s only direct pastoral statement to followers of Christ about, as the Vatican II statement said, his kinsfolk — that is, about the Jews. Other statements, for example in the Gospels, are indirect. In any case, they are about some Jews and not the Jews. Romans 9–11 was the only place in the New Testament where the question is posed about what to make of the fact that most Jews did not become followers of Christ. For Paul this was a deeply painful fact.

The second argument used by Thieme: in his view, Romans, as Paul’s last letter, represented the culmination of his learning, in a sense, the last stage of his reflection upon many things, including the Jewish people. Therefore, the statements in Romans are superior to statements elsewhere that he makes, for example in Thessalonians, when, according to Karl Thieme, Paul didn’t know what he was doing. It gives you a sense of his personality.

Why that point, why 1950, did Karl Thieme shift his views? I think in his case we can rule out opportunism. He was a hardheaded man and theologian and desperately certain to avoid anything that smacked of unorthodox. He was fully orthodox, lots of footnotes in everything he write, including personal letters, at least the ones that I’ve read.

I don’t believe it was witness to the Holocaust, which he knew about very directly. There was nothing new in his writing right after the fact.

I think, instead, what happened, what was decisive in his changing views, was the situation of postwar Europe, in which some Christians and some Jews felt they needed to reflect together about the causes of the recent tragedy in Europe, what we now call the Shoah, or the Holocaust, especially insofar as this event might have had roots in Christian teaching.

So they did something, these Christians and Jews, that had been virtually unthinkable before 1945: they talked to each other. Through dialogue, Christians got to hear what it sounded like to Jewish ears to be told constantly that they must be baptized. It sounded not like the promise of salvation, but like spiritual death.
So my epilogue: how do we get from this little-known thinker — and I think you can look far and wide for work on him; there’s really not very much, even in German; these days people write about Christian-Jewish relations without much relation to Karl Thieme. One of his daughters lives in Rome, and she was very happy actually to hear that somebody was writing about him. So how do we get from him to the Vatican II statements of 1965 voted on by over 2,000 bishops and then promulgated by Paul VI?

I claim that this had to do with his old friend John Oesterreicher, who became in 1960 a paratus (that is, a theological expert) taken to Vatican II to the committee that advised the Council on relations with non-Christian religions. At several key moments, especially in 1964 but also 1965, Oesterreicher found himself drawing upon formulations originally worked out by Karl Thieme in order to move the statement forward, resolved sometimes bitter disputes.

The most bitter dispute occurred in early 1964 — and, indeed, at this point the Council’s statement on the Jews almost failed entirely — when conservative forces close to Paul VI doctored — this is the word that was used actually by some of the bishops — forces within the Curia doctored a draft of the statement that had been worked out by theologians like Oesterreicher. This doctored statement said that the Church looked forward to the day when Jews would join in — that is, when Jews would become Christians.

Now, there was an Irish priest — I believe he was a Jesuit; I may be wrong; there’s much more to the story than I tell in the book — who leaked this draft to the press. It soon caused a scandal for the Council.

The most memorable statement was made by the American Rabbi Abraham Heschel, who said that if faced with the alternative of conversion or death, he was ready to go to Auschwitz at any time. So people fully understood the implication of a statement saying, even in the distant future, that the Church hoped that Jews would become Christians.

Now, I discovered in my research that this formula, which was taken from a minor prophet, Zephaniah, had been worked out by Karl Thieme about ten years earlier. By this point — I mentioned Karl Thieme died in 1963; he died of cancer in the summer of 1963 — so a year later (he had been dead for a year already) he helped resolve one of the greatest crises to face the Second Vatican Council.

Let me just say a couple of words now in conclusion.

To return to my first point, the change at Vatican II was a revolution. Maybe it’s good or appropriate to call it a “silent revolution.” But I think history suggests that some of the most effective revolutions, especially revolutions in values, are indeed silent revolutions. The change is so massive that it seems almost ordinary.

Still, I would argue, there is no such thing as an automatic revolution. Revolutions don’t happen by themselves. The thing that impresses me when looking back upon this story is that the changes confirmed in Nostra Aetate, though they may seem to a large extent commonsensical, required lots of hard work; difficult, painful, costly struggle — so painful, for example, that Karl Thieme and John Oesterreicher stopped talking to each
other completely in 1960. Change was by no means automatic. It wouldn’t have happened but for the engagement and concern of specific identifiable human beings.

Second point: For the sake of the Church, what is interesting for me is how a relatively small group operating at the margins, long ignored by the hierarchy, could ultimately shape the thinking of the Church as a whole.

The Canadian theologian Gregory Baum, who was kind enough to review my book last year, wrote the following in this regard: “In the present winter of the Catholic Church it is good to be reminded of the innovative power of Spirit-guided movements within Catholicism.” So you can guess where Gregory stands theologically.

Third point: A lot of what motivated my characters was personal. We mentioned they were converts. They were directly affected by racism. They were driven by passion, often anger. I think this kind of deep emotional engagement was a constant throughout the story.

But I think they also show the vital importance of ideas to the change that took place. Sentiments, even the best of sentiments, were not enough.

I actually came across a statement by a very well-meaning Protestant pastor from 1945, who was involved in Christian-Jewish dialogue, who posed the question in an article that summer: Can there be a mission to the Jews after Auschwitz? I expected, Well, here is going to be a sign of some change in thinking. His answer was: Not only can there be a mission to the Jews, there must be a mission to the Jews. If there had been one before, perhaps there wouldn't have been an Auschwitz. That was his argument in the summer of 1945.

