

**CONFERENCE PROCEEDING***The Jewishness of Jesus and Christian-Jewish Dialogue:  
A Colloquium in Honor of Joep van Beeck, S.J.*

## Tributes

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On March 16, 2010, at the John Cardinal Cody Colloquium at Loyola University, Chicago, seven scholars honored former John Cardinal Cody Chair, Dr. Frans Josef (Joep) van Beeck, S.J., on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Entitled *The Jewishness of Jesus and Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, the colloquium paid tribute to van Beeck's 1988 Cody lectures and his subsequent book, *Loving the Torah More than God: Toward a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism* (Loyola Press, 1989). His book was the winner of the 1989 Alpha Sigma Nu Book Award. Along with *Loving the Torah More than God*, van Beeck's notable works include *Christ Proclaimed: Christology as Rhetoric* (Paulist Press, 1979) and the series *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology* (Liturgical Press).

Now retired and living in the Netherlands, van Beeck taught at Boston College from 1968 to 1985, when he was appointed the John Cardinal Cody Professor of Theology at Loyola University, Chicago. He was an active participant in and resource for the Catholic-Jewish dialogue begun in Chicago by the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin.

The Cody Colloquium opened and concluded with tributes to van Beeck by two close friends, Thomas H. Tobin, S.J. (Loyola University, Chicago) and Jeffry V. Mallow (Emeritus, Loyola University, Chicago). The tributes by Tobin and Mallow follow.

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*Joep van Beeck: Towards a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism*  
Thomas H. Tobin, S.J.

As we begin this colloquium honoring Joep van Beeck, S.J. on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, I am both honored and delighted to speak about this Jesuit who was my fellow member in the Theology Department here at Loyola. From 1985 to 2002 Joep was the John Cardinal Cody Professor of Theology. During the years when he and I lived together in one of the smaller Jesuit communities, I got to know him best and came greatly to respect both his work and his friendship. We often read each other's work before it was published. He used to try to spiff up my rather laconic prose style (too few words), while I tried to de-baroque his. I think we both benefited from the exercise. I certainly know that I did. In the margins of one of my typescript pages, he

wrote, "The author may know what this page means, but this reader certainly does not." Upon reading over the page, I concluded that he had been too generous. The author did not know what it meant either!

Let me turn to Joep's work. In a presentation as brief as this, I can do little justice to the quality and extent of Joep's contributions to theology. But I do want to make several remarks about what one might call the "character" of his work, those qualities that marked virtually whatever he wrote.

In this regard, I want to begin by noting that, although he studied theology as a young Jesuit, Joep did not have a doctorate in theology. His doctorate was in literature, and his dissertation was an annotated edition of the poems and translations of Sir Edward Sherburne (1616-1702). It is not accidental that Joep's first major work in theology is entitled *Christ Proclaimed: Christology as Rhetoric*. Second—and this is perhaps not widely known—Joep played the violin, and played it quite well. Both these pieces of information, I think, are helpful in understanding the character of Joep's contributions to theology.

Anyone who has read *Christ Proclaimed*, or his *magnum opus*, *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology*, or any of his other shorter works cannot but be struck by the breadth of Joep's reading. There are, of course, the usual theological suspects such as Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, Barth, Tillich, von Balthasar, and Rahner. But Joep's books are also filled with references to literature, to Aeschylus and Sophocles, Seneca and Tacitus, Dante and Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare and Goethe, John Donne and George Herbert, Wordsworth and Tennyson, Flannery O'Connor and Albert Camus. And Joep would never forgive me for omitting one of his favorite authors, the English novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch.

But Joep seldom simply quotes these writers. He quotes them to make a point. There is immense learning here, but more importantly learning put purposefully to work. One of those purposes, I think, is Joep's conviction that literature and, more broadly the humanities generally, provided an access to the thickness and density of human experience and to profound reflections on that experience. Reading Joep's work is sometimes not an easy task. This is not because Joep does not write well. He does. It is because often what he writes involves a close, sophisticated, and insightful reading of a text, not simply of a text in theology, but as often as not of a literary text. This also gives his theology a kind of panoramic character. One is taken for a ride in often unexpected directions and treated to unexpected views, views which as a matter of fact turn out to be important for understanding both some aspect of human experience as well as how that experience is touched by the finger of God. This gives to Joep's theology a deeply humane character. It also gives to his work a historically oriented character. Writers and thinkers from the past become real interlocutors and teachers, and so Joep's theology becomes one that takes seriously not only the density of human experience but also its historical character. These writers were not fools, and we would be fools to think they were.

