

# “Genuine Brotherhood” without Remorse: A Commentary on Joseph Ratzinger’s “Comments on ‘*De Iudaeis*’”

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## Introduction

On March 26, 2000, in what is arguably the most iconic moment since the new relationship between Jews and Catholics began at the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II prayed at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Following Jewish custom, he inserted the physical text of his prayer of penitence and promise into the crevices of the wall. Its final words were: “... and asking Your [God’s] forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.”<sup>1</sup>

Eighteen years later, in the German edition of *Communio*, emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, published an article whose title in the English translation is “Grace and Vocation without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*.”<sup>2</sup> In it, he reflects on theological aspects of the new Catholic-Jewish relationship fifty years after the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate*<sup>3</sup> as discussed in a 2015 statement of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.<sup>4</sup> His choice of title is significant: “Comments” underscores both his sense of the tentativeness of his claims and the non-magisterial nature of the article.<sup>5</sup> For

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<sup>1</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/jan-mar/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20000326\\_jerusalem-prayer.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/jan-mar/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000326_jerusalem-prayer.html).

<sup>2</sup> *Communio* 45/1 (Spring 2018): 163-184. It appeared in the online English edition in January 2019. [https://ccjr.us/images/Ratzinger\\_Grace\\_Vocation\\_without\\_Remorse\\_-\\_English.pdf](https://ccjr.us/images/Ratzinger_Grace_Vocation_without_Remorse_-_English.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (October 28, 1975),

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html). Hereafter *NA*.

<sup>4</sup> Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews (hereafter, CRRJ), “‘The Gifts and Calling of God Are Irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (no. 4)” (December 10, 2015), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crrre/documenti-della-commissione/en.html>. Hereafter “G&C.”

<sup>5</sup> Cardinal Kurt Koch stated in a January 22, 2019 meeting with representatives of the German Coordinating Council of Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation and the Discussion Group “Jews and

reasons that will become clear below, it is useful to consider Benedict's text with John Paul's historic Western Wall prayer in mind, hence the title of this analysis.

Upon its initial appearance, Benedict's "Comments" provoked significant criticism from both Jewish and Christian writers in German-language publications, many charging him with jeopardizing the post-NA rapprochement between Jews and Catholics.<sup>6</sup> He published a brief response insisting that he only wanted to "interpret the great promises to Israel as being at the same time the hope of the Church, [which] represent both what divides us and what unites us."<sup>7</sup> Responding to fears that he was encouraging new Christian missions to baptize Jews,<sup>8</sup> Benedict explicitly declared that, "To Israel...there was not *and still is not* a mission..."<sup>9</sup>

A major reason for the generally negative reception of the "Comments" is Benedict's often-dense writing style. He frequently uses elliptical language, including the passive voice and pronouns with unclear referents, and presupposes debatable claims from his earlier writings. Moreover, the topics he addresses are multi-faceted, burdened with a long history of Christian antipathy toward Jews, yet they are arising again today in a post-*Nostra Aetate* Church that has repudiated that antipathy.

Before we examine his article in detail, it is helpful to establish a central claim. Benedict argues both for what is distinctive from and for what transcends Judaism<sup>10</sup> in the Church's "new covenant" with God in Christ, while also upholding the legitimacy of Jewish covenantal life.<sup>11</sup> His decision to juxtapose two New Testament quotations at the end of the article hints at this tension. He quotes Paul, who says in Romans 11:29 that "the gifts and the calling of God [to Israel] are irrevocable," underscoring Benedict's affirmation of the Jewish covenant as rooted in Scripture. He places this side by side with a quote from Second Timothy, reminding the reader just how much is at stake for Christian faith in the dialogue: "if we endure, we shall also reign with [Christ]; if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2:12). For Benedict,

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Christians" of the Central Committee of German Catholics that Benedict's article did not have "magisterial authority, but [was] the position of an individual scholar." See <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/dkr-zdk-2019jan22>.

<sup>6</sup> See the collection of such reactions on the website of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations at "Emeritus Pope Benedict on Supersession and Covenant," <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope>.

<sup>7</sup> "Not Mission, but Dialogue," *Herder Korrespondenz* (December 2018): 13-14, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/not-mission-but-dialogue>.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Walter Homolka, "We Are Not an Unsaved People!" *Die Zeit* (July 19, 2018): 30: "May [Pope Francis] completely refrain from any mission to the Jews and ignore this writing of Benedict!" <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/we-arae-not-an-unsaved-people>.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI, "Not Mission, but Dialogue" (Emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup> The terms "Judaism" and "Jew(s)" used here and henceforth most often refer to Rabbinic Judaism, the dominant form of Judaism that emerged in the post-New Testament and post-Second Temple period.

<sup>11</sup> On p. 181 of his *Communio* article, Benedict explains that "'covenant' is a dynamic reality." To indicate this dynamism this essay will avoid as much as possible referring to "covenant" as if it were an object to be possessed, preferring instead more active phraseology such as "covenantal life," "covenanting," or "to covenant."

it is necessary to be faithful to Paul's claim and not to slip into replacement theology. It is also necessary not to undermine Christian covenantal legitimacy and distinctiveness, both for Christian self-identity itself and for Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism. This is a difficult balance to maintain, requiring nuance and precision. Benedict is aware of this challenge and, in a statement after his article was published, admits to having been only partially successful in meeting it, for he recognizes that there has emerged a "negative...prevailing opinion of my contribution in Germany."<sup>12</sup> Critical assessments range from measured to harsh.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Benedict usefully identifies several contemporary questions that the post-conciliar rejection of supersessionism raises for Christian religious identity. He identifies some core theological issues, offering what he sees as the parameters within which constructive Catholic theology about Jews and Judaism should continue to develop in the future.

Benedict begins the balancing act by seeking to demonstrate Christian continuity with biblical Israel and its scriptures. This is unsurprising, for the Hebrew Bible provides the foundational theological narrative for both communities. He then appeals to the parallel development of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity after the fall of the Temple in 70 C.E. As we will see, the form Benedict's arguments often take is unusual. He repeatedly grounds his claims about the legitimacy of central Christian ideas by first establishing the legitimacy of biblical religion and post-biblical / Rabbinic Judaism. By doing so, Benedict essentially inverts the traditional Christian zero-sum argument in which Christian legitimacy rested on the *illegitimacy* of Judaism.

This article will critically engage, section by section, with Benedict's complex and often difficult reasoning and suggest the strengths and weaknesses it offers for deepening the new relationship between Christians and Jews. It is the result of joint analysis and dialogue about Benedict's "Comments" by a Jewish professor and a Catholic professor who co-direct an academic institute devoted to Catholic-Jewish relations. While we share some of the concerns found in essays by other commentators (especially regarding Benedict's lack of substantive engagement with Jews and Judaism; see below), we reject overheated accusations that Benedict's views are motivated by antisemitic or anti-Jewish sentiments. On the contrary, we conclude that Benedict makes some genuine contributions to Jewish-Christian relations that deserve serious, dispassionate, and critical study.

## **1. The Theological Significance of the Dialogue between Jews and Christians**

In the first phrase of the opening section, Benedict explicitly establishes the context for his comments: "Since Auschwitz, it has been clear that the Church needs to think anew about the question of the nature of Judaism" (163). While later

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<sup>12</sup> Benedict XVI, "Not Mission, but Dialogue."

<sup>13</sup> See for example the commentaries by Daniel Krochmalnik and Thomas Söding, Walter Homolka, Stanislaw Obirek, Michael Meier, and Michael Böhnke and others at <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope>.

sections of his article can be rightfully critiqued for ignoring contemporary Judaism, here he illustrates a welcome sensitivity to the challenges posed by the Shoah, not to humanity, not to the West, not to Europe, and not even to generic Christians, but to the Catholic Church directly. This challenge and the consequent Church statements about Jews and Judaism provide the impetus for his article.

The title of Benedict's article needs some explanation. His use of the phrase "treatise [from German *traktat*] on the Jews" in this context might be helpfully understood as a systematized "theology" of Jews and Judaism. He is himself not writing such a treatise but commenting on Christian efforts to write them in the past and present. He is frank about what this meant historically. Such writings were "often called *Adversus Judaeos* and conceived in a polemical context" (166). However, the term "treatise" as he uses it is not inherently positive or negative. He seems to frame his comments at least partially as a response to a 1979 study by Franz Mussner, *Traktat über die Juden*.<sup>14</sup> In his book, Mussner writes, "'Tractates against the Jews' were written in the time of the Church fathers, and the anti-Jewish spirit of these tractates has its effects even in our own times." Breaking with this baleful history, Mussner argues that "as the churches undertake a comprehensive rethinking of their relationship to Judaism, it is appropriate and timely for us to produce a 'tractate for the Jews.'"<sup>15</sup> In Mussner's understanding, only after the Shoah did the long history of *adversus Judaeos* tractates come to an end, replaced by positive assessments of Jews and Judaism. Importantly, the two opposed types of tractates did not exist concurrently; rather, the hostile stance gave way to the favorable stance chronologically.<sup>16</sup>

Benedict's use of the phrase "tractate" draws on this discussion, though with two important distinctions from Mussner. First, unlike Mussner, Benedict stresses that Judaism, while rooted in the Old Testament, has undergone a long process of historical and theological development. Therefore, "'Judaism' in the strict sense does not mean the Old Testament" (164). This is both fair to Judaism (which strictly speaking ought to be called "Rabbinic Judaism") and to mainstream, non-Marcionite<sup>17</sup> Christianity (which views the Old Testament as "essentially common to Jews and Christians" [ibid.]).

