

Nostra Aetate

As I look back this afternoon on an occasion commemorating the 40th anniversary of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* which stunned the world with the declaration of the birth of a new age and stunned the Jewish world with an outreach of miraculous proportions seeking to heal a breach of millennia that had separated the church from the Jews, I am struck by the impact of this outreach on my own academic career at a critical moment when I was determining what this direction would be as an historian of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Having been nurtured by an ultra-Orthodox Jewish family I had been given a secure Jewish identity and I had been thoroughly tutored in all the sacred texts of Judaism and was well on my way to becoming a *Talmid Hakham*, a master of the multi-folioed Talmud when a crisis of faith catapulted me out of the Jewish world of my fathers into another world entirely- a world of critical reason which shook my faith to the core and lured me to seek in the dynamics of Jewish history a clue to solving the riddle of the creative survival of Judaism and the Jewish people. It was at this time that I was jolted by *Nostra Aetate* into realizing that the key to the riddle was to be found not in the Middle Ages or modern times but in the parting of the ways which not only set Jews and Christians along two separate paths to salvation, but set their teeth on edge as to which of the two roads was God-ward and which had perdition as its destination.

Equipped as I was with an intimate familiarity with Jewish sources, I ventured forth to master the Christian sources which I was aware had attracted few Jewish scholars, scholars who like myself had been frightened away from reading the New Testament which was looked upon as being the seeding grounds for antisemitism and with it the brutal pogroms and even the holocaust which seemed to have the imprimatur of the church, which had stripped the Jews of their role as the people of God and at the core of God's divine plan and condemning the Jews to being a wandering witness to their perfidy. Taking the pronouncements of Vatican II as a sincere outreach of the church to restore to the Jews the noble status of being a people of God in its own right, I put all caution to the winds in the hope that the dynamics of the history of Judaism and the Jewish people might at long last make the break between Judaism and Christianity intelligible, first for the Jews and then for the Christians. I hoped that in the light of a new understanding that I might build a bridge over the troubled waters of the ages, a bridge over which Jews could cross over to the Christian side, and Christians to the Jewish side without the need for either Jews or Christians to sacrifice their own unique and distinctive insights into the divine and the meaning of God by any compromise of the quintessential core of the hallowed identity of each. It is this bridge which the utilization of the mastery of the sacred texts of my childhood along with a mastery of the sacred texts of Christianity has enabled me to build over the years that I wish to unveil for you today with confidence that I as a Jew come to the church with the same outstretched arm that I grasped when *Nostra Aetate* was proclaimed. I wish today to share the rays of divine light that I found gleaming forth from behind the human shadows of the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. Would that all Jews would allow themselves to be exposed to those rays without the fear and trembling that had kept these gems of divine revelation behind the closed covers of Christian sacred texts.

What I am sharing with you today are the fruits of the years of my dedication to the bridge building and not a chronological account within time or space. Rather it is the finished structure and not the process of building. For this reason I begin with the ending, an ending which reveals the historical dynamic of a revelational process both within Judaism and within Christianity. For of this we can be certain: in the beginning there was Judaism and only hundreds of years later did Christianity grow out of it. I therefore begin not with Judaism in general but with the Judaism that

was normative in Jesus's day, a Judaism which was not, except for the Temple and sacrificial cult, the Judaism of biblical writ. Far from it, it was a very distinctive form of Judaism succinctly expressed in the first verse of Matthew 23, a verse which reads: "the Scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses's seat so do whatever they will tell you to do." The Scribes-Pharisees sit on Moses's seat and sit there by right. Yet there are no Scribes or Pharisees mentioned anywhere in the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch in thousands of verses had set the Aaronides on Moses's seat and not a scholar class attested to only following the Hasmonean Revolt when an illegitimate high priest was set on Moses's seat, not by the authority of the Pentateuch, but by the authority of a Great Synagogue, a Great Synagogue which is not authorized by the Pentateuch to appoint a High priest on the basis of their authority stemming from an Oral Law. The Pentateuch is clear enough: the High priest is to be the first-born son of Aaron, namely Eleazar who was to be followed by his first born son who at the time of the Hasmonean revolt was a direct descendant from the High priest Zadok in Solomon's Temple. Hence, any breaking of that line was strictly and absolutely forbidden under any circumstances, not to speak of the circumstance of a decision by a Great Synagogue which is never mentioned in the Pentateuch and whose authority stemmed not from Pentateuchal rite but from revolutionary rite! Yet in Jesus's day these Scribes-Pharisees not only sat on Moses's seat - and not a Sadducee- but sat on that seat with an authority recognized by the author of Matthew 23.