This way of doing theology also highlights several other aspects of Joep's work. The first is one that Joep himself writes about in the Preface to the first part of Volume 2 of *God Encountered*. He is describing the differences in approach between himself and David Tracy, for whom he clearly has immense respect. He describes the difference between himself and Tracy as one in which Tracy expects more from the critical approach to religion and culture favored by modern social science than Joep does. Conversely, Joep describes his own approach as one in which he gets absorbed by the aesthetics of it all first and then thinks about it later. It is certainly not that Joep is uncritical, but rather that he is first appreciative and then critical within that context.

A bit later on the same page, Joep characterizes his own work as a theologian as someone who is *one among many* in a *particular community* of worship groping for intellectual integrity. I will return to this last point shortly.<sup>1</sup>

The second aspect is Joep's impatience with method and hermeneutics. Here I think it is important to describe at least a bit more closely in what that impatience consists. Joep certainly thinks that it is important to be conscious and intentional about what one is doing theologically. In that sense, he thinks that method indeed is important. As a matter of fact, much of the first volume of *God Encountered* is about method. But he also thinks that one discovers how to think theologically by trying it out, by actually thinking theologically and then reflecting on what one has done and how it could be done better. What he has little patience for is theology which never seems to get beyond method, that is forever concerned with how theology ought to be done but never gets around to actually doing it.

A third important aspect of Joep's work has to do with where he places himself as he does theology, what the proper context is in which and from which theology develops. For Joep this context is one of worship, especially that of the eucharist. The context for theology is this doxological essence of the Church. And it is from this doxological essence that other aspects of theology such as soteriology, ethics, and eschatology are developed. The worship of the Church, which is its present access to the actuality of God is mediated through Christ's perfect worship. And this central role of Christ is representational, that is, one which invites the participation of believers. Indeed the Church is that participation of believers. In one way or another, this central reality of worship becomes the context out of which theology develops. The context from which theology develops is one that is at the center of the life of the Church and from which the theologian tries to understand and make sense of that central mystery and its consequences.<sup>2</sup>

By way of conclusion, but also as an introduction to the topic of this colloquium in Joep's honor, I want to return to the fact that Joep is a violin player. In 1988 Joep gave the Fourth Annual John Cardinal Cody Lectures. These were published the next year as a book entitled *Loving the Torah More Than God: Towards a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism*. Joep's own words, I think, say something important about him and about his concerns:

By treating the subject matter of this book, however, I acknowledge that I do not have only theological reasons for choosing Zvi Kolitz' story and Emmanuel Levinas' commentary. I have *personal* ones too. When I first read these modern Jewish writings, they revived deep and lasting memories in myself, memories from the days when I was an eleven and twelve year old boy in The Hague, in The Netherlands: the embarrassing sight of the yellow stars below the left lapels of the overcoats of sad, fearful, and unspeakably distant-looking people in the streets in the early war years; the anti-Jewish slogans on billboards and the reports on anti-Jewish measures in newspapers; the swift, menacing arrests and deportations of silent, seemingly uncomplaining Jewish men, women, and children in our streets. Most painfully of all, at least for me personally, I recall the dreadful late afternoon of Wednesday, November 25, 1942, when, as a boy of twelve, a few days before my father's birthday, I walked back home in tears, having found the front door of the house of the kindly old gentleman who was my violin teacher secured by means of a seal whose significance we had come to understand only too well. His name was Samuel Schuyer.

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<sup>1</sup> See *God Encountered* 2.1.xv–xvi.

<sup>2</sup> See *God Encountered* 1.145–294.

He was the first Jew I was privileged to meet and learn from, and thank God, not the last.<sup>3</sup>

A bit earlier in the book, Joep wrote of Samuel Schuyer:

The first lecture contained passages of a rather more personal nature. The reader will notice that one of them still occurs in the Introduction. Samuel Schuyer was born in the The Hague, on September 9, 1873, into a family of musicians. He received his training in violin, bassoon, and theory at the Royal Conservatory of his native city. After an early career that involved positions as principal bassoonist in a variety of places as well as a European tour as a bassoon soloist, he became first assistant concertmaster at the French Opera in The Hague, and subsequently concertmaster at the Opera of Ghent, in Belgium. After a short stay in Paris, he returned to The Hague, where he became very active as a violinist and teacher, and occasionally also as a composer. He was sixty-nine years old when, in late November 1942, he was taken from his apartment and transported to the transit camp at Westerbork. On December 8, 1942, he was put on the train to Auschwitz, where he was killed on the day of his arrival, December 11, 1942. May he live in peace.<sup>4</sup>

Those words say a great deal about the Jesuit whom we are honoring today. And what they say says a good deal about why we are honoring him, certainly for his contributions to theology but also for his contributions to a very important and honest dialogue between Catholics and Jews.