Second, for Benedict, anti-Jewish tractates do not reflect one (now past) era of Church thinking, as Mussner had described. On the contrary, for Benedict they had and have no theological legitimacy at all. Rather, they "reflect the political and social problems of coexistence [and] are well known and have repeatedly led to

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<sup>14</sup> Published in English as Franz Mussner, *Tractate on the Jews: The Significance of Judaism for Christian Faith* (trans., Leonard Swidler; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Benedict briefly quotes from the book.

<sup>15</sup> Mussner, *Tractate*, xi. Italics in the original.

<sup>16</sup> With thanks to Anette Adelman for this observation.

<sup>17</sup> Marcion was a mid-second century Christian who argued that the God of Israel in the Hebrew Bible was not the same deity proclaimed by Christ. Therefore, he insisted that Israel's scriptures were not normative for the church. His excommunication by the church in Rome around the year 140 was a crucial decision. The inclusion of the "Old Testament" in the Christian Bible has determined Christian self-understanding ever since.

anti-Semitic failures” (166). Here he radically separates theology from historical circumstance; the latter is what explains anti-Jewish statements and antisemitic acts. If, as he argues, Judaism was and is theologically legitimate, then any claim to the contrary, such as is found in *adversus Judaeos* texts, is not authentically Christian but a reflection of negative secular (“political and social”) influences. It is on these grounds that he praises *NA* §4. In it “the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is formulated in a decisive way. Historical errors are rejected, and the *truly authentic content* of the Christian tradition in matters of Judaism is formulated” (168; emphasis added). Mussner, in contrast, saw the centuries of Christian antisemitism as among the Church’s “great sins in history” for which “the Church must constantly ask God for forgiveness for this guilt.”<sup>18</sup> Their tone is quite different: for Benedict “antisemitic failures” are “historical errors,” while for Mussner, antisemitism “fed the Church for centuries”<sup>19</sup> and demands theological “reparation.”<sup>20</sup>

Benedict rejects anti-Judaism as inauthentic Christian teaching because of a defining early Christian dispute. He criticizes Marcion’s efforts in the second century to sever Christian faith from the Old Testament. Facing this challenge, he writes, other Christians in that time wisely “excommunicated” Marcion, for they believed that the biblical God of Israel was also the God of Jesus Christ (165-66). This decisive move, eventually adopted as the orthodox position, foreclosed all attempts to present Judaism and Christianity as “two opposing religions.” Any claims to the contrary, whether by Marcion or others, jeopardize fundamental Christian affirmations about the Old Testament and the God of Israel, and therefore about Judaism, for the two religions “remain connected through the common foundation of the ‘Old Testament.’” This has profound implications for the legitimacy of both traditions: “Christians and Jews worship the same God.... The faith of Abraham is also the faith of the Christians; Abraham is also for [Jews] ‘the father of faith.’” The formal rejection of Marcion necessarily undermines the legitimacy of any tracts written against the Jews (the “*adversus Judaeos*” tradition). According to Benedict’s logic, no such claim could reflect an “authentic” Christian viewpoint for this would be an unacceptable lapse into Marcionism. *NA* precludes this as well (168).

Benedict’s anti-Marcionite stance is also illustrated in his statements regarding Rabbinic Judaism. He consistently refrains from any negative judgments when writing about Judaism and attributes to it integrity and religious legitimacy. Such a non-polemical, balanced presentation might seem unremarkable. However, considering the long and widespread Christian tradition of hostility to Jews and Judaism, his introductory presentation of the so-called “parting of the ways” is striking. He narrates the painful and contentious emergence of what became Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity without any criticism of Judaism. Adopting a historical orientation, he writes that out of a shared biblical foundation, “Judaism and Christianity

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<sup>18</sup> Mussner, *Tractate*, 252-3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 154ff.

developed along divergent paths through a difficult process and so formed themselves into two separate communities" (166). Eschewing an assessment or comparison of their truth-claims, he simply presents the traditions as "two responses in history to the destruction of the temple and the new radical exile of Israel" (164). Though he says relatively little about Rabbinic Judaism as such (see below), his tone is balanced, and his descriptions are accurate. For example, after a straightforward explanation of the development of the Christian canon, he makes a parallel observation about the seminal texts of the Rabbinic tradition: "In the first centuries after Christ, in the Mishna and the Talmud, [Jews'] own way of reading the sacred scriptures was decisively formulated" (165).<sup>21</sup> The association of these sometimes contradictory approaches to Scripture by Jews and Christians demonstrates the legitimacy he gives them. This recalls the preface he wrote as president of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a 2001 study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission:

It is clear that a Christian rejection of the Old Testament would not only put an end to Christianity itself as indicated above, but, in addition, would prevent the fostering of positive relations between Christians and Jews, precisely because they would lack common ground. In the light of what has happened, what ought to emerge now is a new respect for the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament. On this subject, the [Pontifical Biblical Commission] says two things. First it declares that "the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Scriptures of the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading, which developed in parallel fashion" (no. 22). It adds that Christians can learn a great deal from a Jewish exegesis practiced for more than 2000 years; in return, Christians may hope that Jews can profit from Christian exegetical research (ibid.). I think this analysis will prove useful for the pursuit of Judeo-Christian dialogue, as well as for the interior formation of Christian consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

Benedict's approach in his *Communio* article is especially striking when he discusses the Jews' rejection of Christian beliefs. He is not reticent about their opposition: "For Jews it is clear that Jesus is not the messiah and therefore Christians are wrong to invoke their Bible" (166). Unlike most Christians in history who vilified Jews for their disbelief, he simply states this reality without apparent anger or resentment: "As we know, only a small part of Israel has been able to accept [Christian claims], while the larger part resisted [them]" (164). His characterization of the Jews' alternative belief system is stunningly bland: after 70 CE, Jews went "some other way" than the Christians. There is no indication of his disapproval or

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<sup>21</sup> Later in the article Benedict discusses the "'essence' of Judaism [found in] Talmud and Mishnah" (184).

<sup>22</sup> Preface to the Pontifical Biblical Commission (hereafter PBC), "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scripture in the Christian Bible" (May 24, 2001), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20020212\\_popolo-ebraico\\_en.html#PREFACE](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html#PREFACE).

criticism despite a profound disagreement about the proper response to the destruction of the Temple. Likewise, Benedict's explanation for the Jews' rejection of Christian claims about Jesus accurately reflects the views of most Jews then and now: "the messiah brings peace; Christ did not bring peace into the world." This blunt formulation preserves the force of the challenge, and he does not minimize its seriousness. He then presents an explanation for how Christian adopted a different concept of messianism. While this constitutes an implicit answer to the Jews' objections, it is not cast as a refutation and he does not deny the novelty of certain Christian beliefs. Similarly, he recounts Paul's angry response to unbelieving Jews in Rome in Acts 28. Despite the rancor of the scene, Benedict cites it in order to show the slow "separation of the two communities" (164). This text is indeed relevant to the topic of the "parting of the ways." Benedict uses this scene only to reconstruct this history; he ignores Paul's polemic.

From his anti-Marcionite position, Benedict insists that an authentic theology demands the legitimation of Judaism, for such legitimacy is linked to the very nature of Christianity itself. Importantly, his rejection of hostility to Judaism as inherently un-Christian has the effect of answering with a resounding "no" a question frequently posed after the Shoah—is Christianity inevitably antisemitic? However, he does not discuss the historic fact that despite Christianity's intrinsic relatedness to Judaism, no Christians advanced a non-*adversus Judaeos* theology until the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> This is discussed further below. Silence on this point is a first indication of Benedict's tendency to interpret history in support of presupposed theological constructs.

## 2. Vatican II's New Perspective on the Problem

There is a tension in Benedict's claims regarding authentic and inauthentic Christian teaching. On the one hand, he frankly admits that the Church began to introduce new and unprecedented ideas about Jews and Judaism starting with the Council and continuing to the present. This is apparent in the title he gave to this section ("Vatican II's New Perspective"), as well as his recognition of a "new view of Judaism that developed after the Council" (168). Speaking of *NA*, he writes that it offered "the first basic indications" of a Catholic theology of Judaism (163). He has made this admission before. In an address he delivered as pope in 2005, he acknowledged that in the face of "the recent crimes of the Nazi regime and, in general, with a retrospective look at a long and difficult history, it was necessary to evaluate and define *in a new way* the relationship between the Church and the

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<sup>23</sup> John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge, MA / London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2012) narrates the difficulties faced by Christian theologians trying to counter Nazi antisemitism because the only theological precedents they had to call upon were *adversus Judaeos* ones. See chapters 4 and 6.

faith of Israel."<sup>24</sup> The adjective "new" suggests a possible discontinuity with traditional teachings.

On the other hand, Benedict wants to demonstrate the continuity of post-Vatican II Catholic theology with preceding Church teaching. This, too, he raised in the 2005 address, stating, "The Second Vatican Council...has reviewed or even corrected certain historical decisions, but in this *apparent* discontinuity it has actually preserved and deepened her *inmost nature and true identity*."<sup>25</sup> This argument recurs in Benedict's "Comments." For him, the Church's nature and authentic identity is founded on its connections to biblical Israel, which has implications for the Church's relations to Rabbinic Judaism. Opposing theologies are erroneous and are the result of historical "political and social problems of coexistence" (166). Here his view of the relationship between theology and history is noteworthy. He seems to think primarily in terms of transcendent theological truths that exist in timeless continuity, untainted by their possibly imperfect expressions in history, or perhaps the timeless truths are only made real in history very gradually over time. Thus, the new perspectives introduced by *NA* are not discontinuous with the essential truths of Christian faith. Rather, *NA* began to articulate them accurately, unlike the long-dominant *adversus Iudaeos* position. Among the virtues of this grounding of the post-conciliar theological rapprochement with Jews and Judaism in the nature of the Church itself is that no one may legitimately dismiss it as merely a guilt-driven response to the Shoah.