For the change that took place — this is my fourth point — learning, ideas, were crucial, in particular, theological expertise. A lot of my book is about theological arguments. These are intellectual gains that have to be passed on, they have to be taught. Somebody has to explain to Christians — this is maybe an editorial comment of my own — why anti-Semitism and its foundations in anti-Judaism are incorrect in terms of Church teaching.

We think of the Church often as a moral institution, and I think that’s true. It’s an institution from which people try to derive ideas about good and bad. But, perhaps more fundamentally, it is a religious institution guided by particular teachings.

Therefore — my final point — the theology which grounds this new teaching is too important to be left to theologians.

I’m not a theologian. I took two courses at Georgetown, which we all had to, in theology many years ago. But as a historian, I found it imperative to get inside of these theological arguments. Also, as a Christian, it’s necessary, even though the walls are very high — for some reason, theologians have ways of making it more difficult to enter their discipline than it is perhaps to enter other disciplines. I appeal to you that we must nevertheless persist in finding out what they think. That is, non-experts must persist in finding out what the Church thinks and teaches, even when the complexity, even when the number of footnotes in Greek, seems daunting, and even intimidating.

I’ll stop there and thank you for your attention.

**SUSANNAH HESCHEL:** Thank you so much.

Tell me, has anybody in this room ever had a broken ankle? Yes, here I am.
I'm so glad to be here, and I thank Jim McCartin for organizing this evening, and it's wonderful to be with John Connelly. I want to thank Jim McCartin for organizing this evening. So many of you have come tonight, which is a wonderful sign. And I think it's great that John Connelly came from such a long distance, from California, to speak with us. He has written a very important book, an important book at many levels.

I also just want to say, because I'm here at Fordham, I have a lot of wonderful friends here in the Theology Department, and I want to acknowledge them: Astrid and Bob O'Brien; Donald Moore; Edward Bristow; and Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, whom I've never met but who I admire enormously — isn't she great? Yes, let's show our support for her.

John's book is important for many reasons. He uncovers a very important era in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. He analyzes theological arguments in the larger context, and he makes them very clear and understandable and interesting and important. He sheds new light on things we never knew as historians about this era. I appreciate that.

He also makes it very clear to us that what needs to change sometimes is the way we think, the categories that we use, not simply the content we put into those categories. That's very important.

So he asks the question at the beginning of his book, for instance: What were the constraints within which bishops and other Catholics thought about race and about Jews? What were those constraints? What are the constraints on our minds and how can we break through those constraints and think differently, think a second time?

That's what's remarkable about the people he has discussed this evening. They thought a second time, they pushed through the constraints of their education, of things that were assumptions for so long.

I'm going to pose a few questions to John. I was asked to do that.

I just also want to say something on a personal level. I grew up in a home in which these issues were discussed constantly. My father was a Jewish theologian. He was a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary. His name was Abraham Joshua Heschel. He serves very much as a model, I believe, of how Jews can also change how we think about Christianity and how Christians think about Judaism, sometimes in very personal and intimate ways.

I would perhaps like to emphasize that word “intimacy,” because indeed what greater theological intimacy could exist than between Judaism and Christianity, two religions, to have the founder of one be a pious member of the other. We're so bound up together. We share a Bible, Scripture, history, covenants, so many central ideas.

I have to say there's something very different about the relation between Jews and Catholics and between Jews and Protestants. I have written about Protestants in Germany in the 19th and 20th century. It was a very different story among Protestants than among Catholics, different kinds of arguments. Perhaps we can talk a bit about that later.

But I would like to also just point out that this means so much to us as Jews, to the history of Judaism, this declaration Nostra Aetate, the changes that John Connelly has described for us in his book. It is extraordinary.
Let me first raise a few questions for John.

He spoke about the revolution that no one has ever heard of. I think what’s important here is also, not only the content of the theological arguments, but how we speak, when we speak. That is, I might ask him about the easy adoption of so many Vatican II ideas regarding Jews, so many of the interpretations.

I had a student who went through twelve years of Catholic parochial school. I was teaching something about medieval Jewish history and I mentioned deicide. She had never heard of it. She thought I made it up. Things have changed that much. That’s pretty quick, within a few decades, to have students like that — never even heard of it.

So what does that tell us about the readiness, the eagerness, of so many Catholics to change their views, to receive *Nostra Aetate* so willingly? Not everywhere perhaps, and maybe that’s another question: is it different in the United States, Canada; is it different, let’s say, in Western Europe from Eastern Europe? John, of course, knows the situation in Eastern Europe so well.

Another question I would like to raise is the issue of the marginal position taken by some of the theologians that John writes about — that is, theologians who converted to Catholicism from a Protestant background or from a Jewish background. They were, or they felt themselves, marginal in many respects in the 1930s. John writes about this. It is perhaps the very fact of having experienced a sense of marginalization within the Catholic Church that they became involved in these questions and became driving forces, became so deeply committed to changing the attitudes of the Church.

That I find in striking contrast to Protestant theologians, because in fact it was precisely those Protestants who became avid Nazis, German Protestant theologians who were from marginal areas of Germany — that is, what some viewed as the hinterland, from border regions, people who were not fully central to the German Protestant church. They became the avid Nazis. Their attitudes toward Jews is the opposite of those of the theologians John is writing about.

So what is it about marginality that can lead in different directions? We do apparently need marginal voices — at least that’s one point we can gather from John Connelly’s book. We need the marginal thinkers in our midst to change our minds, to think differently.

Then I would ask about how these teachings regarding Jews and Judaism are received today. I’ll mention in this context a friend of mine, a professor at the University of Chicago, who gave a lecture on “Wagner and anti-Semitism” at a conference of German Wagner scholars. He was the one who spoke about anti-Semitism, the only one at this conference. They mocked him and said, “Oh, that’s just American political correctness to be worried about anti-Semitism.” That was very striking to me.