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*Moving Beyond the Superficial: A Secular Jew and a Jesuit in Dialogue*  
Jeffry V. Mallow

I am not now, nor have I ever been, a member of the Jesuit Order. This will not be a piece on theology. I wouldn't dare. Instead, I will describe to you how I came to know Joep van Beeck. It began with a collaboration: he as the researcher, I as his translator. It developed into an adventure—in fact, a detective story. And it culminated in a friendship between a Catholic priest and a secular Jew.

Let me first define the term “secular Jew,” which may sound like an oxymoron—like jumbo shrimp, white chocolate, or civil divorce. The Christian model which separates faith from peoplehood—German Protestant, American Catholic, et cetera—does not fit Judaism. A Jew is a Jew, from Orthodox to atheist, as long as he or she does not convert to another religion.<sup>5</sup> Conversion is akin to giving up citizenship in the Jewish *people*. For us, “Jews for Jesus” is the real oxymoron. For secular Jews, the house of worship is a synagogue even though we don't set foot into it. Jews tend to deal with their distress at the conversion of their co-religionists with humor, all of which is based on the notion that no matter how hard they try, they never quite get it. Here's an example: A Jew comes to a priest and asks to be converted. The priest agrees, but only if the Jew can demonstrate his knowledge of the Catholic faith. The priest asks, “Where was our Lord born?” The Jew says, “Philadelphia.” The priest, astonished at the answer, asks the Jew to try

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<sup>3</sup> *Loving the Torah More than God*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xv–xvi.

<sup>5</sup> This is not precisely the case for some Orthodox sects. Because they do not recognize conversion they hold that, according to *Halakhah*, Jewish law, a Jew always remains a Jew.

again. "Pittsburgh." The priest says, "You know nothing of our faith, and I simply cannot convert you. Jesus was born in Bethlehem." The Jew replies, "I knew it was Pennsylvania."

Joep understands the fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity. It is a central theme of his 1989 Cody lectures and book, *Loving the Torah More than God: Toward a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism*. In it, he notes that the term "Judeo-Christian tradition" is used by Christians, but not by Jews. *Loving the Torah* is designed not only to inform Christians about the deeper connections of Christianity to Judaism, but about what is fundamentally and insuperably different. Joep's goal is to lead Christian-Jewish dialogue away from the well-meaning but superficial, "Let's see what we share in common," to the difficult but essential, "Let's see what we cannot share in common."

I met Joep as he was preparing the Cody lectures on which *Loving the Torah* is based. A colleague told me that a priest needed a Yiddish translator. I said, "Say what?" And so we met. Joep had read a transcript of a radio lecture given in the 1950s by the French-Jewish philosopher Emanuel Levinas. Levinas compared Judaism to Christianity, and not to the credit of the latter. Briefly, he described Judaism as a religion of responsible adults, partners with God, and Christianity as a religion of irresponsible children, with God as the parent.

If I can be forgiven the presumption of a physicist paraphrasing a description by a theologian of the claims of a philosopher, here is how Joep articulates Levinas' three charges. The first is that of replacement theology: Christians see their religion as a fulfillment of its precursor, Judaism, rather than acknowledge Judaism on its own terms. What Christians call the Old Testament, Jews call the Bible. To quote Joep, "What is the matter is a very problematic conviction that lies at the root of the Christian tradition...in the relationship between Judaism and Christianity there prevails not mutuality but a fundamental *asymmetry*."<sup>6</sup> The second, the centrality of redemption in Christianity removes the sense of responsible partnership central to Judaism. In Joep's words, "Ever since the theme of redemption became the center of the Christian faith...Western Christianity has tended to believe in God as *Savior*...[The] development has tended to reduce the relationship between God and humanity to an opposition between human frailty and sinfulness vs. divine power and mercy...Humanity comes to cast itself in the role of child, alternately requiring punishment and leniency...the transcendent God is cast in the role of humanity's parent, sometimes stern, at other times indulgent."<sup>7</sup> The third is that Christians view the injustice in the world as unavoidable evil, and thus in some sense excusable. Therefore they mystify it by the vicarious suffering of Christ for humanity's sins. To quote Joep, "it allows human beings to get off the hook by dint of piety and sacrament."<sup>8</sup>

These three features: replacement, redemption, and mystification, says Levinas, are at the root of Christian persecution of Jews; furthermore, they are the hallmarks of an immature faith, as contrasted with the mature faith of Judaism, which has none of the three.

