

# STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

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*Official Ecclesial Documents to Implement Vatican II on Relations with Jews:  
Study Them, Become Immersed in Them, and Put Them into Practice*

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I would like to remind my brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church, also those living in Rome, of the fact that the guidelines for implementing the Council in this precise field are already available to everyone in the two documents published respectively in 1974 and in 1985 by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. It is only a question of studying them carefully, of immersing oneself in their teachings and of putting them into practice.

- Pope John Paul II, Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome, April 13, 1986, §5.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

In December 2005, Pope Benedict XVI gave an address to the Vatican curia about the proper way of understanding the Second Vatican Council.<sup>2</sup> He described two different approaches to interpreting it. The first, which he named "a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture," privileges new or creative aspects of the Council over more traditional formulations. Benedict argued that such an approach misconstrues the nature of an ecumenical council, wrongly suggesting that everything prior to the Council needed correction. He preferred what he called a "hermeneutic of reform." Citing Pope John XXIII, he saw such reform as "faithful and [in] perfect conformity to the authentic [received] doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/305-jp2-86apr13.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-benedict-xvi/359-b16-05dec22.html> .

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., §2. [In an *America* magazine online blog, Joseph Komonchak noted that a "hermeneutic of continuity" is the more direct contrast with a "hermeneutic of

discontinuity," Benedict asserted that, "It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists."<sup>4</sup>

However, when it came to *Nostra Aetate*, the Council's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Relations, Benedict observed that something discontinuous with the past was needed in regard to Jews and Judaism. "In particular," he said, "[in the face of] the recent crimes of the Nazi regime and, in general, with a retrospective look at a long and difficult history, it was necessary to evaluate and define in a new way the relationship between the Church and the faith of Israel."<sup>5</sup> This "new way" to relate to the Jewish people was *Nostra Aetate*'s repudiation of the long-lived notions that Jews were an accursed people and Judaism an obsolete religion replaced by the Church. As Cardinal Walter Kasper has put it: "[T]he old theory of substitution is gone since the Second Vatican Council. For us Christians today the covenant with the Jewish people is a living heritage, a living reality."<sup>6</sup>

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discontinuity." Presumably, a hermeneutic of continuity in interpreting the Council would value conciliar statements only to the degree that they reiterated pre-conciliar materials. However, Komonchak continued, Benedict spoke of a hermeneutic of reform, "which he describes quite precisely as a combination of continuity and discontinuity on different levels." Available at: [http://www.americamagazine.org/blog/entry.cfm?blog\\_id=2&id=46248718-3048-741E-6853244124667553](http://www.americamagazine.org/blog/entry.cfm?blog_id=2&id=46248718-3048-741E-6853244124667553) ]

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., §3.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the impact of the Shoah, see Massimo Giuliani, "The Shoah as a Shadow upon and a Stimulus to Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hofmann, SDB, and Joseph Sievers, eds., *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007: 54-70.

<sup>6</sup> "*Dominus Jesus*." Paper delivered at the 17th meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee. (May 1, 2001), 3. Available at:

Even while acknowledging the break that *Nostra Aetate* made with the past, Benedict took pains to avoid supporting a total disjuncture with pre-conciliar teachings: "Indeed, a discontinuity had been revealed but in which, after the various distinctions between concrete historical situations and their requirements had been made, the continuity of principles proved not to have been abandoned. It is easy to miss this fact at a first glance."<sup>7</sup> It is not clear to what the "continuity of principles" precisely refers regarding *Nostra Aetate*, but one suspects it is the declaration's reliance on Romans 9-11 to affirm that "Jews remain beloved of God." Of course, in so doing *Nostra Aetate* reached back over centuries of anti-Jewish teachings to the earliest New Testament author to find texts, admittedly of surpassing scriptural authority, to ground its affirmative statements about Jews.

If the "hermeneutic of reform" involves both continuity and discontinuity, it seems undeniable that in terms of the history of Christian deicide teaching, *Nostra Aetate* was far more discontinuous than continuous with the preponderance of the church's past. If Pope Benedict's "continuity of principles" is not a historical category but a theological one, the question then arises as to how transcendent principles could have been disregarded for so much of the church's existence.<sup>8</sup> In

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<http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analysis/497-kasper01may1.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, December 22, 2005, §3.

<sup>8</sup> N.B. Cardinal Johannes Willebrands' relevant words: "Even though the Jews have never acknowledged Jesus as the holy anointed one and savior of all humanity, 'as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their ancestors, for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11:28-29). *This authentic primitive Christian vision was restored by the council, which, based on the principles of our faith, called upon us to change our attitudes regarding the Jews, moving toward a full reconciliation as children of the same heavenly Father*" [*Church and Jewish People: New Considerations* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992) 3. Italics added].

any case, Pope Benedict XVI's approach to the Council through a hermeneutic of reform suggests the principle that interpretations of *Nostra Aetate* that do not assert both continuity and discontinuity are erroneous.

The question of the proper interpretation of the Second Vatican Council, particularly with regard to *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent implementing documents, is evident in new tensions that have troubled Catholic-Jewish relations in the United States. In recent months, two statements issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have called into question two fundamental axioms that have emerged in the past four decades of Catholic-Jewish interaction and research: (1) that interreligious dialogue by definition excludes intentions to try to persuade or to convert the other away from their own religious tradition; and (2) that the covenant between God and the Jewish people codified in the words of the Torah has never been revoked and continues to be a vehicle of God's presence, of God's grace for Jews.

The American statements will be discussed in detail below, but one of their more notable features is their minimal citation of crucially relevant post-conciliar authoritative Catholic documents. One of the texts, "A Note on Ambiguities Contained in *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*," fails to mention such pertinent materials at all. Questions about this grave oversight have been partially answered by assertions that certain official Catholic statements about Jews and Judaism are not "settled teaching."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thus, to explain the removal of a sentence in the U.S. adult catechism that "the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them," a "Statement of Principles for Catholic-Jewish

In contrast, Pope John Paul II clearly believed that a post-conciliar tradition of teachings about Jews had been authoritatively established. When he visited the Great Synagogue of Rome in 1986 he reminded everyone that "the guidelines for implementing the Council in this precise field [of Catholic-Jewish relations] are already available to everyone in the two documents published respectively in 1974 and in 1985 by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. It is only a question of studying them carefully, of immersing oneself in their teachings and of putting them into practice."<sup>10</sup>

In past writings, I have referred to this developing post-conciliar tradition as expressing a "theology of shalom."<sup>11</sup> "Shalom" does not simply mean "peace," but is also "a process of living in wholesome relationship with others, ideally where partners and participants trust each other, act with integrity and are dedicated to the common good rather than threatening each other."<sup>12</sup> Shalom thus seems an extremely appropriate term to apply to the Catholic Church's efforts beginning with the Council to develop a theology of

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Dialogue" by leading American bishops observes, "A catechism is a compendium of articles of faith, and therefore contains only settled teaching." <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/584-usccbdialogue09oct2.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/305-jp2-86apr13.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Hence, these book titles: *A Story of Shalom: The Calling of Christians and Jews by a Covenanting God* (NY: Paulist Press, 2001); *Sharing Shalom: A Local Interfaith Dialogue Process*, ed. with Rabbi Arthur Starr (NY: Paulist Press, 1998); *Proclaiming Shalom: Lectionary Introductions to Foster the Catholic and Jewish Relationship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995); and *Education for Shalom: Religion Textbooks and the Enhancement of the Catholic and Jewish Relationship* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> William Klassen, "Peace" in Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn, eds., *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 338.

"right relationship" with the Jewish people and "wholeness" in terms of Catholic self-understanding.

But this emerging theology of shalom has recently been challenged by theologians who, motivated by a concern that the universal saving significance of Christ has been compromised, have interpreted *Nostra Aetate* in a very restrictive fashion and minimized the authority of subsequent documents. This alternate approach to a theology of the church's relationship to the Jewish people could be called a "neo-supersessionist" theology, as I will describe below.

This essay will explore the mainstream "theology of shalom" and the neo-supersessionist response beginning with the Second Vatican Council itself.

## 2. The Second Vatican Council: The Authoritative Beginnings of a Theology of Shalom

The documents promulgated by a solemn ecumenical council have enormous authority in the Roman Catholic tradition. The various types of conciliar documents have different weights, with a dogmatic constitution enjoying the greatest authority. Thus, these words of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964) are particularly important:

Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways. There is, first, that people to whom the covenants and promises were made, and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 9:4-5): in view of the divine choice, they are a people most dear for the sake of the fathers, for the gifts of God are without repentance (cf. Rom. 11:28-29). ... Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved

by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may attain eternal salvation" [§16].

Anticipating *Nostra Aetate's* stress on chapters 9-11 of Paul's Letter to the Romans, *Lumen Gentium* taught that Jews remain the chosen people, "to whom the covenants and promises were made." Following Paul's use of the plural in "covenants," it is therefore not consistent with *Lumen Gentium* to suggest that Jews today are the living heirs to only some of the covenants narrated in the Bible. To anticipate one later neo-supersessionist claim, if Jews are truly "most dear to God," then their covenantal relationship to God—as articulated in the Torah and variously interpreted in rabbinic post-Temple Judaism—must continue to be dynamic and vital, otherwise being "dear to God" makes little difference. Moreover, if any human person can be moved by grace and "may attain eternal salvation," then, in the words of Westminster Archbishop John Heenan to the Council in 1964, "how much more luminous is the Jewish religion which is, at the same time, the root of our faith?"<sup>13</sup> *Lumen Gentium* thus links salvation with God's ongoing grace of election of the Jewish people, an interconnection articulated in an authoritative dogmatic constitution.

*Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions is also a formal conciliar statement. Although not as weighty as a dogmatic constitution, it possesses an authority that few other types of ecclesial documents can match. Even though no document of greater authority has been issued to challenge its perspectives, recent neo-supersessionist interpreters have attempted to limit its meaning, as will be discussed below.

<sup>13</sup> John M. Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter between Christians and Jews* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1986), 211.

*Nostra Aetate* admonished that "Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy scripture." This sentence repudiated the so-called "deicide" curse, which had been a constant Christian presupposition for centuries.<sup>14</sup> Logically, if Jews have not been rejected by God, then they must still enjoy the covenantal relationship with God that permeates the Jewish scriptures.

Drawing on Romans 11, *Nostra Aetate*, §4 observed that "the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made." This was reinforced, as Eugene J. Fisher has pointed out,<sup>15</sup> when *Nostra Aetate* rendered a Greek verbless relative clause in Romans 9:4-5 in the present tense: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh." As will be seen below, this implicit but authoritative recognition that Israel continues to abide in a perpetual covenantal relationship with God—without any qualification among the various biblical covenantal "moments" or expressions—was subsequently made fully explicit by Pope John Paul II and later ecclesial documents.

*Nostra Aetate*, §4 also called for Catholics and Jews to collaborate in "biblical and theological enquiry and ... friendly discussions." This reversal of pre-conciliar warnings to avoid contact with Jews has been reiterated and expanded upon in

<sup>14</sup> See the collection of "Texts from the History of the Relationship" on the website of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Eugene J. Fisher, "Official Roman Catholic Teaching on Jews and Judaism: Commentary and Context," *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue*, ed. Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 6.

subsequent ecclesial documents up to the present day. The flowering of such collaboration raises questions about whether Christians can theologize about Jews without regard for Jewish self-understanding, and vice-versa.

