

Gavin D'Costa
*Catholic Doctrines on the
Jewish People After Vatican II*

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I would like to frame my discussion of Gavin D'Costa's book *Catholic Doctrines on the Jewish People after Vatican II* by recalling an iconic moment that occurred twenty years ago. During the Great Jubilee of 2000, Pope John Paul II publicly offered a memorable prayer twice in the month of March. The first occasion was on March 12, the First Sunday of Lent, during a “Mass of Pardon” at Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. This unprecedented liturgy, the pope said in his homily, was an opportunity “for the Church, gathered spiritually round the Successor of Peter, to implore divine forgiveness for the sins of all believers ... based on the objective responsibility which Christians share as members of the Mystical Body, and which spurs today's faithful to recognize, along with their own sins, the sins of yesterday's Christians, in the light of careful historical and theological discernment.”¹ Among the misdeeds that the pope and curial leaders confessed were “sins against the People of Israel.”

Two weeks later, on March 26, in Jerusalem the pontiff prayed in Jewish fashion by inserting a written text of the same prayer into the crevices of the Western Wall. It is arguably one of the most moving scenes in the Catholic and Jewish “journey of friendship”² of the past decades. The prayer read:

¹ John Paul II, “Homily at the Day of Pardon Mass,” March 12, 2000, §3. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000312_pardon.html

² Francis, “Address to the Chief Rabbis of Israel,” May 26, 2014. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140526_terra-santa-visita-rabbini-israele.html

God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring Your name to the nations: we are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of Yours to suffer, and asking Your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.³

Notice that the prayer is structured according to Catholic penitential practice:

- Confession of sin (“Sins Against the People of Israel”)
- Expression of remorse (“deeply saddened by [past] behavior”)
- Plea for forgiveness (“asking Your forgiveness”)
- A firm purpose of amendment (“We ... commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant”).

The fact that John Paul solemnly confessed these sins in St. Peter’s Basilica, and then signed, sealed, and personally delivered this commitment at the remnant of one of the retaining walls of the Second Temple gave his prayer a transcendent spiritual potency and gravity, one that surpasses mere written statements. It was a profound, public act of contrition and of reparation.⁴ I believe it imposes a grave responsibility on Catholic theologians as expressed by Rabbi Irving Greenberg: “No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.”⁵ John Paul’s prayer, as indeed his entire pontificate, contributed to the development of post-*Nostra Aetate* Catholic doctrine and praxis in the service of building relationships with Jews.

Gavin D’Costa’s book is part of a vast reform in the Catholic community that has been unfolding since the Second World War. I agree totally with his statement that “the Catholic Church while cautious is quite radical and innovative in this field [of Christian relations with Jews]. It is constantly pushing forward the boundaries” (13). It is an amazing fact that since *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, Catholic leaders have spoken positively about Jews and Judaism, expressing ideas that literally have never appeared before in church history.

D’Costa writes that Catholic ecclesial texts “provide a kind of guide rope into ... uncharted territory.” His “constructive theological suggestions” are based on how he follows these guide ropes, though he recognizes that “others find these guide ropes leading elsewhere” (13). This respects the rich variety of theological methods used in the Catholic community.

³ John Paul II, Day of Pardon Mass: Confession of Sins Against the People of Israel, March 12, 2000 and “Prayer at the Western Wall,” March 26, 2000. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/jan-mar/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000326_jerusalem-prayer.html

⁴ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1491. See also §1451.

⁵ Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust” in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?: Reflections on the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1977), 23.

Out of the many themes D’Costa addresses, I will focus here on three alliteratively phrased topics: (1) Doctrines, Dogmas, and Declarations; (2) Christology and Covenanting; and (3) Conversion or Conversation?