The significance of this passage in Matthew 23 is that it bears witness to a revelation other than that revelation which we find in the Pentateuch. Rather it was a revelation which supplanted the revelation in the Pentateuch and its legitimacy is not challenged in Matthew 23- quite the reverse the disciples of Jesus were told to recognize this authority even though the Scribes-Pharisees as individuals might be hypocrites. Jesus is pictured as a loyal follower of the second revelation, the revelation of the twofold Law and not a first revelation that Moses was vouchsafed in the wilderness. Jesus by recognizing the authority of the Scribes-Pharisees was adhering to laws not written down without regard to the immutability which over and over again is underlined in the Pentateuch. Jesus in following their authority was turning his back on the *literal* written-down warning that not a jot or tittle was to be altered from the written-down law. For it must be remembered that whenever the Bible is cited by either Jesus or Paul it is only cited as a proof-text, despite the fact that there is no proof-texting extant prior to the rise of the Scribes-Pharisees. So even when Jesus is purported to say you shouldn't change a jot or tittle it should be read that one is not to alter the written word, but certainly it was far from excluding the reading into that written word the unwritten exegesis which is always assumed. Long before Jesus the Pentateuch had become hostage to the overriding authority of the unwritten laws. Thus it was that in Jesus day the twofold Law of the Pharisees had successfully won over the majority of Jews, not only to their oral laws, but to their belief that the resurrection of the dead could be proof-texted from the Pentateuch even as Jesus himself gave the lie to the Sadducees who claimed that this dogmatic belief was imbedded within a Pentateuchal verse.

Now it also has to be remembered that Jesus, though a follower of the oral Law along with most Jews, was living and preaching while Sadducees were by no means extinct though they were a tiny minority. It is clear from Jesus himself that by confronting the Sadducees with their misperceptions he was acknowledging that the Sadducees still had a voice, but a voice not worth listening to. It had become only a whisper, but a whisper nonetheless. This fact of the overarching of the Oral Law in Jesus's day is a fact that most scholars, not only Jewish but Christian, have not only failed to take it into account but also failed to recognize how critical this twofold Law was in Jesus's day. Struck by the centrality of the Scribes-Pharisees for comprehending the significance of Jesus's ministry, I realized that a new look at the Scribes-Pharisees was mandatory. If indeed the Scribes-Pharisees sat on Moses's seat, they could not be the small sect that virtually all Jewish

and Christian scholars believe them to be. This I concluded was a major stumbling block for understanding the structure of Judaism in Jesus's day.

After a close reading of Josephus who was the major source for the notion that the Pharisees were a sect, I realized that all scholars had translated the Greek word *haeresis* as a "sect" when it can be established that in Josephus's day *haeresis* did not mean "sect" but "school of thought." Jesus was giving us vignettes of the three *forms* of Judaism of his day—the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes—that is forms of Judaism irrespective of the number of followers. He is thus telling us of three schools of thought, but not of sects, each one of which was an option. Even though two of these schools, the Sadducees and Essenes could be viewed as sects, the Pharisees cannot. Josephus again and again reminds us that the majority of the Jews follow the teachings of the Pharisees. Once we establish that *haeresis* means "school of thought" in the Greek of Josephus's day, we then can see that Jesus is to be considered as a follower of the teachings of the Scribes-Pharisees even though he may have had controversies with these sages as to his own special relationship to God the Father. For those scholars who consider the Pharisees to have been some kind of confraternity primarily concerned with ritual purity, they have no normative Judaism which must have been functioning to determine the ritual calendar, the procedures to be carried out by the priests in the Temple, the Sabbath laws, et al. If all that we have are sects, where do we look for the rod and measure by which a sect can be separated out from the mainstream?

With this secure fundament provided by Josephus's use of the word *haeresis*, I was inspired to explore more and more deeply into the what, the why and the where of Jesus as a proof-texter ala the Scribes-Pharisees and not a literalist limited by a literal reading. And it was because this was so that Jesus came into collision with the Scribes-Pharisees, not because he did not recognize the legitimacy of proof-texting, but because, although he recognized the legitimacy of the method, it did not mean that he recognized the proof-texting as the Pharisees were using to derive the true meaning of the verse. And it was because of this failure on the part of scholars to fully appreciate Jesus's roots in Pharisaism that their portrait of Jesus lacks its most salient features—mainly that Jesus had been nurtured not on the first revelation but on a second revelation, a revelation that had been totally at odds with the first revelation, a revelation that was proof-texted to secure the support of the Written Law although there was no such support in the literal meaning. This is important because once we understand that there had been two revelations and of the two Jesus was loyal to the second, the unwritten revelation and not to the first written down in the Pentateuch as such, the existence of a second revelation gives grounds for a third revelation centering on the ministry of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. So long then as the revelation of the twofold Law still retains its legitimacy as the true revelation, there are no grounds for precluding a third revelation except on the grounds of rejection of its claims. But after all, the Sadducees had rejected the claims of the second revelation so where is that transcendental measure by which such a decision can be made?