Of course, many commentators, both Jews and Christians, have judged that *NA* was a genuine reversal of past teachings about Jews and Judaism. For instance, a member of its drafting team, Gregory Baum, wrote, "It could be argued, I think, that the Church's recognition of the spiritual status of Jewish religion is the most dramatic example of doctrinal turn-about in the age-old magisterium ordinarium."<sup>26</sup> However, Benedict has long been uncomfortable with a "hermeneutic of discontinuity" when interpreting the outcomes of the Council, writing in 2005 that it "risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church." Thus Benedict's grounding of a theology "*De Iudaeis*" in the Church's

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings," December 22, 2005 (emphasis added), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html)

<sup>25</sup> Benedict, "Address...to the Roman Curia...2005" (emphasis added). See also later in the same address: "Indeed, a discontinuity had been revealed but in which, after the various distinctions between concrete historical situations and their requirements had been made, the continuity of principles proved not to have been abandoned. It is easy to miss this fact at a first glance."

<sup>26</sup> Gregory Baum, "The Social Context of American Catholic Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 (1986): 87. This view is shared by both Jews and Christians; see Connelly, *Enemy to Brother*, 267; Walter Kasper, "*Dominus Iesus*." Paper delivered at the 17th meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, May 1, 2001, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kasper/kasper01may1-1>.

“inmost nature and true identity” simultaneously strengthens the theological foundations of a positive relationship between Christians and Jews and resists the idea that authoritative Catholic teaching can drastically change.<sup>27</sup>

In this section of his “Comments,” Benedict specifically turns to the 2015 Vatican document, “G&C,” and its principal claims. In his opinion, it provided “an authoritative summary of previous developments” toward a post-*NA* theology of Judaism (168). He suggests these developments can be summed up in two statements. First, the Church must reject the pre-*NA* “theory of substitution” (which in English is more commonly called “supersessionism” or “replacement theology”). Second, the covenant between God and Israel was never revoked. In a statement summarizing his argument and indicating what he will focus on, he feels that “both of these theses...are basically correct but are in many ways imprecise and need to be given further critical consideration.” He will go on to examine each of these two “theses” in depth.

Benedict’s identification of these two statements as central in post-*NA* Catholic theological thinking is reasonable. It might be noted, however, that he does not mention a key principle from the 1974 Vatican “Guidelines” to implement *NA*, one that was “a point of particular importance” to John Paul II.<sup>28</sup> The “Guidelines” states: “Christians must...strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism; they must strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.”<sup>29</sup>

One should not conclude that the absence of this principle from his précis of post-*NA* developments means that Benedict disagrees with it. He has, after all, affirmatively cited Rabbinic texts<sup>30</sup> and has written that, “After centuries of antagonism, we now see it as our task to bring these two ways of rereading the

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<sup>27</sup> Benedict, “Address...to the Roman Curia...2005”: “The Church, both before and after the Council, was and is the same Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, journeying on through time; she continues ‘her pilgrimage amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God,’ proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8).” This theological perspective of a church abiding in transcendent continuity as history unfolds is reminiscent of the concern by the CRRJ in the statement “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” (1998) to distinguish “the Church as such” from “the errors” and “failures of her sons and daughters in every age.”

<sup>28</sup> “Address to Representatives of Jewish Organizations,” March 12, 1979, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/jp2-79mar12>.

<sup>29</sup> CRRJ, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4,” December 1, 1974, Preamble (Hereafter “Guidelines”), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crrr/documenti-della-commissione/-orientamenti-e-suggerimenti-per-l-applicazione-della-dichiarazio/en.html>.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., in his “Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome,” January 17, 2010: “In the Jewish tradition there is a wonderful saying of the Fathers of Israel: ‘Simon the Just often said: The world is founded on three things: the Torah, worship, and acts of mercy’ (*Avoth* 1:2)” [§7], [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/january/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20100117\\_sinagoga.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100117_sinagoga.html).

biblical texts—the Christian way and the Jewish way—into dialogue with one another, if we are to understand God’s will and his word aright.”<sup>31</sup> However, by analyzing central aspects of a theology *De Iudaeis* without a conscious and constant engagement with Jewish perspectives, Benedict risks not having the dynamism of ongoing Jewish covenantal life significantly inform his constructive theology. Seen in this light, his “Comments” in *Communio* appears to be more concerned with a theology of Christianity than with a theology of Judaism.

Benedict starts his treatment of his two summary statements by arguing first “that there was no ‘theory of substitution’ as such before the Council” (168). A basis for this is the absence of the phrase from standard theological lexicons: “It had always been amazing to me that I had never heard of this ‘substitution theory’ myself. Although I had never dealt directly with the topic of Christianity and Judaism, it was surprising that I did not know the most important theory about it. That’s why I went in search of it and found out that it was not an explicitly existing theory before the Council.”<sup>32</sup> He adds that there was no “uniform” Christian understanding of “Israel’s position in salvation-history after Christ.” Importantly, the concept of “salvation-history,” which is essential to his theological approach, here makes its first explicit appearance in the “Comments.” Yet he also acknowledges that certain New Testament parables in which vineyard tenants and wedding feast invitees are indeed *replaced* by others “largely shaped the [Church’s] understanding of Israel’s rejection and how it functions in the present history of salvation” (169).<sup>33</sup> These do not deter him from emphasizing that Christianity cannot be supersessionist.

Benedict’s claim here is highly questionable. The fact that supersessionism was not consciously recognized (and challenged) as a theological paradigm until after the Second Vatican Council does not mean that its defining premises were not universally taken for granted by Christians for centuries. From the second century on, Christians have invoked the so-called “deicide” charge as explaining the destruction of Jerusalem<sup>34</sup> and the Christian replacement of Jews as God’s people.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Part Two, *Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 33. See also his preface to the 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission study quoted above.

<sup>32</sup> Benedict XVI, “Not Mission, but Dialogue.”

<sup>33</sup> This sentence is murky about what exactly Israel has rejected (Christ? the Gospel? God?) or whether it is Israel itself that has been rejected (by God?), though his larger point is clear.

<sup>34</sup> See Adam Gregerman, *Building on the Ruins of the Temple: Apologetics and Polemics in Early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> To provide a few of many possible examples over the centuries: Origen, “It was fitting that the city where Jesus endured these sufferings should perish utterly, and the Jewish nation be overthrown, and the invitation to happiness offered them by God to pass to others, I mean to the Christians” (*Contra Celsum*, IV, 22); Augustine of Hippo, “the Church admits and avows the Jewish people to be cursed, because after killing Christ they continue to . . . mourn for the loss of their kingdom, and are in terrified subjection to the immensely superior number of Christians” (*Contra Faustum*, Book 12, §§11, 12); Thomas Aquinas, “the Jews by reason of their crime are sentenced to perpetual servitude” [“Letter to Margaret, Countess of Flanders”]; and Pope Pius X, “The Jewish religion was the foundation of our own; but it was superseded by the teachings of Christ, and we cannot concede it any further validity” [Raphael Patai, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl* (trans. Harry Zohn; New York/London: Herzl Press, Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 1603].

While it is true that these assertions were never magisterially organized into a coherent doctrinal formula that might then appear in theological lexicons, there also is no evidence *at all* for a contrasting positive theology of Judaism. Despite the canonical status of the “Old Testament,” the only theological stance that Catholics had toward Jews until the Second Vatican Council was adversarial. The *adversus Judaeos* tradition, then, coheres well with the standard definition of the Church’s ordinary magisterium as that which has been taught *ubique, semper et ab omnibus* (everywhere, always and by everyone).<sup>36</sup>

Benedict’s lack of direct engagement with the pervasiveness of the *adversus Judaeos* tradition combines his priority on maintaining the continuity of Catholic teaching with his insistence on denying even a hint of legitimacy to supersessionist claims, even in the past. When Christian theology was and is properly understood, he writes, “it was [and is] clear that Israel or Judaism always maintained a special position” in it (169).

As mentioned above, in the next two sections of his article, Benedict will repeatedly argue that the legitimacy of Christianity rests (at least partially) on its genuine rootedness in and emergence from the traditions of ancient Israel. The legitimacy of Rabbinic Judaism likewise depends on the same connection to ancient Israel. This Christian claim is based on a trajectory begun in *NA*, but it ultimately goes back to the break with Marcion. His argument throughout the “Comments” consistently moves from Israel to the Church, with the legitimacy of Jewish covenantal life paralleling the legitimacy of Christianity. Benedict, though, we will see, typically treats Judaism only briefly and largely focuses on applying this claim for legitimacy to Christianity. Still, Benedict is aware that it could not apply only to Christianity, for that would both give space for supersessionism and more importantly undermine any Hebrew Bible-based claims for legitimacy. One could then ask: if such an argument does not hold for Judaism, why should it hold for Christianity? That is why he must dismiss all supersessionist notions as dissolving the firm scriptural ground on which Christians stand.

Benedict marshals biblical arguments to demonstrate the invalidity of supersessionism: “Two points of view have *always* resisted the idea that the Jewish people have been totally cut off from the promise” (169; emphasis added).<sup>37</sup> They are, firstly, that “Israel is undeniably the possessor of Holy Scripture.” Even if they misinterpret it (he cites statements such as 2 Cor 3:15f., regarding a veil that “covers the heart of Israel”), they remain in possession of God’s word: “with Holy Scripture one is holding God’s revelation in one’s hands” (168-169). This is a notably positive assessment of the Jewish connection to the Bible regardless of how it is interpreted (or misinterpreted).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> As developed by St. Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium*, ch. 20, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> This phrasing implies that Israel has at least partially been “cut off from the promise,” but this would seem to run counter to the thrust of Benedict’s reasoning at this point.