1. Doctrines, Dogmas, and Declarations

D’Costa writes, “*Nostra Aetate* is a Declaration that further illuminates and exegetes *Lumen Gentium*. On its own, it is not a doctrinal document” (14).⁶ Since doctrine usually is understood as something the church authoritatively teaches, and since *Nostra Aetate* was overwhelmingly approved by a worldwide council of Catholic cardinals and bishops in union with the pope (96% voted in favor), this seems to be a rather idiosyncratic assertion especially in the light of these considerations out of many other possibilities:

- Cardinal Augustin Bea, who oversaw the composition of *Nostra Aetate* and guided its progress through the Council’s procedures, wrote one year after its promulgation that “it is the Church herself who is speaking through ... a document of the Council, in which she is evidently *teaching in a solemn and universally binding way* ... [A] conciliar document ... is a manifestation of the *most solemn teaching of the Church’s magisterium*.”⁷
- There are many papal addresses that attribute determinative authority to *Nostra Aetate*. For example, John Paul II, soon after the beginning of his papacy in 1979, reviewed key points in *Nostra Aetate* and stated: “*It is on the basis of all this that we recognize with utmost clarity that the path along which we should proceed with the Jewish religious community is one of fraternal dialogue and fruitful collaboration.*”⁸ It is important to note that it was *Nostra Aetate* that determined for the pope the Catholic Church’s future orientation toward Jews.
- Cardinal Kurt Koch, the president of the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews, commented in 2013 on the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, which had publicly rejected the teachings of *Nostra Aetate*: “*if a group does not accept the Council* ... it should ask itself whether it is Catholic.”⁹ In this case, assent to *Nostra Aetate* was among the factors that determined whether a religious order was in communion with the Catholic Church.

⁶ See also his discussion on p. 9 that maintains that conciliar declarations only “reflect” the doctrinal teaching found in conciliar constitutions.

⁷ Augustine Cardinal Bea, *The Church and the Jewish People: A Commentary on the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 9, 11. Italics added here and in the following points.

⁸ John Paul II, “Address to the Representatives of the Jewish World Organizations” (March 12, 1979). http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790312_org-ebraiche.html

⁹ *Servizio Informazione Religiosa*, January 15, 2013.

In support of a non-doctrinal status for *Nostra Aetate*, D'Costa cites in a footnote a 2005 print interview with Ilaria Morali who argued that the declaration has no “doctrinal value” because “it was [only] conceived as a practical appendix to the lines dictated by *Lumen Gentium*” (9, fn. 26). The chronology of the development of *Nostra Aetate* makes it virtually impossible that it was written to elucidate *Lumen Gentium*.¹⁰ It was primarily a response to the Shoah. Relatedly, D'Costa cites the 1985 Special Synod of Bishops as stating that “Declarations were employed to illustrate and further reflect on Dogmatic Constitutions.” However, what the Synod actually said was: “Special attention must be paid to the four major Constitutions of the Council, which contain the interpretative key for the other Decrees and Declarations. It is not licit to separate the pastoral character from the doctrinal vigor of the documents.” In other words, the Synod states that the four conciliar constitutions provide “the interpretive key” to understanding conciliar declarations, not that declarations were written in order to illustrate constitutions. In addition, note that the final quoted sentence undercuts Morali’s attempt to diminish *Nostra Aetate* as merely “practical.” Contrary to the notion that the Second Vatican Council was merely a “pastoral council” with no doctrinal import, orthodoxy and orthopraxis are inseparable. As a leading scholar of the history of the council, John W. O'Malley, has written, “Vatican II is a pastoral council by means of its teaching, its doctrine ... Vatican II was pastoral by being doctrinal.”¹¹

I am left with the question of what definition of doctrine could possibly exclude a conciliar declaration as doctrinal in contrast to a conciliar constitution. The question is important because *Nostra Aetate*, §4 contains crucial statements not found in *Lumen Gentium* (or *Gaudium et Spes*). These include that “Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures,” that the church “decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone,” and that Catholics should engage in biblical and theological studies as well as ... fraternal dialogues” with Jews. These are not simply matters of orthopraxy but also of orthodoxy since action and belief are inextricable.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert Hofmann, and Joseph Sievers, eds., “Appendix 1: Drafts Leading to the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*,” in *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People* (New York 2007), 191-200; Giovanni Miccoli, “Two Sensitive Issues: Religious Freedom and the Jews,” in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *The History of Vatican II*, Vol. 4, *Church as Communion: Third Period and Intercession, September 1964-September 1965* (Maryknoll, NY/Leuven, Belgium: Orbis Books/Peeters, 2003), 135-165; John M. Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter between Christians and Jews* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1986); and John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA/ London, UK: Belknap Press, 2008).