Now what does all this add up to? It adds up to Jesus having an umbilical chord tying him to the Pharisees and untying him from the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Fourth Philosophy and the Dead Sea Scrollatiers. It also adds up to the fact that Jesus was confronted by two revelations incompatible one with the other.

The portrait of Jesus that I have drawn from Josephus, the Gospels and Paul is confirmed independently in study after study which I published, capped by my full-length book *A Hidden Revolution* which reveals the Pharisees for the mighty revolutionary force they were in proclaiming a second revelation, a revelation which even today enjoys the loyalty of millions of Jews worldwide, Jews who never read the Pentateuch literally but only as seen through the proof-texting mode of the Scribes-Pharisees, a form of Judaism totally at odds from that spelled out in

the Pentateuch. These Scribes-Pharisees, far from setting up barriers of ritual cleanliness separating them from the masses of people, were the leaders of one of the most profound and impactful revolutionary movements of all time, a movement which stirred the masses with promises of eternal life and resurrection to such a fevered pitch that they were willing to lay down their lives in a bitter civil war fought against the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus who following in his father's footsteps sought to repress the Pharisees and to abrogate their *paradosis*, the Oral Law. Momentous they were indeed! For they demonstrated that a new revelation could supplant the old—and get away with it. Salome Alexandra restored the oral laws which had been abrogated by John Hyrcanus and effectively reduced the challenge from the first revelation to such an extent that by the time of Jesus the Scribes-Pharisees were securely sitting in Moses's seat of the twofold Law. It was in the last chapter of *A Hidden Revolution* that I interwove Jesus and Paul into a tapestry of skeins drawn from the Pharisees on the one hand and the Gospels and Epistles of Paul on the other. As I look back today on that tapestry I find the skeins need no added skeins to reveal Christianity as bound to the Judaism of the twofold Law by a pattern that gives each skein its due. For this I must give thanks to *Nostra Aetate* for opening to me the windows of Christianity so long closed. Otherwise I would have been barred from taking the full measure of the meaning of that precious verse in Matthew 23, a verse that affirms that the Scribes-Pharisees sat on Moses's seat and they were sitting there legitimately even though it was not the first revelation which was giving them the authority but a second revelation, that of the *paradosis* which had been orally transmitted and which has demonstrated the power of that second revelation by its hearty and creative endurance to this very day.

II

The Epistles of Paul prove to be even more shocking to me than the Gospels because in my years of enforced ignorance, I had come to believe that Paul was the *bete noire* for/of Judaism because of his defiant nullification of the law, lock, stock and barrel. This was confirmed when at the peak of my adolescent piety when I was caught up with the fantasies of a future leader in Israel and an intrepid defender of the law against the inroads of Conservative and Reform and Reconstructionist forms of Judaism along with the secularism that was proving so attractive to the second generation of American Jews, I chanced upon the pioneering works of R. Travers Herford offering a Christian reappraisal of Pharisaism. For the first time I was exposed to Paul and his apostasy and had the opportunity to applaud the tenacity of my faith in Torah-true Judaism which unlike that of Paul was beyond betrayal. When I was jolted out of my tenacity only a week or two later when on my way to the synagogue one Saturday afternoon I was passing by a sandlot baseball diamond where on many a Sabbath as a kid I had sneaked off to confirm that the title "ball hawk" which had been given to me by my peers was still well deserved. As I was passing by I was rudely shaken out of my tenacity when a bolt out of the blue came whispering to me "What if Paul were right?"

Shaken out of my wits, paralyzed and gripped by panic, it was only with the greatest of efforts that I stumbled off to the synagogue, where gripping the prayer book tightly I regained my composure and recaptured the rugged faith I had seemed to have lost. Shrugging off the risen Paul as nothing other than a test of faith and like father Abraham whom God had tested when he called on him to sacrifice his son Isaac, I had passed the test with flying colors. Paul, the *bete noire*, had proved no match for my faith and I was now faith restored and ready to continue my trudge towards eternal life and resurrection with a renewed certainty that the road paved with laws divine was the only road - and I was on it.