<sup>38</sup> The opposite view already was fully formed by the second century. For example, Justin, speaking about biblical prophecy, writes “They are contained in your Scriptures, or rather not yours, but ours.

Secondly, Benedict notes that the New Testament eschatologically refers to "all Israel being saved" (Rom 11:26) and to the redemption of "144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel" (Rv 7:4).<sup>39</sup> He reads these verses inclusively and without attention to their original context (Revelation likely does not refer to non-Christ-believing Jews). Rather, they buttress his claims about Israel's special status beginning in the earliest Christian period. That is why, he argues, Jews "alone in the medieval world could exist alongside Christians as a *religio licita*" ("permitted religion," 169). Augustine's influential "witness people" theology undergirds this special status. Though Augustine simply sought to explain why Judaism even continued to exist after Christ, Benedict reads this theology in an excessively positive way: "Israel must be deemed as existing apart from the community of the Church in order to attest to the authenticity of the Sacred Scriptures."<sup>40</sup>

### 3. The Question of "Substitution"

In this long middle section on supersessionism, Benedict treats "the essential elements of the promise to which the concept of substitution could be applied" rather than the topic in general (169). While this may make sense in theory, in practice both his interest in and scholarly approaches to his five different elements vary so widely as to feel unbalanced. Some he passes over with barely a comment; others require multiple pages. Paradoxically, in the two longest sections (four and five) he does not specifically address the idea of substitution.

#### 3.1 The Temple cult

Benedict explores the implications of the rejection of substitutionary theology, opening with the question, "Does the Eucharist replace the ritual [Temple] sacrifices, or do they remain in themselves necessary?" (170). This framing determines how his reasoning will unfold.

Before looking at the details, it is helpful to give an overview of this subsection. He argues that a post-NA "unqualified no to the 'theory of substitution' [as

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For we believe them; but you, though you read them, do not catch the spirit that is in them" ("Dialogue with Trypho," 29).

<sup>39</sup> Importantly, Benedict also observes, almost in passing, that according "to the perspective of the New Testament, this eschatological view is not simply concerned with something that will eventually come to pass after many thousands of years; rather the 'eschatological' is always also somehow present" (169). If, therefore, the New Testament declares that the salvation of Jews is eschatologically certain, then that salvation is logically "also somehow present" in the covenantal lives of Jews today. Perhaps this relates to the assertion in "G&C," §36: "That the Jews are participants in God's salvation is theologically unquestionable."

<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Benedict's benign presentation of Augustinian thought here can be compared with a recent Orthodox Rabbinical statement that cites two medieval Jewish sages: "As did Maimonides and Yehudah Halevi, we acknowledge that the emergence of Christianity in human history is neither an accident nor an error, but the willed divine outcome and gift to the nations" (International Group of Orthodox Rabbis, "To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians," December 3, 2015, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/jewish/orthodox-2015dec4>).

found in “G&C”] necessarily breaks down” when law and promise are viewed dynamically. In other words, there are ways in which a kind of evolutionary replacement *did* occur that both legitimately continued what came before (sacrificial worship) but introduced new (Christian) eucharistic elements. Hence, it was a limited sort of replacement. Benedict understands these new historical elements to be modifications but not grounds for a full-scale replacement theology. His nuanced claim rests on the *specific* historical fact that Temple sacrifices did actually disappear and had to be replaced or substituted for after 70 CE. Benedict construes this historical development according to a christocentric understanding of salvation-history, a characteristic move of patristic interpretation.<sup>41</sup> However, Benedict gives no support to the idea that Jews’ covenanting with God *more broadly* was replaced.

To buttress his explanation of the Temple cult, Benedict invokes various Hebrew Bible texts that criticize Temple cultic sacrifices, such as Ps 51:16 (“You take no delight in sacrifice.... The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit”). Aware that such passages do not advocate a cessation of animal sacrifice but rather that they be performed with the proper disposition, Benedict also points to verses such as Ps 51:19 to argue “that a merely spiritual sacrifice alone is perceived as insufficient.” This authentic tension in biblical ideas about sacrifice then serves to ground what comes later: the “total self-gift of Jesus in the crucifixion.” This event was both a physical and spiritual sacrifice, reflecting the nature of both of these strands of thought in the biblical tradition. Benedict thus seeks to resolve these inner-biblical tensions by characterizing the crucifixion as a “necessary God-given synthesis of both views.” The self-emptying, physical sacrifice of the divine-human Jesus on the cross was both a spiritual and an “entirely real” physical sacrifice. He writes that, “For Christians, it is clear that all previous cult finds its meaning and its fulfillment only insofar as it moves toward the sacrifice of Jesus Christ” (171). Benedict concludes, “there really is no ‘substitution,’ but a journey that becomes one reality” in the resolution in Christ of the tension between the physical and spiritual. Yet, he adds, “this entails the necessary disappearance of animal sacrifices, in place of which (‘substitution’) the Eucharist occurs” as the reenactment of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

Benedict’s formulation, counterposing “substitution” with “journey,” is not self-evident. It does not map neatly onto the actual chronological development of Christian ritual and belief. However, his argument about consecutive legitimate developments, moving toward a singular reality that requires the disappearance of and substitution for Temple animal sacrifices, makes sense when one recognizes that Benedict is operating with a christological reading of history. This process is not a historical one but a salvation-historical one. This is made clear in his next sentence: “Instead of a static view of substitution or non-substitution, there is a dynamic consideration of the whole of salvation-history, which finds its ἀνακεφαλαιώσις [recapitulation] in Christ” (171). He narrates a linear development, from one stage to another (one might even say from lower to higher—note his

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<sup>41</sup> Gregerman, *Building on the Ruins*, 19-136, 217-220.

language of fulfillment and universalism). Notably, however, Benedict does not deploy this idea of a "recapitulation" of the original Temple cult in order to critique or reject (aspects of) Rabbinic Judaism.

Benedict's christocentric biblical reasoning drives him to seek to integrate the divergent perspectives of ancient Israel's scriptures into a final, harmonious "God-given synthesis." This clearly reflects his distinctive approach, with its emphasis on uniqueness and inevitability (e.g., the crucifixion was "necessary"; "the necessary disappearance" of animal sacrifices). However, by its very nature the canon of the Hebrew Bible is multifaceted, a trait maintained in the later Rabbinic corpus. Jon Levenson's description makes this contrast vivid:

Whereas in the church the sacred text tends to be seen as a *word* (the singular is telling) demanding to be proclaimed magisterially, in Judaism it tends to be seen as a *problem* with many facets, each of which deserves attention and debate. ...And most of the Talmud is a debate, with both majority and minority positions preserved and often unmarked. This is very different from most of the theological literature of Christianity.<sup>42</sup>

Benedict's contention that the Eucharist substitutes for the "necessarily disappearing" Temple sacrifice is predicated upon a harmonizing Christian mode of interpreting the Hebrew Bible that he imposes upon the canon's inherent "polydoxy of biblical theology."<sup>43</sup> Where the Christian Benedict sees "a certain contradiction between the two groups of verses" (171) about the Temple sacrifices, a thesis and an antithesis that beg to be brought together in a salvation-history synthesis, in the Hebrew Bible and in the writings of later Jewish interpreters one finds multiple dimensions of a profound subject maintained in an enduring creative tension. In other words, Benedict's reasoning within a Christian perspective about Temple sacrifices and the Eucharist is circular. The "substitution" of the former by the latter is partially predicated upon the imposition of a univocal "salvation-history" interpretive method that is foreign to the multifaceted nature of the Hebrew biblical tradition. Still, it should be observed that Benedict occasionally qualifies his statements with words such as "for Christians," which suggests a recognition of alternative Jewish possibilities upon which he does not elaborate. His discussion is also devoid of polemic. Benedict's exclusive focus seems to be the insistence that later Christian interpretations are legitimate developments upon a chronologically earlier ritual tradition, reinforcing the impression that his article is really more concerned with Christian theology than with Jewish religious developments.

### 3.2 Cultic laws

Benedict places biblical "laws affecting individual persons" regarding food, circumcision, and the Sabbath in the category "cultic laws." In his brief discussion,

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<sup>42</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 61; emphasis in the original.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

he seeks to neutralize any implication that Christians substituted their own interpretations of these laws for Jewish interpretations. Rather, any differences between them are attributed to the missionary goals of the earliest apostolic preachers to the Gentiles. He writes, “The abolition of the binding character [of these laws] was the condition for the emergence of worldwide Christianity from the Gentiles.” He has in mind here the debates in early Christ-assemblies about whether formerly pagan Gentiles needed to observe the Torah in order to be pleasing to God. His statement reflects the position that prevailed in the early Church and that allowed Gentiles as Gentiles to be admitted as equals. However, note that he does not criticize the law itself. Regarding Jews, Benedict recognizes the Torah’s positive role in maintaining “Israel’s identity” in the diaspora. That is why he can irenically say that questions of Torah observance “have not been a real problem for both sides since the separation of Israel and the Church” (171).

### 3.3 Law and morality

Benedict’s views on the “legal and moral precepts of the Torah” have much in common with his views on the Temple cult (171). As above (in 3.1), he hews to a broad post-*NA* trajectory that rejects claims that Christianity replaces Judaism or that Christian rituals and beliefs replace no-longer-valid Jewish rituals and beliefs. Traditional substitutionary claims, that, for example, “the eight beatitudes are supposed to have taken the place of the commandments [and] the Sermon on the Mount is taken as loosening altogether the morality of the Old Testament” are simply incorrect. Rather than true teaching, they reflect a “misunderstood Paulinism” that pits the “Old Covenant” against the “New Covenant” (171-72). No “radical substitution” has taken place; on the contrary, the biblical tradition itself was “subject to development,” with new views emerging over time.

