

# Making Jesus Christ Visible as a Jew in the Celebration of the Eucharist

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The liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council is one of the great achievements of the Roman Catholic Church in the 20th century. Lasting cornerstones are the recourse to the liturgy of the patristic period, the orientation towards the Holy Scriptures, the focus on the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and the active participation of all believers, who understand themselves as a celebrating community before God.<sup>1</sup> However, one of the points that needs to be deepened today concerns the belief in the incarnation: God becomes man in Christ. He reveals himself through the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus’s Jewishness is not a triviality. Rather, it expresses Jesus’s faith and his relationship with God. Recognized and believed in as the Messiah and “King of the Jews” (John 19:19), he is part of the history of salvation that God has always shared with the Jewish people.

Nevertheless, Catholic liturgical reform after Vatican II continued, in general, to be oblivious to Jesus’s Jewishness and to his people, Israel. Its institution of more Old Testament readings in the liturgy does not compensate for this. This obliviousness essentially stems from the fact that, at the time of the Council, the recognition that the Jews were God’s first chosen people, perpetually in the “irrevocable covenant” with God, was not yet in the picture. With the declaration *Nostra aetate*, the Council succeeded in overcoming the doctrine of replacement. The Church no longer supplants the Jewish people in the history of salvation; instead, Jews continue to bear the honorable title “Israel.” However, those gathered at the council could not anticipate the ecclesiological and liturgical consequences of accepting the continued election of Israel. Only the Good Friday intercession for the Jews, the only place in the liturgy where Jews appear as people of God still alive today, was subjected to a theologically far-sighted revision after the Council in 1970.<sup>2</sup> But the Jewishness of Jesus seemed to be irrelevant for the mystery of salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Klöckener and Benedikt Kranemann, ed., *Liturgiereformen. Historische Studien zu einem bleibenden Grundzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes*, Teil II: Liturgiereformen seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart (Münster: Aschendorf, 2002), 751-1016.

<sup>2</sup> The debate about this, which Pope Benedict triggered in 2007 with the reformulation of the corresponding intercessions for the re-authorized Tridentine Rite, is widely documented and does not need

However, the logic of *Nostra aetate*'s recovery of Jesus's Jewishness suggests much broader possibilities. According to *Nostra aetate* 4, when the Church reflects on her own mystery, she encounters her bond with Abraham's stock. John Paul II states that Judaism belongs, as it were, to the inner realm of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> How is this God-given relationship expressed in the liturgy? How can the Church do justice to its fundamental principle, *lex orandi lex credendi* (the rule of prayer is the rule of faith), which is also valid when reversed: *lex credendi lex orandi*? Christian liturgical celebration and the teachings of the faith must cohere. Once the Church retrieves Jesus's Jewishness, we have to ask, how can this be better incorporated into her liturgical life? The following remarks therefore evaluate the coherence of Christian faith and celebration. It is not a matter of appropriating elements of Jewish liturgy for Christian use or about "Judaizing" the Roman Catholic liturgy.<sup>4</sup>

In the mid-1990s, liturgical scholars became aware of the forgetting of Israel in the liturgy. They debated the Christology of the Eucharistic prayers.<sup>5</sup> Old Testament scholars argued in favor of including the Old Testament history of salvation.<sup>6</sup> In this article, I build on these reflections, presenting fundamental liturgical considerations and using concrete examples to show how Jesus might be visualized and celebrated as a Jew within Catholic liturgy. I first introduce this with thoughts on the reintroduction both of the Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord and of the commemoration of biblical saints. Then, I begin the search for a salvation-historical perspective on liturgical remembrance and representation that includes Judaism today by pointing to examples of where the prayers omit potential references to Israel. Since the Eucharist is a mediation of salvation, I look then at how Christ is soteriologically presented in light of Judaism. Finally, I turn to individual elements of the liturgy, the order of reading, the creed, etc., and ask how the relationship to Judaism is reflected in them.

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to be dealt with further here. See Walter Homolka and Erich Zenger, ed., "... damit sie Jesus Christus erkennen": *Die neue Karfreitagsfürbitte für die Juden* (Freiburg: Herder, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, "Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome," April 13, 1986, <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/jp2-86apr13>.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the similarities between Jewish and Christian liturgy, Gerard Rouwhorst writes significantly: "Recent research, however, has always tended to place the harmonization of the synagogue and synagogue liturgy with the temple and the temple cult in the period after the destruction of the temple. Incidentally, this puts the relationship between Jewish and Christian liturgy in an interesting perspective. In a certain sense, both religions underwent a similar and comparable process of ritualization and sacralization, in which the alignment with the Temple cult played a central role." See his "Jüdischer Einfluss auf christliche Liturgie," in *Dialog oder Monolog? Zur liturgischen Beziehung zwischen Judentum und Christentum*, ed. Albert Gerhards and Hans Hermann Henrix, *Questiones Disputatae* 208 (Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder, 2004), 87.

<sup>5</sup> Klemens Richter and Benedikt Kranemann, eds., *Christologie der Liturgie. Der Gottesdienst der Kirche - Christusbekenntnis und Sinaibund*, *Questiones Disputatae* 159 (Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder, 1995); Albert Gerhards and Hans Hermann Henrix eds., *Dialog oder Monolog?*; Walter Homolka, ed., *Liturgie als Theologie, Aus Religion und Recht* 1 (Berlin: Frank&Timme, 2005); Alexander Deeg and Irene Mildenerberger, ed., "...dass er euch auch erwählet hat": *Liturgie feiern im Horizont des Judentums*, *Beiträge zu Liturgie und Spiritualität* 16 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Georg Braulik and Norbert Lohfink, *Liturgie und Bibel: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2005).