Little did I realize that what I had experienced was an epiphany: a revelation that all was not secure in my inmost self as I had made myself believe. My inner house was in reality a house

divided and heresy was knocking and knocking until some years later it broke through all the barriers of a sturdy faith when in my university years, I was exposed to the power of critical reason to erode the claims that the Pentateuch contained the very word as dictated to Moses on Horeb, Mount Sinai and in the wilderness wanderings. Only then was I ready to open my mind to the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul and see that what I had experienced with the risen Paul was for me in its own way equivalent to Paul's own epiphany of the risen Christ.

Reading Paul's Epistles for the first time was a stunning, eye-opening experience. Far from Paul being a *bete noire*, he was a soul stricken with pain, anguish and bewilderment. Here was no creator of a new religion or a student of mystery cults, no transmitter of Jesus's signs, wonders and teachings. I searched in his Epistles in vain for the marks of Jesus's life only to discover that it was not Jesus's life that inspired Paul or Jesus's teachings and wonderworks that transformed him into an apostle to the Gentiles. It was the resurrection and its meaning that readied him to face the beasts at Ephesus. The epistles give us a tortured soul transfigured by an experience with the risen Christ that could neither be brushed aside nor kept for himself alone. And since this former headstrong persecutor of those preaching Jesus's life, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, it was evident that Paul's coming on the risen Christ could have been nothing other than either miraculous or utterly fraudulent. For him it was a miracle because as a follower of the Pharisees he believed in eternal life and resurrection and as such could not just dismiss the risen Christ as a mirage on the grounds that there was no promise of resurrection in scriptures. Being a follower of the second revelation, that of the twofold Law, however could be in and of itself no barrier. The barrier was not disbelief in the possibility of a resurrection but the experience itself. Was it a mirage, a fevered fantasy, or an actual confirmation of the core belief of the Pharisees? So impressive was the quality of his experience that he became thoroughly convinced that the crucified Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. That zeal which he had first displayed in hounding the followers of Jesus was transfigured into a feverish zeal goading him to preach the good news of Christ's rising, a preaching which put him not only a collision course with Jews, but a collision course with those for whom Jesus paradigmatic life, crucifixion and resurrection as described in the emerging Gospels was their core preaching. But whereas the collision course with the Jews was prompted by his rejection of the first and second revelations as *passé*, the collision course with the followers of Jesus came from Paul's neglect of Jesus's wondrous acts during his lifetime and from his inspiring teachings. In its stead Paul preached his novel interpretation of what Jesus's resurrection meant.

My own experience with the risen Paul was in many ways a mirror image of Paul's experience with the risen Christ. Far from recoiling from Paul, I welcomed him as someone who like myself had been a zealous champion of the twofold Law only to be overwhelmed by some inner surge which catapulted him from being a firm believer in the second revelation to an even firmer believer in the third revelation revolving around Jesus - but on Paul's terms, terms that were so at odds with what was being preached in Jesus name that one must give his epistles the crowning achievement of Christianity: the failure of the law to dissolve the power of sin coupled with the needfulness for Christ's redemptive love. The saving and redemptive power of love has never been so eloquently expressed as it is in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians. Drawn to Paul by the anguish of his unasked for experience with the living Christ which so resembled my panic stricken encounter with the risen Paul, I could empathize with him and be grateful for his paen to love, ever giving, never demanding. My own experience indeed had a different outcome, but it had the same magnitude of effect. It opened up my hidden inner self to me and though it did not bring me to Christ's love it did loosen the shackles of ultraorthodoxy which had held back my mind from thinking unthinkable thoughts and from appreciating other revelations coming from the same divine source which I feared to acknowledge.

And of course my own deep experience with the twofold Law and my firm belief in eternal life and resurrection enabled me to see Paul for the anguished soul he was. For Paul too the risen Christ compelled him to think unthinkable thoughts as to what his experience must mean and share that meaning drawn from his inner soul and not borrowed from sources outside of his own interaction with the risen Christ coming as he did with a zeal for the twofold Law that no one of his day could match.