This model legitimates Christian views of law and morality by recourse to this earlier Hebrew biblical precedent. Some have incorrectly thought Christians’ interpretations of the Bible break with the past (a view typically found among those hostile to Judaism). However, Benedict argues, they are valid outgrowths of an earlier tradition and do not repudiate or invalidate that tradition (or the Rabbinic tradition that continues this development).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, as above, his focus is almost entirely on the Christian tradition, and he has little to say about Jewish views.

His argument is two-fold. First, he illustrates the deep continuities between biblical and Christian teachings. Without denying that some change has taken place, he argues that, fundamentally, “the moral precepts of the Old Covenant...remain valid.” Likewise, the “moral instruction in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is, in the end, identical.” He minimizes or denies apparent discontinuities, thereby avoiding the types of contrasts between aspects of Judaism and Christianity that Christians often used to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity. Second, and simultaneously, he repeatedly employs terminology to describe Christian

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<sup>44</sup> His discussion of “Christians” and “Jews” in the first paragraph of 3.3 indicates his interest in both biblical Israel and later Jews.

views of law and morality that indicate some level of superiority or improvement over biblical or Jewish views. For example, Christians, he says, "read [the law] anew" and do so "in the new context of love for and being loved by Jesus Christ" (171-72). Without deprecating other interpretations, "the new reading" they offer is a "deepening in unaltered validity." This is surely an improvement of some kind (though the precise nature is vague), but, Benedict insists, what emerges is "neither a repeal nor a substitution." Put colloquially, one might say it is "value added." While this second approach does not directly contradict his first approach, it does introduce an unstated tension. By insisting on continuities regarding fundamental aspects of biblical, Jewish, and Christian views, and speaking of them positively, he rejects anti-Jewish polemic or unfavorable contrasts. However, this is only part of his argument. The introduction of the distinctive, and implicitly superior, features of Christian interpretation allow Benedict to avoid relativism or indifferentism. There are unique riches in the Christian tradition, beyond what seem to be present in the Jewish tradition, though these are not defined by contrast to the biblical or Jewish traditions.

### 3.4 The messiah

Not surprisingly, messianism is a prominent issue, certainly for Benedict (if not necessarily for Jews in dialogue with Christians). He asserts that "the messianic identity of Jesus" is what divides Jews and Christians (172). Again, he starts with Scripture, which, he says, presents "a polyphony and variety of forms of [messianic] hope." To illustrate this he cites (but does not quote) a dozen biblical passages, as if to underscore this broad range. This sets up his argument. From this corpus of material two prominent conceptions of messianism emerge: one is offered by "the Jewish side" and the other comes from Jesus and "New Testament testimonies" (173).<sup>45</sup> Importantly, Benedict does not assert that only one is correct. Rather, he fairly represents some of the views of both sides without passing judgment on them and characterizes them as different and even conflicting. He grants both legitimacy, for, he acknowledges, these different ways to interpret the Bible reflect a "real issue of dispute" (172). He is far more interested in and sympathetic toward the Christian conception, of course, though he does illustrate Jewish views with numerous examples from ancient and medieval times.

Specifically, he notes that Jews have generally highlighted Davidic models of messianism and anticipated this-worldly changes in the messianic age. They hold Isaiah 2:2-5 and Micah 4:1-5 ("nation shall not lift up the sword against nation,

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<sup>45</sup> He often writes as if Christian messianic concepts go back to Jesus himself, without noting the important recognition by Catholic exegetes that the "Gospels are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work" (CRRJ, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" [June 24, 1985], IV,21,A [Hereafter "Notes,"], [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_19820306\\_jews-judaism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820306_jews-judaism_en.html)). One manifestation of this approach is that Benedict cites gospel words of Jesus as if they are *ipsissima verba*, (the "actual words" spoken by Jesus), discounting their composition by the post-resurrectional Gospel authors. This has the effect of diluting Jesus' Jewishness by reading later Christian theology into his statements.

neither shall they learn war anymore”) “as the core of [their] messianic hope” (174). He recognizes the sound biblical foundation of a traditional Jewish hope for visible change in the world and frankly admits that “it is clear that these words have not been fulfilled [by Jesus or anyone else] but remain an expectation for the future” (175). He offers no rebuttal or critique of the application of this standard, for he is aware that Jews expect that one who claims to be the messiah would “prove his identity” by inaugurating these changes (173).

Upon turning to Christian messianic conceptions, Benedict moves in parallel fashion. Having briefly illustrated Jews’ views, he then embarks on an extended apologetic for the legitimacy of a christological reading of the messianic promises of the “*entire* Old Testament” (173; emphasis in original). This rests on his portrayal of the Hebrew Bible in developmental terms “as a book of hope,” in which, as time passed, “the passion of God in this world, and thus the suffering of the righteous one, becomes ever more central” (173-74). This undergirds his efforts to find biblical evidence for a messianic role quite different from that expected by most Jews and in line with the “proclamation” by Jesus and early Christians about what the messiah was to do. He tightly situates this role within a christological salvation-history framework: “this [messianic] hope points less and less to an earthly and political power...the importance of the passion as an essential element of hope comes increasingly to the fore.” Grounding this claim in some of the views found (perhaps obliquely; see below) in the Bible, he legitimates a number of departures from the Jewish perspective. For example, he de-emphasizes kingly models of worldly success. Jesus, he writes, “did not draw on the Davidic tradition.” Instead, Benedict finds a starkly different vision. Speaking of Jesus, Benedict writes, “what was central for him” was “the idea of God’s suffering servant, of salvation through suffering.” For this Jesus drew upon “the songs of the suffering servant in Isaiah, as well as the mysterious visions of suffering of Zechariah.” He also drew on “the form of the son of man formulated by Daniel as a figure of hope.” None of these contain hopes for a political or military victory. On the contrary, the hope found in the messianic model exemplified by Jesus reflects yearnings by those facing “exile and persecution.” These experiences, stripped of any “triumphant [read: Davidic] accent,” are “essential stages in God’s journey with his people, which moves toward Jesus of Nazareth” (174).

Benedict’s eschatology diverges significantly from Jewish views. He writes that “according to Jesus’ understanding of history, a ‘time of the Gentiles’ comes between the destruction of the temple and the end of the world.” He introduces multiple steps into the messianic process that align with Jesus’ career and the subsequent history of the Church. Above all, this includes a Gentile mission.<sup>46</sup> Instead of a process “considered to be very short” (which, he admits, reflects authentic biblical traditions), the advent of the messiah “is not a time of cosmic transformation” (176). History moves slowly, even in messianic time, just as the Israelites wandered for forty years in the desert. Benedict does recognize that some of these

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<sup>46</sup> See also the discussion of cultic laws in 3.2 above regarding “the emergence of worldwide Christianity from the Gentiles” (171).

messianic ideas are not "directly evident as such in the texts of the Old Testament." Still, they have biblical roots and, most importantly, "correspond to the unfolding of the hope of Israel" (175). In short, this Christian messianic model is as legitimate as Jewish model(s), only this model is suitable "for Christianity in its Exodus journey" of suffering ultimately followed by "the great gift that leads to true life" (177).

In his defense of the Christian interpretation, Benedict notes that the Church, "in dialogue with the Jews...tries again and again to show that all this is 'scriptural'" (176) This recalls an important statement made by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 2001: "Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one."<sup>47</sup> In his *Communio* "Comments," it is almost as if Benedict longs for Jews to admit that it is the Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible that is a possible one.

### 3.5 The promise of land

Benedict next considers whether supersessionism applies to the biblical promise of the land of Israel to Abraham's biological descendants by noting that Christians also see themselves as his heirs, but not "in the earthly-historical sense" (176). Consequently, Christians are a people found among all the nations, who "do not expect any particular country in this world." The biblical promise of land in the Christian perspective, says Benedict, "refers to the future world and relativizes the different affiliations to particular countries. The dialectic of responsibly belonging to this world and at the same time being on a journey determines the Christian understanding of land and nationality. This must, of course, always be newly worked through, suffered, and experienced" (177). Having argued that Christians are not religiously bound to the land of Israel or to any specific land, he turns next to Judaism. Unlike Christians, Jews "adhered to the idea of the concrete descent from Abraham and thus necessarily had to search again and again for a concrete inner-worldly meaning for the promise of land" (178).

Benedict appreciates that "the events of the Shoah made a state of their own an even more urgent matter...[and] with the decaying of the Ottoman Empire [it became possible] to make the historical homeland of the Jews once again their own." He sees that while the Zionist project to reestablish Jewish sovereignty on their ancestral land was secular in nature, it also aroused deep religious feelings among many Jews. Benedict then correctly observes that the "question of what to make of the Zionist project was also controversial for the Catholic Church" (178).

He proceeds to make the strong but easily misunderstood statement that "a theologically-understood acquisition of land (in the sense of new political *messianism*) was unacceptable...a strictly theologically-understood [Jewish] state—a Jewish faith-state that would view itself as the theological and political fulfillment of the promises—is unthinkable *within history* according to Christian faith and contrary to the Christian understanding of the promises" (178; emphasis added). He adds, however, that just as *NA* had distinguished between the spiritual and worldly

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<sup>47</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible," §22.

realms by insisting that it was “moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love,” so, too, the Holy See was able in 1993 to recognize “the State of Israel as a modern constitutional state, and sees it as a legitimate home of the Jewish people, the rationale of which *cannot be derived directly from Holy Scripture*” (179; emphasis added).