I wonder, and I worry sometimes, if changing attitudes toward Judaism, the kind that emerged from *Nostra Aetate*, may be viewed in some circles as part of a larger liberal package of views that say that contraception is all right, celibacy should be eliminated, women should be ordained priests, and then dismissed as a kind of left-wing liberal package. Are those attitudes associated in that way?

I wonder if support for *Nostra Aetate* today is as strong among theological liberals as it is among conservatives. How do the politics of the reception of these views today break down? How would you describe that?

And then, I would also like to ask, since this very important shift that John Connelly has
called our attention to, the shift to Romans 9–11, were these Catholic theologians influenced at all by Protestant scholarship, Lutheran scholarship — because, after all, for Luther and for Lutheran scholarship, Romans was a central text? Were they reading the work of W.D. Davies or Krister Stendahl at this time?

Then, finally, I guess I have to ask a question about Jewish attitudes toward the figures that John Connelly has described, especially John Oesterreicher.

I can tell you that, from a Jewish point of view, a Jew who converts to Christianity is viewed as a traitor, in a very negative way, someone who has betrayed. A Jew who has converted to Christianity and then promotes mission to the Jews, the conversion of the Jews, that’s viewed in a very negative light in the Jewish community.

I would have to say that I was surprised — and it’s good to be surprised by a book — I was surprised to learn about the role played by John Oesterreicher, and also the change in his views. But I can tell you that during those years of the 1960s when I was growing up, I heard the name John Oesterreicher often from my father, but in very negative terms, because of the fact that he had converted and also promoted mission to the Jews.

I want to conclude this comment by quoting from a memorandum that my father wrote to Cardinal Bea in May of 1962: “Both Judaism and Christianity share the prophets’ belief that God chooses agents through whom his will is made known and his work done throughout history. Both Judaism and Christianity live in the certainty that mankind is in need of ultimate redemption, that God is involved in human history, that in relations between man and man God is at stake, that the humiliation of man is a disgrace to God.”

That is just one of the many ways in which these issues were so very much at stake for my father and for Jews, and I believe for Christians as well.

Thank you.

JAMES McCARTIN: Our two guests will be talking back and forth to one another for a while. But I want you to remember to write down your questions for our guests.

JOHN CONNELLY: I just want to respond briefly to some of the questions that Susannah posed, and then I’ll have a few questions for her as well.

As to what we make of the fact that the Church accepted this teaching so quickly, that’s a very interesting question. When you imagine a 180-degree shift in teaching taking place, you imagine some resistance. But there wasn’t actually a lot of resistance to this.

In fact, when you look at the documents from the Second Vatican Council, the minutes of the bishops’ meetings, the bishops felt deeply remorseful for the failure of anyone to stand up and try to stop the murder of the Jews, even rhetorically, for there to have been any kind of a statement by the bishops, by the Church, in the 1940s.

They were very well aware that the primary stance had been silence. Some of them even said, in 1963 and 1964, “We can’t be silent anymore.” So they were, in a sense, almost desperate to have a new kind of teaching enunciated.

I think that even though some of these bishops may not have understood all of the theological matters involved, they wanted a new foundation, a new break, a path to a future, which would shed these possibilities of indifference in the face of genocide. At the level of the hierarchy, I think there was mostly a real readiness for this to happen.
At the level of mainstream theology, I would say actually that theologians, beginning in the 1940s, like Krister Stendahl and W.D. Davies, Catholics, Protestants, Jews — they had been talking to each other — they were moving forward the issues that this statement in some ways signaled a breakthrough about. That is, they were rereading scripture, the New Testament, and looking at things that had been read as being hostile to the Jews in the Gospels and in the epistles, they were reading them in new ways. That began in a serious way in the 1950s, and it continued in a much more serious way in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

There's a way in which the Church really only ratified something that theologians themselves were doing. I deeply believe this is also about scholarship. What scholars showed, through a very careful, critical reading of Scripture, was that anti-Judaic readings of Scripture were not necessary. I think it's very well founded in theological arguments.

Another reason I think it was quickly adopted was that a lot of the old ideas just sounded absurd. They went against reason.

The idea of deicide, for example, that your student didn't hear of, this is something that on the face of it makes absolutely no sense. Cardinal Bea was able to dismiss it in a sentence when it came up at the Council 1964. He said, "We know very well that the overwhelming majority of Jews did not live in Palestine, they lived in diaspora, even in this period. Therefore, it's silly to say that they could be responsible for the death of Christ. They didn't know about Christ." That's an argument purely at the level of historical logic.

In some areas of Catholicism — I would guess in the United States — these ideas I think did not have very deep roots.

Speaking about the United States, I think there is a way in which the fact that American Catholics tended to live among people of other faiths — Christians, Jews, and others, atheists; they had them in their own families, their own neighborhoods.

Where I grew up in Philadelphia, for example, we had a Catholic family, Jewish family, Protestant family, up and down the street. We played together. People went on dates together. They married. This is a story that goes back to well before World War I. I know I'm idealizing slightly. There's also a story of conflict. But I think that this is a society in which the basic idea of tolerance was popular. So I think there was willingness among Catholics to embrace this teaching for that reason.

But that also raises a problem: Has this teaching been fully absorbed? Do people think they know what the teaching is when they haven’t ever really studied it? What would happen if your average Catholic were asked, "Well, what about this idea of chosen people; what do you make of that?" Or what indeed about certain elements of Scripture, like I believe it’s Matthew 27:25, where the Jewish crowd supposedly calls blood upon itself for the killing of Christ?" This is a statement that has haunted the Church for centuries. What would the average Catholic say about that? The average Catholic will probably be quite ignorant.