## 1. Born Jewish

### 1.1 The Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord

The Christmas season is a special opportunity to represent Jesus' origins and his belonging to the Jewish people. The Advent readings take up the messianic expectations of the Old Testament prophets. The O Antiphons, which are sung from 17 December until Christmas, sing about the Messiah as the wisdom of God, as the bearer of God's name, as the key of David, as the root of Jesse, and so on. In the course of this, they retrace the history of biblical Israel.<sup>7</sup> The infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke (Mt 1:1-17; 2:1-12; Lk 1-2), which are read at Christmas, emphasize Jesus's descent from the house of David in a variety of ways and place him within the Jewish tradition.

However, as I have discussed elsewhere at length,<sup>8</sup> the liturgical reform after Vatican II abolished the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord and the Most Holy Name of Jesus on the octave day of Christmas. January 1 did retain the Gospel about Jesus's circumcision eight days after his birth (Luke 2:16-21). However, the feast of the Circumcision was suppressed by the feast of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Restoring the feast of the Circumcision in the spirit of a renewed theology of Judaism would be a strong sign of celebrating Jesus as the "Son of the Covenant." The commemoration of the naming of Jesus was reclaimed in the 1980s and placed on January 3, but not linked to his circumcision. The naming of the Jewish boy and the sealing of the covenant through circumcision form a unity in the Jewish rite. Reclaiming the Feast of Circumcision without its pre-conciliar anti-Jewish undertones would reunite these rituals historically connected in Jesus's own life.

There are some additional theological benefits to this for Christians. It would organically integrate the belief that "God became man" into the Old Testament history of salvation. When John proclaims that the "Word became flesh" (John 1:19), he refers to the Word that God spoke through Moses, the Torah. The term "*logos*" (word) should be understood not only in the Greek sense, but also against the background of the Jewish faith tradition. The Vatican document marking fifty years after *Nostra aetate* speaks of Jesus as the "living Torah."<sup>9</sup> Jesus as the "Son born under the law" (Gal 4:4) could thus be celebrated in a unique way. In addition, the veneration of Jesus's name forms a bridge to Jewish spirituality, in which the name of God plays a central role. God's name is not only a central theme in the

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<sup>7</sup> Egbert Ballhorn, "Die O-Antiphonen. Israelgebet der Kirche," in *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 37 (1998): 9-34.

<sup>8</sup> Christian M. Rutishauser, "Petition zur Wiederherstellung des Fests der Beschneidung des Herrn, verbunden mit der Namensgebung Jesu," in *Die Beschneidung Jesu. Was sie Juden und Christen heute bedeutet*, ed. Jan-Heiner Tück (Freiburg Basel Vienna: Herder, 2020), 371-398.

<sup>9</sup> Commission for the Religious Relations with Judaism, *The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable (Rom 11,29)* (2015), No. 26. <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/vatican-curia/crrj-2015dec10>.

psalms prayed by Jews and Christians alike. Baroque churches around the world also depict the name of God, the name of Jesus, and often also those of Mary and Joseph in iconographic and calligraphic form. They bear witness to a living spirituality of names and the importance of language in prayer, which can be made fruitful again today in dialogue.<sup>10</sup>

In this regard, it should be noted that liturgical prayers do invoke God as Lord and thus refer to the Tetragrammaton. However, they are not addressed to the “God of Israel” as known in biblical tradition (Ps. 72:18; Isa. 37:16). The Benedictus which is prayed daily in Lauds of the Liturgy of the Hours and invokes the “God of Israel,” (Luke 1:68) could motivate to pray to the “God of Israel” in the Eucharist as well. The connection to the Jewish prayer community could also be made by invoking God as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” as he introduced himself when revealing his name (Ex. 4:5) and as he is invoked, for example, by Elijah in 1 Kings 18:36.

## 1.2 Feasts and Memorial Days of Biblical Saints

*Nostra aetate 4*, but also the ten theses of Seelisberg, remind us that not only was Jesus a Jew, but also his entire family, the disciples and the apostles were too.<sup>11</sup> Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist, Peter and Paul, to name just the most important, all have memorial days on the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar. Remembering Mary as the “Daughter of Zion” and Joseph as a righteous man faithful to the Torah, who taught Jesus to keep the commandments, should not be left to the sermon alone, but could be included in the prayers and prefaces of the Mass.<sup>12</sup> The Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle on 25 January should also be renamed so as not to give the impression that he had converted from Judaism to Christianity.<sup>13</sup> The Feast of the Apparition of Christ to Saint Paul the Apostle could be its official name, because the enlightenment he received from Christ turned him into a messianic Jew who ultimately knew he was being sent to the nations. The preface to the Feast of Peter and Paul on June 29 does not refer to Paul’s “conversion” when it states: “Peter, foremost in confessing the faith, Paul its outstanding preacher, Peter, who established the early Church from the remnant of Israel, Paul, master and teacher of the Gentiles that you call. And so, each in a different way gathered together the one family of Christ.” These are just a few pointers that should sensitize us to the representation of the early Church in liturgy, which was

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<sup>10</sup> Christian M. Rutishauser, “Theologie der Spiritualität angesichts des jüdisch-christlichen Dialogs,” in *Jüdisch-christlicher Dialog. Ein Studienhandbuch für Lehre und Praxis*, ed. Christian M. Rutishauser, Barbara Schmitz and Jan Woppowa (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2024), 194.