Benedict’s differentiation between spiritual and political considerations, however, appears somewhat muddled by his next two sentences: “Yet, in another sense, it [presumably the establishment of the State of Israel] expresses God’s faithfulness to the people of Israel. The nontheological character of the Jewish state means, however, that it cannot as such be considered the fulfillment of the promises of Scripture” (179). His reasoning seems to be that the Holy See established diplomatic relations with the new State of Israel because “the Jewish people, like every people, had a natural right to their own land” (178). In doing so, the Catholic Church was not attributing any messianic fulfillment of biblical promises to Israel’s existence, something that would be “unthinkable within history” because for Christians the messianic era must, by definition, involve Christ Jesus. In his absence, this cannot be the messianic age and thus we are all still “within history.” Nonetheless, Benedict seems unwilling to preclude *any* spiritual meaning to “the massive return of Jews from all over the world to Zion,” as Rabbi Arie Folger wrote in a letter to him.<sup>48</sup> Benedict also mentions the idea that the State of Israel “expresses God’s faithfulness to the people of Israel.” For Benedict, the State of Israel in this may have *religious* significance, but not *messianic* significance in our current pre-eschatological history.<sup>49</sup>

Benedict here echoes the 1985 Vatican “Notes,” which similarly oscillates between spiritual and earthly considerations:

Christians are invited to understand [Jewish] religious attachment [to Israel] which finds its roots in Biblical tradition, without however making their own any *particular religious interpretation* of this relationship. The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the *common principles of international law*. The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted *within God’s design*.<sup>50</sup>

What the “Notes” had articulated as “within God’s design” regarding the Jewish people’s long history, Benedict now applies to the present reality of the existence

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<sup>48</sup> Arie Folger, “Reply to Emeritus Pope Benedict,” September 4, 2018, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emertus-pope/folger-2018sept4>.

<sup>49</sup> This point connects with Benedict’s discussion of the “Time of the Gentiles” in the previous section. For him, this period continues to unfold until the Messianic Age arrives with the Parousia of Christ Jesus in the future.

<sup>50</sup> CRRJ, “Notes,” VI, 25; emphasis added.

of a Jewish national homeland. "God's faithfulness to the people of Israel," a religious concept, can potentially be seen as evident once more in this recent historical development.

As with other topics he discusses in the article, Benedict theologizes with a christocentric conception of salvation-history that, he says, is confirmed by (selected) actual events: "the course of history shows a growth and unfolding of the [specific land] promises, as we have seen in relation to the other dimensions of the promise [in general, beginning with the Patriarchs]" (179). He emphasizes the particular experiences of the Jewish people both in the land and, importantly, outside the land. The latter especially fits into this overarching salvation-history that assigns Israel in exile a unique role: "Israel, in exile, has finally realized that their God is a God above the gods, who freely disposes of history and nations... a God who is not only God of a particular country, but a God to whom the world as a whole belonged." This of course coheres with a Christian salvation-history that begins with the Gospel initially preached only among Jews but soon shared with diaspora Jews and ultimately and successfully with Gentiles as well: "the Jews have opened the door to God precisely through their final scattering in the world" (180). Benedict does not nullify the land promise, though he does minimize its relevance in Christianity.

After a digression into a discussion of the (perhaps providential) convergence of Jewish monotheism with Greek philosophy, this section of the "Comments" concludes. Benedict does not explicitly state whether the biblical promise of land to Abraham has been superseded. He argues that exile from the land enabled the God of Israel to become known by all humanity: "the Jews have opened the door to God precisely through their final scattering in the world" (180). Universalism has been released from its Jewish particularity according to the divine plan. Yet, Benedict does not deny the value of Jewish particularity, noting, almost in passing, that history testifies to "God's faithfulness to the people of Israel" (179).

#### 4. The "Never-Revoked Covenant"

Benedict next turns to the second of his two main topics: the "never-revoked covenant" that defines Jewish covenantal life. The Catholic claim that the covenant was never revoked, he says, is "basically correct" (168). However, "some details need to be clarified and deepened" (181). Unlike in earlier sections, Benedict is not seeking to dispel the possibility that the Christian tradition may have formerly supported an erroneous theological claim. His discussion here relates to what he sees as the overly sweeping nature of the claim about the unrevoked covenant, which precludes a limited form of replacement that Benedict *does* find acceptable. He grants that "the formula of the 'never-revoked covenant' may have been helpful in a first phase of the new dialogue between Jews and Christians," for, among other benefits, it likely assuaged Jewish concerns early in the dialogue. However, "it is not suited in the long run to express in an adequate way the magnitude of [covenantal] reality" (184). His discussion should be seen as his effort to remedy that

weakness. As before, his reading of history as an unfolding of the divine plan of universal salvation shapes his analysis.

Benedict's argument rests on an important distinction. In the history of Jewish covenanting with God *there has been some replacement* (of one covenant for another) but *there has not been abrogation* (the total revocation or cancellation of Jewish covenanting in general). This nuance allows him to demonstrate distinctive features of Christian covenanting vis-à-vis Jewish covenanting without lapsing into an unacceptable anti-Judaism or Marcionism. Before looking at the claims he makes to support this, at the outset one should note that the scope of his overall argument is limited. He does not deny that recent popes and Church teachings have repeatedly referred to a Jewish covenant that, in John Paul II's words in a 1980 speech, "perdure and is never invalidated" (181).<sup>51</sup> He also cites the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as stating that "the Old Covenant has never been revoked."<sup>52</sup> He concludes that the phrase "thus belongs in a certain sense to the current teaching of the Catholic Church." However, his use of the qualification "in a certain sense" hints at the clarification to come.

Benedict resists the use of "covenant" in the singular form and instead endorses a plural view of covenants. Building on Paul's terminology in Romans 4, he says that references to "the covenant" are too limited. They tend toward an unwelcome "strict juxtaposition of Old (First) and New Covenant." Also, he explains that "'covenant' is a dynamic reality that is concretized in an unfolding series of *covenants*...the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and finally, in various guises, the promise of the New Covenant" (181; emphasis added). Therefore, to covenant is to participate in a relationship with some fluidity and that takes various forms. Even if covenants are "broken by man [sic]" they can be renewed, incorporating features that were not present in the earlier covenant. That is why it is too static to speak simply of a covenant never revoked, for there is no single covenant to speak of.

In line with this fluid covenantal model that is based on his linear view of salvation-history, eventually there must be a covenant that includes Christ. Christ is, for Benedict, the pivotal point in salvation-history who inaugurates a covenant

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<sup>51</sup> This claim has its roots in NA 4. While the statement did not speak of a "never-revoked covenant," it is hard to imagine what else the declaration could have meant when it proclaimed that "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers," when it chose to render Romans 9:4-5 in the present tense ("theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises"), and when it repudiated the idea that Jews were "rejected or accursed by God." If Jews are not divinely rejected but beloved and so continue to be blessed by sonship, glory, covenants, law, worship, and promises, then no other conclusion is possible than that Jews continue to abide in covenant with God.

<sup>52</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2004), §121. It is interesting that in this paragraph the *Catechism* is arguing that "because the Old Covenant has never been revoked" the Old Testament is "an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture" whose "books are inspired and retain a permanent value." Unlike Pope John Paul II (whom it does not cite here), the *Catechism* makes no connections with living Jewish covenantal life today and is focusing on intertextual relationships between the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps that is what Benedict means by "in a certain sense."

that transcends the earlier covenants.<sup>53</sup> Benedict posits that there were multiple earlier covenants because "'covenant' in the Bible...occurs in stages" (183). These are "essential stages in God's journey with his people," though ultimately all "moves toward Jesus of Nazareth" (174). There were failures along the way, causing God great suffering but leading to "a new level of love": the self-giving of Jesus Christ "unto death and in Resurrection, [which] opens the New Covenant" (183-84). God's love, he says, requires the unconditional intervention of God's Son into human history to reestablish a final promissory covenant of universal salvation, thereby fulfilling the promises contained in the "book of hope," the Old Testament (173). This is the point at which Benedict introduces replacement terminology in a limited sense. Ultimately, all previous covenants are "gathered together under the heading of the 'first covenant', which is now *replaced* by the final, 'new' covenant" (181; emphasis added). Employing again the salvation-history perspective encountered earlier, Benedict invokes the Letter to the Hebrews and several biblical prophetic texts to argue that the new covenant overcomes the shortcomings of earlier covenants, for it alone is "permanent" and "definitive" (183-84).

How does this scenario relate to the covenants with the biblical Israelites? The people had many failures and shortcomings. As the Bible narrates, "Israel does not remain faithful and prostitutes itself with all kinds of deities" (182). Furthermore, the covenants themselves were "limited" and "intermediate" (181). These previous covenants have to be seen within this context "of human failure, the breaking of the covenant and its internal consequences: the destruction of temple, the scattering of Israel, and the call to repentance, which restores man's capacity for the covenant" (183). Benedict identifies limitations of specific covenants too. The Mosaic covenant, for example, was "bound up with the condition of fulfilling the law." When the law was not fulfilled, the covenant "fail[ed]." Likewise, the Davidic covenant "was broken by man and came to an end."

However, the Jews' transgressions did not leave them bereft of any connection to God: "the covenant between God and Israel is indestructible because of the continuity of God's election" (182). The relationship endures, according to new terms or in a different form. This avoids supersessionism or a retrospective or present invalidation of the relationship between God and Israel. The relationship is inherently unbreakable despite Israel's misbehavior. While there is divine "anger," he also insists "there is no denunciation [of the people] on the part of God" that would constitute revocation. Rather, history has moved to a "new stage of covenant theology," in which Benedict considers it appropriate to speak of replacement in a narrow sense. One could thus speak of "Covenant" with a capital "C" as the overarching dynamic of permanently sharing life with God that is fleshed out historically or articulated in human language in an unfolding series of "covenants" with a lowercase "c." Characteristically, Benedict sees both continuity between the

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<sup>53</sup> On this theme in the writings of Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the CRRJ during Benedict's pontificate, see Adam Greggerman, "Superiority without Supersessionism: Walter Kasper, 'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable', and God's Covenant with the Jews," *Theological Studies* 79 (2018): 36-59.

covenants (one covenant follows or co-exists with another) and discontinuity (all pre-Christian covenants were preliminary, awaiting a “new beginning to the covenant with God.”)

