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Does the Catholic Church Have a Mission “with” Jews or “to” Jews?

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Since the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council that resulted in the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* on October 28, 1965, Catholic teaching on the church's relationship with the Jewish people has both broadened and deepened. Yet, the important question of whether the Church has a "mission" to the Jews—that is, whether Catholics should seek the conversion of Jews to Christianity—has lurked below the surface, seldom addressed explicitly. Many, including myself, conclude that Vatican II and its legacy mean that a mission "to" the Jews is no longer theologically warranted and is pastorally insensitive, even deplorable. Rather, we might speak of having a mission "with" Jews in furthering the Reign of God.¹

Recently, however, the reticence about a Christian mission to the Jews has given way to overt advocacy in some circles: in the pronouncements of certain prominent cardinals, in Pope Benedict's reformulated prayer for Good Friday for the Tridentine Rite, and in the growth of certain organizations for the "ingrafting" of Jews to the church.

Thus, what appeared to those involved in Catholic-Jewish dialogue to be effectively, if implicitly, settled now seems in question. If the chorus of voices calling for Jews to convert (or "be completed") swells and finds resonance in the church, the trust many Jews experienced in and through dialogue will likely give way to wariness and suspicion. Moreover, the work of their Catholic partners will be undermined. It is vital, then, that the issue of mission receives serious attention. I hope my essay will put the question on the table, place it in broad context,

¹ See the essays by Philip Cunningham and Joann Spillman, "Covenant and Conversion" and "Targeting Jews for Conversion Contradicts Christian Faith and Contravenes Christian Hope," respectively, in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation*, ed. Mary C. Boys (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 151-174.

analyze the thinking among the advocates of a mission to Jews, and identify the theological tensions at stake.

I. The Context: A *Nostra Aetate* Trajectory amidst a Bipolarity of Tendencies

Though it has been nearly forty-three years since the conclusion of Vatican II, lively (and at times vociferous) debates about its meaning continue.² In many respects, how Catholics interpret the Council – not just its texts, but its spirit and its reception over the years – provides a theological grounding on the question of mission to (or with) Jews. What complicates analysis is that the conciliar texts themselves represent a "contradictory pluralism" or a "bipolarity of tendencies."³ This is particularly the case with regard to the church's attitude toward the religious other. As a very brief summary of this bipolarity, I offer the following chart, which highlights some of the tensions in key conciliar and post-conciliar texts:⁴

² Among the most significant are Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2004); *The Reception of Vatican II*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987); the 4-volume *History of Vatican II*, eds. Alberigo and Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1996–2003); Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987); John J. O'Malley, S.J., *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988).

³ The phrase "contradictory pluralism" is from Otto Hermann Pesch, cited in Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, 28; "bipolarity of tendencies" is from Arthur Gilbert, *The Vatican Council and the Jews* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing, 1968), 215.

⁴ Abbreviations: From Vatican II: LG, *Lumen Gentium*; GS, *Gaudium et Spes*; AG, *Ad Gentes*, NA, *Nostra Aetate*. Subsequent documents: DM, *Dialogue and Mission* [Secretariat for Non-Christians, 1984]; RM, *Redemptoris Missio* [Encyclical of Pope John Paul II, 1990]; DP, *Dialogue and Proclamation* [Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, 1991]; DI, *Dominus Iesus*.

On the one hand...	On the other...
<p>In the religious tradition of non-Christians there exist “elements which are true and good” (LG §16); “seeds of contemplation (AG §18); “elements of truth and grace” (AG§9); “seeds of the Word” (AG§11, 15); “rays of truth which illumine all humankind” (NA§2).</p>	<p>“With the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the salvation of <i>all</i> humanity (cf. Acts 17:30-31). This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism ‘characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that one religion is as good as another’” (DI§22).</p>
<p>“Interreligious dialogue is truly part of the dialogue of salvation initiated by God” (DP§80). “All dialogue implies reciprocity and aims at banishing fear and aggressiveness” (DP§83).</p>	<p>“If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that <i>objectively speaking</i> they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation” (DI§22).</p>
<p>Dialogue means “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual</p>	<p>Dialogue “cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented towards proclamation insofar as the dynamic process of the church’s</p>

understanding and fulfillment” (DM§3). evangelizing mission reaches in its climax and fullness” (DP§82).

“Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations. It reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness of one’s beliefs and a common exploration of one’s respective religious commitments....[Its aim is] a deeper conversion of all toward God” (DP§40).

“Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (RM§55).

Peoples of other religions who sincerely practice “what is good in their own religious tradition” and follow the “dictates of their conscience” thereby “respond positively to God’s invitation.” Thus, they receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their savior” (DP§29)

...[W]hile remaining firm in their belief that in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tm 2:4-6), the fullness of revelation has been given to them, Christians must remember that God has also manifested himself in some way to the followers of other religious tradition. Consequently, it is with receptive minds that they approach the convictions and values of others (DP§48).

“Part of [the church’s] role consists in recognizing that the inchoate reality of this Kingdom can be found also beyond the confines of the Church, e.g., in the hearts of followers of other religious traditions...” (DP§35).

That ambiguities and contradictions exist in the post-Vatican II teachings of the Catholic Church is not surprising. In one sense they are a sign of health, reflecting the ecclesiastical compromises that allow diverse perspectives on Christian self-understanding to co-exist in a single communion. They become problematic, however, when complexities and consequences are overlooked—or when certain church officials attempt to close off debate on issues that cannot be adequately resolved at this point of history. This is particularly the case with the church’s relationship with Jews, a relationship that took a dramatic turn in 1965 and that has required the church to face its history and to reexamine its theological understandings of Judaism and of its relationship with Jews.

This bipolarity became evident in the drafting process of NA. Although the general direction of the various drafts lay in a positive perspective on Judaism, the second draft articulated a clear hope that Jews should convert: The “Church expects in unshakable faith and with ardent desire ... the union of the Jewish people with the Church.”⁵ In fact, however, the Council rejected this wording. Rather, the drafters couched the final text in a more

⁵ The drafts and final text of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* may be found in their Latin originals and English translations in Beatrice Bruteau, ed. *Merton and Judaism* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2003), 342-362. For a detailed account of Abraham Joshua Heschel’s intervention on this draft and response to further drafts, see Edward K. Kaplan, *Spiritual Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 239-276.

eschatological tone, evoking a day in the distant future time when all will be one before God: “... the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all people will call upon the Lord with a single voice and ‘serve him with one accord’ (Zeph 3:9).” The vote on this [fourth] draft on October 14-15, 1965 was overwhelmingly positive: 1937 for, and 153 against.