<sup>11</sup> *Nostra aetate 4* as well as theses 2 and 3 of the Ten Theses of Seelisberg refer to this. See <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/ecumenical-christian/seelisberg>.

<sup>12</sup> For all liturgical prayers and texts of the Eucharist see the Roman Missal. <https://archive.org/details/Roman-Missal-Third-Edition>.

<sup>13</sup> Marie-Thérèse Andrevon, “Faut-il rebaptiser la fête de la conversion de Paul,” *Etudes. Revue de la culture contemporaine* 1 (2020): 79-90.

formed by Jesus-believing Jews. In this context, it is also worth recalling the proposal in the post-conciliar liturgical reform to include the “saints of the first covenant,” i.e. the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, Moses, King David, prophets, etc. in the Catholic liturgical calendar.<sup>14</sup> This would allow the Church to take up the local tradition of Jerusalem.

## 2. Overcoming Asemitism in the liturgy

### 2.1 Making Israel explicit in the narrative of salvation history

Biblical Israel is present in the liturgy through the Old Testament readings. However, the liturgy regularly transforms statements about the relationship between God and Israel into general statements about the relationship between God and all humanity. This silencing can be called Asemitism, in the sense that it is not explicit and overtly anti-Semitic, but it suppresses any reference to Judaism.<sup>15</sup> For example, the salvation history narrative of the of the Roman Catholic liturgy says: “Time and again you (God) offered them (all human beings) covenants and through the prophets taught them to look forward to salvation.” This conceals that God specifically made a covenant with Israel at Sinai. Georg Braulik tries to rescue this passage by proposing it be read as referring to the covenant with Noah or Abraham. But he ultimately calls the current wording an “operational accident,” because it is for him a conscious or unconscious rejection of God’s covenant with biblical Israel.<sup>16</sup> In any case, God’s covenant with Israel is concealed. To make it visible, it should be formulated: “You (God) have made a covenant with Israel and taught your people through the prophets to expect salvation.”

Another liturgical text that suppresses Jewish salvation history is the seventh Preface for Sundays. The English translation of the Latin text was until 2011: “Through the disobedience of sin we have broken your covenant, through the obedience of your Son, you have renewed it.” The language clearly suggests that Christ’s obedience renews a covenant that was broken by us before his time on earth. What covenant is intended that “we” broke? Is the Church taking the place of Old Testament Israel? Or does this Preface describe human beings in general? In 2011 the prayer text in English was altered to: “by whose obedience [Christ’s] we have been restored to those gifts of yours that, by sinning, we had lost in disobedience.” This text too obscures the permanent distinction between Israel and the nations when it allows Christology to dissolve God’s covenant with Israel into a covenant with universal humanity. At the same time, it fails to acknowledge that

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<sup>14</sup> Marie-Thérèse Andrevon, “Entendre le sanctorial de l’Eglise de Jérusalem à l’Eglise universelle. Une proposition conciliaire oublié,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 140 (2018): 215-234.

<sup>15</sup> James Bernauer, *Jesuit Kaddish: Jesuits, Jews, and Holocaust Remembrance* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2020), 28-31.

<sup>16</sup> “Der Alte Bund im 4. Hochgebet,” ed. Braulik and Lohfink, *Liturgie und Bibel*, 294-298. In the same anthology, see Georg Braulik, “Das göttliche Bundesangebot an die Menschheit,” 269-281. See also Albert Gerhards, “Kontinuität und Divergenz. Konzepte der Bundestheologie im Eucharistischen Hochgebet,” in *Christologie der Liturgie. Der Gottesdienst der Kirche - Christusbekennnis und Sinaibund*, ed. Richter and Kranemann, *Christologie der Liturgie*, 207-223.

the Sinai covenant and the calling of Abraham already had a universal significance. As is well known, all nations are to be blessed through Abraham. (Gen. 12:3) Israel is already to be a light for the nations. (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3) The Christian universalist self-image displaces not only Jewish particularism, but also the Jewish form of universalism.<sup>17</sup>

A subtle example of this sort of silencing of Jesus' Jewishness by omitting that he belongs to God's covenant with Israel occurs in the design of baptismal fonts in many churches and in the consecration of the baptismal water. Jesus' baptism by John is commemorated as if it were a Christian baptism. However, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan was a rite of repentance and penance that differs significantly from later Christian baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom. 6). The prayer for the consecration of baptismal water typologically places Jesus' baptism in the history of salvation:

O God, who caused the children of Abraham to pass dry-shod through the Red Sea, so that the chosen people, set free from slavery to Pharaoh, would prefigure the people of the baptized;

O God, whose Son, baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan, was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and, as he hung upon the Cross, gave forth water from his side along with blood.

In other words, the transition through the Red Sea is presented as a type of the way through death to life, as the baptism of Jesus is presented as a sign of the forgiveness of sins made possible by his death and resurrection. Could it not rather be a reminder of the passage through the Red Sea (Ex 13:17-15-20) and the passage through the Jordan (Joshua 3) on the path of the Exodus, which Jesus takes as the representative of Israel? Matthew's infancy narrative follows precisely this logic when he has Jesus flee to Egypt with his family. Jesus is to go the way of his people. Matthew indicates this by inserting a quotation from Hosea: "Out of Egypt I have called my son" (Mt 2:15). Following the logic of Matthew's Gospel, the prayer for consecration of the baptismal water could be formulated as follows:

You led the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry land, delivered them from slavery, taught them the law and led them into the land of promise. When the fullness of time came, your beloved Son was baptized by John in the wilderness to show us the way out of slavery. He was anointed by the Spirit to live according to your law.