¹¹ John W. O'Malley, “Deconstructing and Reconstructing a Cliché—Vatican II as a ‘Pastoral Council,’” in Vladimir Latinovic, Gerard Mannion, and Jason Welles, eds., *Catholicism Opening to the World and Other Confessions: Vatican II and Its Impact* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 20-21. See also in *Herder Korrespondenz Spezial: Konzil im Konflikt – 50 Jahre Zweites Vatikanum*, October 2012: Bernd Jochen Hilberath, „Kontinuität oder Bruch?: Für eine angemessene Hermeneutik des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils“: 5-9; and Rainer Bucher, „Nur ein Pastoralkonzil?: Zum Eigenwert des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils“: 9-13.

The question of the doctrinal status of *Nostra Aetate* also relates to D’Costa’s insistence that the declaration only speaks of *biblical* Israel as covenanting with God and not of rabbinic or present-day Judaism, a reading with which I disagree (15-18). While it is true that it does not explicitly state, as John Paul II later did, that Jewish covenantal life was “never revoked by God,” one wonders how it would be possible for either the drafters or the Council fathers not to have had living Jews in mind given the recent occurrence of the Shoah. There was certainly public debate in 1964 about what the declaration would say about conversionary missions toward Jews, and the church’s responsibility toward contemporary Jews was a prominent theme in the Council’s sessions on September 25, 27, and 28, 1964.¹² Furthermore, John Connelly has chronicled how the drafters of *Nostra Aetate* grappled with how to describe Jewish identity. They eventually used the phrase “*stirps Abrahae*” (stock of Abraham). Connelly observes: “This new formulation was embedded in a draft relying more heavily upon Paul’s letter to the Romans than previous versions, making clear that the promises made to the ‘stock of Abraham’ remained in force in postbiblical times (‘theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises’), and that God continued to love this people in the present (‘God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers’). For the first time, the church unequivocally recognized that the Covenant made with the Jews remained valid: the use of the present tense to refer to the Jews’ ‘sonship’ was itself revolutionary.”¹³ What other conclusion can one draw from the doctrinally authoritative text of *Nostra Aetate*, §4 than that Jews, never divinely “rejected or accursed,” continue to abide in covenant with God?

2. Christology and Covenanting

D’Costa sketches three different ways in which the magisterial claim that the “covenant with Israel is irrevocable” could be interpreted (29-30). The first is that “Israel’s covenant is transferred to the new Israel,” the church, i.e. supersessionism. The second is that Jewish covenanting is not abrogated but is non-salvific until Jews embrace Christ. When this happens, God’s irrevocable promises to Israel will be fulfilled. Hence, D’Costa calls this the “fulfillment position.” D’Costa describes the third interpretive option as follows:

¹² See Patrick T. Brannan, trans. Philip A. Cunningham, ed., “*Nostra Aetate* Deliberations.” <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/second-vatican-council/na-debate>

¹³ John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge, MA/ London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2012), 261. See further chapters 7 and 8. Note also the judgement of one of *Nostra Aetate*’s drafters that its “recognition of the spiritual status of Jewish religion is the most dramatic example of doctrinal turn-about in the age-old magisterium ordinarium” (Gregory Baum, “The Social Context of American Catholic Theology,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 [1986]: 87). For Baum, the belief that Jews were an accursed people met the criterion of Vincent of Lérins for normative Catholic teaching: it was held “*ubique, semper et ab omnibus*”—everywhere, always and by everyone (*Commonitorium*, §6. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm>). Its repudiation by *Nostra Aetate*, therefore, represented for Baum a reversal of ordinary magisterial teaching.

[B]iblical Jews, as well as Rabbinic Jews, are in an irrevocable covenant that is sufficient [for salvation] in itself, for God instituted this covenant, is faithful to it, and he is followed faithfully through this covenant. The Jewish covenant per se is sufficient for salvation. Therefore, there are dual covenants that are salvific and inaugurated by God. I will call this the dual covenant position (30).

I agree with D'Costa that the "dual covenant" model is unacceptable in Catholic magisterial teaching. D'Costa prefers the "fulfillment" option. However, I would insist that "covenant," in the words of Rabbi Norman Solomon, "is a metaphor for a relationship, not the name of a unique metaphysical object."¹⁴ This leads to a better, fourth option that coheres with Catholic ecclesiastical texts. D'Costa mentions it in passing but dismisses it somewhat off-handedly.