Along with *Nostra Aetate*’s radical shift in posture toward the Jewish People, Vatican II did not *explicitly* reject seeking the conversion of Jews.⁶ Yet by setting aside the formulation “union of the Jewish people with the Church,” the Council may be regarded as turning away from its missionary posture toward Jews. In an analysis of speeches and comments by conciliar participants, Philip A. Cunningham argues that the Council “to all intents and purposes postponed any interest in converting Jews into the indefinite eschatological future.”⁷

Yet post-Vatican II teaching about relations between the Catholic Church and Jews, at least until recently, has been silent about a need to convert Jews; on the contrary, this teaching manifests an increasing regard for Judaism. I think of the following foci as constituting the major elements of the post-*Nostra Aetate* trajectory:

⁶ Of course, whether *Nostra Aetate* was a radical shift is part of the debate. On the one hand, Gregory Baum, a *peritus* involved in its drafting, asserted in his 1986 presidential address to the Catholic Theological Society of America that “the Church’s recognition of the spiritual status of the Jewish religion is the most dramatic example of doctrinal turn-about in the age-old ‘magisterium ordinarium’ to occur at the Council” (“The Social Context of American Catholic Theology,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 [1986], 87). In contrast, Avery Cardinal Dulles has minimized the import of *Nostra Aetate*. See below for discussion of Dulles.

⁷ Philip A. Cunningham, “Reflecting on the Reflections,” Boston College, February 9, 2005, http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/center/events/cunningham_9Feb05.htm.

- *Understanding biblical texts in their historical and literary context*, especially texts that might be (and have been) interpreted in anti-Jewish ways (e.g., texts about the Pharisees and the passion and death of Jesus). Indeed, without the significant flowering of contemporary biblical scholarship in the wake of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII's 1943 encyclical promoting biblical studies, it is difficult to imagine NA and subsequent documents.⁸

- *Recognition that the divine covenant with the Jewish People continues; Jews remain in covenant with God*. Pope John Paul II emphasized this in a 1980 speech to Jewish leaders in Mainz, Germany, when he spoke of Jews as “the people of God of the Old Covenant never revoked by God,” and reiterated in various ways over the years of his papacy.⁹ One of the more important official commentaries on *Nostra Aetate*, the *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985) speaks of the “permanence of Israel” as a “historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God’s design.” The text continues: “We must in any case rid ourselves of the traditional idea of a people

punished, preserved as a living argument for Christian apologetic. It remains a chosen people” (§25).¹⁰

- *Rejection of antisemitism and resolve that the “spoiled seeds of anti-Judaism and antisemitism must never again be allowed to take root in any human heart.”*¹¹ Significantly, the bishops of France acknowledged in 1997 that the “anti-Jewish tradition” in church “doctrine and teaching, in theology, apologetics, preaching and in the liturgy” provided the ground on which the “venomous plant of hatred for the Jews was able to flourish.”¹²

- *Acknowledgment that Christians must learn about Judaism on its own terms*. The 1985 Notes (§4) reiterate what appeared in the introductory section of the 1975 *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate* §4: “On the practical level in particular, Christians must therefore 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.”¹³

⁸ See *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Dean P. Béchar (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001). For a incisive analysis of Catholic hermeneutics, see Raymond E. Brown and Sandra M. Schneiders, “Hermeneutics,” *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. R. E. Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall), 1146-1165.

⁹ Most of the documents cited in this essay are available in numerous sources, especially online. Rather than cite details, I refer readers to the websites of Boston College’s Center for Christian-Jewish Learning (www.bc.edu/cjl) and the International Council of Christians and Jews (www.icrelations.net). For texts of John Paul II, see also *Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995*, eds. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki (New York: Crossroad and ADL, 1995).

¹⁰ Available online in various sites, and in *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations*, A Stimulus Book, ed. Helga Croner (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1985), 220-232.

¹¹ Citation from the final words of “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” by the Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews, 1998. Available online and in the valuable collection by the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 55.

¹² “Declaration of Repentance, in *Catholics Remember the Holocaust*, 34.

¹³ Text available online and in *Stepping Stones...*, 11-16.

- *Recognition of the State of Israel and acknowledgment of the centrality of Israel to Jewish identity*, most notably in the “Fundamental Accord between the Holy See and the State of Israel in 1993.”¹⁴
- *Commitment to education about the Holocaust* in the context of the long history of relations between Jews and Christians.

In the 43 years since the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, relations between Jews and the Catholic Church have advanced in significant ways. Of course, much remains to be done. In too many sectors of the church, these foci seem to exist largely on the periphery, and other church documents, notably *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *Dominus Iesus*, insufficiently integrate the insights from the *Nostra Aetate* trajectory. In general, when the church writes documents explicitly on issues related to its relationship with Jews, the documents reflect sound moorings in biblical scholarship and show the development since *Nostra Aetate*. When, however, they are addressed more generally, the texts are not nearly as carefully composed to incorporate the developments in thinking about Jews and Judaism since the Council.

The promulgation of *Dominus Iesus* in 2001 provided the occasion for an important clarification about a mission to the Jews. At a meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee in New York City in May 2001, Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Vatican’s Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews, offered the following, which I cite at length because it is, to my knowledge, the most official word about a mission to the Jews:

... I wish to say... that the Document *Dominus Iesus* does not state that everybody needs to become a Catholic in or-

¹⁴Text in *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, 203-208.

der 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.

This touches the problem of mission towards Jews, a painful question with regard to forced conversion in the past. *Dominus Iesus*, as other official documents, raised this question again saying that dialogue is a part of *evangelisation*. This stirred Jewish suspicion. But this is a language problem, since the term *evangelisation*, in official Church documents, cannot be understood in the same way it is commonly interpreted in everyday’s speech. In strict theological language, *evangelisation* is a very complex and overall term, and reality. It implies presence and witness, prayer and liturgy, proclamation and catechesis, dialogue and social work. Now, presence and witness, prayer and liturgy, dialogue and social work, which are all part of *evangelisation*, do not have the goal of increasing the number of Catholics. Thus *evangelisation*, if understood in its proper and theological meaning, does not imply any attempt of proselytism whatsoever.

On the other hand, the term *mission*, in its proper sense, is referred to conversion from false gods and idols to the true and one God, who revealed himself in the salvation history with his elected people. Thus mission, in this strict sense, cannot be used with regard to Jews, who believe in the true and one God. Therefore –and this is characteristic-[there] does not exist any Catholic missionary organisation for Jews. There is dialogue with Jews; no mission in this proper sense of the word towards them. But what is *dialogue*? Certainly –as we learned from Jewish philosophers such as Martin Buber- it is more than small talk and mere exchange of opinions. It is also different from academic dispute, however important academic dispute may be within

dialogue. Dialogue implies personal commitments and witness of one's own conviction and faith. Dialogue communicates one's faith and, at the same time, requires profound respect for the conviction and faith of the partner. It respects the difference of the other and brings mutual enrichment.¹⁵

In particular, I highlight Cardinal Kasper's judgment: "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."

