

Readings Once Chosen and Now Obsolete: Judaism, Historical Progressivism, and Ongoing Catholic Liturgical Reform

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In his famous 1980 speech in the Synagogue of Mainz, Pope St. John Paul II declared that the “Old Covenant” was never revoked by God.¹ This theologically powerful statement, asserting that Judaism and the Jewish people retain an inherent connection to God, was a watershed moment in the Catholic theology of Judaism. Since developed and expounded more fully by a variety of magisterial and theological authorities, the Catholic belief in the continued sanctity of the Jewish religion has become a cornerstone of contemporary Catholic-Jewish dialogue.²

Far from reflecting the belief in God’s abiding blessing for the Jewish people, however, the Catholic liturgy contains a number of texts that deprecate Judaism. The Office of Readings, an element of the Liturgy of the Hours designed specifically for reading and reflection on classical sources from the history of the Church, has a particularly problematic collection of such texts. For instance, the Office of Readings on the Feast of the Epiphany says:

Let the children of the promise now receive the blessing in the seed of Abraham, the blessing renounced by the children of his flesh.³

Similarly, on the subsequent Saturday, the Office of Readings teaches:

¹ John Paul II, “Address to Representatives of the West German Jewish Community” (November 17, 1980).

² See, for instance, Gavin D’Costa, *Catholic Doctrines on the Jews after the Second Vatican Council* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Gavin D’Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); Amy-Jill Levine, “Supersessionism: Admit and Address Rather than Debate or Deny,” *Religions* 13(2) (2022): 155; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020155>.

³ *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite* (New York: Catholic Books Publishing, 1975) [henceforth *LOTH*], vol. 1, 560-561. The Latin is: *benedictionem...qua se filii carnis abdicant, filii promissionis accipient: Liturgia Horarium iuxta Ritus Romanum: Officium Divinum ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum, editio typica* [henceforth *LH*], vol. 1, 483. See below for more on this passage. Although most of the Liturgy of the Hours is subject to a new English translation (to enter force in 2027), it appears that the second readings in the Office of Readings will not be retranslated and the translations given here will remain in liturgical use. The Latin texts have not been revised.

The old covenant, which Jews follow, is exhausted by its letter; the new covenant, which belongs to us, has the savor of life and is filled with grace.⁴

These texts, and the other anti-Jewish texts in the Office of Readings detailed and categorized below, clearly require redaction in order to bring the Catholic liturgy in accord with recent magisterial teaching.

The clear need to redact these texts, however, is complicated by three difficulties. Firstly, there needs to be an inventory of the different categories of problematic texts. The removal of all texts that mention “Jews” or “Judaism,” essentially producing a liturgy free of any connection to Judaism, would be deeply undesirable; instead, only texts that fall into some sort of theological error should be removed. Secondly, suitable replacement texts would need to be identified; ideally, these replacement texts would not only erase negative references to Judaism but actually contain positive references to the Jewish people.

This article provides some initial suggestions for both the categorization of problematic texts (using the helpful framework of types of supersessionism developed by Kendall Soulen) and the identification of replacement texts; however, the key argument of this article concerns the third difficulty: the need for a suitable hermeneutic of liturgical revision. The above-identified problematic texts were themselves incorporated into the liturgy as a result of the post-Vatican II process of liturgical revision. In suggesting that these texts need to be removed, then, I am diagnosing a problem with the way that liturgical reform has been done in the past. The suggestion that ongoing liturgical reform is required is widely accepted and even part of the design of the Office of Readings; however, in order to advocate for an ongoing liturgical reform, I need to both identify the mentality that led to these past errors and identify a better mode of liturgical reform that would avoid these problems.⁵

⁴ LOTH, vol. 1, 620-621 (see also below for more from this reading). The Latin is: *descendit ad terras Ecclesiae ex gentibus congregandae* (LH, vol. 1, 531).

⁵ On the Breviary as continually reformed, see Batiffol, Pierre, *History of the Roman Breviary* (London: Longmans, 1912), 181-182; 186-187; 193-194; 202-203; Gregory DiPippo, “Compendium of the Reforms of the Roman Breviary,” *New Liturgical Movement*. The reformers were conscious of this ongoing development: Michael Pellegrino, “De lectionibus patristicis in Breviario,” *Notitiae* 7-8 (July-August 1965): 209. For the Office of Readings in particular as subject to ongoing development, see Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948–1975*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 544. On the planned “optional lectionary” of Biblical readings that is still in progress and has not yet been implemented, see Menke, Andrew, “Q. The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours,” *Adoremus Bulletin* (March 16, 2022). Note that the Biblical reading in the Office of Readings is usually not related to the subsequent patristic reading in any schema. For the variety of national and monastic lectionaries for the Office of Readings, see the Italian *L’ora dell’ascolto* (Italy: Edizione del Deserto, 1997); the Benedictine *A Word in Season* (Augustinian Press, 1995) [henceforth AWIS]. Most changes have not intentionally or systematically addressed the question of Judaism (cf. anti-Jewish texts incorporated into AWIS, vol. 1, 43-45; 57-58; 187-188; vol. 2, 200-202; vol. 7, 26. fitting into the categories outlined below). Some other scholars have suggested a need to reform the liturgy to respond specifically to anti-Judaism; for instance, Paul Griffiths, *Israel: A Christian Grammar* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023), 210; Philip Cunningham, “Reviving the Catholic Observance of the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus,” in Celia Deutsch, Eugene J. Fisher, and A. James Rudin, eds., *Toward the Future: Essays on Catholic-Jewish Relations in Memory of Rabbi Leon Klenicki*, eds.