These are, of course, teachings that have a long history in other places, a much more tragic history. I’m thinking of Eastern Europe, which Susannah asked about. I think there the change has not been as quick.

Poland, for example, is basically divided into urban, educated, reasoned, I would say, Poland; and then there is rural. I don’t want to speak down about villages, but these are
areas of Poland, provincial Poland, where there is less education and there is more willingness to fall back upon old stereotypes — for example, the idea that Jews would capture Christian children and use their blood. This was an idea that I heard as a student in Poland in the 1980s. So those ideas have not completely disappeared.

Marginality is a fascinating concept. I'll just say briefly what I say about my characters — they all came from the margins, because they were people who had been from marginal areas of Germany or marginal areas within their own religious communities.

I agree that actually being from the margins alone doesn't really mean anything — that, for example, Germans who come from the Sudetenland in Bohemia, or Poles that come from eastern Poland, where they live with Ukrainians and Lithuanians and Jews, that this didn't mean anything. You find plenty of nationalists in the margins.

What was different about my people — and they were relatively few — is that they transcended the margins, they went beyond the margins. I call them in the book “border crossers.” They are people who went beyond the margin into the realm of the other, whether it was linguistic, cultural, or religious. In a sense, virtually all the people I study and all of the Christians, not just Catholics, who resisted racism in the 1930s, were people who tended to exist on both sides of a linguistic or cultural border, whether it was the French-German border, the Polish-German border, etc.

What I say in the book is that these people were not afraid of complexity — in fact, they needed complexity to survive, and they were open to thinking in new ways for that reason.

They were converts also. In a sense, they had thrown their previous lives behind. They were willing to do that, unlike many other people.

The final question — actually there were a couple more — the question about politics and the Church's teaching on the Jews, Susannah, I think your perspective — and we can talk more about this — is more of a European perspective.

Reading the American journals Commonweal, America, First Things — that is, Catholic journals from left to right — my sense is that the issue is really not politicized very much in this country.

After all, it was John Paul II, a great hero of conservative Catholics, if I can generalize wildly, who came out with some very — how shall we call it? — progressive statements about the Jews, saying that the covenant with the Jews was never revoked, for example, referring to the Jews as 'Christians' older brothers.” These are statements that John Paul II himself made.

I think that, more or less, liberals and conservatives among Catholics in this country are in agreement on the basic outlines of Nostra Aetate. Where they disagree, I think, tends to be a greater concern with evangelization on the right. We could talk more about that.

However, I don't believe that this will ever lead, or will lead in the foreseeable future, to any call for mission to the Jews among any kind of Catholics, because the Catholic Church actually never had a very strong tradition of mission to the Jews. It's interesting that you have a mission here at the moment at Fordham.

As far as mission to the Jews was concerned, there were two societies in France and then there was John Oesterreicher in Vienna and then Manhattan. There were very few Catholics ever interested in this issue. But I'd be interested in hearing more about the
European situation.

As far as Protestant influences are concerned, Karl Thieme after the war in a sense went back to his origins and back to the Protestants that he was close to and wrote to them and worked with them — not so much Stendahl and the people that you mentioned, but other German Protestants.

They tended to read a theologian named Erik Peterson. Erik Peterson was really the Catholic theologian, giving credit, for breaking through to a new understanding of Romans. He of course was a convert from Protestantism.

They all tend to go back to a French thinker named Léon Bloy, who was the godfather of Jacques Maritai, and wrote a book called *Salvation from the Jews*. In many ways, it was a deeply anti-Semitic work. But he also talks about Romans as being the place to look for for inspiration on the Jews. Bloy was also a convert from Protestantism.

Oesterreicher, like Karl Thieme, didn’t care really what anybody thought about him. I’m sure he was called traitor. I would love to know what his family made of his moves in his life. I’ve never figured that out. It would be a great story to know more about.

But, interestingly enough, as a young man Oesterreicher was a fervent Zionist. In fact, he was a member of Left Zionist Scouting. That’s why the Catholic Church, before he became director of the mission to the Jews in Vienna, first made him the head of Catholic scouting in Vienna, because he had valuable experience, having been in Zionist scouting in Moravia as a young man.

He was a pretty good Zionist scout. He learned Hebrew quite well apparently. He began returning to this history right about the time of the Second Vatican Council.

One of his boyhood friends was the cultural attaché for the State of Israel in Cologne. He reinvigorated contacts with this friend and got in touch with some old friends of his from Zionist scouting, including his teacher, who by that point was living in Israel. Oesterreicher actually managed to visit this man in the late 1960s.

My point is that, in a sense, all of this became possible only through Vatican II. There were many Jewish thinkers who wouldn’t talk to Oesterreicher and thought of him in the terms that Susannah has described. But there were others, like Joseph Lichten for example, of the Anti-Defamation League, who grew quite close to him.

There was also a Jewish theologian in Cincinnati — I’m blanking on the name — **SUSANNAH HESCHEL**: Petuchowski.

**JOHN CONNELLY:** Jacob Petuchowski and Oesterreicher actually became close friends in the 1960s. They had actually been — how shall I put this? — rhetorical enemies in the 1950s. Petuchowski had strong disagreements with Oesterreicher. But the two men actually grew quite close, and they valued each other’s company and advice.

By 1970, Oesterreicher was basically saying that he thought Judaism and Christianity were two kinds of holiness. So he was, in essence, espousing the so-called two-covenant theory. So you see in some ways — not perfectly — Oesterreicher coming full circle in his life.