There are tensions between Benedict’s salvation-history approach and a chronological historical account. Benedict puts Christ at the center or pivot of history. All other events—past or future—necessarily must be somehow related to him. For example, he writes, “Jesus *responds in advance* to the two historical events that shortly afterward fundamentally changed the situation of Israel and the concrete form of the Sinai covenant: the destruction of the temple...and the scattering of Israel in a worldwide diaspora” (184; emphasis added). Benedict here breaks with a linear consideration of historical events. The Jerusalem Temple was destroyed forty years *after* Jesus’ crucifixion. The Jewish diaspora had been well-established for centuries *before* Jesus’ birth. Benedict here subordinates history to Christian theological paradigms. This orientation also raises questions regarding the development of Catholic theologies that take seriously Jewish self-understandings of their own history and covenantal experiences.

Benedict further describes the approach of the Letter to the Hebrews to the “new covenant” as taking all “previous covenants” and gathering them “together under the heading of the ‘first covenant,’ which is now replaced by the final, ‘new’ covenant” in Christ (181). He does not recognize the eschatological character of prophetic expectations in many of these previous covenants or the eschatological horizon of the author of Hebrews. Apocalyptic Jewish texts and movements, including but not limited to the movement started by Jesus, applied such “new covenant” language to themselves precisely because they also believed they were living at the end of the days. Benedict however minimizes this context, treating all of them as preliminary despite what they say. Furthermore, two thousand years later, it is self-evident that the Torah has not yet been put into the inmost beings or inscribed on the hearts of either Christians or Jews (cf. Jer 31:33). This means that the “new covenant” has not yet achieved the finality that Benedict here attributes to it. Finally, the Letter to the Hebrews, and its discussion of “all previous covenants,” was written before Rabbinic Judaism had arisen. It is therefore questionable how it can contribute to present-day theology about Judaism.

His covenantal scenario raises questions regarding his earlier statements about Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. In a particularly enigmatic sentence, he makes the claim that the Sinai covenant was “reestablished”<sup>54</sup> in Jesus’ blood (184). The Christian covenant has this unique status, for it is related to but surpasses earlier covenants. In particular, it fundamentally altered “the concrete form of the Sinai covenant.” However, Benedict earlier asserted that Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity were *both* responses to the end of Israelite cultic practices with the destruction of the Temple. He clearly avoids making any comparisons between them. As noted, he usually presents Rabbinic Judaism alongside emergent Christianity as one of

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<sup>54</sup> “*Umstiftung*” in the German original, which is something of a neologism. It has the sense of a re-foundation, a re-grounding, a new basis for something. Franz Posset helpfully noted Benedict’s use of this unusual word.

"two paths," each with their own "essence." But if only one tradition is grounded in the reestablished covenant, does he introduce a hierarchy of legitimacy otherwise absent from his parallel statements about the two religions? Perhaps the reestablishment of the Sinai covenant in Christ need not be the only "permanently valid form" of the Covenant if the Rabbinical re-grounding is itself a dynamic manifestation of the "indestructible" covenantal life between God and Israel (182). It might be said that the work of the Rabbis was *mutatis mutandis* also a "reestablishment" of the Sinai covenant in their adaptive traditions of Torah interpretation.

There is another seeming imbalance in his views. Benedict, using generic terminology, says covenantal history "is codetermined by the whole drama of human error" (182). Even its "permanently valid form" does not preclude or end violations. However, it is not human or Gentile but only Jewish sins and offenses that he mentions: "the breaking of the covenant and its internal consequences: the destruction of temple, the scattering of Israel" (183). Illustrations of the seemingly generic "guilt of man" are not taken from non-Jews' misdeeds.<sup>55</sup> There is no explicit recognition of Christians' sinfulness in his discussion of covenantal breaches. This absence results in a contrast between earlier covenants, repeatedly violated by Jews, and the definitive and final new covenant in Christ. Benedict of course does not believe that Christians are sinless or do not also violate their own covenantal obligations before God. Earlier he had written about Christians' "antisemitic failures" (166) and that the "time of the Gentiles" is a time "in which evil continues to have power...a time when love and truth are defeated" (176). He also concludes his article with a quotation from the New Testament that mentions Christians being faithless (184). Therefore, it would have been more balanced theologically to have engaged directly with Christians' imperfect performance of their covenanting life in Christ.

## 5. Conclusion

Benedict makes some welcome contributions to a Catholic theology of relations with Jews and Judaism:

**First, he insists that such theology must be predicated on the fundamental principle that Christianity and Judaism are not opposing religions.** It is integral to the nature of genuine Christianity to have a positive and enriching relationship with Jews and Judaism. In Benedict's perspective, for Christians to be anti-Jewish would be tantamount to falling into the heresy of Marcionism. Replacement theology or supersessionism in the sense of Christians' substituting for Jews as God's covenanting people is not and could never be part of authentic Christian theology.

**Second, since Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity are both the legitimate heirs of the Hebrew Bible, their interrelationship must be a dialogical one based upon their shared biblical roots.** Each community in its respective history and traditions has built upon but also moved beyond the ways that covenantal life

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<sup>55</sup> Some readers of the German *Communio* article found this lopsided treatment to be especially offensive and hurtful; see *Dialogika*, "Emeritus Pope Benedict on Supersession and Covenant."

was lived in biblical Israel. Benedict, in a correspondence following the publication of his article, said he believes that these different traditions of biblical interpretation need to dialogue with each other even though, “as far as humans can foresee, this dialogue within ongoing history will never lead to an agreement between the two interpretations: this is God’s business at the end of history. For now, it remains to both sides to struggle for the proper insight and to reverentially respect the perspective of the other side.”<sup>56</sup>

**Third, Benedict seeks to balance the “already” and “not-yet” aspects of Christian soteriology.** Christ is, for Benedict, the “turning point in time” (167). Thus, he emphasizes that Jesus fulfills Israel’s unfulfilled hopes (citing, for example, Luke 1:33 [181] and John 1:18; 13:25 [175]). In Christ, the promise in Jeremiah 31 “is now a present reality” (183). Still, Benedict simultaneously holds that a “time of the Gentiles” is currently unfolding. Salvation has not yet fully arrived. This era in which we currently live is not yet “a time of cosmic transformation” but rather a time when “God’s power...is a power of patience and love that remains effective against the power of evil. It is a time of God’s patience, which is often too great for us—a time of victories, but also a time when love and truth are defeated” (176). While placing Christ Jesus at the center of human history is not the only way of conceiving Christian salvation history, Benedict’s effort to assert both the “already” and the “not yet” is important, not just for Christian theology generally but for relations with Jews, whom Christians accused in the past of stubbornly refusing to recognize all that has already been accomplished in Christ. It can thus be said that foundational to Benedict’s thinking here is that both Jews and Christians await the complete fulfillment of the hopes expressed in the Hebrew Bible and which, for Christians, were confirmed and intensified in Christ.

**Fourth, Benedict largely adheres to the tradition of the Catholic Church’s politically and religiously cautious and moderate views of the State of Israel.**<sup>57</sup> Shunning eschatological scenarios, he writes that Catholics may not view this state messianically as the manifestation of the imminence of the End-Times. He also eschews theological denunciations of Israeli policies that cast the state as a “corporate Jew,” to be judged according to biblical standards as interpreted by Christians.<sup>58</sup> It should be regarded as a “legitimate home of the Jewish people...consistent with the standards of international law.” He does, however, make a brief, allusive comment that the existence of this Jewish home *can* have religious significance for Christians as an expression of “God’s faithfulness to the people of Israel” (179; emphasis added). This suggests an area for possible further theological development.

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<sup>56</sup> Benedict XVI, “Letter to Rabbi Ari Folger,” August 23, 2018, <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/benedict-2018aug28>.

<sup>57</sup> See “Biblical Land Promises and the State of Israel: A Challenge for Catholic (and Jewish) Theology” in Philip A. Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom: The Journey to Right Relationship between Catholics and Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI. and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 220-233.

<sup>58</sup> See for example Adam Greggerman, “Israel as the ‘Hermeneutical Jew’ in Protestant Statements on the Land and State of Israel: Four Presbyterian Examples,” *Israel Affairs* 23 (2017): 773-93.

**Fifth, Benedict in a number of writings has affirmed that the Jewish people today have a God-given mission in the world.** He ventures to say that in the time of the Gentiles, "Israel retains its own mission,"<sup>59</sup> even after having "opened the door to God precisely through their final [diasporic] scattering in the world" (180). From ancient times through the present, Jews and Christians have "a common struggle with our mission."<sup>60</sup> He does not say much about the content of the Jewish mission, though it would be prudent and respectful to let Jews define their own understandings of their mission(s) "in the light of their own religious experience."<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the recognition of Jewish vocations in the world is a significant step for Catholic theology.

Keeping these parameters and principles in mind, we turn finally to questions for the future, some of them arising from serious weaknesses in Benedict's essay. He helpfully distinguishes between biblical Israelite faith and Jewish (i.e., Rabbinic) faith. His attribution of spiritual worth to the latter is a significant departure from supersessionist views that saw post-New Testament Judaism as obsolete. However, to the degree that Benedict's article "deals exclusively with the refining of internal Christian...norms but does not actually have a conversation with Jewish theology,"<sup>62</sup> it effectively relegates living Judaism to irrelevance for Catholic theology, at least in regard to much of the substance of his "Comments." This lack of consistent engagement with Judaism as lived within the Jewish community significantly constricts the contribution he can make to the development of "a newly-fashioned treatise *De Iudaeis*" (168).