If the dual covenant approach is indeed problematic for Catholics because Judaism is left "ontologically unrelated to Christ," what if it is maintained that "all salvation is from Christ, even within ... Judaism" (23-24)? D'Costa remarks that if this were the case, then, "logically it would be better for Jews to become Christians than remain Jews if the salvation within Judaism came from Christ" (23). I do not find this logic persuasive. Since "being saved" is not a pressing issue for Jews as it is for Christians, why should they feel a need to become Christian simply because Christians think that Christ Jesus is involved in Jewish covenantal life? (To put this logic in reverse, if from their perspective Jews assess my righteousness according to the Noahide laws, why would I feel impelled to abandon Christianity?)

In my view, the river of Catholic doctrinal development is flowing toward the fourth approach, which I will call Christians and Jews as "co-covenanting companions with the divine Word." Let me spell it out with a series of statements:

1. It is Christian dogma that God is Triune. The Three who are One are always involved in everything that God does.
2. It is Christian dogma that the Word of God was incarnated in the first-century Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and raised. (This is what Christians mean by "Christ.") Due to the "hypostatic union" (to employ Chalcedonian language), the glorified Jesus participates in everything the Word of God does today.
3. It is Christian dogma that Christians covenant with the One God of Israel (since Marcionism was rejected).
4. It is now Catholic doctrine that Jews also covenant with the One God.
5. Therefore, *from a Christian perspective*, the Holy One with whom Jews covenant must indisputably be the same One God whom Christians know as Triune, even though God has not been revealed to Jews in that way.

¹⁴ Norman Solomon, "Covenant" (paper presented at Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT, December 4, 2001), §3.

https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/solomon.htm.

6. Therefore, *from a Christian perspective*, the Three who are One (including the Word united with the glorified Jesus) are all dynamically active in Israel's covenanting with God.

I want to stress that points five and six above articulate *Christian* theology; Jews would not be expected to conceive of God in the Christian Trinitarian manner, or to put it another way, Jews are not participants in the Christian revelation.¹⁵ Nonetheless, by virtue of the intimacy of living in covenant with God, Christians must conclude that the divine Word and Spirit are dynamically at work in Jewish covenantal life. This means, to use D'Costa's language, that Jews are ontologically in relationship with the glorified Jew Jesus, the one whom Christians believe is hypostatically united with the divine Word since the Incarnation. Indeed, Christians might say that the intimacy between the people of Israel and the God of Israel has been intensified by virtue of the "Christ event." The Incarnation's import for Israel continues since today Jesus continues to live in glory united with the divine Word.

This logic undergirds paragraph §24 in the 2015 statement of the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews, "The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable" (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, no. 4":

God revealed [God]self in his Word, so that it may be understood by humanity in actual historical situations. This Word invites all people to respond. If their responses are in accord with the Word of God, they stand in *right relationship* with [God]. For Jews, this Word can be learned through the Torah and the traditions based on it. The Torah is the instruction for a successful life in *right relationship* with God. Whoever observes the Torah has *life in its fullness* (cf. *Pirqe Avot* II, 7). By observing the Torah the Jew receives *a share in communion with God*. In this regard, Pope Francis has stated: "The Christian confessions find their unity in Christ; Judaism finds its unity in the Torah. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh in the world; for Jews the Word of God is present above all in the Torah. Both faith traditions find their foundation in the One God, the God of the Covenant, who reveals himself through his Word. In seeking a right attitude towards God,

¹⁵ Here let me express my great discomfort with applying the traditional Christian terminology of "invincible ignorance" or "inculpable ignorance" to Jews. An early discussion of the concept is found in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (written around 1270) while considering whether ignorance is a sin: "Now it is evident that whoever neglects to have or do what he ought to have or do, commits a sin of omission. Wherefore through negligence, ignorance of what one is bound to know, is a sin; whereas it is not imputed as a sin to man, if he fails to know what he is unable to know" (Ia IIae q.76 a.2). D'Costa's suggestion that the rabbinic tradition has put almost all Jews into the state of being "unable to know" Christ is a benevolent effort to hold Jews blameless for their "good faith" rejection of the gospel (43). Nevertheless, this language is to me redolent of the kind of "boasting" that Paul repudiates in Romans 11. Such arrogance has no place in a dialogical relationship and serves to impede the theological humility Christians need to be open to Jews' experiences of God in their revelatory tradition. It would be better to speak of the distinctive self-disclosures of God to Jews and Christians.