Susannah, I was interested perhaps in your thoughts about something that you know about but I don’t know much about, but it’s closely related to the subject, which is how Jewish views of Christianity have changed.
In the book I talk a lot about changing Christian and Catholic views about Jews. It would be interesting to learn about changing Jewish views of Christianity.

Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich was a Jewish intellectual in Germany and, I think, in Switzerland after the war. He said to Oesterreicher at one point, “Fortunately, we in Judaism don’t have a Vatican, and therefore we don’t have the problems with definitions that you have.” But nevertheless, maybe one can identify some central thinking among Jews about Christianity.

SUSANNAH HESCHEL: The question of Ehrlich is a very interesting one, especially his intervention at the last minute in the interpretation of Romans. Sometimes a Jewish intervention in the reading of a New Testament text can be very helpful and insightful, and John writes about that in a very interesting way.

So the question was, what about Jewish views of Christianity? In the modern period, Christianity becomes so important to Judaism, such a point of identification — that is, how Judaism is defined vis-à-vis Christianity.

It, first of all, begins with the 18th century, with Jacob Emden, who was an Orthodox rabbi in Germany, who wrote some very beautiful things about Jesus as a Jew, teaching Jewish ideas, which he sent to Catholic bishops in Poland. The reason he did this is he tried to curry favor with these Catholic bishops by speaking in positive terms because he wanted the bishops to condemn some Jewish heretics who were doing naughty things in the 18th century in Poland, some Sabbateans. The bishops were actually in charge of Jewish heretics — any heretic, Jewish or Christian, in Poland. So the first positive affirmations come from him, a problematic kind of scenario.

But you know Moses Mendelssohn, the great Jewish philosopher in Berlin in the late 18th century, wrote in a letter to a friend, “What if I said in public in print that Jesus was a Jew and that he taught Jewish ideas? Imagine the trouble that would get me into.” I think it’s very important to realize that in the 18th century even someone who was as highly respected as Moses Mendelssohn found it dangerous to affirm Jesus as Jewish in those days.

In the 19th century, we have Abraham Geiger, who was a fascinating, brilliant scholar — I wrote a book about him and I admire him greatly — who wrote about the parallels between the teachings of Jesus and those of other rabbis of his day. He had a bit of a “umm, umm” when he wrote that. He wanted, first of all, to build a bridge to Christians and to tell Christian theologians, “If you want to find the historical Jesus, you have to know something about Judaism in the 1st century.” They didn’t like that.

Even Veldhausen, by the way, wrote a book arguing “No, no, no, you can’t trust the reliability of the mishnah about the Pharisees; only the Gospels on the Pharisees are historically accurate,” which really is beneath Veldhausen’s dignity to write such a thing. He shouldn’t have written the book. But he didn’t ask me. I would have told him, “Don’t write that.”

So Geiger’s argument said really Jesus was a good Jew and it was Paul who founded Christianity, and Jesus’ faith was the faith of the liberal, progressive Pharisees. Just as he, Geiger, was trying to create a reform Judaism in the 19th century, it was like sort of a recapturing of liberal, progressive Pharisaic religion.

Of course, the implication of that was that for Christians who wanted the faith of Jesus, rather than the religion about Jesus, where would you find it? In Judaism, and you’d
become a reformed Jew. So you can see there was a bit of an edge in Geiger’s work.

Martin Buber, I think, is much softer when he speaks of “Jesus as my older brother” and the closeness that he felt. It’s striking that, not only Buber, but so many Jewish thinkers — Zionist thinkers, Orthodox rabbis, also spoke of feeling at home when they read the Gospel. That’s interesting.

Then we come to Marc Chagall, the great painter, who uses Christ as an image for the Jews. That’s striking. And he’s not the only one who does that.

And then, finally, I guess we come to this era that you have been writing about, so we come to the 1960s and beyond. I would have to say that I think the situation has changed dramatically. I don’t think the issue is any longer what Jews say about Jesus and whether he’s Jewish or not and so forth. It’s something that transcends.

I suppose that’s where my father, and also Joseph Soloveitchik, come into play, the great Orthodox thinker. For them, the issue wasn’t whether we can find doctrinal positions in common, but whether we can talk on a different level about struggles with personal faith, with how difficult it is sometimes to pray, and how we can support ourselves as we are all searching for moments of holiness. I think that’s a much more helpful, frankly, way of Jews and Christians approaching one another.

[Applause]

JOHN CONNELLY: You remind me that in the book actually, although I focus on Catholic theology, it is by no means a Catholic story. In some ways, the most important figure in rethinking Christian thinking about the Jews was the Jewish historian Jules Isaac, who wrote a book during Nazi occupation — he was actually hiding from the Gestapo in France; he was a historian — he wrote a book called Jesus in Israel, essentially showing that Jesus did not stand against his people, and in fact that many Jews followed Jesus. If anything, Jesus had great compassion, great love, for Jews, breaking with a tradition that goes back many centuries in the Church of thinking of Jesus as somehow set against Judaism.

What you find after the war is in fact constant conversation among theologians who were Jewish and Christian — whether Catholic or what origin doesn’t really matter. It just seems that the main thing is that they are pushing forward ideas with a common sense of the problems in the background. It’s all done in the shadow of the Holocaust, although that word really isn’t used, as we know, in common parlance until the 1970s.

There was actually a response to a piece I wrote in The Daily Forward in the summer about these issues, about the revolution of the converts. Rabbi Alan Brill of Seton Hall University was concerned that when people found out that it was converts who were behind this revolution, that they would say, “Oh, it’s another Jewish plot” [Laughter] — and what’s more, if they find out that it was non-converted Jews also who were expressing their ideas about Christian Scripture.