Finally, there is a decisive but often overlooked sentence in *Nostra Aetate*, §4: "Together with the prophets and that same apostle [Paul], the church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all peoples will call on God with one voice and serve him shoulder to shoulder." This wording had been carefully considered during the Council's deliberations,<sup>16</sup> particularly after public controversy arose in the summer and fall of 1964 over whether a leaked draft paragraph would encourage Catholics to seek to baptize Jews. The prominent rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel repeatedly and dramatically declared that he was "ready to go to Auschwitz any time, if faced with the alternative of conversion or death."<sup>17</sup>

In Council conclaves on September 28 and 29, 1964, several cardinals and bishops specifically addressed the topic of conversionary initiatives toward Jews. They asserted that the question of a collective Jewish turn to Christianity was to be understood as an eschatological matter. It was not the task of Catholics in historical time to mount campaigns to try to baptize Jews.<sup>18</sup> The final text of *Nostra Aetate*—that the Church awaits a day known to God alone—was meant to convey, in the words of Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro of

Bologna, that "only an eschatological turn of events will bring [Jews and Christians] to the common messianic meal of the eternal Pasch."<sup>19</sup>

After the interventions of the Council fathers who urged this futurist eschatology, the draft of the declaration was revised accordingly. The official Council record explained: "The paragraph concerning the church's eschatological hope is changed. Many fathers asked that in the expression of this hope, since it concerns the mystery [of Israel], any appearance of proselytism be avoided. Other fathers requested that it somehow be expressed that Christian hope also embraces all peoples. By this present [revised] paragraph we wish to satisfy all these desires."<sup>20</sup>

When the Council voted on *Nostra Aetate* on October 14-15, 1965, there were 1937 votes in favor of the section that included the eschatological phrase about awaiting the day known to God alone, and only 153 votes against it.<sup>21</sup> Given the discussions that had occurred in the Council, and also in the public media, it is reasonable to conclude that the Council Fathers were well aware that the new wording postponed any interest in collectively bringing Jews to Christ into the indefinite eschatological future. On October 4, 1965, *The New York Times* described the new phraseology as "an expression of the long-term 'eschatological' hope of the Church for the eventual unity of all mankind ... But there is no call to active proselytization and no presentation of conversion as the price of brotherhood."

Three days before the Council vote, a self-designated "International Association of Bishops" distributed a letter

<sup>16</sup> For "a quick presentation of the preconciliar work that led to the declaration *Nostra Aetate*," see Alberto Melloni, "Nostra Aetate and the Discovery of the Sacrament of Otherness," in Cunningham, et al, *Catholic Church and Jewish People*: 129-151.

<sup>17</sup> Beatrice Bruteau, ed., *Merton and Judaism, Holiness in Words: Recognition, Repentance, and Renewal* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003), pp. 223-224.

<sup>18</sup> Naturally, this argument did not exclude individual Jews who might choose to exercise their freedom of religion and seek baptism.

<sup>19</sup> Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, 204-205.

<sup>20</sup> *Acta Syn* III.8, 648. My thanks to Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P., a member of the drafting team for *Nostra Aetate*, for this citation.

<sup>21</sup> Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, 275.

urging rejection of *Nostra Aetate*. Signed by Bishop Luigi Carli, Archbishop Maurice Mathieu Louis Rigaud and the later excommunicated Archbishop Marcel Lefèbvre, the letter among other things protested that it was “unworthy of the Council” to have framed “the future conversion of Israel” so as to preclude proselytizing.<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, this perception from opponents of *Nostra Aetate* agrees with the opinion of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel that the declaration was “devoid of any expression of hope for conversion.”<sup>23</sup>

That this understanding of the expression “the Church awaits the day” was shared by friends and foes of the Declaration, by an informed Jewish commentator, and was so explicated in the media—and that there were no alternative interpretations circulating—demonstrates that its meaning was crystal clear to the Council Fathers when they overwhelmingly voted their approval.

As a conciliar declaration, then, *Nostra Aetate*, §4 authoritatively relegated thoughts for a communal Jewish turn to Christ into the indefinite eschatological future. In the words during the Council of Archbishop Patrick O’Boyle of Washington, D.C., “The destiny of the Jewish people depends totally on the ways of Divine Providence and the grace of God. If we express our hope in words [suggesting] we are guided by the definite and conscious intention of working for their conversion, we set up a new and high wall of division, which makes any fruitful dialogue impossible. ... [We should instead] remain within the limits of our

knowledge and respect the hidden ways of Divine Providence.”<sup>24</sup>

The Council's futurist eschatological approach was a principal contribution to what I have termed a “theology of shalom.” “Right relationship” with Jews becomes possible when Catholics affirm the mystery that Jews dwell in covenant relationship with God until the End of Days. *Nostra Aetate*'s futurist eschatology helps explain why in the Catholic Church today “there is no organized Catholic missionary activity towards Jews as is for all other non-Christian religions.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, these futurist perspectives were vigorously reiterated in a recent essay by Cardinal Walter Kasper published in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*: “the Church does not take it upon herself to orchestrate the realization of the unfathomable mystery. She cannot do so. Instead, she lays the when and the how entirely in God's hands. God alone can bring about

<sup>22</sup> See Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, 272, 274.

<sup>23</sup> Reuven Kimelman, “Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish-Christian Relations,” *The Edah Journal* 4/2 (2004), p. 6, citing, Abraham J. Heschel, “From Mission to Dialogue,” *Conservative Judaism* 21 (Spring, 1967), p. 10. Available at: [http://www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/4\\_2\\_Kimelman.pdf](http://www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/4_2_Kimelman.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, 199-200. Apparently, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn disagrees with the Council on this point. In a 2008 article published in a British Catholic newspaper, he argued that, “The fact that the Church has apologised for the diverse forms of compulsion which they have had to suffer throughout the Christian era implies that Christians have now irrevocably renounced all forms of [coercive] proselytism. This does not mean that Christians for their part have abandoned the mandate to proclaim the Gospel 'to the Jews first' which the Apostles received from Christ and which they passed on to the Church. On the other hand, it means that this mandate must be carried out in the most sensitive way, cleansed of all un-Christian motives” [“Judaism's Way to Salvation,” *The Tablet* (March 29, 2008): <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/articles/11223/>].

<sup>25</sup> Walter Cardinal Kasper, “The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavour of the Catholic Church,” address delivered at Boston College, Nov. 6, 2002, III. <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/educational-and-liturgical-materials/classic-articles/496-kasper02nov6.html>.

the Kingdom of God in which the whole of Israel is saved and eschatological peace is bestowed on the world."<sup>26</sup>

### 3. Avery Dulles' Minimalist Reading of *Nostra Aetate*

Before proceeding with a survey of the implementation of the Second Vatican Council in later ecclesial documents about Jews and Judaism, it is useful to observe at this point that the reception of *Nostra Aetate*, §4 into the life of the Catholic community has not been without disputation. Perhaps the most influential reservations appeared in two articles published in 2002 and 2005 by the late Cardinal Avery Dulles.<sup>27</sup> The sway of his arguments is evident in some recent texts, as will be seen below.

Alarmed by theological statements that appeared to him to compromise the Christian conviction that Christ is necessary for salvation, he felt that "Jews are obliged to take cognizance of the New Testament" and that "conversion to Christ, baptism and adherence to the church are ... important for Jews."<sup>28</sup> Hence, he thought interreligious dialogue had to be viewed as an occasion to invite others to faith in Christ because Christians "[b]elieving that the Son of God has lived among us, ... will wish to make him known, loved, praised, confessed, and obeyed by as many people as possible."<sup>29</sup> He also (correctly) emphasized that from a Christian perspective Jewish covenantal life cannot be seen as totally

separate from life in Christ or that there are "two independent covenants, one for Jews and another for Christians, running on parallel tracks to the end of history."<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, his arguments were based on a binary way of thinking that effectively denied that *Nostra Aetate* had reformed very much.

Thus, he alleged that a Catholic-Jewish dialogue working paper entitled "Reflections on Covenant and Mission" appeared "to say that Christians can evangelize without pronouncing the name of Jesus,"<sup>31</sup> even though the document in question had explicitly declared that, "the Catholic Church must ... always witness to its faith in the presence of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ to Jews and to all other people."<sup>32</sup> Dulles seemed to think that either Catholic participants in interreligious dialogue must intend for their Jewish interlocutors to be moved to seek baptism or they are not adequately witnessing to their faith in Christ. However, this either/or logic becomes untenable in the light of *Nostra Aetate*'s decision to see a Jewish "turn to Christ" as an eschatological matter left in the hands of God. Post-*Nostra Aetate* Catholics can witness fully to their Christian faith while dialoguing with Jews without the hope or burden of expecting their interlocutors to abandon or totally reconfigure their Jewish identities and seek baptism. Rather, their mutual witness to each other reinforces their respective distinctive commitments to God's Reign, which Catholics

<sup>26</sup> "Striving for Mutual Respect in Modes of Prayer," IV, pp. 8-9. Available at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-todays-dialogue/good-friday-prayer/446-kasper08apr16.html>.

<sup>27</sup> "Covenant and Mission," *America* (October 21, 2002): 8-11 [available at <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-todays-dialogue/conversion/519-dulles02oct21.html>]; and "The Covenant With Israel," *First Things* (November 2005): 16-21 [available at: <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/08/the-covenant-with-israel--42>].

<sup>28</sup> Dulles, "Covenant and Mission," 10, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Dulles, "Covenant with Israel," 21.

<sup>30</sup> Dulles, "Covenant and Mission," 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Reflections on Covenant and Mission." Available at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/interreligious/517-ncs-bccia02aug12.html>.

understand as both proleptically<sup>33</sup> present and yet to be eschatologically realized.

The liberation from such expectations enables Catholics to be more open to learning from the ongoing Jewish relationship with God, but Dulles seemed to prefer a thoroughly self-referential way of thinking of interreligious dialogue. Acknowledging that, "Undoubtedly Christians have much to learn from Jews," he immediately qualified this by asserting, "and [they] will profit immensely from the Jews' adherence to Christ (Rom 11:12). This gives us even greater motives for sharing with Jews the good news that the Son of God came to be their savior as well as ours. We force nothing on them, but invite them with patience and love to share our joy."<sup>34</sup> Apparently, Catholics could not both witness to their Christian faith and learn much from the Jewish witness to their distinctive and dynamic faith-life with God today.

Dulles' impoverished view of dialogue relates to another binary conceptualization. Either one ignores the rich flowering of Jewish spirituality in post-New Testament centuries (by speaking exclusively in terms of Old Testament "promises") or one is giving an unacceptable "independent validity to the Old Covenant [... depicting] the Old and New Covenants as two 'separate but equal' parallel paths to salvation, the one intended for Jews, the other for gentiles."<sup>35</sup> Such binary logic precludes Catholics, working from within their faith-experience of Christ, from conceiving of Judaism's ongoing covenantal life today as deeply involving Christ in the Spirit, despite Jewish rejection of

<sup>33</sup> To experience something proleptically is to experience in the present a reality that will be fully realized in the future.

<sup>34</sup> Avery Dulles, "Letter to the Editor," *Commonweal* magazine, (February 28, 2003): 2.

<sup>35</sup> Dulles, "Covenant with Israel," 20.

Christian preaching of the gospel. By avoiding logical polarities, is it not possible for Catholic theology to maintain both the distinctiveness (and worth) of the Jewish covenantal experience and the universal salvific activity of Christ? A "theology of shalom" is oriented to developing an affirmative theological explication of this, but a neo-supersessionist approach seeks to deny the legitimacy of the question.

I suggested above that Dulles' binary way of thinking effectively denied that *Nostra Aetate* changed anything. A few passages in his articles are especially pertinent in this regard:

The Second Vatican Council, while providing a solid and traditional framework for discussing Jewish-Christian relations, did not attempt to settle all questions. In particular, it left open the question whether the Old Covenant remains in force today. Are there two covenants, one for Jews and one for Christians? If so, are the two related as phases of a single developing covenant, a single saving plan of God?<sup>36</sup>

The first sentence in this quotation relates to an earlier comment on *Nostra Aetate*: "The Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, though excellent, is not exhaustive or sufficient. It needs to be understood in the broader context of the full teaching of the council."<sup>37</sup> There is a methodological problem here. If one attempts to read *Nostra Aetate* in the light of conciliar documents that did not have the particular questions about the church's unique relationship to Judaism in view, one risks subordinating the "hermeneutic of reform" to a "hermeneutic of continuity" with received traditions. In other words, and to recall Benedict XVI's words cited above, *Nostra Aetate*'s task "to evaluate and define in a new way the relationship between the Church and the faith of Israel"

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

is undermined if subordinated to other texts that did not address that specific question. *Nostra Aetate* must be interpreted through a hermeneutic of reform.

Therefore, what did Dulles mean by claiming that the Second Vatican Council provided a traditional framework for discussing Jewish-Christian relations? Apparently, he meant "that it left open the question of whether the Old Covenant remains in force today." The question about one or two covenants is a different question, but one that arises only if one has already concluded that Israel's covenantal life remains "in force."