III

There was also another area profoundly affecting Christian-Jewish relations which throws a hopeful light that may clarify its impact and that is the sensitive and fragile question of antisemitism in the New Testament. For me the answer was quick in coming because the dynamics of the historical process had revealed that antisemitism occurs only when a society is breaking down and in the course of its collapse intensifies the anxiety of those who suffer from it and are desperate for simple explanations as to what is occurring- an explanation which is simple and not an explanation offering the rational effort to determine the nature and the structure of the matrix of causality which is essential if such a phenomena is to be understood. I had discovered that truth has little power under such circumstances as the breakdown of a society to have any discernable impact. When this is kept in mind, the hostile passages affecting the Jews in the Gospels cannot be considered antisemitic on this score alone nor can they be considered antisemitic on any score. The hostile passages of which there certainly are some express the normal hostility within any grouping in which some challenge emerges directed at those holding power and authority. There is no religion that I am aware of that has escaped the barbs of hatred sparked by disagreements over this religious doctrine or that religious practice frequently ending up in bloody religious wars laced with venom, hatred and the opportunity to coerce.

It is important for Jews to look back on their own history and ask whether the great prophets were antisemitic when the excoriated kings, princes, priests and other prophets whom they considered to be false. Were the Israelites of the north antisemitic when they established a kingdom of their own? What of the civil war that pitted Pharisees against Sadducees in the days of Alexander Jannaeus? Was this antisemitism and if so which of the two colliding entities was to be held responsible for such an attitude? And when we get to Jesus's day were the followers of the Fourth Philosophy antisemitic? Or those Jewish factions who butchered each other in Jerusalem during the revolt against Rome, were they laced with antisemitic hatreds? Were the Kairites perhaps antisemitic or the Maimonides and the anti-Maimonidists who denounced each others misperceptions and rank heresies? And what of Shabbatai Zvi the pseudo-Messiah and his thousands of followers, many of whom were distinguished rabbis, were they antisemitic or simply misperceiving Jews? And what are we to make of the harsh quarrelings that were heaped on the Baal Shem Tov and his followers by the Vilna Gaon and his followers that raged for decades in the 18th century? And coming to our own day are Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Jews antisemitic because of their divided notions as what the true Judaism should be? Obviously then there can be no antisemitism however much Jews come to blows with each other. Since this is so, how can the New Testament be considered a seedbed of antisemitism however many times Matthew calls the Scribes-Pharisees hypocrites? Remember too the early Christians had no power to do physical harm against the Scribes-Pharisees when they were driven out of the synagogues. After all until the time of Constantine it was Christians who were far more on the run than Jews. There can be antisemitism only after the Christians gain power and could use the hostile passages in the New Testament to justify their efforts to degrade the Jews to an inferior status.

And as for Paul, far from being an anti-Semite, Paul was ready to be cursed and give up his bond to Christ if only Israel of the flesh, God's chosen people, would accept Jesus's love for them. After all, Paul had more than a verse or two from the great prophets castigating their people for turning from God and arousing his anger against them. For these texts Paul needed no midrash. Their words are the same as their meanings.

IV

There is one more area of discord that has haunted Jewish-Christian relations virtually from the moment of its breakout and that is the charge of deicide that again and again has lifted its frightening head as the Easter season unleashed memories of Jesus's agonizing suffering on the cross and especially as given in the Gospel of John. Yearly Passion plays incited Christians to express their pain and rage by assaulting the Jews in pogroms that left the Jews shaken and hateful and unforgiving. Especially frightening were the recurrent charges of Jews killing Christian children to use their blood for the making of unleavened bread for Passover and the piercing of the Holy Sacrament until it bled. Much as in later years in the United States Negroes were in constant fear of lynching, Jews throughout the Middle Ages were in constant fear of annual pogroms, but unlike lynching which was justified by a racial fear and hatred, pogroms were justified on the grounds of deicide. It was these experiences of how lethal the deicide texts in the Gospels could be that made the New Testament a book to be excoriated by Jews and not a book to read and cherish for the stories of Jesus loving compassion for the poor and the oppressed and of his healing of the sick in body and soul. The charge of deicide even crowded out Jesus's last words on the cross pleading with God to forgive his executioners because they knew not what they were doing. If Christians paid no heed to these words, why should Jews being pogrommed by the charge of deicide pay heed?