II. A Mission to the Jews?

A. Hierarchical Voices

Among leading church officials in the United States, Avery Cardinal Dulles has been the major voice for a more negative assessment of Judaism. Dulles relegates *Nostra Aetate* to one of the lesser conciliar documents (as a declaration, and not one of the constitutions or decrees), and holds the supersessionist perspective of the Letter to the Hebrews 8:13 ("In speaking of 'a new covenant,' he [Jesus] has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear") as a warrant for regarding Israel's covenant as obsolete.¹⁶ He gives what Philip Cunningham terms a "minimalist" reading of *Nostra*

Aetate in judging that the Council "left open the question whether the Old Covenant remains in force today."¹⁷

In an essay published in *First Things* in 2005, Dulles says, without critique, that Augustine and Aquinas "denied that Jewish rites had any saving efficacy, even for Jews." He continues: "The Council of Florence, in its Decree for the Copts, taught that the legal statutes of Israel, including circumcision and Sabbath, ought no longer be observed after the promulgation of the gospel, and that converts from Judaism must give up Jewish ritual practice."¹⁸ Dulles adds no contextual or critical assessment of this harsh fifteenth-century decree, the first to connect "Jews" and "pagans" with the axiom "Outside the Church no salvation."¹⁹

¹⁷ Philip A. Cunningham, "Uncharted Waters: the Future of Catholic-Jewish Relations," *Commonweal* 133/13 (July 14, 2006); http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/pdf/Uncharted_Waters.pdf. An account of the complexities of the conciliar processes involved in *Nostra Aetate*, see Alberto Melloni, "Nostra Aetate and the Discovery of the Sacrament of Otherness," in *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*, eds. Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hofmann, and Joseph Sievers (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 129-151.

¹⁸ Avery Cardinal Dulles, "The Covenant with Israel," *First Things* (November 2005): http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=256.

¹⁹ The "Decree for the Copts," issued in 1442 by the General Council of Florence, reads in part: ["The Holy Roman church] ...firmly believes, professes and preaches that 'no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans,' but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the 'eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt 25:41), unless before the end of their life they are received into it. ... For union with the body of the Church is of so great importance that the sacraments of the church are helpful to salvation only for those remaining in it; and fasts, almsgiving, other works of piety, and the exercises of a militant Christian life bear eternal rewards for them alone. 'And no one can be saved, no matter how much alms has given, even if shedding one's blood for the name of Christ, unless one remains in the bosom of the Catholic Church.'" For the citation from the Council of Florence, see J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1996), #1005. The quotations within the Council of Florence's decree are from a North African bishop, Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-

¹⁵ Text available at: http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/kasper_dominus_iesus.htm.

¹⁶ For a critique of Dulles's reading of Hebrews, see Eugene J. Fisher, "God's Plan for the Jews," *The Tablet* (5 April 2008): 12. See also the exchange in the Jesuit journal *America* between Cardinal Avery Dulles, "Covenant and Mission," and Mary C. Boys, Philip A. Cunningham and John T. Pawlikowski, "Theology's Sacred Obligation" *America* (October 21, 2002): http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2550

Even though private assurances were given at high levels of the Vatican that Dulles's views were his personal ones, no one at that level publicly expressed a contrary argument. As the only theologian among the cardinals of the U.S., Dulles has been influential among sectors of the episcopacy.²⁰

More recently, the papal reformulation of the Good Friday prayer for the so-called Tridentine rite (from the Roman Missal of 1962) and the ensuing controversy has heightened discussion about Christian mission to the Jews.²¹ After Vatican II, the

533), the first to formulate the axiom, "Outside the Church no salvation." For analysis see Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997), 84-102.

²⁰ See John Pawlikowski, "Moving the Christian-Jewish Dialogue to a New Level: Can It Happen?" in the Conference Proceedings section of this Volume.

²¹ In the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* of July 7, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI gave greater latitude for the celebration of the Tridentine Rite. Left unanswered was the question of the Good Friday orations, particularly that for Jews. In a press conference on July 19, 2007, the Holy See's Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone proposed that the Tridentine Rite should use the same prayer as the normative Roman Rite; see Anthony J. Cernera and Eugene Korn, "The Latin Liturgy and the Jews," *America* (October 8, 2007): 10-13. On 6 February 2008, however, the pope released his version of the prayer for this rite only: *Oremus et pro Iudaeis: Ut Deus et Dominus noster illuminet corda eorum, ut agnoscant Iesum Christum salvatorem omnium hominum. (Oremus. Flectamus genua. Levate.) Omnipotens sempiternus Deus, qui vis ut omnes homines salvi fiant et ad agnitionem veritatis veniant, concede propitius, ut plenitudine gentium in Ecclesiam Tuam intrante omnis Israel salvus fiat. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.* The prayer is headed: "Pro Conversione Iudaeorum." One translation reads: "Let us pray also for the Jews. That our Lord and God may enlighten their hearts, that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ as the savior of all men. Almighty, ever living God, who wills that all men would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, graciously grant that all Israel may be saved when the fullness of the nations enter into Your Church. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen." Among the

Good Friday orations were changed in accord with the spirit of the Council. Thus, since 1970 the church has no longer prayed for Jews as blind and faithless.²² Rather, its prayer is that they might "continue to grow in the love of [God's] name and in faithfulness to his covenant."²³ Instead of retaining the 1970 prayer in Latin for those who worship according to the Tridentine rite, the pope has restored the petition that Jews "may acknowledge Jesus Christ as the savior of all men." Although he softened the harsh language of the pre-1970 versions, he nevertheless returned to the notion that the salvation of Jews requires con-

critics of the prayer are the German bishops; see "Bishops 'Unhappy' over Good Friday Prayer," *The Tablet* (29 March 2008), 32.

²² Before 1955 the prayer's English translation read: "Let us pray also for the perfidious Jews: that Almighty God may remove the veil from their hearts; so that they too may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord. Almighty and eternal God, who dost not exclude from thy mercy even Jewish faithlessness: hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people; that acknowledging the light of thy Truth, which is Christ, they may be delivered from their darkness. Through the same Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen." In 1955, "perfidious" was changed to "faithless"; in the 1960 version, this adjective was removed altogether. In 1965 Pope Paul VI modified the prayer to read: "Let us pray for the Jews: Our Lord God deign to let your face shine upon them, so that even they may recognize the redeemer of all, our Lord Jesus Christ. O almighty and eternal God who has made his promises to the people of Abraham beloved of God, heed with kindness the prayer of your Church, that your chosen people of old will be able to attain to the fullness of grace in the redemption."

²³ The full wording of the 1970 prayer: "Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant."