Thinking in a binary fashion, Dulles was inclined to answer his question about what remains "in force" with as minimal an affirmation as possible. Departing from *Nostra Aetate*, §4's grounding in Romans 9-11, Dulles drew instead upon the Letter to the Hebrews:

The most formal statement on the status of the Sinai covenant under Christianity appears in the Letter to the Hebrews, which points out that in view of the new covenant promised by God through the prophet Jeremiah, the first covenant is "obsolete" and "ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). The priesthood and the law have changed (Heb. 7:12). Christ, we are told, "abolishes the first [covenant] in order to establish the second" (Heb. 10:9).<sup>38</sup>

Dulles' characterization of Hebrews is very debatable. As Luke Timothy Johnson has stated, "[T]he New Testament compositions were not written from a position of Christian superiority to Judaism. They were, rather, composed in the context of competition among sects within the framework of Judaism. For Dulles to speak of Hebrews as 'the most formal

<sup>38</sup> Dulles, "Covenant and Mission," 10-11.

statement on the status of the Sinai covenant under Christianity,' is, at the very least, anachronistic."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as Johnson observed elsewhere,<sup>40</sup> Dulles' use of the preposition in "the status of the Sinai covenant under Christianity" was disturbing, redolent of triumphalism.

A number of recent exegetical commentaries have warned against uncritically reading Hebrews as claiming that Christianity has replaced Judaism. Among other things, the biblical understanding that God's relationship with the People of Israel is marked by a succession of covenantal renewals, which might be expressed in modern terms as evolving expressions of the overarching Covenant with God, must be borne in mind. Seen in this light, Hebrews' conceives of the blood of Christ's sacrifice as enacting a covenantal renewal ritual between God and the Jewish people. The author of Hebrews portrays Christ as the High Priest who provides access to the heavenly throne of God by virtue of being exalted to God's right hand. "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere a copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb. 9:22,24).

This renewed covenant in Christ's blood is seen by the anonymous writer of Hebrews as the latest and ultimate re-expression of God's covenant with Israel. As Luke Timothy Johnson observes, "The author of Hebrews does not stand

<sup>39</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "Christians and Jews: Starting Over—Why the Real Dialogue Has Just Begun," *Commonweal* (Jan. 31, 2003). Available at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-todays-dialogue/conversion/526-johnson03jan31.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Reply to Avery Dulles, "Letter to the Editor," *Commonweal* magazine, (February 28, 2003): 2.

outside the original covenant that God established with the 'seed of Abraham' and the promise that God secured by his unfailing oath (2:16; 6:13-18); rather the author stands within the commitments and story of this covenanted people. ... The author makes a claim for a new covenant precisely for this people. ... There is here no contrast between Gentiles and Jews. There is certainly yet no 'Christianity' facing off against an equally defined 'Judaism.' Hebrews does not therefore speak as representative of a Gentile Christianity that claims to have superseded Judaism."<sup>41</sup>

Writing from the perspective that Hebrews was written to reassure a church in Rome after the fall of the Temple, Alan Mitchell makes another important point about the genre of Hebrews. It is a sermon, not a doctrinal exposition:

[O]ne has to assume first that Hebrews was a sermon written for and delivered to Christians alone. As an in-house document it could not have been intended to make a public and definitive statement on the status of Judaism at the time it was composed. Addressed to a Roman house church, probably dominated by Gentile Christians, it seems intended rather to stress what Christians have in Christ and what is worthwhile holding on to, rather than what Jews had lost in the failure of the First Revolt.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews : A Commentary*. The New Testament Library (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 211.

<sup>42</sup> Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*. Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 26. Mitchell poses a series of useful questions that draw out the implications of a post-Temple setting for Hebrews: "Were the author's arguments so constructed because he believed that the Temple never had any legitimacy, or out of respect for the fact that it was no longer standing? Were his arguments shaped to show the insufficiency of the old cultic system, or to address a question in the minds of his listeners about what kind of access to God was now possible in an age when familiar means of mediation were no longer available? When he speaks of a new covenant, which stresses the interior over the exterior, is it because he wishes to challenge the

Since it is a sermon, it is inappropriate to simplistically quote Hebrews to make apodictic statements about Sinai's obsolescence. "Hebrews was written by a Christian for Christians, to help them appreciate the salvation that is theirs in Christ. Any attempt to use it against Jews is inappropriate, unwarranted, and unfounded."<sup>43</sup>

It should also be stressed that Hebrews understands history to be nearing its eschatological climax. By drawing upon Jeremiah 31:31-34 in speaking of a "new covenant," (similar to the Qumran community) it taps into yet another eschatological text. Since the author of Hebrews understands himself to be writing "in these last days" (1:2), it is natural for him to be attracted to Jeremiah's vision of a new epoch when the law is written upon the covenanted people's hearts, who consequently know God directly and need not teach one another about God anymore. Since Christians living two thousand years later are still teaching one another about God, it is clear that Jeremiah's "new covenant" has yet to be fully realized.

Thus, Dulles' appeal to Hebrews to imply that Jewish Torah-centered life is obsolete today is exegetically shaky.<sup>44</sup> Hebrews is by no means a "formal statement on the status of the Sinai covenant under Christianity," let alone the New Testament's "most formal statement." The author of Hebrews had other concerns. "Hebrews does not even take

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efficaciousness of the old covenant, or is it because the disappearance of the external means of the 'old' now make interiority a necessity? Surely these are impossible questions to answer with certitude, but they may be able to place Hebrews in a broader context of inclusiveness by trying to show where the 'new' is the logical completion of the 'old' when the usual institutions of the 'old' are no longer available to accomplish their intended goals" [p. 27].

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>44</sup> Although it must be mentioned that Hebrews exegete Cardinal Albert Vanhoye holds a minority viewpoint among exegetes about this that perhaps informed Dulles' views. More on this below.

up—indeed, it was not in a position to take up—the status of Judaism (as a religion among other religions!) in light of the experience of Jesus as exalted Lord."<sup>45</sup>

The only New Testament writer to consider at any length the question of Jews outside of Christ is, in fact, the Apostle Paul, precisely in chapters 9-11 of his letter to the Romans that was so central to *Lumen Gentium*, §16's and *Nostra Aetate*, §4's teaching about Jews today.

In Romans, Paul is bothered by boastful attitudes and speech. He wants no boasting of strong over weak (Rom. 14:1; 15:1), of weak over strong (14:3b-4), of Jew over Gentile (2:17ff), or of Gentile over Jew (1:18ff). Boasting signifies for Paul a lack of appreciation of God's mercy (3:9,27; 5:1-5). It also shows a disregard for the unity of the Body of Christ (12:1-21). In his reflections on boasting, he focuses on the boasting of Gentiles in the Church over Jews outside the Church (11:13-14,25-26). This leads Paul for the first time to write about the "status" of unbaptized Jews and of the apostles' overall failure to successfully preach the Gospel to them.

The Letter to the Romans was therefore the most applicable New Testament text for the Council fathers to actualize. Like Paul, *mutatis mutandis*, they were concerned about negative Christian attitudes toward Jews. Indeed, by recalling his admonitions the Council indirectly highlighted the historical fact that the later church had virtually ignored Paul on this point. Instead of putting aside boastfulness, the prevailing Christian approach (for various historical reasons) was to delegitimize Judaism and eventually to discriminate against Jews in Christendom.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *Hebrews*, 212.

By invoking an exegetically dubious reading of Hebrews and seeking to harmonize its perspectives with the very different circumstances and concerns of Romans, Dulles was led to write about today's Judaism in ways that seem unaffected by the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*: "With respect to the ceremonial law, therefore, we may say that the Old Covenant is in a sense abolished while being at the same time fulfilled. The law of Christ gives a definitive interpretation to the Torah of Moses. Yet the ancient rites retain their value as signs of what was to come. The priesthood, the temple, and the sacrifices are not extinct; they survive in a super-eminent way in Christ and the Church."<sup>46</sup> Although it is not clear if Dulles meant for "ceremonial law" to include the observance of all the *mitzvot* in the Torah, his formulation failed to acknowledge that priesthood, temple, and sacrifices are also not extinct in contemporary Judaism: they were transformed by the rabbis after New Testament times into a living, Torah-centered, home- and synagogue-based religious heritage. Dulles did not grapple with the existential reality of Judaism as lived today. He was able to do this by his narrow reading of *Nostra Aetate*, but also by ignoring the important post-conciliar ecclesial documents to which we will shortly turn.

First, though, it will be helpful to sketch the elements of what I have termed "neo-supersessionism," some (but not all) of which have been seen in the preceding discussion of Cardinal Dulles' approach to these matters. Neo-supersessionism is a related cluster of ideas that began to surface perhaps in the mid-1980s in response to the mainstream trajectory of a "theology of shalom" that had been developing since the Second Vatican Council. It is not organized into a coherent system; commentators who express one tendency that could be called neo-supersessionist may be unaware of its interconnections with

<sup>46</sup> Dulles, "Covenant with Israel," 19.

other related ideas. But this reaction against post-conciliar theological developments can properly be called a new form of supersessionism because some of its expressions could just as easily have been (and in some cases were) asserted prior to *Nostra Aetate* as afterwards.<sup>47</sup> Neo-supersessionist thought threatens to undermine the conviction of the Council fathers that reform was needed, that the times demanded a communal "examination of conscience" over Christian teachings about Jews.

It must be emphatically stressed that unlike classical Christian supersessionism, which was often based on animosity toward Jews driven by the deicide charge, present-day exponents of "neo-supersessionism" are not

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<sup>47</sup> Space does not permit a detailed discussion of this, but what I am calling "neo-supersessionism" should be distinguished from what David Novak has called "soft supersessionism." He reasons that for "hard supersessionism... the old covenant is dead." For soft supersessionism, "those Jews who do not accept Jesus' messiahhood are still part of the covenant in the sense of 'what God has joined together let no one put asunder.' Nevertheless, they are out of step with the fulfillment of the covenant which Jesus began already and which he shall return to totally complete." Novak says that he thinks "Christianity must be generically supersessionist" in this "soft" sense, and has suspicions about Christians who claim they are not supersessionist at all because "Christians must believe that they are offering the world something better or else why not remain Jews or become Jews?" ["The Covenant in Rabbinic Thought," in Eugene B. Korn and John T. Pawlikowski, eds., *Two Faiths, One Covenant? – Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other* (Lanham, MD, New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 66, 67.] Prescinding from the question of whether Jews can define what constitutes authentic Christianity according to not fully apt theoretical questions, there are indeed some affinities between "soft-" and "neo-supersessionism." But there is a major difference. I am using "neo-supersessionism" to describe a set of Catholic tendencies that effectively seeks to change *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent documents from texts of reform to texts of continuity. Especially significant is the resistance to develop Catholic theologies that seriously engage Jewish self-understanding. "Soft supersessionism" seems to be an outsider's way of categorizing various Christian opinions about Judaism that does not reckon with the particularities of Catholic magisterial developments and indeed could impede a Catholic *chesbon hanefesh*, a reckoning of the soul.

motivated by hostility to Jews and certainly not by antisemitism. They are moved by their dedication to certain understandings of soteriology. As Dulles worried, "Once we grant that there are some persons for whom it is not important to acknowledge Christ, to be baptized and to receive the sacraments, we raise questions about our own religious life."<sup>48</sup>

The raising of core religious questions about our own religious life by taking seriously the post-conciliar encounter with Jews is indeed inevitable. This is precisely because from a Catholic point of view, as Cardinal Dulles correctly insisted, Christian and Jewish covenantal lives are intertwined and not disconnected. Or as Cardinal Kasper has expressed it, "we Catholics [have become] aware with greater clarity that the faith of Israel is that of our elder brothers, and, most importantly, that Judaism is as a sacrament of every otherness that as such the Church must learn to discern, recognize and celebrate."<sup>49</sup> Therefore, any change in the Catholic understanding of Judaism—and it is inarguable that *Nostra Aetate* represents a major "discontinuity" with the long-standing, pervasive "teaching of contempt"—inescapably impacts Catholic self-understanding as well.

Therefore, a "neo-supersessionist" perspective avoids rather than confronts unsettling questions about "our own religious life" by tending to do one or more of the following:

- A. construing *Nostra Aetate* minimally by subordinating it to other conciliar documents and/or inflating its continuity with received traditions;

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<sup>48</sup> Dulles, "Covenant and Mission," 11.

<sup>49</sup> Walter Kasper, "Address on the Thirty-seventh Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*," October 28, 2002.