But none of this concerns scholarship. Scholarship is what the bishops relied upon at the Council. There were very serious discussions about Scripture, in terms of its historical sources, in terms of critical reading. I would say that it is a very solidly, as far as I can say as an historian, grounded document.

I want to ask Susannah a bit more about the European context, because I have to confess I’m a historian of Poland but I don’t get over there as often. I’m just wondering why it is that you were suggesting that in Europe there seems to be this idea that following Nostro
Aetate is a sign of political correctness. Is this something you have observed in certain situations? Do you tie it to a certain kind of politics, weak theology? Can you explain to us what you have observed and what sense you make of it?

SUSANNAH HESCHEL: My experience has been primarily in Germany, where I have done research and I have taught, and I spent last year in Berlin at the Wissenschaftskolleg, which was a great experience.

I’ll just give you an example. As I mentioned to you earlier, I went to a conference run by the German Protestant Church of Thuringia, a small conference about two thinkers, who were Christians, during the Nazi era. One was a Nazi theologian, a professor of the New Testament, named Walter Grundmann, who was from Thuringia. The other was a judge from Saxony, Lothar Kreyssig, who lost his judgeship, who was opposed to Hitler, and after the war founded Action Reconciliation, which sends young people from Germany all over the world to work as volunteers in different communities. It’s an extraordinary organization.

Anyway, I had written about the Nazi Grundmann and discovered some horrible things about him and his friends, etc., what they did, and I gave a small talk about it. Afterwards, an older woman came over to me and she said, very angrily and strongly, “The Jews are just as racist as Hitler.” I was shocked. I asked her to repeat it. I couldn’t believe it.

I called over the director, who was a minister, and I asked her to say it to him. She said it again. There was no embarrassment.

He said to her, “Oh, but the Jews have the Noahide commandments — that is, the seven commandments — and they believe that if you follow the Noahide commandments, even if you’re not Jewish, you’ll go to heaven.”

I found that moment very telling. First of all, I would never compare anybody to Hitler, period. I don’t care who it is, it’s completely not done. It’s disgusting to do that. But then, for her to say “The Jews are like Hitler” — what kind of a thing is that? What kind of a mentality is that?

It turns out this woman was in charge — her career; she’s retired now — of religious instruction in the public schools of Saxony in Thuringia for many decades.

JOHN CONNELLY: She was an East German.

SUSANNAH HESCHEL: An East German, and she had been a student of this very Nazi, Walter Grundmann.

But I found it interesting to see that the response to her was a theological approach, with the Noahide commandments. “You see, the Jews really aren’t so racist because you can go to heaven.” The thinking of it was very foreign and strange to me.

I can’t imagine that — I haven’t experienced anything like that — in the United States. If someone says something like that, the response would be outrage; it wouldn’t be, “Oh, but the Jews have Noahide commandments,” which really are something that Jews don’t even talk about very much. It’s a very marginal point.

I would say that in Germany in the scholarly on the churches the word “anti-Semitism” almost never appeared in the scholarly literature for many decades after World War II. It’s not a concept. I would meet graduate students who were working in church archives with me and we would talk about it. “Anti-Semitism” no. “Racism” maybe, but “anti-
Semitism. You make a very, very important point in your book. You point out the difference. That is, racism looks at a group and says, “Oh, they're inferior.” Anti-Semitism — the Nazi anti-Semitism, but in general — looks at Jews and says, “Look how powerful and dangerous they are.” There are some very specific things about anti-Semitism. It can't be conflated. There's something very specific that has to be examined.

In Germany there's a lot of defensiveness. There's anti-Semitism, and that's not nice. But really what happened in the modern period was racial anti-Semitism, and that's very different. “Hitler had to do with anti-Semitism, and there's no connection,” they say — I hear this all the time — “there's no connection between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism.” I don't know how they can say that, frankly. It doesn't make sense. There's an argument that that has been dominant.

Now, of course, that has begun to change, and there were individual figures, theologians, who did great work in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, like Markfar [phonetic] for example, and others in Germany, really very much at the forefront internationally in their thinking.

But these are some of the problems that can remain until this day. That's why this political correctness would come up as a charge.

JAMES McCARTIN: We have a lot of questions tonight, so you'll forgive me for maybe collapsing a couple questions into one, in the interest of getting through as many questions as we can.

There seems to be a significant irony to this story that was told tonight. Jewish converts to Catholicism were able to bring about an official Catholic declaration saying that Jews need not convert. In these cases, conversion from Judaism seems to have brought about a great good both for Jews and Catholics — back to Susannah's point earlier. So how should we think about this? How should we think about conversion, knowing this story?

JOHN CONNELLY: Well, as an American, in our tradition of individual rights and individual opportunity, I would simply say it's a matter of the individual at some level. But I am not a spokesperson for any — not even for my own history department at Berkeley.

But it is a tremendous irony that it's converts who brought about a situation in which the Church no longer speaks of conversion. I can only say that John Oesterreicher, although he became very friendly with some of his friends from boyhood, he never turned anybody away who wanted to become Christian, until late in his life he actually gave instruction particularly to Jews who knew about him, for reasons sometimes because they were marrying a Christian woman and wanted to enter the Catholic Church.

But the point is that it was no longer a mission. I think that's pretty much how this operates currently within the Church.

SUSANNAH HESCHEL: I would just say that I always heard about the greatness of Reinhold Niebuhr, that when Will Herberg came to him seeking conversion, he said, “No, go and study Judaism.” So perhaps in some of these cases these were Jews who didn't know much about Judaism.