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<sup>17</sup> Christian M. Rutishauser, "Partikularismus und Universalismus in der jüdisch-christlichen Beziehung," in "*Edler Ölbaum und wilde Zweige*" (Rom 11:16-24). *Christlich-Jüdischer Dialog auf neutestamentlicher Grundlage. Zur Erinnerung an Maria Neubrand MC*, ed. Angelika Strotmann and Heinz Blatz (Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk, 2023), 204-222.

The use of the phrase “children of Israel” instead of “children of Abraham” follows the language of the Exodus text and serves to make the reference to the Jewish people more visible.

The examples listed show that the history of God with the people of Israel is suppressed in the liturgical language whether unconsciously or consciously. We can identify a tendency to overwrite the Jewish by the generally human, that is Christian. I conclude: Anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism have largely been overcome in the liturgy, but Asemitism seems to be a remnant of the old doctrine of substitution that still persists.

## 2.2 Celebrating Liturgy Alongside Judaism

An a-Semitic substitution also occurs in the liturgy when the qualifications of Israel are transferred exclusively to the Church, without explicitly including a recognition that in this the Church participates in the calling of the Jewish people. For example, the first preface for the Sundays of the year states that all believers in Christ are “now called a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for your own possession.” The statement itself is not theologically problematic. It paraphrases 1 Peter 2:9 and unfolds what is celebrated in the baptismal rite: the anointing as kings, priests and prophets. However, both here and in the baptismal rite, this becomes problematic when the Church does not identify itself as a community that stands together with Israel in this election. 1 Peter itself is paraphrasing Exodus 19:5-6 where God, at Sinai, applies this language to Israel. Were the Church to include in these liturgical prayers the language, “as Israel is, so are we as a church,” this would acknowledge that today’s Jews continue to be a chosen race and a priestly-royal nation.<sup>18</sup>

The Jewish people seek their way through history in faithfulness to their calling no less than the pilgrim Church does. “Shoulder to shoulder” is how *Nostra aetate* 4 puts it. This simultaneity of the Church and Israel is well expressed in today’s Good Friday intercession: “Let us also pray for the Jewish people, to whom the Lord our God spoke first that he may grant them to advance in love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant.”<sup>19</sup> However, this simultaneity needs consistent expressions. It is missing, for example, in the so-called Swiss Eucharistic Prayer, “God leads the Church,” which otherwise refers explicitly to Israel. It is formulated chronologically: “Once you led Israel, your people, with a strong hand through the pathless desert. Today you lead your pilgrim church in the power of the Holy Spirit.” To counter substitutionary thinking, the prayer could read: “You once led Israel, your people, with a strong hand through the pathless desert. Today too, you lead your people Israel and your pilgrim church in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Daniela Kranemann, “Teilhabe an der Würde Israels. Anmerkungen zur Israeltheologie in den Gebetstexten des Messbuchs,” in *Dialog oder Monolog?*, ed. Gerhards and Henrix, 301.

<sup>19</sup> Missale Romanum 1969, Good Friday Liturgy.

<sup>20</sup> On the suppression of Old Testament salvation history in the liturgy, see: Norbert Lohfink, “Altes Testament und Liturgie,” in *Liturgie und Bibel*, ed. Braulik and Lohfink, 65-83.

This constitutive connection between church and synagogue calls Christians to pray for Jews more than just once a year. Some bishops' conferences have introduced a Day of Judaism in their dioceses.<sup>21</sup> In Switzerland, where it is celebrated on the second Sunday of Lent, the liturgy takes center stage. Pastors of every parish are provided with the necessary liturgical aids. In addition, a separate votive mass for the people of Israel would be desirable. Of course, a votive mass for Israel is not about praying for the conversion of the Jews, but, analogous to the Good Friday intercession, for the Jewish people to remain faithful to their calling. There are drafts for this. Numerous readings from the Old Testament are conceivable, for example the reading of the covenant at Sinai. Romans 11 or Ephesians 2 are New Testament texts that reflect the bond of the Church with Israel. The Gospel reading could be the opening of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:17-20), which is explicitly depicting Jesus as an interpreter of the Torah.

These examples and suggestions demonstrate how Christian liturgy can be celebrated in ways that recognize Jesus' Jewishness and the Church's ongoing relationship with Judaism. The adoption of Old Testament faith claims is not problematic for the Church, for the Church also sees itself as "Israel." Likewise, that the Christian Church spiritualizes and interprets the Old Testament is not in itself opposed to Judaism; the rabbinical tradition also ties itself to biblical Israel through a variety of spiritual interpretations. Both Jews and Christians produce literal and spiritual, particularistic and universal interpretations. Dissent may exist between the two traditions. A-Semitism, however, begins where the church makes an exclusive claim to be the heir to the biblical tradition and no longer sees itself as a messianic movement that gathers the nations around Israel.