Christians turn to Christ as the fount of new life, and Jews to the teaching of the Torah” (Address to members of the International Council of Christians and Jews, 30 June 2015).¹⁶

The words italicized above have unmistakable salvific cadences. As the same document says elsewhere, “That the Jews are participants in God’s salvation is theologically unquestionable” (§36). In addition, the Word of God is seen in the underlined text as not simply imparting data but as extending an invitation to relationship. From the Catholic perspective, all relationships with God that are so intimate as to be described as covenantal are the result of the activity to the Word of God, whom Christians believe is “hypostatically united” with the crucified and raised Jesus.

This Catholic understanding of Jews and Christians as “co-covenanting companions” must be distinguished from D’Costa’s second option of a “dual covenant” approach. That the Word of God is present and active in Israel in the Torah as well as united with Christ is not a dual covenantal model since, as already said, everything that the Word does is done in ontological unity with the glorified Christ.¹⁷

The Catholic recognition of the living presence of the Word of God in both the Jewish and Christian communities gives added profundity to the consistent call of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis for ever-deepening and sustained Catholic dialogue with Jews. For example, Benedict XVI wrote in 2011 that “after centuries of antagonism, we now see it as our task to bring these two ways of re-reading the 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.”¹⁸ His wording that understanding God’s will and word aright requires that both Jewish and Christian interpretive approaches be studied is striking. In his 2014 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis wrote, “God continues to work among the people of the Old Covenant and to bring forth treasures of wisdom which

¹⁶ <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en.html>.

¹⁷ In fn. 6 on p. 31, D’Costa correctly states that magisterial teaching rejects the dual covenant view as he has described it. However, he goes on to assert that an unpublished doctoral dissertation “successfully shows that Cardinal Walter Kasper and Mary Boys propound this erroneous view.” It is remarkable that this judgment of propounding doctrinal error is relegated to a footnote that provides no direct evidence from either Kasper or Boys. Note that Kasper, previous president of the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews, has explicitly written the opposite: “[T]he Document *Dominus Iesus* does not state that everybody needs to become a Catholic in order to be saved by God. On the contrary, it declares that God’s grace, *which is the grace of Jesus Christ according to our faith*, is available to all. Therefore, the Church believes that Judaism, i.e. the faithful response of the Jewish people to God’s irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them, because God is faithful to his promises” (“*Dominus Iesus*,” address 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>; **emphasis added**). The italicized phrase clearly does not leave Jewish covenanting with God “ontologically unrelated to Christ” (24).

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Part Two, *Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 33

flow from their encounter with his word. For this reason, the Church also is enriched when she receives the values of Judaism. ... [T]here exists as well a rich complementarity [between Jews and Christians] which allows us to read the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures together and to help one another to mine the riches of God's word."¹⁹ His first sentence particularly resonates with the conception of Christians and Jews as co-covenanting companions with the divine Word.²⁰

The activity of the divine Word in both communities is why the dialogue between Catholics and Jews is so important as a *locus theologicus*. This explains why literally every one of the dozens of Catholic ecclesiastical texts on Jews and Judaism since *Nostra Aetate* calls for dialogue with Jews and for its deepening.

D'Costa should consider that a description of Christians and Jews as co-covenanting companions, both deeply engaging with the Word of God, contributes better than a fulfillment model to "genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

3. Conversion or Conversation?

Finally, I would like to comment on D'Costa's chapter 5, "Catholic Mission to the Jewish People?" by recalling a revolutionary sentence in *Nostra Aetate*, §4: "This sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues." I call this sentence "revolutionary" because a call for Catholic-Jewish theological dialogue was literally unheard-of in pre-Vatican II ecclesiastical texts.

The experience of the past 55 years demonstrates that the ensuing and deepening dialogue has established this new *locus theologicus* for Catholic theology. It establishes that interpersonal and intercommunal relationships are key for a post-Shoah Catholic theology of relations with Jews. The question D'Costa considers is "if the Jewish covenant given by God is irrevocable, is [a conversionary] mission to the Jewish people still valid?" (6). D'Costa says yes, I say no.