- B. disregarding post-*Nostra Aetate* official ecclesial documents;
- C. being unconcerned with the history of post-New Testament Judaism and/or of contemporary Jewish self-understanding;
- D. invoking the Letter to the Hebrews to circumscribe the Letter to the Romans;
- E. preferring a realized eschatology over a futurist eschatology, especially when speaking of "fulfilment";
- F. seeing an intention to convert the other as necessary in interreligious dialogue; and
- G. understanding "covenant" in terms of promises rather than as a continuing relationship; and so doubt the ongoing validity/vitality of the Sinai covenant after Christ. God's faithfulness is upheld with regard to promise(s), but not in terms of an ongoing walking through life with the Jewish people.

With this introduction to "neo-supersessionist" thought, we turn now to one of the most significant post-conciliar implementation documents that such perspectives prefer to ignore.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> A very recent instance of "neo-supersessionist" thought may be found in Brian W. Harrison, "The Catholic Liturgy and 'Supersessionism,'" *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (June 2009): 20-27. The article argues on the basis of liturgical texts, many of which have not been reconsidered in the wake of *Nostra Aetate*, that the promises made to Abraham ought to be distinguished from the "Mosaic covenant" in Catholic theology, and that the latter has been ended by the coming of Christ. Harrison seems unaware of the pertinent documents of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and so also does not deem Jewish self-understanding to be relevant.

#### 4. The 1974 Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 4

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, Catholic leaders began to put into action its various decrees and declarations. As Cardinal Jorge Maria Mejía has explained, under the supervision of Cardinal Augustin Bea it was necessary "to institutionalize within the Holy See the absolutely new relationship with Judaism. ... [In addition,] guidelines [were needed] so that the Catholic Church and its central governing bodies, as well as the National Episcopal Conferences, could establish these relations, which were equally new, or in fact, totally alien for the great majority of the world's episcopate."<sup>51</sup> Already in 1969, work had begun in the Vatican to compose a document to put into practice the perspectives of *Nostra Aetate*. Thus, soon after October 22, 1974, when Pope Paul VI established the "Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews" to nurture the embryonic unprecedented relationship with Jews, the new commission finalized drafts that had been composed with the participation "of all the bishops who were members of the Secretariat for Christian Unity."<sup>52</sup> On December 1, 1974, it officially promulgated, "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 4."

As an official Vatican document intended to "help to bring into actual existence in the life of the Church the intentions expressed"<sup>53</sup> by an ecumenical council, the 1974 Guidelines is a highly authoritative text. Its principles cannot be ignored.

<sup>51</sup> "The Creation and Work of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews," in Cunningham, et al, *Catholic Church and Jewish People*, 153.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>53</sup> Vatican "Guidelines" (1974), Preamble. See: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/vatican-curia/277-guidelines.html>

For the purposes of this essay, the following should especially be noted:

- A. The "links and relationships ["binding the Church to Judaism"] render obligatory a better mutual understanding and renewed mutual esteem. 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."<sup>54</sup>

This is an exceedingly important statement. If, because of the spiritual connectedness between Christianity and Judaism, Christians need an awareness of Jewish self-understanding of their lived religious experience, then: (1) Jews must presently enjoy an ongoing and authentic relationship with God; and (2) ignorance of Jewish self-understanding will result in a distorted understanding of Christianity. Or to apply the last point in a particular way, because Judaism and Christianity are organically related, Christian theologians are obliged to reckon with Judaism on its own terms as lived today.

Pope John Paul II, recognizing the significance of this principle, reiterated and expanded upon it on several occasions.<sup>55</sup> His address to Jewish leaders in Mainz, Germany on Nov. 17, 1980 has major import:

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Thus, as early as March 12, 1979: "The Guidelines ... whose value I wish to underline and reaffirm ...stress a point of particular importance: '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 the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.'" See also, "Necessary for any sincere dialogue is the intention of each partner to

A second dimension of our dialogue—the true and central one—is the meeting between present-day Christian Churches and the present-day people of the Covenant concluded with Moses. It is important here "that Christians—so continue the post-conciliar Guidelines—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"

As will be discussed in more depth below, here John Paul II connected the imperative for Christians to understand Judaism accurately and on its own terms with "the religious reality lived by ... the present-day people of the Covenant concluded with Moses." It is the combined recognition of ongoing Jewish covenantal life and the integral relationship between Christianity and Judaism that requires Catholic theology to engage the lived Jewish experience and tradition.

In terms of textual authority, it should also be mentioned that the authority already enjoyed by the 1974 Guidelines by virtue of implementing the will of an ecumenical Council has been intensified by being repeatedly affirmed and utilized by a pope.

- B. "When commenting on biblical tests, emphasis will be laid on the continuity of our faith with that of the earlier Covenant, in the perspective of the promises, without minimizing those elements of Christianity which are original. We believe that those promises

allow others to define themselves 'in the light of their own religious experience' [1974 *Guidelines*, Introduction]" (Miami, Sept. 11, 1987). For an online collection of John Paul's writings about Catholic relations with Jews, see on the website of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii.html>.

were fulfilled with the first coming of Christ. But it is nonetheless true that we still await their perfect fulfillment in his glorious return at the end of time."<sup>56</sup>

This paragraph concerning liturgical preaching shows an important consequence of the Council's affirmation in *Nostra Aetate*, 4 that "the church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all peoples will call on God with one voice and serve him shoulder to shoulder." When speaking of the church's continuity with the "Old Testament," the Guidelines' use of "fulfillment" language explicitly presents a tension between what has "already" been fulfilled and what has "not yet" been fulfilled with the first coming of Christ. The encounter with the living reality of the Jewish people impacts the Christian understanding of how Christ "fulfills" earlier "promises." In terms of Christian theology, fulfillment is proleptic: it is the present experience of a reality to be fully realized in the future.

- C. "The history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem, but rather went on to develop a religious tradition. And, although we believe that the importance and meaning of that tradition was deeply affected by the coming of Christ, it is still nonetheless rich in religious values. With the prophets and the apostle Paul, 'the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and 'serve Him with one accord' (Zeph. 3:9)" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4)."<sup>57</sup>

"An effort will be made to acquire a better understanding of whatever in the Old Testament retains its own perpetual value (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 14-15), since that has not been canceled by the later interpretation of the New Testament.

<sup>56</sup> Vatican, "Guidelines" (1974), II.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., III.

Rather, the New Testament brings out the full meaning of the Old, while both Old and New illumine and explain each other (cf. *ibid.*, 16)."<sup>58</sup>

These two statements may be considered together because they both refer to the history of Judaism—both in biblical and post-biblical times—as having perpetual religious values that have not been nullified by the coming of Christ or canceled by the New Testament. It is noteworthy that the explicit recognition of Judaism's post-Temple development into a tradition "rich in religious values" is immediately followed by *Nostra Aetate's* futurist eschatological formulation. A realized Christian eschatology tends to overlook post-New Testament Jewish existence, whereas a futurist eschatology fosters a respect for Judaism's ongoing religious history.

- D. "To tell the truth, such relations as there have been between Jew and Christian have scarcely ever risen above the level of monologue. From now on, real dialogue must be established. Dialogue presupposes that each side wishes to know the other, and wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other. It constitutes a particularly suitable means of favoring a better mutual knowledge and, especially in the case of dialogue between Jews and Christians, of probing the riches of one's own tradition. Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is; above all, respect for his faith and his religious convictions."<sup>59</sup>

Continuing in its purpose "to implement ... the express intentions of the Council,"<sup>60</sup> the 1974 "Guidelines" described the nature of interreligious dialogue between Catholics and

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., II.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., I.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Conclusion.

Jews that was to be established. The defining purpose of such dialogue was to “increase and deepen” knowledge of each other, with a secondary purpose “of probing the riches of one’s own tradition” as a result of the interaction with the other. These goals demanded respect for “the other as he is.”

Acknowledging that “[i]n virtue of her divine mission, and her very nature, the Church must preach Jesus Christ to the world,’ (*Ad Gentes*, 2),”<sup>61</sup> the “Guidelines” cautioned Catholics to maintain “the strictest respect for religious liberty in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*),” and to “strive to understand the difficulties which arise for the Jewish soul—rightly imbued with an extremely high, pure notion of the divine transcendence—when faced with the mystery of the Incarnate Word.”<sup>62</sup> Since a painful past has caused many Jews to suspect Catholic motives for wanting to discuss religious matters, “it will be vital to guarantee, not only tact, but a great openness of spirit and diffidence with respect to one’s own prejudices.”<sup>63</sup>

The “Guidelines” for the implementation of *Nostra Aetate*, §4 thus established certain common sense principles for Catholic-Jewish dialogue that were widely adopted. The dialogue was for the purposes of mutual understanding and self-understanding, was to be characterized by respect for the other’s religious convictions, and while Christians witnessed to their faith in Christ, they had to be open, humble, and alert to their own biases.

Finally, the conclusion of the “Guidelines” merits being quoted at some length:

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., I.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

The problem of Jewish-Christian relations concerns the Church as such, since it is when “pondering her own mystery” that she encounters the mystery of Israel. Therefore, even in areas where no Jewish communities exist, this remains an important problem. ...

In this field, the bishops will know what best to do on the pastoral level, within the general disciplinary framework of the Church and in line with the common teaching of her magisterium. For example, they will create some suitable commissions or secretariats on a national or regional level, or appoint some competent person to promote the implementation of the conciliar directives and the suggestions made above.

On 22 October 1974, the Holy Father instituted for the universal Church this Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, joined to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. This special Commission, created to encourage and foster religious relations between Jews and Catholics ... will be, within the limits of its competence, at the service of all interested organizations, providing information for them, and helping them to pursue their task in conformity with the instructions of the Holy See.

The Commission wishes to develop this collaboration in order to implement, correctly and effectively, the express intentions of the Council.<sup>64</sup>

What is noteworthy here is the Commission’s mandate to collaborate with bishops on the national and local levels in

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Conclusion.

order to implement correctly the "express intentions of the Council."<sup>65</sup>

### 5. The 1985 Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church.

About a decade after issuing the "Guidelines," the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews promulgated a lengthier document. It was a detailed elaboration on many of the points first made by *Nostra Aetate*, §4 and the 1974 "Guidelines." The "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church" sought not only to continue the implementation of the Council, but in particular to remedy "a painful ignorance of the history and traditions of Judaism, of which only negative aspects and often caricature seem to form part of the stock ideas of many Christians."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> In this regard, the U.S. bishops have over time made important contributions to this collaborative effort to implement the Council. In addition to their 1967 and 1985 "Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations and an important 1975 "Statement on Catholic-Jewish Relations," there are also 1988's *God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching* and *Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion* and 2001's *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah: Implementing the Holy See's "We Remember."* [All are available at: <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops.html>.] The extent of the collaboration between the U.S. bishops and the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews can be seen in the citation in the 1985 Vatican "Notes" of an American document [VI, 25], which is somewhat unusual in a Vatican text. Given the differences with these earlier conference materials, one cannot help but speculate that the Commission was not consulted in the preparation of the June 18, 2009 and August 12, 2009 statements issued by the USCCB, as stipulated by the 1974 Vatican "Guidelines."

<sup>66</sup> Vatican, "Notes" (1985), §27. Available at: <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/vatican-curia/234-notes.html>

Like a multi-stage rocket, the "Notes" further extended the trajectory of the "theology of shalom" launched by *Nostra Aetate* and advanced by the "Guidelines." Two aspects of this trajectory are particularly relevant: how the "Notes" understood (1) the vitality of Jewish religious life today; and (2) eschatology and fulfillment.

In addition to reiterating the insistence of the 1974 "Guidelines" that Catholics must become familiar with Jewish self-understanding,<sup>67</sup> the "Notes" stressed that its "concern for Judaism in Catholic teaching has not merely a historical or archeological foundation. ... [It is a concern] for a still living reality closely related to the Church."<sup>68</sup>

The "Notes" described this "still living reality" by quoting from an important address delivered a few years earlier by Pope John Paul II:

As the Holy Father said in the speech already quoted, after he had again mentioned the "common patrimony" of the Church and Judaism as "considerable:" "To assess it carefully in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people *as they are professed and practiced still today*, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life pastoral of the Church" (italics added). ... The Holy Father has stated this permanent reality of the Jewish people in a remarkable theological formula, in his allocution to the Jewish community of West Germany at Mainz, on November 17th, 1980: "The people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked."<sup>69</sup> [I,3]

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., I, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., I, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

The significance of John Paul II's contributions to "unpacking" the meaning of *Nostra Aetate*, §4 will be discussed in the following section. For now, his explicit description of Jewish covenantal life as having "never been revoked" was clearly reflected in the "Notes" treatment of post-New Testament Judaism:

The history of Israel did not end in 70 A.D. (cf. *Guidelines*, II). It continued, especially in a numerous Diaspora which allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness—often heroic—of its fidelity to the one God and to "exalt Him in the presence of all the living" (Tobit 13:4), while preserving the memory of the land of their forefathers at the heart of their hope (Passover *Seder*). ... The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God's design. 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, "the pure olive on which were grafted the branches of the wild olive which are the gentiles" (John Paul II, 6 March 1982, alluding to Rm. 11:17-24). We must remember how much the balance of relations between Jews and Christians over two thousand years has been negative. We must remind ourselves how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times, taking its start from a patrimony which we long shared, so much so that "the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church" (John Paul II, 6 March 1982).<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., VI, 25.