Levinas took as his starting point a story written in 1946 by Zvi Kolitz: *Yossel Rakover's Appeal to God*. Yossel is a Jew in the last stages of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He knows that he will soon be killed, and he initiates a confrontation with God. Following are some quotes from the story:

<sup>6</sup> *Loving the Torah More than God*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

You say, perhaps, that we have sinned, O Lord? It must surely be true. And therefore we are punished? I can understand that too. But I should like You to tell me—*Is there any sin in the world deserving of such punishment as the punishment we have received?*

I want to say to You that now, more than in any previous period of our eternal path of agony, we the tortured, humiliated, buried alive, and burned alive, we the insulted, the object of mockery, we who have been murdered by the millions, we have the right to know: *What are the limits of Your forbearance?*

I should like to say something more: Do not put the rope under too much strain, lest, alas, it may snap. The test to which You have put us is so severe, so unbearably severe, that You should—You must—forgive those members of Your people who, in their misery, have turned from You.

The murderers themselves have already passed sentence on themselves and will never escape it; but may You carry out a doubly severe sentence on those who are condoning the murder.

Those that condemn murder orally, but rejoice at it in their hearts...Those who meditate in their foul hearts: It is fitting, after all, to say that he is evil, this tyrant, but he carries out a bit of work for us for which we will always be grateful to him!

But those who are silent in the face of murder, those who have no fear of You, but fear what people might say (fools! they are unaware that the people will say nothing!), those who express their sympathy with the drowning man but refuse to rescue him—punish them, O Lord, punish them, I implore You...with a doubly-severe sentence!<sup>9</sup>

These are perhaps shocking statements. The first three take God to task. The second three indict Gentiles—Christians—for their indifference to and complicity in genocide. As Joep told me, no serious Christian could encounter the Koltitz story and the Levinas lecture and not confront the issues it raised. Hence the Cody lectures and the book.

It is here that the translations of the Zvi Koltitz story play an important part. There were two textual traditions surrounding the story: one claiming that the original was in English which appeared in an American collection of Holocaust fiction entitled *Tiger Beneath My Skin: Stories and Parables of the Years of Death*, and later translated into Yiddish and published in *Die Yiddishe Tsaytung*. The second textual tradition claimed that the original was in Yiddish in *Die Yiddishe Tsaytung*, translated into English (*Tiger Beneath My Skin*). The original Yiddish version was re-published in a literary journal in Israel, *Die Goldene Keyt*. This was subsequently translated into German, Hebrew, and French. The French translation was the one used by Levinas.

The question confronting us was, which of the two was the authentic text, the English or the Yiddish? Or did it matter? Were they substantially the same? The problem was that we didn't have a copy of *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*.

Joep began with the assumption that the English version was the original. He based this on an ambiguous remark by Koltitz in an Israeli journal, which seemed to suggest that. So although all Joep had was the English in *Tiger Beneath my Skin*, he was not willing to use it for the Cody

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 23-26.

series until he had compared it with the Yiddish version in *Di Goldene Keyt*. Thus he left open the possibility that the Yiddish version was the original.

That's where I came in. I translated that Yiddish version. And we got a surprise. The Yiddish version in *Di Goldene Keyt* was substantially longer than the English version in *Tiger Beneath my Skin*. It contained extra passages which Joep first assumed had been added as the story made its way from *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung* to *Di Goldene Keyt*. If, in fact, the extra text was added, this frontal attack on Christianity, harsher even than the attacks in *Tiger Beneath my Skin*, such as the ones I quoted earlier, was unforgivable. The passages seemed to be a deliberate attempt to provoke confrontation with Christians. Furthermore, if these were not the original words of Kolitz, then Levinas, using the French translation of the Yiddish from *Di Goldene Keyt*, was inadvertently basing his critique in part on things that Kolitz had not written.