¹⁹ Francis, "*Evangelii Gaudium*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World" (November 24, 2013), §249.

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

²⁰ This perspective does not make Jews into "anonymous Christians," a phrase coined but then later set aside by Karl Rahner. While a discussion of Rahner's work is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that post-*Nostra Aetate* ecclesial documents indicate that Catholics "must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience" (Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews, "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* [n. 4]," 1974, Preamble.

<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/en3.html>

). They cannot be content with simply seeing aspects of their own traditions as defining the other, but rather, in the words of Cardinal Kasper, appreciate Jews as like "a sacrament of every otherness that as such the Church must learn to discern, recognize and celebrate" ("Address on the 37th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*": <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kasper/wk02oct28>).

D'Costa writes, "It is not possible to find salvific grace outside [better: not involving] Christ; and while Jews may participate in salvation as Jews, that participation can only be understood by Catholics with reference to Jesus Christ" (167). I agree. However, to me the question is not whether there is a Catholic "mission" to Jews, but rather in what that mission consists. In pursuing this question, pre-*Nostra Aetate* ecclesiastical texts will be of limited help since none of them imagined that the *sui generis* relationship with Jews led to any other options for engaging with them apart from conversionary missions.

D'Costa is quite correct when he writes that Vatican documents use important terms—such as evangelization, witness, mission, proclamation—inconsistently. Note, though, that when given a choice among various usages, D'Costa tends toward the most restrictive reading, writing, for example, "I will use 'evangelization' only in [the] narrow sense, unless specified otherwise" (149).

I follow the ecclesiastical "guide ropes" differently and submit that: (A) the mission of the church toward Jews *is* dialogue, (B) in dialogue Christians always witness to their faith in Christ, not with persuasive intent but to mutually share and receive the gift of our respective faith relationships with God, and (C) this dialogue fulfills the church's evangelizing mandate with respect to Jews. On the last point, I would not call this an "exception" for Jews from the church's general duty to proclaim Christ, but rather a necessary consequence of our "'intra-religious' or 'intra-familial' ... *sui generis*" relationship.²¹

The developments starting with the Second Vatican Council make clear that the mission of the church toward and with Jews is dialogue. First, on September 28, 1964, at the Council, Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle of Washington, D.C. stated: "if we [imply ...] we are guided by the definite, conscious intention of working for [Jews'] conversion, we set up a new and high wall of division, which makes any fruitful dialogue impossible. ... It would therefore be better for us to remain within the limits of our knowledge and respect the hidden ways of divine Providence."²² The desire for dialogue with Jews was reiterated by several Council fathers.²³ Since the final text of *Nostra Aetate*, which was composed after major public debate of these issues in the summer and fall of 1964, makes no mention of conversionary hopes (unlike in an earlier, draft), it is reasonable to conclude that when the Council Fathers overwhelmingly approved *Nostra Aetate* they were well aware that they were affirming that dialogue with Jews was the church's priority toward them.

Second, the Vatican became more aware of the corollaries of *Nostra Aetate* when Tommaso Federici, consultant to the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, presented at the 1977 meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee a "study outline" on "The Mission and Witness of the Church." He wrote, "the temptation to create organizations of any kind ... to 'convert' Jews is to be rejected ... Once the spiritual identity of the one and the other is guaranteed

²¹ See CRRJ, "Gifts and Calling," §20.

²² <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/second-vatican-council/na-debate/v21964sept29b#oboyle>

²³ See Brannan and Cunningham, "*Nostra Aetate* Deliberations."

[in dialogue], there must be mutual esteem and respect (theological as well), and the conviction that every growth and bettering in the spiritual field comes about with the other's contribution."²⁴ This reiterated the Council's preference for dialogue but also made explicit the necessary respect for Jews' religious integrity, which later and more authoritative texts would reinforce.