The fact that the "Notes" discussed post-New Testament Judaism in such positive terms is highly significant. If the Jewish people have manifest "a continuous spiritual fecundity" throughout history, that cannot be unconnected to their covenantal life with God. Their "often heroic" witness of "fidelity to the one God" demonstrates their continuing profound relationship with God, a relationship not delimited by the Christian experience. The repeated invocation of John Paul II by the "Notes" is also striking. Besides continuing the implementation of a conciliar declaration, the Commission's "Notes" are rendered additionally authoritative by consistently incorporating relevant papal teachings.

The "Notes" similarly expanded upon the futurist eschatology previously offered by *Nostra Aetate's* "the church awaits the day" phrase and by the 1974 "Guidelines," III. Like the "Guidelines," the "Notes" discussion of eschatology was linked to the interpretation of Israel's scriptures, in this case regarding Christian typological readings of the "Old Testament." The "Notes" should be quoted at length:

Typological reading only manifests the unfathomable riches of the Old Testament, its inexhaustible content and the mystery of which it is full, and should not lead us to forget that it retains its own value as Revelation that the New Testament often does no more than resume (Mk. 12:29-31). Moreover, the New Testament itself demands to be read in the light of the Old. Primitive Christian catechesis constantly had recourse to this (e.g., 1 Co. 5:6-8; 10:1-11).

Typology further signifies reaching towards the accomplishment of the divine plan, when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). This holds true also for the Church which, realized already in Christ, yet awaits its definitive perfecting as the Body of Christ. The fact that the Body of

Christ is still tending towards its full stature (Eph. 4:12-19) takes nothing from the value of being a Christian. So also the calling of the patriarchs and Exodus from Egypt do not lose their importance and value in God's design from being at the same time intermediate stages (e.g., *Nostra Aetate*, no. 4).

The Exodus, for example, represents an experience of salvation and liberation that is not complete in itself, but has in it, over and above its own meaning, the capacity to be developed further. Salvation and liberation are already accomplished in Christ and gradually realized by the sacraments in the Church. This makes way for the fulfillment of God's design, which awaits its final consummation with the return of Jesus as Messiah, for which we pray each day. The Kingdom, for the coming of which we also pray each day, will be finally established. With salvation and liberation the elect and the whole of Creation will be transformed in Christ (Rm. 8:19-23).

Furthermore, in underlining the eschatological dimension of Christianity we shall reach a greater awareness that the people of God of the Old and the New Testament are tending towards a like end in the future: the coming or return of the Messiah—even if they start from two different points of view. It is more clearly understood that the person of the Messiah is not only a point of division for the people of God but also a point of convergence (*Sussidi per l'ecumenismo*, Diocese of Rome, no. 140). Thus it can be said that Jews and Christians meet in a comparable hope, grounded on the same promise made to Abraham (Gn. 12:1-3; Heb. 6:13-18).<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., II, 7-10.

By its insistence on a futurist eschatology, the "Notes" established a nuanced theological orientation toward "fulfillment" language. Maintaining the "already/not yet" approach of *Nostra Aetate* and the "Guidelines," the "Notes" stated that while salvation has already been "accomplished in Christ" and "gradually realized" by the church's sacraments, these achievements "make way" for the ultimate "fulfillment of God's design" in the future. A set of guidelines for preachers published three years later by the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy would complement this nuanced sense of fulfillment by defining "fulfilled" as "irreversibly inaugurated."<sup>72</sup>

An important consequence of this conception of fulfillment is immediately apparent in the "Notes'" references to Jews and Christians being divided but also converging "towards a like end in the future." Christians and Jews, therefore, have a "responsibility to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah by working together for social justice, respect for the rights of persons and nations and for social and international reconciliation."<sup>73</sup> However, if Christians speak lopsidedly of "fulfillment" as something achieved already, then the ongoing witness of Jews to their relationship with God is emptied of much significance.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> *God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching* (1988), §11. Available at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/478-bcl-1988.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Vatican, "Notes" (1985), II, 11.

<sup>74</sup> N.B. the related later caution of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: "[E]xcessive insistence, characteristic of a certain apologetic, on the probative value attributable to the fulfillment of prophecy must be discarded. This insistence has contributed to harsh judgments by Christians of Jews and their reading of the Old Testament: the more reference to Christ is found in Old Testament texts, the more the incredulity of the Jews is considered inexcusable and obstinate" [*The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian*

Finally, the "Notes" also offered important insights into the spiritual relationship between Judaism and the church. First, the "Church and Judaism cannot ... be seen as two parallel ways of salvation and the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all, 'while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council declaration, *Dignitatis Humanae*' (*Guidelines and Suggestions*, no. 1)."<sup>75</sup> Because of the close spiritual connections between Jews and Christians, Catholic teaching rejects a total separation between the two traditions.

This was, indeed, correctly insisted upon by Cardinal Avery Dulles as discussed above. Nonetheless, Dulles maintained a unified covenantal approach by seeing the value of Jewish covenantal life only in terms of Christian categories: "Undoubtedly Christians have much to learn from Jews, and will profit immensely from the Jews' adherence to Christ."<sup>76</sup> The "Notes," however, by recognizing Judaism's "continuous spiritual fecundity,"<sup>77</sup> could also perceive that Judaism and Christianity are "now irreducibly separated." Their spiritual bond cannot lead to a "playing down or glossing over [of] this rupture,"<sup>78</sup> which will last until the messianic age since "the people of God of the Old and the New Testament are tending towards a like end in the future."<sup>79</sup>

The constellation of interrelated teachings imparted by the "Notes" is a crucial component of a "theology of shalom."

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*Bible* (2001), II,A,5 - §21]. <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/vatican-curia/282-pbc-2001.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Vatican, "Notes" (1985), 1, 7.

<sup>76</sup> Avery Dulles, "Letter to the Editor," *Commonweal* magazine, (February 28, 2003): 2.

<sup>77</sup> Vatican, "Notes" (1985), VI, 25.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 21, D.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 10.

Implementing the conciliar work that Pope Benedict described as evaluating and defining "in a new way the relationship between the Church and the faith of Israel,"<sup>80</sup> the "Notes" established or reiterated certain parameters: (1) Jewish covenantal life is permanent and vital; (2) this vitality is evidenced throughout Jewish history; (3) Judaism and Christianity are closely related and are not disconnected "parallel" traditions; (4) Judaism and Christianity are on converging paths toward the eschatological age, when all God's plans and promises will achieve their complete fulfillment; and (5) in the present time, both Jews and Christians have the covenantal responsibility to "prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah."

The ecclesial authority of the "Notes" rests on several facts: its promulgation by the competent Vatican dicastery (with the approbation of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith) charged to continue the implementation of a conciliar declaration; together with its quotations of previous authoritative documents (*Nostra Aetate*, the 1974 "Guidelines) and the papal pronouncements of John Paul II.

## 6. The Teachings of Pope John Paul II

As already suggested by the previous discussion of the 1985 Vatican "Notes," the long papacy of John Paul II was extremely significant for the unfolding post-conciliar new relationship between Catholics and Jews. As a boy growing up in Poland, Karol Wojtyla had many Jewish friends, only a few of whom would survive the Shoah into adulthood, especially Jerzy Kluger.<sup>81</sup> When he became Pope John Paul

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<sup>80</sup> "Address to the Roman Curia," December 22, 2005.

<sup>81</sup> See Darcy O'Brien, *The Hidden Pope: The Untold Story of a Lifelong Friendship that is Changing the Relationship between Catholics and Jews: The Personal Journey of John Paul II and Jerzy Kluger* (New York: Rodale Books, 1998).

II on October 16, 1978, he brought with him a very personal commitment to shalom with the Jewish people.

Thus, already on March 12, 1979, he told an international delegation of Jewish leaders that the Second Vatican Council "understood that our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities. ... It is on [this] basis ... 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."<sup>82</sup> If "fraternal dialogue" is understood as described in the 1974 "Guidelines," which the pope indeed affirmed extensively in this address, then its principal purpose was to increase and deepen knowledge of the other with great respect for the other's faith and religious convictions. While quoting the "Guidelines" that "the Church must preach Jesus Christ to the world," the pope clearly saw interreligious dialogue as the venue for pursuing "that fuller mutual understanding which we are called to achieve."<sup>83</sup>

In fact, John Paul's twenty-six year long papacy followed precisely this path. In over fifty addresses and apostolic letters that fill a book-length volume,<sup>84</sup> he gradually constructed a network of theological teachings about the Catholic Church's relationship to the Jewish people that flowed from his understanding of *Nostra Aetate* and his personal experiences with lived Judaism.

<sup>82</sup> "Address to Representatives of Jewish Organizations," March 12, 1979, <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/231-jp2-79mar12.html>

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> See Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds., *John Paul II: A Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism, 1979-1995* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

Of particular interest for this essay is John Paul II's thinking about Jewish covenantal life as reflected in such phrases as "the people of the Covenant" or the covenant "never revoked by God." He first broached this topic during the aforementioned major address delivered in Mainz, Germany on November 17, 1980.<sup>85</sup> In encouraging the practice of Catholic-Jewish dialogue, he observed:

The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God [cf. Rom. 11:29], and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible. ...

A second dimension of our dialogue—the true and central one—is the meeting between present-day Christian Churches and the present-day people of the Covenant concluded with Moses. It is important here that Christians—so continue the post-conciliar Guidelines—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" [Introduction]. The way for this mutual knowledge is dialogue.

At Mainz, John Paul II correlated "the people of God of the [unrevoked] Old Covenant" with the first part of the Christian Bible. "Old Covenant" thus incorporates the entire corpus of the Christian Old Testament, containing all the distinct "covenants" it narrates, such as the covenants with Abraham, at Sinai, with David, etc. Biblically, the Torah covenant at Sinai lies at the heart of Jewish covenantal life,

<sup>85</sup> See: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/297-jp2-80nov17.html>

so it was quite appropriate for the pope to also describe the "people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God" as "the present-day people of the Covenant concluded with Moses." In the entire collection of the writings and addresses of John Paul II on Jews and Judaism, there is no evidence that he discriminated among the various biblical covenantal articulations, preferring some over others or thinking that some might no longer be valid. In fact, the evidence in all his writings on the subject indicates that he thought of the "Old Covenant, never revoked by God," in an inclusive, collective sense—certainly including the Torah of Sinai.

This is an important point to make because such scholars as Cardinal Albert Vanhoye (elevated to the College of Cardinals in 2006) have attempted to argue that John Paul II could not have meant that the Sinai covenant was still in effect.<sup>86</sup> In an article published in 1994, which likely informed Cardinal Dulles' views, he claimed that the covenant with Abraham, especially in terms of divine promises, endured but that Sinai is virtually inert after Christ. In addition to drawing on a debatable reading of the Letter to the Hebrews to make this case, he also drew upon Galatians 3:15-18, 29. In so doing he entirely overlooked the radically different context from Hebrews of that Pauline letter, which was concerned with whether Gentiles in Christ had to become halakhically observant, not with whether Jews outside the church should cease Torah observance.