Perhaps the fresh understanding of the how, the why and the wherefore of Jesus's trial and crucifixion that my research has made clear beyond challenge will put an end once and for all any charge of deicide. Jesus could not have been tried by a religious body because in Jesus's day the Sanhedrin was a political body presided over by a high priest who was appointed by the procurator bereft of any religious legitimacy. From top to bottom- from emperor to procurator to high priest- political power, not religious precedent, held sway. Since this is so, the only concern on the part of the political authorities could only have been whether or not Jesus was attracting crowds and not whether or not he was the would-be messiah ushering in the kingdom of God. Crowds, the procurator and the high priest knew only too well, could easily get out of hand even if as in the case of Jesus, he was telling his listeners that they should render unto Caesar what was Caesar's and unto God what was God's. Thus we know from Josephus that John the Baptist was put to death not because of his irenic teachings but because his eloquence attracted crowds and crowds were dangerous as experience had taught, especially at festival time when thousands of Jews crowded into Jerusalem to bring sacrifices to be offered up in the Temple. Jesus, like John the Baptist as recorded in the Gospel story, was attracting crowds and the procurator-appointed high priest, Caiaphas, was the only high priest who held office for more than a year or two under one procurator after another presumably because unlike his predecessors, Caiaphas took no chances with what was being preached but focused exclusively on how many listeners Jesus was attracting. A crowd was a crowd was a crowd- any crowd was dangerous and his tenure as high priest was dependent on how effectively he preserved law and order. The only issue was whether or not he was being acclaimed as king of the Jews by crowds eager that a messiah save them.

How utterly free of religious coercion were the members of the high priest's privy council, a Sanhedrin, is made manifest by the fact that the council was made up of Scribes-Pharisees,

protagonists of the twofold Law, and presided over by a Sadducean high priest along with his Sadducee confreres who followed two distinct systems of laws and who regarded each other as heretics whose religious differences had throughout the years when Alexander Jannaeus reigned engaged one another in a bloody civil war, so bloody in fact that Alexander Jannaeus had fifty of the rebels crucified.

Though under Salome Alexander a compact of “live and let live” was negotiated, there was no compromise over the issue as to whether God had revealed to Moses only the Written Law, or a twofold Law which gave to those religious leaders in the chain of transmission permission to legislate laws so long as they were not written down. That the controversies between the Sadducees and the Pharisees in the time of Jesus were still very much alive is attested to both in the Tannaitic literature and in the Gospels. Since this was so, how could Jesus have been tried on religious grounds by a privy council made up of Scribes-Pharisees and Sadducees when among other differences dividing them was the belief in eternal life and resurrection on the part of the Scribes-Pharisees and the denial on the part of the Sadducees. But these critical differences with respect to the nature of God’s revelation to Moses did not preclude a joint interest in the preservation of law and order given the bloody history of crowds going berserk time and time again in the years following the harsh punishment meted out to those responsible for the tearing down of the Roman eagle shortly before Herod’s death.

That no religious body could have been responsible for Jesus’s crucifixion could have been easily confirmed by a close reading of Josephus and the Gospels, but my intense interest in a proof that could not be challenged finally was rewarded when it occurred to me the *Beth Din ha-Gadol*, the Great Legislature, was not called a Sanhedrin but a *boule*, the word that Josephus uses for the Roman senate, a legislative body, and never a Sanhedrin which he always uses to refer to a privy council appointed by one of high authority. Sanhedrin came to be used as synonymous with *Beth Din* only after the destruction of the Temple when the *Beth Din* came to be called a Sanhedrin because with the destruction of the Temple there was no longer a high priest. For the Romans to head up a privy council to preserve law and order, they called the body that was the only authority after the destruction of the Temple a Sanhedrin. This Sanhedrin was simply the *Beth Din ha-Gadol* or *boule* and therefore there were no Sadducees that were members. Going through the Tractate Sanhedrin I found that the term *Beth Din* with only a few exceptions is the word used for this body. Furthermore the head of the *Beth Din* was still called *Nasi*, while the vice-*Nasi* was called *Ab Beth Din* and not *Ab Sanhedrin*. It should also be noted that the Tannaitic sources refer to a major ordinance that was proclaimed by the sage Hillel who lived while the Temple still stood called a *prosboule* and not a *prossanhedrin*. And when an even closer reading of Josephus was undertaken, I noted that Josephus refers to a *bouletehon* situated on the Temple Mount and not a *sanhedrion*. Thus the upshot of my intrepidity was the long needed proof that Jesus could not have been tried by a religious body because the Gospels never refer to a *boule* and never refer to a *Nasi* but exclusively to the high priest who as I pointed out above was a Sadducee. As for the high priest, whether a Pharisee or a Sadducee, he never presided over the *Beth Din ha-Gadol*. A *Nasi* only presided over the *boule*.