Third, within a few months of his election, Pope John Paul II, after reviewing key points in *Nostra Aetate*, stressed that: "It is on the basis of all this that we recognize with utmost clarity that the path along which we should proceed with the Jewish religious community is one of fraternal dialogue and fruitful collaboration" (Mar 12, 1979). Later at the Great Synagogue of Rome, he made this "fraternal dialogue" contingent on respect for the other's religious convictions. He said, "No one is unaware that [our] fundamental difference from the very beginning has been the attachment of us Catholics to the person and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, a son of your People ... But this attachment is located in the order of faith, that is to say in the free assent of the mind and heart guided by the Spirit, *and it can never be the object of exterior pressure, in one sense or the other. This is the reason why we wish to deepen dialogue in loyalty and friendship, in respect for one another's intimate convictions.*"²⁵

Fourth, the wisdom of recognizing that a commitment to Catholic-Jewish dialogue required the abandonment of the long history of efforts to convert Jews became evident in an episode that occurred in the United States in the first decade of this century (see 175-77). In response to news that some Christian groups were about to launch conversionary campaigns aimed at Jews, the consultation of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues decided in 2002 to discuss why this did not seem to be an interest of the Catholic Church. The resulting dialogue document, "Reflections on Covenant and Mission," vetted by the Bishops' Office of Doctrine, stated, "A deepening Catholic appreciation of the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people, together with a recognition of a divinely-given mission to Jews to witness to God's faithful love, lead to the conclusion that campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church. ... Catholics participating in interreligious dialogue [are] ... witnessing to their own faith in the kingdom of God embodied in Christ, [which is] a form of evangelization, a way of engaging in the Church's mission."²⁶

However, in 2009 the Bishop's Offices of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and of Doctrine prepared a "clarification," stating, "Though Christian

²⁴ <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/educational-and-liturgical-materials/classic-articles/federici1977>

²⁵ "Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome" (April 13, 1986), §5. Italics added.

<http://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/jp2-86apr13>

²⁶ Delegates of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues, "Reflections on Covenant and Mission." Contrary to D'Costa's fn. 48 on p. 159, the document is on the USCCB website at: <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/jewish/upload/Reflections-on-Covenant-and-Mission.pdf>

participation in interreligious dialogue *would not normally include an explicit invitation to baptism* and entrance into the Church, the Christian dialogue partner is always giving witness to the following of Christ, to which all are implicitly invited.²⁷ The possibility that Catholic-Jewish dialogues could be the occasion for Catholics to invite Jews to receive baptism stunned both Jews and Catholics. All the major American Jewish organizations and movements wrote a unanimous letter to the bishops' conference to explain that they would have to withdraw from dialogue if this was to be the Catholic understanding of it. They wrote, "[O]nce Jewish-Christian dialogue has been formally characterized as an invitation, whether explicit or implicit, to apostatize, then Jewish participation becomes untenable."²⁸ For a time, the vibrant Catholic-Jewish dialogue in the United States seemed poised to collapse over this issue.

D'Costa calls this "an important development in doctrinal clarity ... even if of limited authority" (177). However, he does not continue with the narrative of events, which actually challenge his views. He omits the response of the bishops who led the USCCB at the time. Within a matter of weeks, they took the unheard-of step of excising the language of implicit and explicit invitations from the "Note" and stated that "Jewish-Catholic dialogue, one of the blessed fruits of the Second Vatican Council, has never been and will never be used by the Catholic Church as a means of proselytism—nor is it intended as a disguised invitation to baptism."²⁹ Far from positing, as D'Costa writes, "a theological rationale for mission to the Jewish people" (177), the episode actually reinforced the priority of dialogue in which Catholics give witness to their faith in Christ that is not concealing conversionary intent.

Fifth, the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI had rocky moments in terms of Catholic-Jewish Relations. These included a controversy over his revised Good Friday Prayer for Jews in the Tridentine Rite and the lifting of the excommunications of four bishops of the Priestly Society of St. Pius X, one of whom turned out to have denied the Shoah in interviews. Just before Benedict's visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome in January 2010, a cartoon in the Italian Jewish newspaper *Pagine Ebraiche* by Enea Riboldi depicted him as crossing the Tiber from the Vatican to the synagogue on a tightrope, holding a balancing rod with the words "*conversione*" and "*dialogo*" on opposite ends.³⁰

Whatever degree of uncertainty Pope Benedict may have felt was apparently resolved when in a 2011 book he favorably quoted the Abbess Hildegard Brem who wrote, "In the light of Romans 11:25, *the Church must not concern herself with the conversion of the Jews*, since she must wait for the time fixed for this by God, 'until the full number of the Gentiles come in' (Rom 11:25)." Benedict went

²⁷ "A Note on Ambiguities Contained in *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*," June 18, 2009. The unredacted original version can be found at:

<https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/conversion/njil09aug18>

²⁸ <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/conversion/njil09aug18>

²⁹ <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/jewish/upload/Statement-of-Catholic-Principles-for-Catholic-Jewish-Dialogue-2009.pdf>, §3.