### 3. The Eucharist as a Sacrament of Redemption

The texts of the current eucharistic prefaces thank God alone for Christ's act of redemption. They speak of Christ as the Son of God and use the language of the incarnation of God in Christ in general terms: "God became man." The incarnation and the sacrifice of the Eucharist is narrated as a work of redemption that follows on the fall of Adam. In other words, redemption in Christ follows directly from the primeval history of Genesis 1-11, a history that was, after the Fall, characterized by violence and injustice. This elides the entire history of Israel as salvation history, even if the Roman Canon refers to the sacrifices of Abel, Melchisedek and Abraham.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, if prayers narrate that salvation through Christ will only be completed in the eschaton, Israel doesn't play any role, but is instead omitted – although Paul speaks of the salvation of all Israel in the end of time (Roman 11:26). With this exclusive focus on salvation through Christ as "true man and true God,"

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<sup>21</sup> Christian M. Rutishauser, *Christlichen Glauben denken. Im Dialog mit der jüdischen Tradition*, Forum Christen und Juden vol. 15 (Vienna: LIT-Verlag, 2016), 249-278.

<sup>22</sup> Daniela Kranemann calculates that only five percent of the two thousand liturgical prayers refer solely to the history of salvation in the Old Testament. See her "Teilhabe an der Würde Israels," 291.

a-Semitism continues in the story of salvation, which can be overcome through reshaping the memory of salvation and expanding the view to its full realization.

### 3.1 Reshaping the Memory and Completion of Salvation

The prefaces are prayers of thanksgiving and praise. They are structured in an analogous way to Jewish prayers: They remember God's wondrous deeds in history and give thanks and praise to God before turning to the present, asking for God's guidance and agency today. The memory, technically called the anamnestic emblem, would be a particularly suitable location for including Israel in the Church's history of salvation.<sup>23</sup> Care should be taken to ensure that what is memorialized is not only a preparation for the Incarnation and the Passover mystery of Christ, as is the case in the scheme of salvation history in the current missal. Rather, the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt and the gift of the Torah at Sinai should be recalled as integral to God's saving work, shaping the new freedom in righteousness. Furthermore, deeds from the life of Jesus must also be remembered in prayers in such a way that it is clear that the God of Israel is acting through him and that he is performing God's deeds.

Section 8 of the liturgical constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* also emphasizes the eschatological character of liturgy. It not only commemorates God's past acts of salvation but also anticipates the future completion of his salvific work. Therefore, the prayers should not only refer to the mission of the Church and its eschatological fulfillment, but also the mission of Israel to all mankind and its salvation in the end of time. When the eschatological perspective of salvation history is told, it is important to ensure that both Jews and Christians find their place in it. The good news that Ephesians 2 formulates is the reconciliation of Jews and gentile Christians and not the dissolution of Judaism into Christianity. The Revelation of John allows the history of salvation to flow into an eschatological, heavenly liturgy that foresees Israel together with the Church out of the nations (Rev. 4: 7).

Therefore, the threefold scheme in the prayers that recalls the history of salvation as "Creation—Adam's fall—redemption through Christ" should be expanded by several elements: Creation—entanglement in sin—calling of Abraham—exodus and covenant at Sinai—Davidic messianic kingship—incarnation and paschal mystery of Christ—eschatological vision of the saved out of both Israel and the Gentiles, of Jews and Christians. Only if the history of redemption begins with Abraham and Israel, reaches its first climax at Sinai and its central climax in life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, leading to the hope of completion which is shared by Israel and the Church, is salvation through Christ appropriately contextualized. It can then no longer be read in an a-Semitic or anti-Judaic way. This is the only way for the Church to free itself from misleading fulfillment thinking.

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<sup>23</sup> Albert Gerhards, "Die Präfationen," in *Bewahren und Erneuern. Studien zur Messliturgie*, ed. Reinhard Meißner, Eduard Nagel and Rudolf Pacik, Innsbrucker Theologische Studien vol. 42 (Innsbruck, Wien: Tyrolia, 1995), 202-218.

In other words: The permanent indwelling of God in Israel must be remembered alongside the incarnation of God in Christ, and the Holy Spirit who guides the Church. This is a mode integral to the New Testament, which repeatedly recalls that God has spoken through the “law and the prophets” or “Moses and the prophets” (cf. Mt 5:17; 7:12; Lk 16:29, 31; Jn 1:45; Acts 28:23; Rom 3:21). Jesus is proclaimed in the prayers as “light to the nations and glory to your people Israel” (Lk 2:32), but this must not obscure the fact that the Jewish people remain a “light to the nations” (Isa 49:6) too.

### 3.2 Christology and the Messianic Hope

Recovering the Jewishness of Jesus in the liturgy also means that Christology is complemented by messianology. What do I mean by this? Classical Christology, as present in liturgical prayers, primarily determines who Jesus is, how he relates to God the Father, and what he means for the individual believer. Messianology, however, focusses on Jesus as the Messiah, through whom the Kingdom of God comes into this world, who brings social justice and peace and completes the work of creation. The social dimension of redemption is formulated more strongly. Expressing the link between Christology and messianology in the liturgy creates a further bridge to Judaism. Stressing in prayers not only the relationship between Christ, God the Father and the praying community, but also expressing the transformation of social relations through Christ, also allows us to hear the Gospels and the New Testament readings in their more original sense.

Therefore, Jesus’s message of the dawning of the kingdom of God should be at the center of the Church’s prayers of remembrance and thanksgiving (cf. Mk 1:14f). Norbert Lohfink pointed out that even in Old Testament texts, the redeemed and just community that is to dawn is not absorbed in politics. He recalls that the ideal people of Israel, envisioned in the book of Exodus, refers to an egalitarian, fraternal society that finds its symbolic expression first and foremost in feasting and liturgical celebrations. Pharaoh is told to allow the Israelites to celebrate a festival in the desert (Ex. 5:1 et al.).<sup>24</sup> It is worth considering whether the Feast of Christ the King at the end of the liturgical year might not be a time to draw inspiration from this. The kingship of Christ shares in God’s kingship (John 18:36). The following Advent season, which is orientated towards the eschatological appearance of the Messiah, represents, as stated at the beginning, a privileged liturgical place to wait together with the Jewish people for the final messianic restoration of the world.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Norbert Lohfink, “Die richtige Gesellschaft,” in *Liturgie und Bibel*, ed. Braulik and Lohfink, 20-27.