JOHN CONNELLY: That's true.

There was actually a case in the 1930s, when John Oesterreicher was running his mission
to the Jews and getting an appropriately negative response from the Viennese Jewish community, that one rabbi said, “If somebody not knowing much about Judaism comes to you, send him back to us, because we can make him into a faithful Jew, and that’s what a Jew should be.” I think late in life Oesterreicher actually came to accept that position.

But as I said, as a Catholic priest, he couldn’t turn anybody away. So in some senses it touches upon these matters of mystery that I think we historians, and perhaps theologians as well, can’t really have any definitive statement about.

JAMES McCARTIN: Another question: Was the State of Israel and its founding in 1948 in any way influential on the way Catholic thinkers were willing to change their views? Was the founding of the State of Israel somehow influential in the story of change within the Catholic Church in thinking about Jews?

JOHN CONNELLY: The people that I study, at least in the 1950s, claimed that it wasn’t important. But of course they couldn’t ignore the founding of the State of Israel. In some ways it represented for them the will of God. These are people who were deeply historicist in their training. They believed that they could read the will of God through history. When they saw the Jews return to their homeland and establish a state, they thought it meant something. But expressing that theologically was something that the people that I study didn’t attempt to do, and I think the Catholic Church has also been very hesitant to do that.

In 1985 — I don’t know whether you’ve looked at this — there was a statement from the Vatican simply saying that Catholics should have understanding that for Jews it’s important to have a sense of link to — I believe the word is “land.” That’s about it.

In some sense, it’s like the history of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, the founding of the State of Israel, are things in the background that are never really brought up directly in the discussion that I talk about. But then you see people like Karl Thieme and Karl Oesterreicher.

The major supporter of Karl Thieme in Germany was actually a woman named Gertrud Luckner, who was a Catholic of Protestant background. She was actually a convert from Protestantism, who was born Jane Hart in England and then became Gertrud Luckner in Germany. During the war, we actually took money and supplies to Jews living in Germany. She was the first German invited to Israel, as I understand it, in I believe it’s 1950 or 1951. She went all the time and in her journal wrote about Israel all the time.

It seemed natural to them that this was something that they should be interested in, but theologically I don’t know that there was much that they said about it.

JAMES McCARTIN: These questions seem to be mostly directed at Susannah, but, John, of course feel free to jump in.

Obviously, Catholics were able to largely overcome a long and bitter history with regard to their relationship to Jews. But how about Protestants? Was there a parallel story among Protestants in Europe or in the United States? Was overcoming anti-Semitism a harder lift in some sense for them, or was it easier?

Moving in a slightly different direction but on the question of interreligious relations, Susannah, do you detect any signs of change among Muslims today that might parallel earlier changes taking place among Catholics with regard to their attitudes toward Jews?

So first Protestants and then Muslims.
SUSANNAH HESCHEL: Yes, those are big questions.

I would say on the question of was it easier for Protestants, actually if you read John’s book, you’ll see the discussion in the book of some various meetings that were held to formulate statements regarding Christian views of Judaism after World War II that involved Central European theologians, German theologians. Some of them were very problematic and some of them were positive.

The one at Seelisberg, for example, which was I believe in 1947, involved Jews as well as Christians, and the outcome was a very positive statement.

Others didn’t involve Jews. The Stuttgart Confession in 1945 of the German Protestant Church doesn’t mention the Holocaust at all and draws its language from the Declaration from the Barmen Declaration from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but it is really a very disappointing and problematic statement.

There are others, though, that moved beyond this to speak against mission to the Jews, Protestant declarations that came, I believe, subsequent to Nostra Aetate.

The Church of the Rhineland issued a declaration rejecting mission to the Jews, and then was sued by some of its member churches in court on the grounds that abandoning mission means you have relinquished your tax-free status as a church, for instance. That was resolved, by the way.

Was it harder or easier? Difficult to give an answer whether it was harder or easier. But it was complicated and it had some similar debates over Romans 9–11, for instance, but of course differences.

In terms of Muslims, let me move on. Actually I am writing a book about the history of Jewish scholarship on Islam from the 1830s to the 1930s. There were Jewish scholars, from Germany primarily, who were very involved with Muslims at Al-Azhar University and at Aligarh Muslim University and elsewhere. The relations were very positive on both sides.

Even one professor from Germany who went to teach at a Muslim university as a professor of Arabic, I found that subsequently his students and students of the students, grand-students, published a commentary on the Hebrew text. It was very positive, in other words, a positive influence.

I think there was a kind of a golden age of that era, from the late-19th century to the early-20th, and I don’t see it reflected today actually. I hope that it will return at some point.

JAMES McCARTIN: A question for John: You brought up that there was a doctoring of the schema of Nostra Aetate, of the draft of Nostra Aetate, during the Second Vatican Council. Would you comment a little more on the doctoring of the text that needed correction later on?

JOHN CONNELLY: Well, “doctoring” is a strong word, but it was the word used actually by British Cardinal Heenan to say what had happened in the Curia. The Vatican administration, which consists of mostly Italian cardinals, conservative, opposed to change, in early 1964 got a copy of one of the drafts of Nostra Aetate, and they changed the one phrase that I mentioned, to indicate that the Church looked forward to the day when Jews would become Christians, essentially.
They also took out the use of the word “deicide.” There had been a refutation of deicide in the previous statement.

Another thing they changed is they took out a condemnation of anti-Semitism. There had actually been a sentence saying that the Church condemns anti-Semitism, and that was weakened. In the final draft, I believe the word used is “deplored.”