³⁰ The artist was Enea Riboldi and the cartoon appeared in *Pagine Ebraiche*, January 2010, 4.

on to say that, “In the meantime, *Israel retains its own mission*. Israel is in the hands of God, who will save it ‘as a whole’ at the proper time.”³¹

As emeritus pope, Benedict wrote, “To Israel, therefore, there was not and *still is not a mission, but rather the dialogue* about whether Jesus of Nazareth is ‘the Son of God, the Logos.’”³² Around the same time, he also wrote, “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.”³³

Sixth and finally, the current pontiff Pope Francis has spoken about his many experiences, unique for a pope, of religious dialogue with Jews, especially his numerous conversations over the years with fellow Argentine Rabbi Abraham Skorka. In an interview about the personal significance of making friends across religious lines, Francis stated:

There was a basis of total trust, and because we knew in our conversations—and I want to highlight that—*neither of us negotiated our own identity*. If we had, we would not have been able to talk. It would have been a sham. ... And the friendship grew, *always maintaining our respective identities*. ... It is very important because my religious life became richer with his explanations, so much richer. ... And I began to further understand the [scriptural] revelation, and he further understood the Christian stance. *It developed from our own identities* and that’s really nice. ... And *neither of us attempted to convert the other*.³⁴

Very notable here are the number of times that Francis stresses the need to respect the religious identity of the dialogue partner. It is clear that having extensive theological dialogue with Jews has allowed Francis to discern that the *locus theologicus* of dialogue requires that conversionary thoughts be set aside.

It should be noted that the overall post-conciliar doctrinal trajectory that Catholics should eschew missionizing Jews and let God “carry out [God’s] universal plan of salvation in ways that only [God] knows”³⁵ has prompted important Jewish

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Part Two, *Holy Week: from the entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 45, 47; emphasis added. See also Cardinal Kurt Koch: “The most profound reason why there cannot be any organised mission to the Jews has in turn been expressed by St Paul when he proceeds from the conviction that not only salvation comes from the Jews, but also that in the ‘time of the Gentiles’ God entrusted Israel with a specific individual mission” (“Christians Called to be Faithful to Abraham’s Heritage,” [May 24, 2012] <http://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kurt-cardinal-koch/koch2012may24>).

³² Benedict XVI, “Not Mission, but Dialogue,” *Herder Korrespondenz*, December 2018: 14; emphasis added.

³³ Benedict XVI, “Reply to Rabbi Ari Folger,” August 23, 2018.

<http://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/benedict-2018aug28>

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4Xu3i3ki9Q>; emphasis added. This video was produced by the Elijah Interfaith Institute as part of its “Make Friends” series.

³⁵ CRRJ, “Gifts and Calling,” §42.

responses. This is evident in a 2015 statement by an international group of Orthodox rabbis. They wrote, "Now that the Catholic Church has acknowledged the eternal Covenant between G-d and Israel, we Jews can acknowledge the ongoing constructive validity of Christianity as our partner in world redemption, without any fear that this will be exploited for missionary purposes."³⁶

In sum, the question of the proper "institutional" mission of the Catholic Church toward the Jewish people has become a vital one in the wake of the Shoah and of the Second Vatican Council. Whatever guidance the tradition can provide is conditioned by the uncritiqued claim that Jews were a *sui generis* people as the only people under a divine malediction. *Nostra Aetate's* rejection of that idea has enabled Catholics to see Jews as *sui generis* for a different reason: they are co-covenanting companions with whom Catholics must dialogue.

Conclusion

Catholic Doctrines on the Jewish People after Vatican II is the latest fruit of D'Costa's invaluable work on Jewish-Catholic relations and specifically on doctrinal developments in the historical Catholic tradition. His research complements other methods of theological inquiry, and he contributes to the constant pushing forward of the boundaries that is needed to enact the Catholic Church's commitment to (in John Paul II's words) "genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

³⁶ Center for Jewish and Christian Understanding and Collaboration, "To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians," §3.
<https://www.cjcuc.org/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity/>