<sup>25</sup> The Jewish-Catholic dialogue texts of recent decades underline that the dialogue is not only about theological issues and the relationship between Israel and the Church. Rather, both faith communities are called to fulfill their vocation in global society, cf. for example the Vatican Document, *The Gifts and Calling*, Nos. 46-49.

#### 4. On the Design of Individual Liturgical Elements

So far, I have shown that Jesus as a Jew can be made present in the liturgy by incorporating his belonging to the Jewish people and their view of salvation history into various prayers. In this section, I will now consider how not only the choice of biblical readings and texts in the liturgy, but also the formulation of the creed and the design of the liturgical space in general, can contribute to keeping alive the Church's enduring bond with Judaism.

##### 4.1 Pericope Order of the Readings and Gospels

The liturgical readings from the Old Testament, which were characteristic of Christian liturgy in late antiquity, were inherited from the synagogue in which Christ himself participated but subsequently were almost lost. Their recovery is one of the most outstanding benefits of the liturgical reform that followed the Second Vatican Council. However, the selection of Old Testament readings for Sundays has been rightly criticized, much more than that for weekdays.<sup>26</sup> The principle of selecting readings that are as short as possible and related to the respective Sunday Gospel absolutizes typological readings of these texts, making it impossible to perceive the Old Testament in its intrinsic value. It turns it into a quarry from which discrete nuggets are extracted, whose own theological thematic developments and contexts are no longer visible. It is therefore necessary to ask how the intrinsic value of the Old Testament and its connection with Judaism can be better expressed.

Hansjakob Becker has suggested that Christian liturgy retrieve the history of the Old Testament in a more comprehensive way.<sup>27</sup> However, it is not the narrative logic of history that structures Jewish liturgy. Rather, it celebrates the gift of the Torah and the revelation of God in the Word. It is necessary to consider the both theology of the Tanach as a canon and the rabbinic order for its reading in the synagogue service. This method also takes into account the faith of the historical Jesus; it follows the Gospels' authors who depict Jesus as an interpreter of the Torah in modes familiar to his Jewish community. Matthew has Jesus speak five discourses<sup>28</sup> echoing the five books of the Torah from Sinai. The Sermon on the Mount, also alluding to Sinai, opens with a discussion of Halakha, while Jesus's Kingdom of Heaven discourse, for example, comes across in an entirely aggadic, narrative style. John also speaks of Jesus "interpreting" God (John 1:19) and has him write with his finger in the sand (John 8:6; 8), probably an expression of the oral Torah and alluding to God, who wrote the written Torah with his finger on

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<sup>26</sup> Braulik and Lohfink, *Liturgie und Bibel*, 125-266; Heinz-Günther Schöttler, *Re-Visionen christlicher Theologie aus der Begegnung mit dem Judentum, Judentum-Christentum-Islam*. Interreligiöse Studien, vol. 13 (Würzburg: Ergon, 2016), 435-456.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Jakob Becker, "Die Bibel Jesu und das Evangelium Jesu. Ein konkreter Vorschlag zur Weiterführung der Reform des Wortgottesdienstes," in *Bibel und Liturgie* 68 (1995): 186-194.

<sup>28</sup> Sermon on the Mount: 5:1-7:29; Sermon on the sending forth: 9:35-11:1; Discourse on the kingdom of God: 13:1-53; Community discourse: 18:1-35; End-time discourse: 24:1-25:46.

tablets (Deut 9:10). The Gospels relate to the Old Testament in much the same way as the oral Torah relates to the written Torah in subsequent rabbinical tradition. The Torah is the interpretative horizon and truth space of the New Testament. It interprets it and presents an all-important Torah commentary for its community of faith.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the proposal to introduce a reading of the Torah into the Sunday liturgy alongside the reading of the Gospels seems appropriate to me. Georg Braulik has put forward the most mature proposal that hints in this direction:<sup>30</sup> A Torah and a Gospel reading section by section over three years outside the special liturgical seasons of Christmas and Easter. There would be two *lectio currens*, side by side. In addition, a third reading can be chosen from two choices, one from Old Testament and one from the New Testament, with the Old Testament reading referring to the Torah and the New Testament reading referring to the Gospel. That means that there would still be three readings in the Sunday liturgy. Torah and Gospels would form the two poles, and the third reading interprets either the Torah or the Gospel.

Understanding the Gospel as a messianic commentary on the Torah and the Torah as a preface to the Gospel would activate the principle already guiding Christian bible reading in antiquity, namely that the Old and New Testaments interpret each other in a new way. This understanding does not displace the typological reading of the Old Testament. It contextualizes it. Nor does it oppose the category of fulfilment with which the New Testament is read in relation to the Old Testament. Finally, it recognizes that “the hermeneutics of the New Testament in dealing with the Old Testament is not directed against the Jewish hermeneutics of the time, but is itself originally Jewish.”<sup>31</sup> With the fulfilment quotations and the expression “according to the Scriptures,” the New Testament authors place the Christ event and the spiritual experience after Jesus’s death within the history of the God of Israel. In his detailed analysis, Heinz-Günther Schöttler therefore translates “it has been fulfilled” as “it confirms,” “it affirms itself,” “it comes into its own anew.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> On the significance and position of the commentary and the oral Torah in relation to the written Torah, see: Almut Bruckstein, *The Mask of Moses*, Studien zur jüdischen Hermeneutik (Berlin Wien: Philo Verlag, 2001), 51-77.