Almighty and eternal God, long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and his posterity. Listen to your Church as we pray that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen."

version to Christianity, though “when the fullness of the nations enter into Your Church.”²⁴

Amidst the controversy spawned by the new prayer, the question has arisen whether it inspires or even implicitly mandates Catholics to seek the conversion of Jews.²⁵ Or, should the prayer be understood eschatologically, as a *hope that at the End of Days* “all Israel may be saved when the fullness of the nations enter into Your Church”? Various interpretations of the prayer have been offered, and it is not clear that one is to be regarded as definitive. Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos, President of the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* since 2000, entrusted with relations with traditionalist groups such as the Society of St. Pius X, has been a chief proponent of *Summorum Pontificium*, and, in response to an interviewer’s question about criticism of the pope’s prayer, said:

Is it not a good thing to pray for our brothers the sons of Abraham? Abraham is the father of faith, but in a chain of salvation in which the Messiah is expected. And the Messiah has arrived. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that, in

²⁴ Those who have followed Pope Benedict’s thinking on Judaism during his long reign as the prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith will not be shocked at the wording of his prayer. In interviews in the late 1990s, the then Cardinal Ratzinger said that the Jews “still stand within the faithful covenant of God and we believe they will in the end be together with us in Christ. We are waiting for the moment when Israel, too, will say Yes to Christ, but until that moment comes all of us, Jews and Christians, stand within the patience of God” (cited by Avery Cardinal Dulles, “The Covenant with Israel”) For analysis of Ratzinger’s 1998 book, *Many Religions, One Covenant?: Israel, the Church and the World*, see Mary C. Boys, “The Covenant in Contemporary Ecclesial Documents,” in *Two Faiths, One Covenant: Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, eds. Eugene B. Korn and John T. Pawlikowski (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 86-89.

²⁵ Another controversy related to the papal prayer is what, if anything, Jews say about peoples of other religious traditions in their liturgy and sacred texts. See Gilbert S. Rosenthal, “Jewish Views of Other Faiths,” *America* 198/17 (May 19, 2008): 14-16.

one day, five thousand Jews have converted. *I am not contesting the prayer of the novus ordo, but I consider perfect the present one of the extraordinary rite.* And I pray gladly for the conversion of my many Jewish friends, because I believe truly that Jesus is the Son of God and the Saviour of all.²⁶

Cardinal Kasper has offered the lengthiest, most nuanced interpretation of the prayer in an April 2008 article in *L’Osservatore Romano*. He notes the importance of sensitivity to Jewish concerns, recognizing that “Many Jews consider a mission to the Jews as a threat to their existence; some even speak of it as a Shoah by different means.”²⁷ Kasper reads the first part of the prayer – that Jews “may acknowledge Jesus Christ as the savior of all men” – as based in the “whole of the New Testament” and as an indication of the “universally acknowledged fundamental difference between Christians and Jews.” He notes that Catholics do not expect that Jews will

²⁶ Interview by Vittoria Prisciandaro in the Catholic magazine, *Jesus* (<http://www.sanpaolo.org/jesus/0805je/0805je54.htm>); it was translated into English on a liturgical blog (<http://thenewliturgicalmovement.blogspot.com/2008/05/cardinal-castrillon-tradition-without.html>) and posted on May 9, 2008 on the listserv of the Council on Centers of Jewish-Christian Relations (ccjr@listserv.bc.edu). Emphasis in original. By “extraordinary rite,” the cardinal is referring to the Tridentine rite.

²⁷ Cardinal Walter Kasper, “Striving for Mutual Respect in Modes of Prayer,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition (16 April 2008), 8-9. Similarly, in an address at Boston College on November 6, 2002, Cardinal Kasper remarked: “But whilst Jews expect the coming of the Messiah, who is still unknown, Christians believe that he has already shown his face in Jesus of Nazareth whom we as Christians therefore confess as the Christ, he who at the end of time will be revealed as the Messiah for Jews and for all nations...This does not mean that Jews in order to be saved have to become Christians; if they follow their own conscience and believe in God’s promises as they understand them in their religious tradition they are in line with God’s plan, which for us comes to its historical completion in Jesus Christ” (“The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavour of the Catholic Church,” http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Kasper_6Nov02.htm.)

agree with the Christological aspect of the prayer, but that “we do expect them to respect that we as Christians pray in accordance with our belief, just as we evidently do as regards their mode of prayer.”²⁸

The “really controversial question,” Kasper admits, is two fold: “Should Christians pray for the conversion of the Jews?²⁹ Can there be a mission to the Jews?” The cardinal claims, as he had in his 2001 address cited above, that the “Catholic Church has no organised or institutionalised mission to the Jews,” and, in a reading of Rom 9-11, he infers that in the end God will bring about Israel’s salvation, “not on the basis of a mission to the Jews but on the basis of the mission to the Gentiles, when the fullness of the Gentiles has entered. He alone who has caused the hardening of the majority of the Jews can dissolve that hardening again. He will do so when ‘the Deliverer’ comes from Zion (Rom 11:26).³⁰ Thus, in Kasper’s view, the wording of the pope’s Good Friday prayer “expresses this hope in a prayer of intercession directed to God.” He continues:

Basically, with this prayer the Church is repeating the petition in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come” (Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2), and the early Christian liturgical cry, ‘Marantha’: “Come Lord Jesus, come soon” (1 Cor 16:22); Rv 22:20; Did 10, 6). Such petitions for the coming of the Kingdom of God and for the realization of the mystery of salvation are not by nature a call to the Church to undertake missionary action to the Jews. Rather, they respect the whole depth of the *Deus absconditus*, of his election through grace, of the hardening and of his infinite mercy. So in this prayer the Church does not take it upon herself to orchestrate the realisation of the

²⁸ Kasper, 8.

²⁹ As Kasper concedes, although in the prayer itself the term conversion does not appear, but Pope Benedict has apparently retained the heading from the Missal of 1962, “*Pro conversione Iudaeorum*.”

³⁰ Kasper, 8.

unfathomable mystery. She cannot do so. Instead, she lays the when and the how entirely in God’s hands. God alone can bring about the Kingdom of God in which the whole of Israel is saved and eschatological peace is bestowed upon the world.³¹

Nonetheless, even if Christians do not have an “intentional and institutional mission to the Jews,” they must “offer witness before their elder brothers and sisters in the faith of Abraham (John Paul II) to their faith and the richness and beauty of their belief in Jesus Christ.” Such a witness, he adds, must be done “tactfully and respectfully; but it would be dishonest if Christians in their encounters with Jewish friends remained silent about their faith or denied it.”³²

The Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, has recently proffered another point of view on mission to the Jews. Basing his arguments on an array of New Testament texts, he argues that although there is but one salvation in Christ, there are “two clearly distinguishable ways of proclaiming and accepting this salvation.” Schönborn distinguishes between Christ’s mandate to evangelize all nations – i.e., the Gentiles – and to make an overture or offer to Jews to recognize Jesus as Messiah:

By welcoming the gospel, the Jews are witnesses of God’s fidelity to his promise, while the Gentiles are witnesses of the universality of his mercy. These two appeals in the Church reflect the twofold way of the same salvation in Christ, one for Jews and one for Gentiles. Thus the same Jesus Christ is simultaneously “a light for the revelation to

³¹ Kasper, 8.

³² Kasper, 8-9.

the Gentiles, and for the glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32).³³

Schönborn reminds his readers that the various forms of compulsion Jews have experienced means that while "Christians have now irrevocably renounced all forms of proselytism," they have not "abandoned the mandate to proclaim the Gospel 'to the Jews first.'" Nevertheless, he advises, Christians should fulfill this mandate "in the most sensitive way, cleansed of all un-Christian motives," and with "due respect and humility" so that Jews may understand Christ's salvation as fulfillment rather than as a denial of God's promise to them.³⁴ Schönborn, however, provides no clear criteria by which one might distinguish proselytism from the mandate to proclaim the Gospel.

