

Reflections on Catholic Seminary Education on Jewish-Catholic Relations

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1. I am happy to share a few thoughts with you this afternoon based on my thirty years of experience in seminary education and on the data secured in the October 2012 annual survey of Catholic seminary education conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate [CARA] a research center at Georgetown University.
2. In the study, which CARA sends each year to seminary rectors, eighty percent reported that they offer instruction in Catholic-Jewish relations. This is good news. This stands in contrast to pre-*Nostra Aetate* seminary instruction.
3. One seminary reports that it offers a MS degree in Jewish-Christian Studies, while another report that it is developing a certificate program with a defined sequence of courses.
4. I would note however that there is no report of a required course in Jewish-Christian relations. I am presuming that most study is integrated into the courses on scripture and on preaching. One hears more today about needing to understand the Jewish background of Jesus to understand who he was. This comes through in the recent preaching document entitled *Preaching the Mystery of Faith* from the USCCB which is being implemented this fall semester.
5. In the section entitled *Speaking with Respect and Reverence for Others* the document says, "A succession of statements by modern popes and the U.S. bishops, for example, has emphasized the need to avoid any prejudice or anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic views in Catholic preaching. Proclamation of the scriptures should be, if anything, an occasion for promoting respect for Judaism and the Jewish tradition, the spiritual ancestry from which Jesus and the Gospels emerged." (p. 41)
6. Over 40% of the theology schools offer the required course in ecumenism which may cover some aspects of the Jewish-Catholic relationship based on *Nostra Aetate* and recent church teaching.

7. Some seminaries conduct visits to synagogues and/or join in a Holocaust memorial service. The key to these is personal contact. Does the seminary send a knowledgeable person with the students to introduce them to the key players at the synagogue or service? Are people receptive—do they come over to chat and the like? Does the same happen on Catholic campuses with Jewish visitors? Personal encounter and getting to know one another is important.
8. Two weeks ago I gave a presentation at the mid-west meeting of Catholic Theological Schools on the overall results of the CARA study. One thing I suggested was adding day-long programs such as a day on Judaism and Catholicism. This idea came up at the bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs bi-annual meeting last spring, when we discussed the CARA data. The idea here is to focus the students and faculty on the basics. I suggested, based on my conversations with Bishop Madden that seminarians have to meet people and have some personal experience.
9. There were positions on some seminary faculties which were funded by a grant years ago—courses on Jewish-Christians relations were taught on a regular basis. I am not sure if any of these part-time positions continue to be funded.
10. I believe that the young may take the present cordial relationships for granted—I believe that education is called for. Thus I am sympathetic to the recommendation the recent International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee's made last week "that all Jewish and Catholic seminaries include instruction about the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate* and the subsequent documents of the Holy See implementing the council's declaration in their curricula."