Benedict's dense writing style also opens the door to his being misconstrued by some readers as supporting anti-Jewish attitudes. For example, one wonders if Benedict's judgement that "a merely spiritual sacrifice alone is perceived [in certain biblical verses] as insufficient" could be taken by unsophisticated readers as a criticism of Rabbinic Judaism (170). Rabbinic Judaism, after all, came to view non-sacrificial ritual practices as equal or superior to animal sacrifices.<sup>63</sup> Since Benedict had already pointed out that Judaism and Christianity "were two responses in history to the destruction of the temple," it would have been preferable had he observed that the Rabbis also substituted new practices for the vanished Temple rites (164). By not integrating Jewish self-understanding and history on precisely such points of overlap, he limits the possibilities of "deepened theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and Judaism."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Jesus of Nazareth*, 46.

<sup>60</sup> Letter to Rabbi Arie Folger.

<sup>61</sup> CRRJ, "Guidelines," Preamble.

<sup>62</sup> Vatican News, "Theologe Tück kommentiert neuen Text von Benedikt XVI," July 9, 2018, <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2018-07/papst-benedikt-xvi-emeritiert-aufsatz-juden-christen-theologie.html>.

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Avot d'Rabbi Nathan 4 (Walking by the destroyed Jerusalem Temple, Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai reassured a worried Rabbi Joshua, "we have another form of atonement which is as great, and this is deeds of loving-kindness").

<sup>64</sup> Kurt Koch praises the article for this reason in his "Foreword to Benedict XVI's 'Grace and Vocation without Remorse,'" *Communio* 45/1 (Spring 2018): 162.

Relatedly, we have seen how much of Benedict's thought is predicated on a certain narration of Christian salvation-history, one that places Christ at the center of human history and simultaneously contributes to the sidelining of Jewish covenantal life. Instead of ignoring ongoing Jewish covenantal life, ought not Christians be seeking to retell the story of salvation-history in ways that substantively affirm Judaism as contributing to humanity's redemption until the End of Days? Is it possible, for example, to draw upon Benedict's affinity for thinking in terms of covenantal "stages" to conceive of Jewish spiritual life today as another "stage" or "path" existing concurrently with Christianity as a post-New Testament "stage" or "path"? This would seem a particularly useful approach since Judaism's "indestructible" covenantal relationship with God must, from a Christian point of view, necessarily also include the experience of the ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, Benedict has previously written about Christ as the "living Torah," which presents interesting possibilities for further developments in christology and hence also of a salvation-history narrative.<sup>65</sup>

Benedict deserves thanks for stressing the importance of Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Even though Jews read the Tanakh with Rabbinic "lenses" and Christians read the Old Testament with New Testament "lenses," there is, of course, not a single "Jewish" way of reading a specific text any more than there is a single "Catholic" way. New insights and research tools are constantly emerging, especially for those Christians and Jews who learn together. This raises interesting possibilities likely to be welcomed by Benedict, who spoke of his "great joy that I was able to see how much the new work of exegesis on both sides allows for approaches that were hitherto barely imaginable... it is a great encouragement to me to see so many new possibilities."<sup>66</sup> In addition, since 1943 the Catholic Church has embraced critical methods of interpreting scripture. So, too, many Jewish scholars employ various forms of critical analyses. A question for the future is whether joint Catholic and Jewish studies of scripture will help both communities negotiate the sometime tense relationship between their respective traditional interpretations and the results of critical biblical research.

Benedict has put forth a Christian agenda for the dialogue, one that likely differs from what might be offered by a Jew. He gives the strong impression that Christ is the only significant topic to consider.<sup>67</sup> This is evident in his choice of

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<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Hans Hermann Henrix, "The Son of God Became Human as a Jew: Implications of the Jewishness of Jesus for Christology," in Philip A. Cunningham et al., eds., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 114-143, esp. 131-138.

<sup>66</sup> Benedict XVI, "Not Mission, but Dialogue."

<sup>67</sup> Note the very germane observation by historian John Connelly about conversations between Jews and Christians in the aftermath of World War II: "Strange as it sounds, it was this sense—the sense of common suffering of Jews and Christians—and not witness to Auschwitz that gave impetus to the remolding of Christian thought. It did so because it opened channels of communication between Christians and Jews who were concerned about a resurgence of racial and religious bigotry after the war. This was a revolutionary development. ... [I]t was the first time since the days of Justin Martyr that Jews and Christians had discussed any theological matter other than whether or not Christ was the Messiah. Once Christians began talking to Jews about theology ... they began to realize how obscene

models of dialogue from the New Testament. For example, he recalls the narrative about Jesus' teaching his followers on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 about what the messiah must endure. This scene "describes in essence the conversation between Jews and Christians *as it should be up until today*—a conversation that, unfortunately, has occurred only in rare moments" (176; emphasis added). This narrow focus is also seen in his statement on the Gospel of John. The "concluding summary of Jesus' dialogue with the Jews...at the same time *mirrors the future dialogue* between Jews and Christians" (175; emphasis added). In the past, Christians in dialogue with Jews focused on substantiating their messianic claims about Jesus, trying "*again and again* to show that *all this is 'scriptural'*" (176; emphasis added). In the present as well, the Catholic Church does not support "a [conversionary] mission, but rather *the dialogue about whether Jesus of Nazareth is 'the Son of God, the Logos, who is expected by Israel...* Resuming this dialogue is the task that *the present time* sets before us."<sup>68</sup> These statements offer a circumscribed view of Catholic-Jewish dialogue, implying that the prime task of Catholic interlocutors is to explain and defend a christological reading of the Hebrew Bible, even though Catholic teaching recognizes the value of non-christological readings.<sup>69</sup>

True, Benedict acknowledged in his letter to Rabbi Folger that "this dialogue within ongoing history will never lead to an agreement between the two interpretations." Still, why would Jews want to participate in a conversation focusing mostly on Jesus' messianic credentials as understood by Christians? When addressing Jewish audiences, Benedict has movingly spoken of the need for "Jews and Christians to exercise, in our time, a special generosity towards the poor, towards women and children, strangers, the sick, the weak and the needy. ...In exercising justice and mercy, Jews and Christians are called to announce and to bear witness to the coming Kingdom of the Most High, for which we pray and work in hope each day."<sup>70</sup> So, clearly, he believes that Jews and Catholics have many topics to learn about from each other. His Catholic focus on the centrality of Christ in the dialogue again seems driven by Benedict's concern that post-conciliar Catholic theological developments are "de-centering" Christ. But perhaps by being inspired by Israel's experiences of God, Christians can learn to think in new and stimulating ways about Christ and their relationship with him.

Benedict's essay is noteworthy in the study of developments in Christian-Jewish relations. Beyond its historically remarkable authorship by an emeritus pope, it provides a window into how one prominent German dogmatic theologian grapples with the challenges of the post-*Nostra Aetate* Church's effort to build new and positive relationships with the Jewish people and tradition. That effort is driven largely

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much of their own teaching sounded when spoken in the shadow of the war's crimes (*From Enemy to Brother*, 176-77; emphasis added).

<sup>68</sup> Benedict XVI, "Not Dialogue, but Mission," emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> E.g., PBC, "Jewish People": "The Old Testament in itself has great value as the Word of God. To read the Old Testament as Christians then does not mean wishing to find everywhere direct reference to Jesus and to Christian realities" (II,A,6). See also: CRRJ, "Guidelines," II; CRRJ, "Notes," II, 6; PBC, "Interpretation," I,C,2.

<sup>70</sup> Benedict XVI, "Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome."

by the need for Catholic theology to confront the history of Christian religious and sociological anti-Judaism. Yet Benedict's way of theologizing leads him to view history in terms of established theological formulations, as can be seen in which historical events he chooses to stress and which he chooses not to consider. If some of those established formulas were themselves shaped in and tainted by an anti-Jewish historical milieu, then the necessary confrontation with historical Christian teachings becomes diluted. Benedict's theological approach risks being of limited effectiveness in the removal of the legacy of hostility to Jews, a goal to which Benedict is clearly committed.

This brings us back to the scene with which we opened: John Paul's solemn commitment of the Catholic Church at the Western Wall to "genuine brotherhood with the people of the covenant," a commitment that Benedict has made his own.<sup>71</sup> Thinking of the Catholic-Jewish relationship in intimate family terms demands that a high priority be placed on the interreligious relationship itself. This requires a certain vulnerability, an openness to being changed by the ongoing encounter because we so value the dialogue partner. As Pope Francis has written, "to dialogue, one must know how to lower the defenses, to open the doors of one's home and to offer warmth."<sup>72</sup> In terms of a treatise *De Iudaeis*, Catholics must be unhesitatingly "without remorse" in their commitment to genuine brotherhood and sisterhood with Jews. Jews should be similarly dedicated. That deepening trust and friendship will be the holy space (the *locus theologicus*) within which a theology of their new relationship will be nurtured.

That has been our experience as a Jewish scholar and a Catholic scholar who closely studied Benedict's "Comments" together. We were intensely enriched by our joint exploration of it and are grateful to the emeritus pope for greatly stimulating our own ongoing dialogue.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "Address to Delegates of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, February 12, 2009; "Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome," January 17, 2010.

<sup>72</sup> Jorge Bergoglio, "The Façade as Mirror," in Jorge Mario Bergoglio and Abraham Skorka, *On Heaven and Earth: Pope Francis on Faith, Family, and the Church in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Image Books, 2013), xiv.

<sup>73</sup> Our thanks to our colleague Brendan Sammon for his helpful comments on a draft of this article.