A clear tension exists between the positions of Cardinals Dulles, Castrillón Hoyos and Schönborn, on the one hand, and Cardinal Kasper, on the other. Although the Vatican has offered no public clarification, Rabbi David Rosen, chair of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, reported on May 28, 2008 that Cardinal Bertone sent a fax "at the end of last week to the Chief Rabbis [of Israel]. In Rosen's reading of the fax, Bertone provided "official Vatican confirmation of the contents of Cardinal Walter Kasper's letter to me (as chair of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations) and his article in *Osservatore Romano*, regarding the prayer for the Jews in the (Easter) Latin liturgy" [i.e., the Kasper article in *L'Osservatore Romano*, cited above].

Rabbi Rosen cites two key elements of the Bertone fax: "As Cardinal Kasper has clearly explained, the new *Oremus et pro Iudaeis* is not intended to promote proselytism towards the

³³ Christoph Schönborn, "Judaism's Way to Salvation," *The Tablet* (29 March 2008): 9.

³⁴ Schönborn, 9. See the response to Cardinal Schönborn by Eugene J. Fisher in the subsequent issue of *The Tablet* (5 April 2008), "God's Plan for the Jews," 12-13.

Jews and opens up an eschatological perspective. Christians however cannot but bear witness to their faith in full and total respect for the freedom of others, and this leads them also to pray that all will come to recognize Christ." Bertone continues: "[As] the Cardinal emphasized, a sincere dialogue between Jews and Christians is possible on the one hand on the basis of our common faith in One God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, and in the promises made to Abraham; but on the other hand, through respectfully acknowledging the fundamental difference over faith in Jesus as Christ and Redeemer of all mankind."³⁵

B. The Voices of Jewish "Converts"

Despite the post-Nostra Aetate reticence about the appropriateness and nature of a "Christian mission to the Jews," in some quarters of the Catholic Church a clear campaign is being waged to bring Jews to "completion" as Catholics. Such a movement for the conversion of Jews provides a concrete example of what John Pawlikowski calls the "central, unresolved question" in the dialogue with Jews.³⁶

The Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri, where sound ecumenical and interreligious relations have been built in the years since the Council, now has an active group committed to a mission to the Jews. With the support of Archbishop Raymond Burke, the Association of Hebrew Catholics has relocated from Ypsilanti, Michigan to St. Louis under the leadership of its president, David Moss. They "add a Catholic witness to the

³⁵ Rosen's report was circulated on the listserv of the Council on Centers for Christian-Jewish Relations on May 28, 2008. As Philip Cunningham noted in a response posted on the same listserv on May 29, 2008, the prayer composed by Benedict XVI still seems to retain the title *Pro conversione Iudaeorum*. As of May 29, 2008, the full text of the Bertone letter is available at <http://www.sidic.org/en/docOnLineView.asp?class=Doc00604>.

³⁶ See the Pawlikowski article under Conference Proceedings in this Volume.

Messianic Jewish movement.³⁷ Moss lists the following aims of the association:³⁸

- To gather the Jews who have entered the Church and to help re-enable their irrevocable calling, providing a collective and unified witness to Jesus and His Church.
- To preserve the identity and heritage of the Jewish people within the Church.
- To provide pastoral support for those who have entered the Church.
- To provide support for Jews who are searching and inquiring about Jesus and the Church.
- To be an integral part of the new evangelization, contributing a vibrant and rich Jewish perspective.
- To be an eschatological sign of the ingrafting, which may have already begun.³⁹

³⁷ <http://hebrewcatholic.org/AbouttheAHC/Havurah/whyahchavurot.html>. The website includes a letter from Archbishop Burke dated May 19, 2006 expressing his esteem for the apostolate of the Association of Hebrew Catholics and offering his support as they established their headquarters in St. Louis. On June 27, 2008 Pope Benedict XVI named Archbishop Burke as the head of the highest court of the Vatican, Apostolic Signatura; thus, he will be leaving St. Louis. An article in a British publication calls Burke "one of the world's most enthusiastic Episcopal supporters of reviving the Tridentine Rite" (Robert Mickens and Rocco Palmo, "U.S. Conservative Appointed Head of Vatican's 'Supreme Court,'" *The Tablet* [5 July 2008]: 30).

³⁸ Excerpts from an address by David Moss in May 2005, "Jewish Identity: The Irrevocable Calling the New Evangelization." See <http://hebrewcatholic.org/jewishidentityir.html>, accessed May 29, 2008.

³⁹ Moss, "Jewish Identity..." <http://hebrewcatholic.org/jewishidentityir.html>. "Ingrafting" seems to be a major term for this movement and associated movements, and arises from a distinctive interpretation of the New Testament. As Moss, following the thinking of the late Elias Friedman, OCD, reads Scripture, he discerns four major points: (1) "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (Rm 11:2) "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rm 11:29). (2) "The people of Israel will enter the Catholic Church, as St. Paul assures us" (Rm 11:25-26). (3) The time has now come; the full

- To help all Catholics understand the Jewish roots of their faith.
- To be a witness to the Jewish people that the cross is not a sign of persecution, but rather of sacrificial love, that Jesus is the glory of Israel, and that Catholicism is the Judaism of the Redemption.⁴⁰

Roy H. Schoeman, one of the preeminent members of the Association of Hebrew Catholics, articulates its theological perspectives in his 2003 book, *Salvation Is from the Jews: The Role of Judaism in Salvation History from Abraham to the Second Coming*. While its length precludes detailed analysis in this essay, several aspects of the book limn the thinking of these Jewish "converts" to Catholicism.

A personal religious experience lies at the core. In Schoeman's case, though he had grown up in a synagogue and had a Jewish education, by the time he was in his thirties and a faculty member at the Harvard Business School, he had lost touch with God and was "inwardly overwhelmed with a sense of pointlessness bordering on despair."⁴¹ Then, while walking the dunes on Cape Cod, he found himself "most consciously and tangibly in the presence of God" (359), and on his return home spent a year pursuing various spiritual options. Then he had a dream: "When I awoke...I was hopelessly in love with the

number of Gentiles has come in, and this is the time of Israel's ingrafting: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk 21:24). Jerusalem has indeed been "trampled on by the Gentiles," but now for the first time since 70 AD, Jerusalem is reunified under the sovereignty of the People of Israel. (4) When "the Jewish people do enter the Church, a great blessing shall result."

⁴⁰ Moss, "Jewish Identity..." <http://hebrewcatholic.org/jewishidentityir.html>.

⁴¹ Roy A. Schoeman, *Salvation Is from the Jews: The Role of Judaism in Salvation History from Abraham to the Second Coming* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 358. In further citations from this book, I will cite page numbers in parentheses following the quotations.

Blessed Virgin Mary and knew that the God Who had revealed Himself to me on the beach had been Christ” (361). Several years later he was baptized.