Exegetical issues aside, how could John Paul II speak in Mainz of "the present-day people of the Covenant concluded

<sup>86</sup> See Joseph Sievers, "A History of the Interpretation of Romans 11:29," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 14 (1997) 381-442. A shorter version may be found as "God's Gifts and Call are Irrevocable: The Reception of Romans 11:29 through the Centuries and Christian-Jewish Relations," in *Reading Israel in Romans: Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations*, ed. Cristina Grenholm and Daniel Patte (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 127-173.

with Moses," if he agreed with Vanhoye that Sinai is obsolete? Moreover, as Joseph Sievers notes, "Vanhoye also does not seem to pay sufficient attention to the context. The Pope was speaking to Jewish leaders. Is it conceivable that he came to tell them that God's irrevocable covenant is no longer theirs? Apparently no one understood him to mean that and the further use of this phrase in [the 1985 Vatican "Notes"] seems to preclude such an understanding."<sup>87</sup> Moreover, had the 1985 "Notes" misrepresented John Paul's views, he would surely have corrected the text before approving its promulgation.

It is beyond imagining that John Paul II could think in neo-supersessionist terms without leaving any hints to that effect in all his writings on the subject. In fact, in the years following Mainz he went on to repeatedly say virtually the opposite. Note the underlined phrases below in which he continues to speak of Israel's story in collective terms, often explicitly mentioning the centrality of Sinai:

Where Catholics are concerned, it will continue to be an explicit and very important part of my mission to repeat and emphasize that our attitude to the Jewish religion should be one of the greatest respect, since the Catholic faith is rooted in the eternal truths contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the irrevocable covenant made with Abraham. We, too, gratefully hold these same truths of our Jewish heritage and look upon you as our brothers and sisters in the Lord. For the Jewish people themselves, Catholics should have not only respect but also great fraternal love for it is the teaching of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures that the Jews are beloved of God, who has called them with an irrevocable

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 439 (p. 157 in the shorter version).

calling [To the Australian Jewish Community, November 26, 1986].<sup>88</sup>

It is fitting at the beginning of our meeting to emphasize our faith in the one God, who chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and made with them a covenant of eternal love which was never revoked [cf. Gen. 27:13; Rom. 11:29]. It was rather confirmed by the gift of the Torah to Moses, opened by the Prophets to the hope of eternal redemption and to the universal commitment for justice and peace [Address to American Jewish Leaders, September 11, 1987].<sup>89</sup>

The relationship between Jews and Christians has essentially changed and improved since the Second Vatican Council and its solemn declaration *Nostra Aetate*. Since then there is an official dialogue whose proper and central dimension should be the "encounter between the present Christian Churches and today's people of the Covenant made with Moses," as I expressed on another occasion [Address to the Viennese Jewish Community, June 24, 1988].<sup>90</sup>

There is yet another nation [that is part of Polish history], a particular people: the people of the patriarchs, of Moses and the Prophets, the heirs of the faith of Abraham. ... The people who lived with us for many generations has remained with us after the terrible death of millions of its sons and daughters. Together we await

the Day of Judgment and Resurrection [Jasna Gora Meditation, September 26, 1990].<sup>91</sup>

In this context we should also mention the tragedy of the Jews. For Christians the heavy burden of guilt for the murder of the Jewish people must be an enduring call to repentance; thereby we can overcome every form of anti-Semitism and establish a new relationship with our kindred nation of the Old Covenant [Address to the New Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See. Nov. 8, 1990].<sup>92</sup>

In meditating on the mystery of Israel and its "irrevocable calling" (cf. *Insegnamenti* IX/1 [1986], p. 1028), Christians also explore the mystery of their own roots. In the biblical sources they share with their Jewish brothers and sisters, they find the indispensable elements for living and deepening their own faith. ... Today dialogue means that Christians should be more aware of these elements which bring us closer together. Just as we take note of the "covenant never revoked by God" (cf. *Insegnamenti*, 1980, [III/2], pp. 1272-1276), so we should consider the intrinsic value of the Old Testament (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 3), even if this only acquires its full meaning in the light of the New Testament and contains promises that are fulfilled in Jesus [General Audience, April 28, 1999].<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/306-jp2-86nov26.html>

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/308-87sep11.html>

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/309-jp2-88june24.html>

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/312-jp2-90sep26.html>

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/311-jp2-90nov8.html>

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/326-jp2-99apr28.html>. N.B. that the pope does not restrict the Old Testament's "intrinsic value" to the promises that are fulfilled in Christ.

The experience of the people of Abraham unfolded over hundreds of years, touching many places in the Near East. At the heart of this experience there are the events of the Exodus, when the people of Israel, after the hard trial of slavery, went forth under the leadership of Moses towards the Land of freedom. Three moments mark that journey, each of them linked to mountainous places charged with mystery. There rises first of all, in the early stage, Mount Horeb, as Sinai is sometimes called in the Bible, where Moses received the revelation of God's name, the sign of his mystery and of his powerful saving presence: "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14). No less than Abraham, Moses was asked to entrust himself to God's plan, and to put himself at the head of his people. Thus began the dramatic event of the liberation, which Israel would always remember as the founding experience of its faith. On the journey through the desert, it was again Sinai which was the setting for the sealing of the Covenant between Yahweh and his people, thus linking the mountain to the gift of the Ten Commandments, the ten "words" which commit Israel to a life fully obedient to the will of God [Letter concerning Pilgrimage to Places Linked to the History of Salvation, June 29, 1999].<sup>94</sup>

Here on Mount Sinai, the truth of "who God is" became the foundation and guarantee of the covenant. Moses enters "the luminous darkness" (The *Life of Moses*, II, 164), and there he is given the law "written with the finger of God" (Ex. 31:18). But what is this law? It is the law of life and freedom! At the Red Sea the people had experienced a great liberation. They had seen the power and fidelity of God; they had discovered that he is the God who does indeed set his people free as he had promised. But now on the heights of Sinai this same God

seals his love by making the covenant that he will never renounce. If the people obey his law, they will know freedom forever. The exodus and the covenant are not just events of the past; they are forever the destiny of all God's people! [Homily at Mount Sinai, February 26, 2000].<sup>95</sup>

Despite this overwhelming consistency in the late pope's writings, Vanhoye apparently disagreed. He more recently reasserted his reading of Hebrews at the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" in October 2008 while discussing the 2001 study from the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*. He stated that the PBC study, "does not quote this text [Hebrews], but takes it into account, because it refrains from asserting the permanent validity of the Sinai Covenant. It mentions the permanent validity of the 'covenant-promise of God,' which is not a bilateral pact such as the Sinai Covenant, often broken by the Israelites. It is 'all merciful' and 'cannot be annulled' (no. 41). It 'is definitive and cannot be abolished.' In this sense, according to the New Testament, 'Israel continues to be in a covenant relationship with God'. (no. 42)."<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/332-jp2-00feb26.html>

<sup>96</sup> "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible" at <http://www.zenit.org/article-23841?l=english>. Vanhoye's reading of the PBC study, that the bilateral Sinai covenant does not have a permanent validity even though (somehow) Israel "continues to be in a covenant relationship with God" is highly questionable. First, in §42 of the study the PBC is simply describing various ways in which the theme of "covenant" is treated in different New Testament books. It does not indicate any preference among these diverse approaches, nor does it universally absolutize one approach as the immutable or defining perspective preferable above all others. Second, while discussing Pauline understandings in §85, the PBC observes that, "Israel's election is made concrete and specific in the Sinai covenant and by the institutions based on it,

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/343-jp2-99june29.html>

In the light of all of the John Paul's statements noted above, it is unthinkable that the pope shared Vanhoye's views about Sinai's obsolescence. In his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, he again made it clear that for him there was no question that the Second Vatican Council had definitively charted a new course that included a comprehensive understanding of covenant: "No Council had ever spoken so clearly about ... about the specific meaning of the Old Covenant and of Israel ..." <sup>97</sup> The question, then, is not what John Paul II meant, but rather what authoritative weight is carried by his body of work on relations with Jews and Judaism.

### 7. An Analysis of Recent USCCB documents

As observed in the introduction to this essay, two statements issued in recent months by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have disturbed American Catholic-Jewish relations. The first was "A Note on Ambiguities Contained in *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*," issued on June 18, 2009. <sup>98</sup> This Note discussed a 2002 dialogue document, *Reflections on Covenant and*

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especially the Law and the Temple. The New Testament is in continuity with this covenant and its institutions." If Sinai was made obsolete by the coming of Christ as Vanhoye suggests, then Israel's ongoing election would have no concrete specificity and the Jewish people's self-understanding of post-Temple rabbinic Judaism as continuous with the Sinai covenant would be denied. The latter would contradict the PBC's statement in §22 that rabbinic readings of the Jewish Scriptures are possible and valuable for Christians. Third, the PBC study takes pains to portray Judaism as a vital and dynamic covenantal community. Vanhoye's interpretation of the PBC study would produce a portrait of an illegitimate and groundless Judaism, futilely attempting to live out a concrete expression of a covenant that no longer exists. This is hardly the tone of the PBC study.

<sup>97</sup> III, §19. <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/314-jp2-94nov10.html>.

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-todays-dialogue/conversion/559-usccb-09june18.html>.

*Mission*, <sup>99</sup> in order to clarify "some statements [in it] that are insufficiently precise and potentially misleading." <sup>100</sup>

It is not easy to glean from the ten short paragraphs of the "Note on Ambiguities" exactly what ambiguities found in "Reflections on Covenant and Mission" [RCM] needed its clarification. It is not until par. 5 of the "Note on Ambiguities" that a clarification about the contents of RCM is expressed. After admitting that RCM "correctly acknowledges that 'Judaism is a religion that springs from divine revelation' and that 'it is only about Israel's covenant that the Church can speak with the certainty of the biblical witness,'" the "Note on Ambiguities" claims that "[n]evertheless, it is incomplete and potentially misleading in this context to refer to the enduring quality of the covenant without adding that for Catholics Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God fulfills both in history and at the end of time the special relationship that God established with Israel." After quoting a Vatican II document (*Dei Verbum*) that was not addressing the same questions, the "Note on Ambiguities" goes on to say that the "long story of God's intervention in the history of Israel comes to its unsurpassable culmination in Jesus Christ, who is God become man." It seems that the "Note on Ambiguities" faults RCM for not explaining to Jewish dialogue partners that while the Catholic Church recognizes "the enduring quality of the covenant," it also holds that Christ "fulfills" (without any explanation or qualification) Judaism's covenantal life. This would seem a strange point for RCM to make while setting forth why the church doesn't engage in conversionary campaigns toward Jews. Logically, such realized fulfillment language should lead to the opposite conclusion: Jews need to be baptized. Par. 6 of the

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<sup>99</sup> <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/interreligious/517-ncs-bceia02aug12.html>.

<sup>100</sup> "Note on Ambiguities," §2.

"Note on Ambiguities" similarly would have preferred RCM to state that "Jesus Christ in himself fulfills God's revelation."

It is par. 7 of the "Note on Ambiguities" that has proven the most controversial. It critiques RCM's formulation that interreligious dialogue is a form of evangelization that is "a mutually enriching sharing of gifts devoid of any intention whatsoever to invite the dialogue partner to baptism." It would rather say that, "[t]hough Christian 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."

Within weeks of the issuance of the "Note on Ambiguities," interfaith leaders across the broad spectrum of the American Jewish community wrote an unprecedented joint letter that particularly expressed shock over par. 7. of the "Note on Ambiguities":

Since *Reflections* focused specifically on Jews, the latest statement informs us that Catholics engaging in dialogue with Jews must have the intention of extending an implicit invitation to embrace Christianity and that one can even imagine a situation in such a dialogue where this invitation would be made explicit. A declaration of this sort is antithetical to the very essence of Jewish-Christian dialogue as we have understood it in the post-Vatican II era. We pose no objection to the position that Christians must bear witness to the truth of their faith and expound on it forthrightly, candidly and passionately. However, once Jewish-Christian dialogue has been formally characterized as an invitation, whether explicit or

implicit, to apostatize, then Jewish participation becomes untenable.<sup>101</sup>

The Jewish leaders also questioned the statement's evident disregard for the Mosaic covenant: "[T]he new USCCB 'Note' states that 'the fulfillment of the covenants, indeed, of all of God's promises to Israel, is found only in Jesus Christ.' This appears to posit that the Mosaic covenant is obsolete and Judaism no longer has a reason to exist."

The Jewish letter's citation of "the post-Vatican era" was apt. Readers of the "Note on Ambiguities" were, in fact, confronted by elements of the "neo-supersessionist" approach described earlier: a failure to take cognizance of Vatican documents to implement *Nostra Aetate*, §4;<sup>102</sup> a disregard for Jewish self-understanding; a desire to propose Christ to Jews in the context of interreligious dialogue; and a preference for a realized over a futurist eschatology.