<sup>30</sup> Georg Braulik, “Die Tora als Bahnlesung. Zur Hermeneutik einer zukünftigen Auswahl der Sonntagsperikopen,” in *Bewahren und Erneuern*, 50-76.

<sup>31</sup> Klemens Richter, “Christlicher Gottesdienst zwischen Sinaibund und Christusbekenntnis. Eine Einführung,” in *Christologie der Liturgie*, ed. Richter and Kranemann, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Heinz-Günther Schöttler, *Re-Visionen christlicher Theologie*, 47-136, here 135. The liturgical books published by the Swiss and German Bishops’ Conferences for the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays and Holy Days in 1997 and 2004 bear witness to a movement toward a more conscious relationship with Israel. Daniela Kranemann concludes: “In terms of form, but above all in terms of content, the prayers of praise examined for Sunday celebrations of the word of God testify to a clearer Israel-theological profile than the majority of the prayer texts in the missal.... This is perhaps most evident in the way in which the revelation-theological reference point of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, which is central to Jewish identity, is taken up in the prayers.” See her “Lobpreis für das Wort der Heiligen Schrift - Lobpreis für Israel. Anmerkungen zu einem neuen Gebetstypus,” in, “...dass er euch auch erwählt hat,” ed. Deeg and Mildenberger, 148.

## 4.2 The Psalms

The Psalms form the common prayer treasure of Jews and Christians. Christians should realize that the historical Jesus prayed them. Not only the “Our Father” but also the Psalms are words uttered by the mouth of Jesus. In their canonical form, the Psalms were attributed to David already in pre-Christian times. Did putting the Psalms in King David’s mouth only mean giving them historical authority? Did it also express a messianic hope? Georg Braulik writes: “For our theological awareness, the messianic understanding of the Psalms hinges first and foremost on the so-called ‘royal Psalms.’ The (‘restorative’) messianism at issue here is a theology of kingship that has been shifted into the future.”<sup>33</sup> This also applies even more to a later Christian theological and liturgical interpretation that sees Christ as the actual psalmist. The reason for it is not only Jesus’ descent from the Davidic house as presented in the Gospels (Mt 1:6-16; Lk 1:32), but also because Jesus is believed as the only righteous, his voice resonating through the righteous prayer in the Psalms. Praying the Psalms today means taking upon oneself the complex vocation to strive for righteousness. It is given to Jews and Christians together. In this theological perspective, the Psalms are not only historically the common prayer of Jews and Christians, but they are also an expression of their common calling today. That’s a strong argument for giving the Psalms an appropriate place in liturgies of the word and in the Eucharist.

## 4.3 The Profession of Faith

On Sundays and feast days, the Apostles’ Creed or the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is recited during church services. Many suggest that with their credal formulations, the first ecumenical councils Hellenized Christianity, creating a perception that its teachings are in opposition to Judaism. From a Christian perspective, however, the Trinity does not betray Israel’s faith in the one God but rather establishes Israel’s faith as binding for the Church even as the Church expresses her faith in terms of Greek philosophy.<sup>34</sup> The councils interpreted the Jewish concepts of God’s unity and uniqueness on the one hand as a mystery of love. On the other hand, they described how the invisible and transcendent God is nevertheless close to his faithful through his embodiment in Jesus.

Assuming this is the case, we can focus on other aspects of the creeds than the Trinity and Incarnation, both discussed at length in systematic theology. We can see again a clear a-Semitism in the creeds. Why do they not speak about Jesus the Jew and God’s covenant with the Jewish people? What do the creeds conceal? They only testify to Jesus’s birth from Mary, his incarnation, death and resurrection.

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<sup>33</sup> Georg Baulik, “Christologisches Verständnis der Psalmen – schon im Alten Testament?,” in *Christologie der Liturgie*, ed. Richter and Kranemann, 62.

<sup>34</sup> Vatican International Theological Commission, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior: 1700 Years of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325-2025)” (2025), no. 16; 19f. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_doc\\_20250403\\_1700-nicaea\\_ge.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20250403_1700-nicaea_ge.html).

Nothing is said about Jesus's life, that as the son of the Jewish people he lived according to and interpreted the Torah of Moses. The creeds are also silent about the narratives of salvation history preceding the incarnation. The sentence on the Holy Spirit in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed does mention that God spoke through the (Old Testament) prophets, but Israel itself goes unmentioned. These prophets are present only as harbingers of Christ, not as interpreters of the Torah. Redemption and salvation apparently only begin with the Incarnation of God in Christ. The result, thus, is no different than in the orations, prefaces, and the Eucharistic prayers.

A great deal of theological reflection took place in 2025 to mark the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nicaea, creating an occasion for such an update of the corresponding creed with a positive and explicit declaration of the Church's relationship to Judaism. There are several arguments for this: the Roman Catholic Church sees Jewish-Christian dialogue as closely linked to inner-Christian ecumenism,<sup>35</sup> it should agree with Karl Barth's statement that there is ultimately only one major ecumenical question, namely the relationship to Judaism.<sup>36</sup> In addition, many believers memorize the creed. It is prayed aloud by everyone during liturgy. It is therefore also of great pastoral importance to overcome its a-Semitism. Here, too, I would like to propose a formulation that develops and deepens the tradition in a lively way, just by inserting aspects of faith (here in italics) which are relevant in the presence of Judaism:

I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, who created all things, heaven and earth, the visible and invisible worlds, who called Abraham, delivered the children of Israel from captivity and made a covenant with his people for the salvation of the world.