Theologically, the issue is clear: “If Jesus was the Jewish Messiah – the Messiah long prophesied, expected, and prayed for by the Jews – then a Jew can either be right and accept that He was the Messiah or be wrong and maintain that He was not” (10). Thus Schoeman traces the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and what he sees as its fulfillment in Christ, drawing freely upon biblical texts without regard to context. He interprets them as inerrant (28); the alternative is to regard the Gospels as “fictional accounts” (79). There is no question, he asserts, that Jesus “intended Christianity to be adopted by Jews in place of Judaism” (67); “God wants Jewish entry into the Church” (71).

Schoeman discusses the Holocaust at length. He maintains that the Third Reich’s extermination of Jews “did not flow out of Christianity,” but rather out of a contrary philosophy, “one introduced by Darwinism and epitomized in our country by Planned Parenthood and Margaret Sanger. The Holocaust owed nothing to the principles of ‘Christianity’; it owed everything to the principles of Margaret Sanger and ‘Planned Parenthood’” (191). In speculating on what motivations might lie behind the Holocaust, Schoeman offers a distinctive hypothesis: at least in part, the Holocaust might “have been an attempt to forestall the Second Coming.” He continues:

Obviously the first coming of the Messiah came through the Jews, and the New Testament also implies – most notably in Romans 11 – that the Jews will have a role to play in the Second Coming...*If the adversary’s primary motivation behind the Holocaust was to prevent the Second coming of Christ by exterminating all the Jews, there was still a secondary way he could succeed even if some Jews survived.*

That would be by stopping the conversion of the Jews that must precede Christ’s return. As the Catechism [of the Catholic Church] states: “The glorious Messiah’s coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by ‘all Israel’ (Rm 11:20-26; cf. Mt 23:39). (246)⁴²

Schoeman notes that the Holocaust has also influenced “even the Catholic Church to curtail or eliminate entirely any efforts to evangelize Jews” – and here he footnotes the 2002 document, *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*, which concludes that “campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church.⁴³ In fact, Schoeman devotes an entire chapter to “The Jews and the Second Coming,” identifying many biblical texts he sees as predictions that “the Jewish nation will be re-born in a single day” (307), the return of Jews from Russia to Israel (“out of the north country,” Jer 16:15), “the fight over the city of Jerusalem will cause a world war” (309) but “Israel will be miraculously militarily strong and able to successfully defend itself” – and “there will be a widespread conversion of the Jews” (310). Jesus himself prophesied this conversion of the Jews prior to his Second Coming (Matthew 23:37-39, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...”), but so had Zechariah: “And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, – so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (12:10).

⁴² Emphasis added. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994, #674). The Catechism is also available online on numerous sites.

⁴³ This text is a joint production of the Bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Council of Synagogues. See http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ncs_usccb120802.htm.

Schoeman and others in the Association of Hebrew Catholics frequently make the point that in becoming Catholic they have not “changed” religions but simply “come into the fullness of its truth.” Drawing upon Paul’s metaphor of the olive tree (Rm 11), he sees his baptism not so much a “conversion” as an experience of being “ingrafted.” It is a “return;” he sees the Catholic Church as “simply the continuation (and fulfillment) of Judaism after the first coming of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah” (317). In his perspective, the Jews who accepted Jesus became the first Christians and thereby stayed within the core of Judaism, “while those who rejected Him left the mainstream, the fullness of the truth of the religion” (317).

Schoeman offers a closing argument: just as the New Covenant brought the Old Covenant to fruition at the first coming, so the Old Covenant will bring the New Covenant to fruition “by the return of the Jews at the Second Coming.” He avers: “Thus, the current wave of Jewish entry into the Church may be among the most important things going on today, or indeed, in the history of the world” (353). In an accompanying footnote, Schoeman writes: “This also means that the misguided attempt on the part of some in the Church to say that such entry is inappropriate plays directly into the hands of the enemy” (353, n.48).

Schoeman’s colleague in the AHC, Rosalind Moss, shares his disagreement with those Catholics who do not believe in seeking the conversion of Jews. In a lengthy open letter to Cardinal William Keeler in 2002, Moss objects to the theology in *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*. She writes that she is “at a loss to understand how anyone can conclude, with Walter Cardinal Kasper, that “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.”⁴⁴ Quoting from the New Testament, *Catechism of*

⁴⁴See <http://www.hebrewcatholic.org/FaithandTheology/Reflections-Covenant-Mission/openlettertocard.html> . Emphasis in original.

the Catholic Church and Dominus Iesus, Moss asserts that the “fullness of redemption” is to be found only in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12), and unless we embrace him in this life we cannot presume to be happy with him in the next.”

Moss, like her brother David, is a convert from Judaism to Catholicism in 1995 (though by way of evangelical Protestantism). Various interviewers generally identify Moss as a Catholic apologist, and host of radio and television programs on the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN). She is currently involved in founding a community of religious women, Daughters of Mary, Mother of Israel’s Hope. Self-identified as a “completed” or “fulfilled Jew,” The major apostolate of this traditionalist community, in the process of establishing itself in St. Louis under Archbishop Burke, she says, will be evangelization. Given her association with the Association of Hebrew Catholics, one may infer that Jews will be a principal focus of her evangelizing efforts.⁴⁵ Among the topics she addresses as a lecturer (at an honorarium of \$1600 per day in addition to expenses): “Christ in the Old Testament,” “From Judaism to the Fullness of Christ,” and “The Passover Fulfilled.”⁴⁶

The foundation of a community of sisters involved in evangelizing Jews (and others) in 2008 is ironic. It goes in a direction contrary to the highly regarded Sisters of Zion. This congregation of Catholic women, founded in the 1840s in France, initially was established to convert Jews. According to their Constitutions of 1874, their “particular aim is the sanctification of the Children of Israel.” In the 1950s and 1960s, however, the Sisters of Zion undertook a serious rethinking of their mission.

⁴⁵ Moss holds a M.A. in Ministry degree from Talbot School of Theology, which, among its other degree programs, offers a M.Div. degree in Messianic Jewish Studies in partnership with Chosen People Ministries in New York City. As a self-identified “theologically conservative evangelical” school, its doctrinal statement indicates that Talbot upholds biblical inerrancy and the “Rapture” of believers before the millennium.

⁴⁶ See <http://www.catholic.com/seminars/moss.asp>.