The suggestion that interreligious dialogue might be used to promote Jewish conversions to Christ is naturally viewed as an inducement to apostasy by Jews because a rejection of Christian claims about him is part of Jewish self-definition today. As the Jewish interfaith leaders wrote, such a possibility makes the very prospect of dialogue "untenable." Indeed, it is useful to recall that this same point was made by Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle during the Council: "If we express our [eschatological] hope in words [suggesting] we are guided by the definite and conscious intention of working for their conversion, we set up a new and high wall of division, which makes any fruitful dialogue impossible."<sup>103</sup>

<sup>101</sup>"National Jewish Interfaith Leadership Letter on USCCB 'Note on Ambiguities.'" Available at: <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-todays-dialogue/conversion/574-njil09aug18.html>.

<sup>102</sup>It is noteworthy that while RCM extensively quoted post-*Nostra Aetate* ecclesial documents, the "Note on Ambiguities" cites none.

<sup>103</sup>Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, 199-200.

The "Note on Ambiguities" also calls into question the purposes of Catholic-Jewish dialogue as set forth in the 1974 Vatican "Guidelines": to foster mutual understanding of each other and a better awareness of one's own tradition—a perspective that informs virtually the entire post-Vatican II corpus.

Although a mild eschatological allusion is present at one point, by using the present tense to say that Christ "is the fulfillment of all covenants," the "Note on Ambiguities" expressed a realized eschatology without any of the nuance or caveats articulated in *Nostra Aetate's* "the Church awaits the day known to God alone;" the 1974 Vatican "Guidelines" qualification that "we still await their perfect fulfillment in his glorious return at the end of time;" and the 1985 Vatican Notes' proviso that "the fulfillment of God's design ... awaits its final consummation with the return of Jesus as Messiah, for which we pray each day." By assuming a timeless, transcendent voice and by failing to incorporate the perspectives of official Vatican conciliar and implementing documents, the "Note on Ambiguities" winds up leaving Judaism with little meaningful role in human history except in self-referential Christian ways. When it comes to theological statements about the relationship of the Catholic Church to the Jewish people and tradition, the ecclesial documents to implement *Nostra Aetate*, §4 unanimously insist on maintaining the eschatological tension between the already and the not yet.

A second phase of the controversy was triggered by an August 27, 2009 press release and an accompanying "Backgrounder" information sheet announcing Vatican "*recognitio*" or approval of a change in the American Adult Catechism.<sup>104</sup> The initial catechism text had stated that:

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/577-usccb09aug27.html>

"When God called Abraham out of Ur, he promised to make of him a 'great nation.' This began the history of God revealing his divine plan of salvation to a chosen people with whom he made enduring covenants. Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them." This was revised to: "When God called Abraham out of Ur, he promised to make of him a "great nation." To the Jewish people, whom God first chose to hear his Word, "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ." (Rom 9: 4-5; cf. CCC, no. 839).

The "Backgrounder" explained the revision in this way: "By making the change in the USCCA, there is not a change in the Church's teaching. Catholics believe that all previous covenants that God made with the Jewish people are fulfilled in Jesus Christ<sup>105</sup> through the new covenant established through his sacrificial death on the cross. The prior version of the text might be understood to imply that one of the former covenants imparts salvation without the mediation of Christ, whom Christians believe to be the universal savior of all people."<sup>106</sup>

Like the "Note on Ambiguities," the "Backgrounder" also uses realized eschatological fulfillment language. However,

<sup>105</sup> It should be noted that the formula "Christ fulfills all previous covenants" is not a biblical one. Paul put it this way: "For I tell you that Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" [Rom 15:8-9]; "For in [Christ] every one of God's promises is a 'Yes'" [2 Cor. 1:20]. There is a significant difference for Christian relations with Jews to speak of Christ as "fulfilling" rather than "confirming" promises (not covenants).

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/577-usccb09aug27.html>

by now using the passive voice: "all previous covenants that God made with the Jewish people are fulfilled in Jesus Christ," the sense of a past completed action is intensified. The unfortunate use of the ambiguous adjective "former" exacerbates the problems.

In addition, if the authors of the "Backgrounder" were concerned that the original wording of the catechism could be read to exclude the necessary mediation of Christ, then why not simply add to the sentence in question without removing the affirmation that the Mosaic covenant "remains eternally valid" for Jews? The formulation offered by Cardinal Walter Kasper in his capacity as president of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews would have served quite well: "The 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."<sup>107</sup> One could therefore imagine that the adult catechism might have been revised to say, "Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them, although Christians believe that the grace of Jesus Christ is always necessary and at work in human salvation." Something along these lines would have asserted the universal mediation of Christ and prevented the interpretation feared by the authors of the "Backgrounder" without leaving readers to conclude that Catholic Church can no longer affirm the continuing vitality of the Sinai covenant.

This binary logic recalls the arguments offered by Cardinal Avery Dulles in his critique of RCM, discussed

<sup>107</sup> "*Dominus Iesus*," §3.

above. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the "Note on Ambiguities" and the "Backgrounder" of the catechism *recognitio* were attempts to advance neo-supersessionist theologies of the church's relationship to Jews and Judaism. By disregarding the trajectory of the "theology of shalom" emerging in post-conciliar official documents, right relationship with the Jewish people, painstakingly pursued for more than four decades, was seriously jeopardized. By not reckoning with Jewish self-understanding of their experience of their relationship with God, these two recent texts violated an essential axiom of the 1974 "Guidelines" to implement *Nostra Aetate*, causing the stirring up of old fears and caricatures.

Fortunately, five episcopal leaders of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops very recently issued a public response to the letter of concern from the Jewish interfaith leaders, together with a six-point "Statement of Principles for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue."<sup>108</sup> In their letter, the bishops take the unusual and perhaps unprecedented step of retracting the problematic language in the "Note on Ambiguities" that "although Christian 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." The bishops wrote, "After further discussion, our Committees have also decided to amend the *Note* by excising the last two sentences of paragraph seven in order to address the concerns you and others have raised about the relationship between dialogue and witness."<sup>109</sup> In

<sup>108</sup> The bishops' letter may be found at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/585-usccb09oct2.html>. The "Statement of Principles for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue" is available at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/584-usccbdialogue09oct2.html>.

<sup>109</sup> US Bishops' Reply to Jewish Letter of Concern, Oct. 2, 2009.

the "Statement of Principles," they explain 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."<sup>110</sup> Since "proselytism" can be technically understood only as coercion to convert, the concluding clause in this sentence is an important one. It would appear that the five bishops have removed desires for Jewish conversion from the "lived context" of interreligious dialogue, thereby bringing the understanding of dialogue back to the primary purpose of mutual understanding as delineated by the 1974 Vatican "Guidelines." However the final wording of the truncated par. 7 of the revised "Note on Ambiguities" is yet to appear.

One is struck by the helpful absence of binary thinking in the "Statement" and the effort to maintain several "both/and" formulations. Thus, the "Statement of Principles" observes in point three that "Catholics [both] have a sacred responsibility to bear witness to Christ at every moment of their lives, but [also that] lived context shapes the form of that witness to the Lord we love."

In addition, after quoting without citation Pope John Paul II's words in Miami to American Jewish leaders (Sept. 11, 1987) that "God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and made with them a covenant of eternal love, which was never revoked," the "Statement" goes on to say that "Jewish covenantal life endures till the present day as a vital witness to God's saving will for His people Israel and for all of humanity." Then in point two it balances this affirmation with the apostolic conviction that "Jesus Christ is the unique savior or all humankind, who fulfills in himself all of God's promises and covenants with the people of Israel." This juxtaposition is an improvement over the lopsided assertions

<sup>110</sup> "Statement of Principles for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue," §3.

of the earlier two texts that failed to simultaneously affirm Judaism's covenantal life while proclaiming the saving significance of Christ.

But these phrasings in the "Statement of Principles" are not without problems. One wonders, for example, why point one's quotation of John Paul II's address in Miami did not go on to include the very next sentence: "... the covenant of eternal love, which was never revoked. It was rather confirmed by the gift of the Torah to Moses, opened by the Prophets to the hope of eternal redemption and to the universal commitment for justice and peace." Apparently, the late pope's comfort in acknowledging the vitality of Torah-based covenantal life is not shared by the "Statement of Principles," possibly because this is allegedly "unsettled teaching" [see point five].

Likewise, the wording of point two that "Jesus Christ ... fulfills in himself all of God's promises and covenants with the people of Israel" evidences a neo-supersessionist preference for a realized eschatology (in contrast to *Nostra Aetate*, §4, the 1974 Vatican "Guidelines," and the 1985 Vatican "Notes") and a related tendency to collapse "covenant" into "promises."

Thus, it would appear that these welcome October texts from the five American bishops, while effectively addressing the injuries inflicted on Catholic-Jewish relations by the June and August statements, still show signs of the continuing tensions between neo-supersessionist perspectives and the mainstream "theology of shalom" emanating from the Council.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Other infelicitous phrasings suggestive of this continuing tension are found in the "Statement of Principles." Thus, rather than acknowledging that par. 7 of the "Note on Ambiguities" had been unclearly worded (as suggested by the excision of two of its sentences), the prelude to the "Statement on Principles"

It may be that much hinges upon the claim in point five of the "Statement of Principles" that "a catechism is a compendium of the articles of faith, and therefore contains only settled teaching." The original wording of the adult catechism, that "the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them," is according to the "Statement of Principles" evidently not "settled teaching," despite the body of relevant official Vatican documentation and papal allocutions discussed above. It seems incredible to claim that the inclusive understanding of "Old Covenant" as encompassing all biblical covenants including Sinai that was repeatedly conveyed by John Paul II does not belong in a catechism. One gets the impression that people with neo-supersessionist perspectives are raising arguments, some of them spurious, in an effort to alter the direction of the Vatican's implementation of the Council regarding the church's relationship with Judaism and Jews.

This brings us, finally, to the question of the authority of post-conciliar teaching in these matters.

### 8. Conclusion: Settled and unsettling teaching

What constitutes "settled teaching"? First, it must be observed that this is not a formal or legal term. Its meaning is ambiguous. Perhaps it means infallibly declared teachings

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rather defensively suggests that the original wording had "been misinterpreted by some Catholics and some Jews and has led to misunderstanding and feelings of hurt among members of the Jewish community." In principle three, the bishops write that they "insist that only Catholics committed to the teachings of the Church encounter [Jews] in our dialogues." This bears on the reference in point five to "settled teaching." Which theologians are truly "committed to the teachings of the Church"—those who regularly cite official ecclesial documents about Jews and Judaism or those who consistently disregard or minimalistically interpret them? In any case, the tone of the letter from the bishops to the Jewish leaders has a more conciliatory tone than the "Statement of Principles."

(i.e., an exercise of the extraordinary magisterium) or perhaps teachings that are binding on all Catholics. However, the claim that catechisms are supposed to contain only "settled teachings" in these senses is demonstrably wrong. The universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was, for instance, revised in its second edition on the subject of capital punishment precisely because of John Paul's half-dozen statements on that topic.<sup>112</sup> This revision was made even though, according to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2004, the pope's views on capital punishment were not binding teaching.<sup>113</sup>

The nature of the teaching authority of the Second Vatican Council must be considered. A paragraph appended to *Lumen Gentium* stated:

In view of conciliar practice and the pastoral purpose of the present Council, this sacred synod defines matters of faith or morals as binding on the church only when the synod itself openly declares so. Other matters which the sacred synod [the Council] proposes as the doctrine of the supreme teaching authority of the church, each and every member of the faithful is obliged to accept and embrace according to the mind of the sacred synod itself, which becomes known either from the subject matter or from the language employed, according to the norms of theological interpretation.

In other words, the conciliar documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate* are expressions of the non-infallible

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<sup>112</sup>"Catechism takes a harder line on death penalty," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 19, 1997: 12. See the USCCB website for a list of John Paul's statements concerning capital punishment: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/deathpenalty/holyfather.shtml>

<sup>113</sup>"Worthiness to Receive Communion: General Principles," *Origins* 34/9 (July 29, 2004): 133-134, §3.

ordinary magisterium of the Catholic Church, which every Catholic should accept as articulations of the "mind of the Council." As will be seen below, the intent of the Council is especially made clear by the official interpretations offered by post-conciliar ecclesiastical documents.