And in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all time: God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father; through him all things were created. For us human beings and for our salvation he came down from heaven, took on flesh through the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary and became man. He proclaimed the kingdom of God, taught the Torah, healed the sick, and gathered all God's people from wherever they dwelt. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried, rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven. He sits at the right hand of the Father and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead; there will be no end to his reign.

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<sup>35</sup> Hans-Hermann Henrix, *Israel trägt die Kirche. Zur Theologie der Beziehung von Kirche und Judentum* (LIT: Münster, 2019); Christian M. Rutishauser, "Jüdisch-christlicher Dialog und christliche Ökumene," in *Ökumene in säkularer Gesellschaft*, ed. Wolfgang W. Müller and Franc Wagner (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2022), 275-301; Christian M. Rutishauser, "Jüdisch-christlicher Dialog und innerchristliche Ökumene aus vatikanischer Perspektive," *Kirche und Israel* 1 (2025): 75-83.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Hans Hermann Henrix, "Ökumenische Theologie und Judentum," in *Freiburger Rundbrief* 27 (1976): 27.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and gives life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who is worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son, who spoke through the prophets. I believe in God's faithfulness to Israel and the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess the one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I await the resurrection of the dead, the salvation of all Israel and the life of the world to come. Amen.

#### 4.4 Liturgical Space and Sacred Signs

As is well known, liturgy does not only consist of spoken prayer. The Eucharist renders its spiritual reality present through signs and symbols. Old church buildings face east, many include a rich Old Testament pictorial program, depicting the Decalogue tablets or even the Tetragrammaton. Many depictions are characterized by a Christian, typological interpretation of the Old Testament in relation to the New. The baptismal font appropriates the baptism of Jesus by John for Christian baptism, although it was a Jewish rite of repentance, as mentioned above. Some of these depictions—and not just the classic pair of *Ecclesia et Synagoga*—are also anti-Jewish. How should these be handled?<sup>37</sup>

Much will depend on Israel-sensitive commentary and contextualization, which must be carried out with attention to its pastoral dimensions as well.<sup>38</sup> However, new signs of solidarity with Judaism can also be placed in churches. In the Würzburg Cathedral, for example, there is a large menorah in the entrance area. Churches commissioned the Jewish artist, Marc Chagall, who depicted Jesus as a Jew in stained glass windows and paintings in places like Zürich and Mainz. The design of liturgical vestments can be considered too. Next to the cross, not only the burning bush from Exodus 3 appears from time to time, but also the Hebrew letter Shin for the *Shema Israel* to visualize the first commandment and faith in the God of Israel. Renovation and renewal work offers numerous opportunities to overcome Christian forgetfulness of Israel and to represent Jesus the Jew. Why should new church buildings not be oriented towards Jerusalem? In European and North America, this would complement the eastward orientation of the old churches, oriented towards the rising of the sun to honor Christ, the “Sun of Righteousness” (Mal 3:20). Where dioceses do not have a commissioner for relations with Judaism who can provide guidance on such specific issues, such a commissioner should be appointed.

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<sup>37</sup> One example of this is the controversy surrounding the depiction of Jews in Cologne Cathedral. See Bernd Wacker and Rolf Lauer, “Der Kölner Dom und ‘die Juden’.” Symposium of the Karl Rahner Academy Cologne in cooperation with the Cologne Cathedral Building Administration from 18 to 19 November 2006,” *Jahrbuch des Zentral-Dombau-Vereins* (Köln: Verlag Kölner Dom: 2/2018).

<sup>38</sup> Katholische (Erz)-Bistümer, Evangelische Landeskirchen NRW, ed., *...und jetzt?. Leitlinien zum Umgang mit antijüdischen Bildwerken in und an Kirchenräumen* (Düsseldorf: Die Umweltdruckerei, 2025).

### **Conclusion**

Keeping Jesus' Jewishness present in the liturgy is certainly one of the central tasks of preaching. Preaching must be in accordance with a renewed theology of Judaism since Vatican II and always in a spirit of dialogue with the Jewish people, as if Jews were present at that eucharist. However, this essay has attempted to raise awareness that the official prayers of the Roman Catholic liturgy also need to be revised. Since the post-conciliar liturgical reform, Jewish theology has greatly evolved. Therefore, adjustments must be made. In doing so, it is not enough to look at Jesus as an individual and as a Jew of his historical time. Rather, he must be seen as a representative of the Jewish people and understood in the broader context of rabbinical theology, which began to develop parallel to early Christianity. Above all, the Church's framing of salvation history, which has overwritten or simply omitted the Jewish elements, should be revised and supplemented. The presentation of the design of salvation history must point to God's redemptive work, from creation, through the Israelites, and up to and including contemporary Israel, understood as today's Jews and Christian longing together for eschatological completion. Christian anti-Judaism may have been overcome. But the a-Semitism that this overcoming has brought with it can't be the solution. Only an explicitly positive appreciation of Judaism does justice to the doctrine of God's irrevocable covenant with Israel and the role within it of Jesus the Jew. Liturgy must take up this reference to the first covenant and to Jesus's Jewishness in a positive way if it wants to do justice to God's revelation.