In light of extensive reflection on the *Shoah* (which deeply affected especially the European members), theological study and consultation, they radically revised their mission to include a “particular responsibility to promote understanding and justice for the Jewish community, and to keep alive in the Church the consciousness that in some mysterious way, Christianity is linked to Judaism from its origin to its final destiny.”⁴⁷ Among other significant changes, the Sisters of Zion removed communal prayers with a negative depiction of Judaism. Ironically, one of those prayers that they had long suppressed as not in accord with Zion’s theology now surfaces on the Schoeman’s website: “Salvation is from the Jews,” and is listed as “Prayer from the Congregation of the Daughters of Zion.”⁴⁸

III. A Mission *with* Jews: Reinvigorating the Council’s Legacy

It is appropriate to revisit *Nostra Aetate*’s formulation: “In the company of the prophets and the same Apostle [Paul], the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all people will call upon the Lord with one voice and ‘serve him shoulder to shoulder’ (Zeph. 3:9; see Is 66:23; Ps 65:4; Rom 11:11-32).” In light of the intense debate over *Nostra Aetate*’s second draft, with its conversionary language, and of post-conciliar texts on the church’s relations with Jews, this sentence should be interpreted as a judgment against seeking the conversion of Jews. To evangelize Jews is not compatible with the obligation of the Roman Catholic Church to repent of its anti-Judaism and to seek reconciliation with the Jewish people. Yet, as Philip Cunningham has observed, the Council’s formulation was in essence a matter of *orthopraxis*; it did not make explicit questions

⁴⁷ This citation is taken from the current Zion Constitutions of 1984. For an extensive study of the evolution of their change in self-understanding, see Mary C. Boys, “The Sisters of Zion: From a Conversionist Stance to a Dialogical Way of Life,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 31/1-2 (1994): 27-48.

⁴⁸ See <http://www.salvationisfromthejews.com/prayers.html>.

of *orthodoxy*, such as the relationship between Jews and Jesus as the savior of all.⁴⁹

The present state of affairs is lamentable, inviting Jewish mistrust. Prominent cardinals gloss over some forty years of substantive dialogue and scholarship. The Catholic Church now has two “competing” prayers for Jews on Good Friday. The zeal of the Association of Hebrew Catholics and similar messianic Jewish movements in the church far exceeds their employment of careful biblical and theological reflection. The Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews, from whom useful commentaries on *Nostra Aetate* have emanated, has fallen largely silent at precisely the point when vigorous leadership is critically needed.

Thus, it is imperative that Catholic theologians involved in dialogue take up the question and articulate what it means to have a mission *with* Jews rather than *to* them. By way of prologue to this task, I offer a brief analysis of central elements of the question.

A. Taking history seriously

In reviewing the work of those who advocate a mission to the Jews, I am struck with how little they wrestle with the consequences of the centuries-long anti-Jewish teaching of the church. Although precisely how those teachings played a role in the *Shoah* is a complex matter, I detected little awareness of serious attempts in Catholicism to confront its own shadow side, such the candor of the French bishops in confessing that the church’s anti-Jewish teachings provided the ground on which the “venomous plant of hatred for the Jews was able to flourish.”⁵⁰ In a recent article in *Commonweal*, Robert Egan

⁴⁹ Cunningham, “Reflecting on the *Reflections*.”

⁵⁰ Text in *Origins* 27/18 (October 16, 1997) and widely available on various websites.

cites Bernard Lonergan's assertion that "The meaning of Vatican II was the acknowledgment of history."⁵¹ To be involved in dialogue with Jews is to meet history at virtually every turn – and to feel its consequences in a visceral way. Acknowledging history in the presence of Jews is not only an exercise in humility about one's tradition, but a catalyst in rethinking one's theological foundations. "Historical investigations," Terrence Tilley argues, "may bring up facts that 'force' theologians to rethink their formulations, but not that force them to reject their faith."⁵²

B. The importance of Catholic hermeneutical principles

Both Cardinals Dulles and Schönborn make considerable use of biblical texts without attention to their literary and historical context. Schoeman (whom Dulles cites approvingly in his article in *First Things*) and Moss are prolific in proof-texting. Further, among those advocating a mission to the Jews – even if this is regarded as "ingrafting" or a "Gospel mandate" to be exercised with "sensitivity" – there is virtually no reference to the considerable body of hermeneutical principles that might be derived from the Pontifical Biblical Commission, such as the "Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels (1964), "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" (1993) and the "Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible" (2001), all of which have spawned commentaries of their own. Moreover, the considerable corpus of Catholic biblical scholarship, including many fine popular texts authored by first-rate scholars, is largely ignored. On the issue of a mission to or with the Jews, a grave methodological chasm exists.⁵³

⁵¹ Robert Egan, "Why Not? Scripture, History and Women's Ordination," *Commonweal* 135/7 (April 11, 2008), 17.

⁵² Terrence Tilley, *History, Theology and Faith: Dissolving the Modern Problematic* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 154.

⁵³ Some of these methodological differences can be gleaned from the controversy over the film by Mel Gibson, "The Passion of the Christ." See, e.g., *Pondering the Passion*, ed. Philip A. Cunningham (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004; *On the Passion of the Christ: Exploring the Issues*

C. The role of post-*Nostra Aetate* documents

Also typically passed over in silence (or outrightly rejected) by those who propose a mission to the Jews are key documents by Vatican offices, national episcopal conferences, and diocesan commissions that refine and extend *Nostra Aetate*. Of particular significance are "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing *Nostra Aetate* #4" (1975), and "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism" (1985), both from the Vatican's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews. The principles articulated in 1975 *Guidelines* that "Christians must...strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience" is largely ignored. One senses little or no in-depth engagement with Jewish thinking among Cardinals Castrillón Hoyos, Dulles and Schönborn, for example. However learned they may be, one wonders to what extent they have seriously and substantially engaged with Jews and scholarship on Jewish-Christian relations. One does not get a sense from their writing that they grasp in any way the profundity of Judaism. And while many in the Association of Hebrew Catholics are converts from Judaism, it is not clear how learned they were in their own tradition – nor, indeed, how learned they have become in Catholicism. Moreover, one would never know from their writings and addresses that an extensive body of scholarship on Christian-Jewish relations exists, and grows exponentially.

In the United States, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops has published a number of important resources: "Within Context" (1978), "God's Mercy Endures Forever" (1988), "Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion" (1988), and "The Bible, the Jews and the Death of Jesus" (2004). These documents have provided a fundamental

Raised by the Controversial Movie, ed. Paula Fredriksen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006; a reissue of *Perspectives on the Passion of the Christ*, published by Miramax Books in 2004).

orientation for many involved in dialogue with Jews – but they seem largely unknown, even among many of the bishops and among vast numbers of the clergy.

D. The meaning of “fidelity to the Magisterium”

One notes among the Association of Hebrew Catholics, for example, consistent mention of their fidelity to the Magisterium – as their website says on their home page, “As a lay apostolate, we are faithful to the Magisterium” – but this is a selective adherence and made as an assertion rather than an argument. From my review of resources available on line, there tends to be a high correlation between groups such as the Association of Hebrew Catholics and very conservative understandings of Catholic thought and practice, thereby eliciting approval and support from conservative prelates. For example, in the foundation of the congregation Daughters of Mary, Mother of Israel’s Hope, considerable attention is devoted to their intention to wear the “holy habit;” in the words of Rosalind Moss, “I want to restore the years the locusts have eaten with an order of sisters that will restore the hemline to the floor and the habit to the world.” She adds that “young people today want God; they want orthodoxy; they believe the Church is the Church Christ established; the Magisterium is the Church’s teaching office; the Church is our Mother.”⁵⁴

However well intentioned such views are, the naïveté of the ecclesiology is striking. Yet, it clearly strikes a chord for some Catholics unfamiliar with – or unalterably opposed to – theologies out of Vatican II. Ironically, those traditionalist Catholics in the Association of Hebrew Catholics may not be conversant with the antisemitism that has been a part of traditionalist

⁵⁴ http://stlouiscatholic.blogspot.com/2008/03/saint-louis-catholic-interview-with_10.html .

groups, such as the Society of St. Pius X.⁵⁵ Moreover, the piety evident on the website of the Association of Hebrew Catholics is redolent of pre-Vatican II devotionalism.