The significance of this finding was that a Sanhedrin in Josephus’s day was exclusively a privy council should be appreciated for its implications for it means that the Gospels which were cited to justify the charge of deicide and which had such tragic consequences for the Jews actually confirm that Jesus could not have been tried by a religious body, a *boule*, but by a body carefully selected by the high priest who had been appointed by the procurator in open defiance of both the Written Law and the Oral Law. Nowhere in the Gospels do we find *boule*, a religious body, but only a Sanhedrin which has no other function than to be the eyes and ears of the procurator so that the procurator would be immediately alerted to any crowd raiser.

The reason that this simple solution of a such a complex problem was neglected by scholars stemmed from the fact that the critical role of the Scribes-Pharisees from the time of the Hasmonean Revolt to the time of Christian origins and beyond has never been noted until my own studies began to appear first in learned journals and then in my book-length portrait of the Pharisees, *A Hidden Revolution: the Pharisees Search for the Kingdom Within*. This neglect is to be largely explained by the fact that the promulgation of the twofold Law and its development were confined to sources which were not written down until the publication of the Mishnah by Judah the Nasi at the beginning of the 4th century—more than four hundred years after the Kneset ha-Gadolah, Great Synagogue, had installed Simon the Hasmonean as high priest on the authority of a Great Synagogue which had no warrant from the Pentateuch. According to the Pentateuch a high priest was to be a firstborn descendant of Aaron and his son Eleazar. After the building of Solomon's Temple that Aaronide family was called the sons of Zadok. It was thus a flagrant violation of the divine law when a *Kneset ha-Gadolah* appointed Simon the Hasmonean to be high priest and replaced the Zadokite line with that Hasmonean.

But since the revelation of the Oral Law precluded any of it being written down lest the Pharisees be charged with having violated God's command that no jot or tittle of the Written Law was to be added to or subtracted from, scholars were denied access to any documentation of the Oral Law until Judah the Prince published the Mishnah after 400 years of oral transmission exclusively. And because scholars were denied access to any documents contemporary with the rise of the Pharisees, most modern scholars seem to have equated non-availability as equivalent to non-operative and therefore came to the conclusion that the *Beth Din ha-Gadol* and the Oral Law were not operative until the destruction of the Temple in the year 70. Thus it was that a religious movement of monumental proportion which spawned Christianity and Islam remained unrecognized and being unrecognized there was no organizing principle that holds the period after the Hasmonean Revolt together. All that was available were limited to remnants and relics of this amazing stage in Jewish history.

Bereft of a unifying principle, scholars fell back on Josephus, the pseudepigraphic literature and most tragically on the Dead Sea Scrolls- none of which sources, with the exception of some sections of Josephus, were available to discover a unifying principle. For this reason this period is a kind of a hodge-podge of many varieties of Judaism with no single variety being viewed as normative. A reconstruction of Christianity's birth proved to be impossible because without the normative Judaism of the Scribes-Pharisees it is impossible to make intelligible the role of Jesus within the framework of his time. As a result, a revolutionary movement of such awesome proportions had been stripped down to a sect defined by its extreme concern for ritual purity and a separation from the ignorant masses who were negligent when it came to the laws of ritual purity. Even Josephus could be drawn upon to confirm that the Pharisees were a mere sect so long as scholars kept translating *haeresis* as "sect" rather than "school of thought." Josephus also could be drawn upon to undergird the Pharisees as a sect since the episode that he narrates regarding the 6,000 Pharisees could be taken to mean that they were very small in number. So long as there was no recognition that *perushim* (the Hebrew for Pharisees) is ambiguous, depending on the context sometimes meaning Pharisees, the teachers of the twofold Law, and sometimes separatists as ascetics, there could be no comprehension of the awesome transmutations that the Pharisees wrought. As for the Dead Sea Scrolls, most scholars fail to realize that the discovery of lost texts from antiquity does not in and of itself render them more valuable than texts which have been preserved as copies of copies. To date, the Dead Sea Scrolls have yielded nothing of a relationship to the Gospels or the Epistles of Paul nor for that matter any indications of their importance in any other sources until the rise of the Kairites in the 7th century. Yet scholars continue to invest an extraordinary amount of time and energy to find in the

Dead Sea Scrolls any significant connection. These scrolls do not throw any light on Christian origins and they are never cited in any Christian texts or any other texts for that matter.

