

# Foreword

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Matthew Tapié's wonderful study of Thomas Aquinas's theological approach to the significance of the Jewish religion for Christians comes as a timely reminder of both the ambiguities and the possibilities of the contribution of this Master of the Sacred Page in an era of interfaith awareness.

Now that the declaration on the relation between the Catholic Church and the other religions of humankind is approaching its fiftieth anniversary, we become more and more aware of what has been accomplished by this document of the Second Vatican Council promulgated in 1965, but we are able to see the unsolved challenges more clearly as well. The accomplishment of the document is phrased perfectly by Tapié when he remarks that his students fail to see anything remarkable in what the document says about the Jewish people. Many things that could not be said or written by Christians without severe consequences from the side of the National Socialist regime in Europe less than a century ago have now almost become platitudes. Of course Jesus was a Jew. Of course the Jews are still dear to God. In that sense, the dialogue between Jews and Christians has profited from the awareness that the atrocity of the *shoah* was made possible by centuries of Christian anti-Judaism (or, as some would prefer, anti-Semitism). Yet, apart from the fact that it took European theologians in continental Europe more than a few decennia to develop such an awareness, and that it is still a minority position in many Christian civilizations, it would be naïve to say that we are living in an era in which the dialogue between Jews and Christians has succeeded. Historians or sociologists may use categories such as "success" or even "effectiveness" to measure certain processes of interfaith communication, but theologians know that they need to talk about historical processes with an amount of eschatological reserve. While we may be thankful that theologians from the German speaking countries and from the United States have charted new territories in the landscape of

Jewish-Christian encounters, much work still needs to be done. Following Tapié's analysis I want to single out two challenges.

The first challenge can be phrased as the relation between biblical and systematic theology. One of the great merits of Tapié's book is that he has been able to read Aquinas's systematic theology on the relation between Israel and the Church in coherence with his biblical commentaries. As he rightly argues, Aquinas has too long been read and interpreted exclusively as a systematic theologian—if he was read as a theologian at all. One of the consequences of this approach was that scholars only looked at the synthesis in Aquinas's thinking without giving enough attention to the theses and the antithesis that nourished this synthesis. If it is true that the literary genre of the *quaestio* that allows us to retrace these divergent trajectories has its origin in the scholarly reading of Scripture, as I have argued elsewhere, the consequence is that one cannot appreciate the synthetic aspects of Aquinas as a systematic theologian without paying sufficient attention to his biblical commentaries as the roots that nourished his systematic works. As Tapié confirms in his book, this approach to Aquinas as a biblical theologian is quite new and is itself a fruit of ecumenical relationships. Yet Tapié's own work shows how such an approach can be made fruitful again in interreligious conversations, starting with Jules Isaac and Michael Wyschogrod, and continuing in contemporary movements such as Scriptural Reasoning. At the same time, Tapié makes meticulously clear how appreciating Aquinas as a biblical theologian may be more fruitful in interreligious conversations: Aquinas does not have one simple supersessionist or non-supersessionist answer, but he tries to do justice to the tension created by rival narratives, such as the tension between Galatians 5:2 and Romans 3:1–2 described in chapter 8. The tension between the narratives is partly dissolved in what one may call Aquinas's "dominant" perspective, viz. that the Jewish religious ceremonies have become superfluous and even deadly after the death of Christ. Yet, at the same time, there are traces of a rival narrative, an "unofficial teaching" (Bruce Marshall) in Aquinas that argues in favor of a certain fruitfulness of these Jewish rites even for the Church. Tapié has unearthed this hidden tension in Aquinas as a heritage not only of a conflict between Augustine and Jerome, but also between Paul in his letter to the Galatians and the same Paul in his letter to the Romans. So the "perspectivist" nature of Paul's letters, implying that he emphasizes different aspects as the situation in which he writes requires, allows Aquinas to leave some of the tension intact as well, and allows us in our different

era with different concerns to unearth what remained hidden in Aquinas's copious treasures.

Let me make clear what I mean by recurring to a famous example. In his recent work, *From Enemy to Brother*, John Connelly has shown how Karl Thieme and John Oesterreicher have paved the way towards the statements about the lasting significance of God's covenant with the Jewish people by their careful reading of Paul's letter to the Romans. In this book Tapie shows that Aquinas has done something similar in that his systematic theological works preserved the viewpoint of Paul's letter to the Romans together with the dominant voice of the Pauline tradition in Galatians and Hebrews. Now that such a viewpoint has become dominant again thanks to Thieme and Oesterreicher and *Nostra Aetate*—but not without the guidance of Jules Isaac and others—it is easier for us to re-discover it in Aquinas as Tapie has done. Yet my point here is that this breakthrough in Jewish-Christian relations has been made possible by careful attention to the Scriptures as sources of so much that we have in common in the two religious traditions. Even though this might be easier between Christians and Jews—the lack of a common religious tradition as source of authority is one of the arguments used by Aquinas to classify Islam as a kind of paganism—it might work in other forms of comparative readings as well. For example, I am convinced that careful attention to what Karl Barth has to say about the righteousness of those “outside the Church” in his commentary on chapters 9–11 of the letter to the Romans might help Christians to start understanding the Qur'anic critique of the claims to salvation brought forward by Jews and Christians. But that is material for another book.

The second challenge for future encounters between Jews and Christians can only be touched upon here, since even though it originates in Paul's analysis of the relation between Jews and gentiles in his letter to the Romans, the ramifications of this challenge seem rather dazzling to me. What is the theological consequence of the claim that God does not revoke God's covenant with the Jews, even though God enters into a new covenant with the followers of his only-begotten Son? When compared with some of his scholastic colleagues—John Duns Scotus comes to mind—Aquinas seems to be remarkably reluctant to leave the historical ground of the biblical tradition. Of course, God is free to act as God wants, but this is not an unlimited freedom because once God acts in a certain way, this makes a difference that cannot be left undone. This leads Aquinas to his famous answer to the question as to whether God would have become incarnate

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if Adam had not sinned: we could speculate about what God could have done, but the Bible gives us a certain limit for our speculations. This was in fact the point that Pope Benedict XVI wanted to make in his infamous address at Regensburg in September 2006: God can be trusted to remain true to God's initiatives in history, and therefore faith and reason cannot be in disharmony. I have always tried to explain to my students—following insights from Christian Duquoc—that the Christian faith in God as a Trinitarian God can only be explained as a combination between continuity and discontinuity. As Christians we believe that God remains true to the covenant with the people of Israel, but at the same time we believe that God took a radical new initiative, and therefore we talk about “New Testament.” In the theological reflection on the dialogue between religions, this combination of continuity and discontinuity means that the two extremes of a narrow exclusivism and an unmediated pluralism cannot be true, since it would require a God who is either entirely bound or limitlessly free. As far as I can see, the great religious traditions of humankind try to steer a middle course between these extremes in their reflections on the relations between themselves and other religions. Because of its specific recognition of the covenant between God and Israel, and of the Scriptures that give witness to this covenant, Christianity needs to recognize that its relationship with the people of Israel is a divinely warranted relationship. Yet at the same time it needs to think through the consequences of such a relationship for its encounter with the other religions. This is one of the challenges of the document *Nostra Aetate* that we have barely begun to realize. As the Austrian theologian Ulrich Winkler says, Christian theology needs to learn how to balance a theology of Israel and a theology of religions. I am convinced that in this much larger project of future Christian theology, Tapié's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas's view of Israel and the Church may serve its future purpose by bringing us back to the sources on which all theology needs to be based.

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