E. How Catholics understand authority in the church today.⁵⁶

Given that relatively few pay attention to the nuances of theology, many assume that if a pope or cardinal or bishop pronounces on something, it is authoritative, and, thus, settled. Most Catholics are likely to be unaware of the range of views on theological matters (even among cardinals and bishops). They typically lack familiarity with church documents (as well as facility with their rhetorical style), and are unaware of or unable to follow highly nuanced arguments. So the nuances of carefully phrased piece, such as Cardinal Kasper’s April article in the *L’Osservatore Romano*, are likely to be missed by most who read it. As Rabbi Ruth Langer observed about that article:

- Cardinal Kasper is trying to find a way to mollify the voices on both sides of this issue, to create a middle path that will put discussions back on track. That is probably a responsibility that comes with his position, on the one hand, and a constructive move, on the other, for the long-term dialogue.
- However, his eschatological solution, however well grounded in Catholic theology, strikes me as a theological solution that requires a degree of nuanced

⁵⁵ See Michael Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

⁵⁶ I am indebted to Sister of Sion Celia Deutsch, a professor at Barnard College, for this observation. For an especially helpful work on authority in the Catholic Church, see Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003).

- thinking that will go right past most people. How can a prayer with the heading "For the conversion of the Jews" be taught effectively as referring to "For the conversion of the Jews only after everyone else has been converted" when those words simply aren't in the liturgical text and those reciting them aren't interested in hearing them? Thus, Cardinal Kasper's learned solution really doesn't address the educational and pastoral challenge created by this prayer. And for the Jewish community, the reality on the ground, what people are taught to think that ultimately shapes their actions, takes priority over abstract theological reflection. So how does Cardinal Kasper's reading move from words on a page to effective teaching?⁵⁷

F. Disregard of what the church has learned through dialogue with Jews

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of *Nostra Aetate* is its exhortation to: "[E]nter with prudence and charity into discussion [*colloquia*] and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture." This excerpt suggests approaching the question of salvation outside the church from what *has actually been learned in and through dialogue*, from what Jacques Dupuis calls the "praxis of interreligious dialogue." This praxis, he says, is not merely a necessary condition, premise or first step in theologies of religious pluralism. Rather, it is theological reflection *on and within* dialogue and properly belongs to every stage of

⁵⁷ Posted on the listserv of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations on May 9, 2008, and used with the permission of the author.

theologies of religion.⁵⁸ Since the Council, many Christians have taken up this mandate – and their dialogue with the religious other has characteristically embraced the fourfold forms of life, action, theological exchange and religious experience.⁵⁹

When an ecumenical council – the highest authority in the Catholic Church – exhorts its members to engage in discussion and collaboration with the religious other and that exhortation has been taken with utmost seriousness, then does it not follow that the church will gain new knowledge, see itself in the eyes of the other and thereby gain new perspectives that may require a changed self-understanding? This does not mean jettisoning the tradition, but rather approaching it through new lenses and discerning how that tradition might continue to inspire and sustain in light of what has been learned in and through dialogue. Much of what the church has articulated about Jesus over the centuries has been rooted in a Christology based on supersessionism grounded in a distorted understanding of Judaism. Might we at long last acknowledge the consequences of such teaching? As Jewish scholar Peter Ochs says, supersessionism "kills": The "Jewish people in this day must regard a supersessionist church as an obstacle to redemption."⁶⁰ Just as Christology has been in the making for nearly 2000 years, so too must we continue to rearticulate it in terms of new insights.

⁵⁸ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 18-19.

⁵⁹ See the Vatican statement "Dialogue and Proclamation, #42; text and commentary, inter alia, in *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, ed. William R. Burrows (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 104.

⁶⁰ Peter Ochs, "Israel's Redeemer," in *The Redemption*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O'Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145.

G. Pastoral sensitivity and educational responsibility

It seems crucial that Catholics long involved in dialogue with Jews recognize the vulnerability Jewish converts to Christianity may experience when they hear language about Judaism as “salvific.” Having “converted” because in their view Christ fulfills their Judaism, a more nuanced theological position seems to question the basis of their conversion. The religious experience at the core of their own “ingrafting” seems to complicate openness to theological understandings contrary to their views of Catholic-Jewish relations.

There is an enormous gap between the sensibilities and theologies of these converts and the scholars of Catholic-Jewish relations. To allege that becoming Catholic “is the most Jewish thing a person can do,” as Rosalind Moss has said in various interviews, flies in the face not only what the vast majority of Jews hold but also effectively denies the *Nostra Aetate* trajectory. Yet precisely how to deal with the thinking of those advocating conversion of Jews to Catholic Christianity is a challenge, particularly since their views are promulgated in the circles of the Catholic right, such as the Eternal Word Television Network and various websites (e.g., www.ignatiusinsight.com) that tend to attract people unreceptive to Vatican II and its legacy. Their thinking also has support in some hierarchical circles.

Yet even as Schoeman, Moss, et al., deserve respect for their decision to commit themselves to Christ and the church, their theologies need to be challenged – precisely because they go contrary to the direction of the church since Vatican II. And the importance of sound biblical learning cannot be stressed enough.

H. Greater humility about what we know about God’s ways

In considering the question of a mission to or with Jews, we must remember we are in the realm of faith, not certainty. We neither know the extent of nor the manifold ways in which God “saves,” says Michael Barnes, a British Jesuit and scholar of the religions of India. Rather, “The Church speaks of what it knows in faith – that God raised Jesus from the dead and thereby transformed the whole of creation. What the Church does not know is the total reality of what always remains other and utterly mysterious. *Christians must, therefore, acknowledge this possibility: God may act in the world in ways of which the Church does not know.*”⁶¹

Much is at stake. Can Jews trust that the Catholic Church will respect the integrity of Judaism as a way to God? Will Catholics draw upon their own substantive body of biblical scholarship in honoring the complex character of the Scriptures? Will the hierarchy let theological scholarship flourish, or champion only traditionalist views? Will the church as a whole learn from its more than forty years of dialogue with Jews? Will it take history seriously, including its own shadow side in regard to treatment of the religious other? Will the scholarship of the Christian-Jewish encounter be made widely accessible and be seen as essential to theology?

The legacy of Vatican II is at issue. So is the still-fragile relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people.

⁶¹ Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 28. Emphasis added.