But what Paul VI felt was that he wanted to get as much support for the final statement as possible. You all know that Paul VI came into office in 1963, after the death of John XXIII, who had actually called for the Council in 1959 and then began organizing activities in 1960. Paul VI is thought of as a more conservative — more hesitant perhaps is a good way of saying it — figure. He wanted to get as much support from right and left within the Church, if one can talk about right and left within the Church. Therefore, he did give in to some of these requests for what some saw as a watering-down of the document.

But as you saw, the statement that the Church looks forward to the day Jews join the Church was removed and it was changed to the sentence that I gave you.

The statement actually faced resistance from some quarters within the Church all the way until the fall of 1965, in particular from bishops from Eastern churches, churches often in Arab lands, who were afraid of what might happen to the tiny Christian communities there because of concern that Arab states and Arab populations would rise up and persecute the Christians for any kind of recognition of Israel. That was something that Paul VI took seriously.

But in the end — and I think John Oesterreicher would have agreed — he did assure the passage of a statement which has stood the test of time.

**JAMES McCARTIN:** An observation and a question. Being Catholic seems to be an individual spiritual choice. Being Jewish appears to be more than an individual spiritual choice; it’s an identity. Does this make it too easy in some ways to speak of a Jewish race?

**SUSANNAH HESCHEL:** I don’t use the word “race” particularly. I don’t find it very helpful. There’s a genealogy. The politics of the history of the use of the term is very problematic.

But I would actually say I think that Jews and Catholics do have an identity as well as a religion, a religious faith. We’re similar in that respect.

I have friends who tell me, “I’m an ex-Catholic.” Fine. In other words, once a Catholic always a Catholic. A Catholic is someone who has, yes, a spiritual choice, but there’s also the way a child is raised, like a Jew. A Jewish child is raised. We’re both raised and educated and taught and given experiences. We are given by our parents experiences, experiences of religiosity, experiences of holiness, that we hope our children will take with them forever and keep in their hearts. We teach them, they’re educated, they’re raised. But we teach not just the mind, but the heart, the soul, as well.

So I actually think that we have the same kind of experience. I wouldn’t call that “race,” “ethnicity.” No, it’s something much more complicated and subtle.

I wouldn’t turn to anthropologists for the terminology. I would ask religious people. Of course we understand what it means. So yes, I think Jews and Catholics have that special commonality.
JAMES McCARTIN: To conclude, just a question about Catholic-Jewish relations, Jewish-Catholic relations, since Vatican II: Do you see any dangers of reversion in this area, a lack of attention to the special relationship between Catholicism and Judaism?

And an addendum question: How has the most recent papacy perhaps brought Jewish-Catholic relations to a better point or a worse point?

JOHN CONNELLY: I may be a bit of an optimist, but I don’t see the possibilities for reversion.

This is something that I was asked explicitly. I spoke at a synagogue a couple of months ago. A gentleman came up afterwards and asked, “Well, if the Church can change its mind in the 1960s, can it change its mind again?”

I think my answer would be only if the Holocaust became forgotten. I think that, fortunately, thanks to educators, is unlikely.

But I also think — maybe again I’m a bit of an optimist — that you can see a clear shift in theology, in the thinking of people educated in Scripture. It’s clearly in one direction, and it’s massive. It reveals that the old anti-Judaic way of reading Scripture was conditioned by interests of a particular time against the Jews, and this is not the way we need to read the New Testament. I think a faithful reading of the New Testament is reflected in that kind of theology. So I’m not concerned about reversion at that level.

However, I still think we need to be vigilant, we need to be concerned that this teaching is taught, not simply something that theologians and some priests know about, but something that broad masses of Christians understand. It’s not that difficult. It is well explained, for example, in the work of Daniel Harrington, a Jesuit at Boston College. But there are other theologians as well, Christian, Jewish. This is something that I simply think needs to be taught. So I’m a believer at this level in enlightenment.

SUSANNAH HESCHEL: One comment about this. In recent decades, what I find so striking is that Jewish historians and theologians are finally beginning to think about Christian influence on Judaism. I don’t just mean in the historical context, but actual influence on the way early Judaism developed in response to Christianity. Or, for instance, since we are in pre-Passover/pre-Easter season, that the Passover Haggadah was written in response to Christianity, not vice versa.

The Haggadah actually took shape — the liturgy, the word — after the 1st century, and in response to certain Christian ideas. Such as when we say Hei Lachma Anya [this is the bread of affliction], holding it up, what do you think we’re doing? And so many other moments when we speak at Passover liturgically.

So I think that willingness or openness of Jews to think about Christian influence on Judaism as a religion, as a faith, that’s very important.

Finally, I just have to say — forgive me — I broke my ankle. The people I really wanted to, and did, turn to for some consolation were not the rabbis, because they disappointed me. It was when I had some — I’m sorry; this is embarrassing to say — the people I turned to for consolation when I broke my ankle were sisters, were Catholic sisters, and they came and they talked to me and they helped me. I’m so grateful that I have the privilege of living in an era where that’s possible, where that’s open to me, because I really needed those sisters. I think you understand what I’m talking about, because we all need those sisters.
Thank you.

**JAMES McCARTIN:** I almost filled in your last line for you. I knew who you were going to say, Catholic sisters.

In closing, I want to remind you and invite you to come up and purchase a copy of John Connelly’s and/or Susannah Heschel’s books. They'll be signing over here. Purchase over here, signing over here.

I want to thank you all for coming tonight.

Please join me in thanking our guests, John Connelly and Susannah Heschel.

[Adjourned: 7:38 p.m.]