After *Loving the Torah* was published, Joep learned that back issues of *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung* were available in a library in Buenos Aires. After we obtained an original copy of the story, the question confronting us was: which version was in *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, the shorter one in *Tiger Beneath my Skin* or the longer one in *Di Goldene Keyt*? After translating the story from the newspaper, we discovered that the extra passages were in fact in the original. The translation must have been from Yiddish to English, from *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung* to *Tiger Beneath my Skin*. Kolitz himself later confirmed this to Joep. Thus, the truth was the opposite of our original hypothesis: rather than adding into the original the harsher passages—sin enough—whoever had translated the version from *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung* into the English of *Tiger Beneath my Skin* had committed a worse sin: eliding the original passages, presumably to avoid confrontation with Christians.

Our translation of the original story—the full text—from *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung* was eventually published in the Fall 1994 issue of the American Catholic journal *Cross Currents*. Our revised version included the offending passages and matched in all essentials the Yiddish version in *Di Goldene Keyt*. Joep's interpretation had been insightfully correct when he had regarded even the weaker text, the one in *Loving the Torah*, as a serious indictment of Christianity—yet kept open the possibility that what we thought were additions might have been in the original.

We can surely indict the translator for an act of appalling intellectual dishonesty. But let us examine the motive behind the act: the desire to avoid confrontation. This is a quintessential example of what has often been wrong with Catholic-Jewish dialogue, or interfaith dialogue in general: the fear of giving offence, the hushing up of fighting words. The approach is: Let's see what we share in common, rather than let's see what we don't. Joep would have none of it. For him dialogue was either honest or a waste of time. In *Loving the Torah* he asks that Christians and Jews open themselves to real learning from each other, that they take the risk of giving offence on their way to mutual understanding.

Following are two quotations from *Loving the Torah*. In the first, Joep summarizes the book—i.e., his resolution of the challenges posed by Levinas:

We have reviewed three dubious developments. It is not difficult to recognize in them three principal causes of friction between Christianity and Judaism, all of them pointed out and criticized by Levinas. The first—Christianity's status as an established religion—accounts for the fact that the Christian concept of fulfillment got misinterpreted as *displacement of Judaism*. The second—dependency as a widespread characteristic of the Christian style of believing—accounts for the prominence of the salvation theme in Christian believing, at the expense of the theme of moral responsibility for humanity in the

world. The third—salvation by substitutionary Atonement—accounts for the tendency, excoriated by Levinas, to mystify suffering and thus justify it.

From the point of view of Christian, Catholic theology, and in the name of the gospel and the great Tradition of the undivided Christian Church, we have to say that on all three counts, the type of Christian faith that Levinas rejects is one that deserves to be rejected. In demanding (1) that Judaism be respected in its own integrity, (2) that faith in God be construed, not as an assurance of divine indulgence to comfort the immature, but as a divine call to disciplined maturity, and (3) that the suffering of the innocent not be mystified and thus justified, Levinas is simply asking Christians to be true to their own deepest tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Then in the final passage of the book, Joep speaks of his hopes:

And so, finally, I come to the extreme of buoyancy to which I promised I would carry my theological reflections about the relationship between Jews and Christians. Could it be that the taste for humane, disciplined civilization that Catholic Christianity has in common with Judaism somehow already underlies the vigorous interest so many Jews take in being involved, in a variety of ways, in such a deeply Christian and especially Catholic venture as a Catholic university?<sup>11</sup>

I flatter myself that in this he includes me. Joep and I have become good friends. We have dealt with some difficult theological and ethical questions whose answers separate Catholics and Jews—and we did not and will not reach an accord on them. There are simply some unbridgeable differences. Jews believe that life begins when the kids go off to college and the dog dies. There are also some lesser, albeit still unbridgeable differences. Joep and his compatriot Professor Adriaan Peperzak have extolled at some length the superiority of Dutch coffee. When I think of coffee I think of insomnia and acid reflux. But one thing Joep never brought into question was my identity as a secular Jew.

Over twenty years ago, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin initiated an outreach project in Chicago in the form of Catholic-Jewish dialogue groups. Ours exists to this day. Joep was one of our speakers. Following Joep's example, we have moved beyond the superficial. We have dealt with some, albeit not all, of the tough questions. That task will not be completed until the Messiah comes—or comes again.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 83.