Francis A. Sullivan has offered an important observation about the authority of Vatican II documents when they conflict with the teachings of previous popes. Citing Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he explains:

The fact that the teaching of Vatican II, while it represents the almost unanimous consensus of the whole Catholic episcopate, including its head the pope, still remains in the category of "ordinary magisterium" is a unique feature of this council. Joseph Ratzinger has raised one of the questions which this suggests: How does the conciliar exercise of ordinary magisterium compare with the one with which we are more familiar: namely, that of the popes in their encyclicals? ... [H]is reply is "The conciliar text by far surpasses the ordinary declarations of papal magisterium, including the encyclicals, regarding the nature of the theological obligations which it entails." ... [H]is judgment would seem applicable to a number of other texts in which Vatican II has taken a position that differs from what previous popes had taught in their encyclicals. There can be no doubt that the teaching of the council on such issues as ... the significance of non-Christian religions prevails over what had been the official position of the Catholic Church put forth by the ordinary papal magisterium prior to Vatican II.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Francis A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 167-168.

Thus, *Nostra Aetate's* mandate that "Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy scripture," supersedes Pope Paul IV's assertion in 1555 that "Jews, whose guilt—all of their own doing—has condemned them to eternal slavery," which served as the basis for the establishment of the Roman ghetto.<sup>115</sup> This also illustrates the nature of *Nostra Aetate* as a reforming document that is both in continuity (Romans 9-11) and discontinuity (the tradition of Jews as accursed) with the past. As noted previously, Pope Benedict XVI's approach to the Second Vatican Council through a hermeneutic of reform suggests the principle that interpretations of *Nostra Aetate* that do not assert both continuity and discontinuity are erroneous.

Although not infallible, the documents of the Second Vatican Council are an expression of "the doctrine of the supreme teaching authority of the church," which all Catholics "ought to accept and embrace ... according to the mind of the Council." While not binding, they certainly may not be ignored by any Catholics who theologize about the matters they address. Therefore, *Lumen Gentium*, §16 and *Nostra Aetate*, §4 must be taken very seriously. But what about their interpretation?

Phrases synonymous with "the mind of the Council" have been encountered earlier in this essay. The 1974 "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, 4," as its title conveys, was written to "bring into actual existence in the life of the Church the intentions expressed in the conciliar document."<sup>116</sup> The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews which promulgated it has the stated mission "to implement, correctly and effectively, the express intentions of the

<sup>115</sup> *Cum Nibis Absurdum*, preface.

<sup>116</sup> Vatican, "Guidelines" (1974), Preamble. Emphasis added.

Council.”<sup>117</sup> These “Guidelines,” therefore, as officially implementing the “mind of the Council,” and published with the approval of Pope Paul VI, authoritatively established the direction for the interpretation of *Nostra Aetate*, §4.<sup>118</sup> Since there exist no other ecclesial documents of comparable authority, this established trajectory of interpreting and implementing the conciliar declaration, what I have called the development of a “theology of shalom,” cannot be summarily dismissed by theologians committed to the official teachings of the Catholic Church.

Similarly, the Commission’s 1985 “Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church” focused on the educational mandate enacted by *Nostra Aetate*, §4 and further delineated by the 1974 “Guidelines.” The 1985 “Notes” were promulgated “to serve this purpose”<sup>119</sup> of the Council: “All should take pains, then, lest in catechetical instruction and in the preaching of God’s Word they teach anything out of harmony with the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.”<sup>120</sup> The 1974 “Guidelines” specified that “Information concerning these questions is important at all levels of Christian instruction and education”<sup>121</sup> and went on to list a number of particular steps to be taken. By complying with the principles set forth in the “Notes,” the Commission intended “that the Council text and *Guidelines and Suggestions* would be more easily and faithfully put into practice.”<sup>122</sup> In the absence of any other ecclesial documents of comparable authority, this formal statement

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Conclusion. Emphasis added.

<sup>118</sup> This is true even though conciliar implementing documents were promulgated in the common form (*in forma communi*) without invoking full papal authority.

<sup>119</sup> Vatican, “Notes” (1985), Preliminary Considerations.

<sup>120</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, §4.

<sup>121</sup> Vatican, “Guidelines” (1974), III.

<sup>122</sup> Vatican, “Notes” (1985), §27.

with the ecclesiastical competence to interpret and implement “the mind of the Council” on the matters it addresses cannot be facilely disregarded by theologians committed to the official teachings of the Catholic Church.

Turning to the corpus of Pope John Paul II’s relevant writings, while he did not formally define his addresses and letter as binding matters of Catholic faith, they nonetheless possess significant ecclesiastical authority for the following reasons: (1) they represent a large, consistent body of papal reflection; (2) John Paul II saw his work as part of the implementation or realization of the will of the Second Vatican Council to build a new relationship with the Jewish people as further oriented by the 1974 “Guidelines;” and (3) in many instances, John Paul II quoted the documents of the Council and affirmed and reiterated texts of the Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, and in the latter case was often quoted by the documents promulgated by the Commission. Thus, there was considerable synergy between the purpose of the late pope and of the Commission to realize the Council’s intentions.

For all these reasons, John Paul’s writings can neither be neglected, nor narrowed by citing them only selectively, nor relativized by appealing to other texts (either by himself or by others) that do not consciously address the specific subject of the Catholic Church’s *sui generis* relationship with Jews.

In addition, some of John Paul II’s actions (and the writings associated with them) have a compelling authoritative power that arises from the historical or dramatic contexts in which they occurred. These include his visits to sites connected to the Shoah, to the Great Synagogue of Rome, and to various holy places such as Mount Sinai while on pilgrimage during the Great Jubilee of 2000.

In this regard, perhaps the most significant events for relations with Jews during John Paul's pontificate were the unprecedented "Mass of Pardon" in St. Peter's Basilica on March 12, 2000 and the equally unprecedented prayer at the Western Wall in Jerusalem on March 26, 2000.

As part of the observances of the Great Jubilee of 2000, set forth in advance by John Paul II in his 1994 Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, the pope and Vatican curia gathered on the First Sunday of Lent so that "in this year of mercy the Church, strong in the holiness which she receives from her Lord, should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters."<sup>123</sup> Among the seven categories of sins for which God's forgiveness was sought were those "against the people of Israel." Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, then president of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, introduced the papal prayer of confession by saying: "Let us pray that, in recalling the sufferings endured by the people of Israel throughout history, Christians will acknowledge the sins committed by not a few of their number against the people of the Covenant and the blessings, and in this way will purify their hearts."<sup>124</sup> John Paul II then prayed in words that committed the Catholic Church to "genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

Those same papal words were used two weeks later when John Paul II stood at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. As the remnants of where the Temple once stood, this is Judaism's holiest site. Not only did the pope visit it, but he prayed there according to the Jewish custom of inserting a

written prayer, a *kvitel*, into the wall's crevices. This unprecedented action symbolically acknowledged both the holiness of the site and the legitimacy of the Jewish form of addressing God there.<sup>125</sup> As if to give his *kvitel* even more significance, the note, now preserved at Yad Vashem, was personally signed and sealed with the papal seal. It said: "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."<sup>126</sup>

How is one to measure the compelling ecclesiastical authority of such events that transcend standard canonical categories? A solemn intercession first offered during an historic millennial penitential Mass by all the leaders of the Vatican at St. Peter's Basilica is literally signed, sealed, and personally delivered to Judaism's holiest site in Jerusalem by the first pope to visit it since the days of Peter. It is breathtaking in its scope.

Clearly, the recurring expression "people of the Covenant" is meant in the comprehensive sense that John Paul II used when he correlated the "people of the [unrevoked] Old Covenant" with the Christian "Old Testament" at Mainz. It thus conveys a vigorous sense of Jewish covenantal life from biblical times to the present. It would be inconsistent to the point of irrationality for John Paul II to pray at the Western Wall in the mode of today's Torah-centered Jewish tradition if he felt that Jewish observance of the *mitzvot* of the Sinai covenant no longer

<sup>123</sup> Homily at the Mass of Pardon, quoting the papal bull *Incarnationis mysterium*, §11.

<sup>124</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/333-jp2-00mar12.html>

<sup>125</sup> Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed this act during his own visit to the Western Wall on May 12, 2009.

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/338-jp2-00mar26.html>

had divine import. Even worse, it would be deceptive and contemptuous in the extreme for him to penitentially commit the Catholic Church in that setting to "genuine brotherhood" with a people he believed were living an outmoded, already "fulfilled" covenant. Therefore, the late pope's momentous actions in the Vatican and in Jerusalem in 2000 are an undeniable and compelling commitment of the Catholic community to supportive relations with a people who enjoy a profound and living covenantal life with God rooted in the Torah and the rabbinic tradition.

So where does this leave us with regard to the so-called "not settled teaching" about the church's new self-understanding in relation to Jews and Judaism, and especially the affirmation of Judaism's ongoing covenantal life?

First, both the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, and its declaration *Nostra Aetate*, expressions "of the Church's supreme teaching authority [or magisterium]," drew on Paul's Letter to the Romans to proclaim that Jews, those "to whom the covenants and promises were made ... in view of the divine choice, ... are a people most dear for the sake of the fathers, for the gifts of God are without repentance." Neither conciliar document contained any hint that the continuing election of the Jewish people involved only some of the covenants God made with their ancestors and not others. *Nostra Aetate*, in fact, by urging "friendly conversations" and in deliberately postponing the thought of a Jewish turn to Christ until the eschaton plainly conveyed an appreciation of the spiritual value of contemporary Jewish religious life. In addition, the Council's reliance on Romans 9-11 is both exegetically sound and a determinative decision. Catholic theologians may not simply subordinate Romans 9-11 to other New Testament texts of doubtful applicability to these

questions, thereby impeding the clear intentions of the Council.

Second, the 1974 "Guidelines" and the 1985 "Notes," promulgated with papal approval by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, authoritatively set the direction for how the Council was to be interpreted on these matters. There are no other documents of comparable authority that orient the work of implementation in any other direction. Thus, to review earlier portions of this essay, these two documents require that the "mind of the Council" be implemented by Catholics theologizing about the church's relationship to Jews and Judaism in ways that include: (1) seriously engaging Jewish self-understanding on its own terms; (2) constantly affirming both the realized and futurist aspects of Christian eschatology; (3) realizing that Old Testament texts have an "inexhaustible content ... that the New Testament often does no more than resume;"<sup>127</sup> and (4) respecting that Jews are, "The people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked," and that "the permanence of [the people of] Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times ... a sign to be interpreted within God's design."<sup>128</sup>

Third, it has been demonstrated above that John Paul II repeatedly and consistently spoke of the unrevoked "Old Covenant" in a comprehensive, inclusive fashion,

<sup>127</sup>Vatican, "Notes" (1985), II, 7. N.B. the relevant words of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible" (2001): "Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Each of these two readings is part of the vision of each respective faith of which it is a product and an expression. Consequently, they cannot be reduced one into the other" [§22].

<sup>128</sup>Vatican, "Notes" (1985), I,3 (quoting John Paul II's address at Mainz); VI, 25.

encompassing in particular the central role of the Torah for Jewish spiritual life (as is consistent, incidentally, with Jewish self-understanding). Together, the 1985 "Notes" and John Paul II further delineated the trajectory of interpreting and implementing the "mind of the Council."

Catholic theologians may not ignore all these developments, expressions arising from authoritative interpretations "of the Church's supreme magisterium" by ecclesiastically competent offices and by a pope himself. The burden of proof is therefore on those who suggest that the statement "the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them" is somehow questionable Catholic teaching and therefore ought not to be included in a catechism.

In their October 2009 letter to American Jewish interfaith leaders, the five episcopal signatories insightfully observed that "Vatican II's decree *Nostra aetate* raised a question that is central to our present discussion: 'How does God's covenant with the Jewish people-as lived today-relate to that of Jesus?'" This is indeed a crucial question. As Cardinal Walter Kasper has noted, "we are only at the beginning and still far from a definitive understanding ... of the overall Christian theology of Judaism."<sup>129</sup>

However, Catholics cannot avoid unsettling questions by the indefensible disregard of matters already set forth in official ecclesiastical documents. In grappling with this core question, the clear direction pointed out in Vatican documents to implement the Second Vatican Council must be followed. As John Paul II declared, "It is only a question

of studying them carefully, of immersing oneself in their teachings and of putting them into practice."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> "The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews," §3.

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<sup>130</sup> "Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome," April 13, 1986, §5