As for the Tannaitic literature, scholars refused to use them on the grounds that the Mishnah was not written down 'til long after the destruction of the Temple. This assumption that the Tannaitic literature cannot be used for the pre-70 period has barred the use of those texts in the Mishnah which pertain to institutions, scholars, events and teachings which go back as far as the time of the *Knesset ha-Gadolah* and which one would think would have to be taken seriously as a source when they refer to pre-70 structures and issues. Most scholars for this reason brush aside the possibility that the *Beth Din ha-Gadol* was functioning from the time of the *Knesset ha-Gadolah* and the Oral Law was operative before 70 as testified to by Josephus's statement that when John Hyrcanus broke with the Pharisees, he abrogated the *paradosis*. It would seem that since there was a *paradosis*, there must have been an institution such as the *Beth Din ha-Gadol* to legislate new halakhot reaffirm ongoing halakhot and dropping halakhot that no longer have relevance. Why scholars cannot consider the Zugoth, the pairs, that are attested to in the Mishnah and who are listed as the transmitters of the twofold Law from the time of the Hasmonean revolt until after the death of Hillel and Shammai when the office of *Nasi* became hereditary and the Zugoth structure was modified.

V

Surely what I have shared with you today is of my odyssey from a Jesus Christ whom I feared and held in contempt to a Jesus Christ being one who bespeaks a revelation that I as a Jew find revealing. And this would not have been the case had *Nostra Aetate* not opened windows of opportunity to do my bit by reaching out as a Jew to fully understand the "Other." And that I had done. I feel today fully at home among the people of Christ because I have spent most of my academic life seeking a clue to the riddle of how a religion which preached a gospel of love could have spawned so much hate, and how the Judaism that I was heir to could have barred me from access to Christian holy writ and nurtured me on contempt and fear. Inspired by *Nostra Aetate* I did what I knew best. I approached the problem with history as my guide and as any good historian must do, I approached the problem by putting myself into the place of those confronting each other with hostility and feeling each in turn what they had felt and thinking with each and what they thought. This capacity for empathy enabled me even back in my early years at school when I tried to make sense of the "Civil War," as it was called by the North, and the "War Between the States," as it was called by the South. Half of my time I spent with the Confederates and the other half with the Union. I came to feel the pain of the South which they felt in the loss of their distinctive way of life and the horror of Sherman's bloody and destructive march to the sea—and I knew that their pain was for them pain indeed and justified. So too the dilemmas of the North as to how far they should go to abandoning any restraint lest they lose the war and the Union and leave the slaves to fend for themselves. Coming to the tragedy of two religions hating each other and all the while preaching love and justice and compassion, I was able to see where each religion was coming from and how this might have been avoided had they known then what they know now. Jews were blinded by their belief that God had given an immutable revelation while the early Christians were blinded by their assumption that Christ's revelation must supersede the revelation that the Jews had believed to be immutable. This blindness for the Christians in the tatter years was intensified by their lack of awareness that the Sanhedrin was not a *Beth Din* but a *boule* and Jews were blinded by their failure to recognize that the Pharisees were not a sect but the normative Judaism of the day. My studies have rectified this ignorance and have paved the way for more than one legitimate revelation—the Jews having had already two revelations in Jesus's day. Two or more revelations can flourish side by side with each having

unique perceptions and insights as to what God may be and what his divine plan might be—so long of course as the divine plan does not exclude a plan that has a role for all God seekers.

I surely have come to know the “Other,” and I have shared my findings that have made this ignorance dispensable. As one who has come to know and respect Christianity’s revelations, I feel confident that with this knowledge- with the Jews as a small people it could be that their role in God’s divine plan could be the unique experience of a people without land, without sovereignty and without power and ever-alert to the meaning of their experiences as bearing the profound truth that the God of the first chapter of Genesis created a single individual, male and female, and not a privileged people or a special land or a special gender, race or color. Furthermore, the Jews have a history of intermingling with so many peoples, so many societies, so many cultures, that for them the world in all of its length and breadth has proved to be their homeland and not any land of their origins or any other single land of their sojournings. Like Abraham they are sojourners in time and space seeking to spread the truth of the first chapter of Genesis.

As for Christianity could not their unique role as a religion of the multi-millions - even billions- throughout the world be illuminating by their love, Christ’s love for every individual, male or female, white or black, living in every corner of the world, and by spreading the good news that the love that Christ bore for humankind will eventuate with the end of human destructiveness and the terror of human impulses unchecked by a higher vision and hope.

I have shared a vision- One God, many revelations coexisting creatively side by side and looking back on exclusivity and supercessionism as a grievous misunderstanding of God’s divine plan. With *Nostra Aetate* pointing the way, the new era will make its mark as the era of human liberation and divine love dissolving the tyranny of evil and spinning off a spiral of love, goodness and compassion to reign forever and ever. Amen.