The core hermeneutic of the post-Vatican II reform of the Office of Readings was one of historical progressivism. Reformers believed that many patristic texts read in the pre-Vatican II liturgy (in the office of Matins, the predecessor of the Office of Readings) were obsolete: either through their references to long-disappeared heresies, through their reliance on antiquated philosophical concepts, or for their irrelevance to the concerns of modern Christians.⁶ As such, these reformers believed that these readings should be abandoned and replaced with a “better selection” of more suitable readings.⁷

Addressing anti-Jewish texts was not a stated priority for the reformers of the Office of Readings.⁸ Although they responded to the mandate of *Nostra Aetate* to remove texts that levied the charge of deicide upon the Jewish people, the reformers included texts that asserted the irrelevance of the Jewish covenant, that “God was displeased with the Jews,” or that “the Jews...stand for sensual men and those desirous of carnal and sensual things.”⁹ Viewed through the hermeneutic of historical progressivism, these texts were indeed obsolete almost from the moment they were published.

A core problem of historical progressivism is that it is a prevarication to view the present as essentially different from the past. While the post-Vatican II liturgical reformers might have believed that anti-Judaism was a problem only of the past, the reality—revealed by their own textual choices—is that anti-Judaism continued to afflict the Church in their own day, and indeed has continued to afflict the Church through the present.¹⁰ A favorable comparison with the “bad old days” of deicide does not resolve the ongoing problem of Christian anti-Judaism, but indeed perpetuates an anti-Jewish way of doing history wherein the new (usually coded as Christian) replaces the old (usually coded as Jewish).¹¹

(New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press/Stimulus Books, 2013), 129-146; Tyler Mayfield, “‘Read and Mark in Holy Scripture’: Reassessing the Scripture Readings of ‘A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols’ in a Post-Shoah World,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 20(1) (2025).

⁶ Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, 539; adapted from Pellegrino, “De lectionibus patristicis in Breviario,” 209-210.

⁷ The phrase “better selection” is from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 92b (“melius seligantur”). See the context in DiPippo, “Compendium of the Reforms of the Roman Breviary, 10.3.”

⁸ Although Bugnini explicitly noted the need to address anti-Jewish texts in the reform of the Good Friday Liturgy (*The Reform of the Liturgy*, 119), he noted no such need for the Office of Readings (*ibid*, 539).

⁹ For texts that lay the deicide charge in the pre-Vatican II *Roman Breviary*, see Bute, *The Roman Breviary: Reformed by Order of the Holy Ecumenical Council of Trent* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1908), v. 1, 621; 889; 893; etc; and also the Matins texts for Good Friday (2nd nocturn). Also texts that intentionally stoke hatred, even if they do not directly indicate Jewish deicide, are found at Bute, v. 1, 602; 607; etc. For the newly included texts, see LOTH, vol. 4, 595-6; LOTH vol. 4, 201-202 (both discussed below).

¹⁰ On ongoing supersessionism in the Church, see Levine, “Supersessionism.”

¹¹ For instance, the terminology of Hebrew Bible as “Old Testament.” See also the *Catena Aurea* on Luke 1:23-25 (Elizabeth as representing the Jewish Old). On the role of the Hebrew Bible in Christian narratives, see R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 13-15; 31; 46-47.

Not only is the present not all good; the past is not all bad. A reduction of the pre-Vatican II theology of Judaism to the charge of deicide omits aspects of historical Catholic teaching on Judaism that were remarkably positive. These passages are in fact more in keeping with the post-Vatican II magisterial teaching on Judaism than many of the passages selected by the liturgical editors of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, as this article will suggest, there are an abundance of patristic and historical texts that could serve to contextualize modern Catholic teaching on Judaism and that would be appropriate for liturgical use.

Any history of the Church that sets the present against the past is doomed to be deceptive. This article is undergirded by the historical claim that instead of exalting the present or dismissing the past, we should understand the ways that Christian attitudes towards the Jewish people have been continually contested over time and through the present. The liturgy has often been such a venue for the contestation of these views; the Office of Readings is both a site of contestation (as in this article) and a vehicle through which clerics and participants in the liturgical life of the Church come to understand this history. As such, the Office of Readings deserves a genuinely “better selection” of ancient and modern texts that engage with Judaism.

The texts engaging with Judaism in the contemporary Office of Readings fall generally into three problematic categories, roughly parallel to the three categories of “supersessionism” outlined by Soulen.¹² The first category of texts embraces the narrative of “punitive supersessionism,” suggesting that the Jewish people have fallen under the punishment of God. The second category of texts, asserting that the Jewish people have been replaced by the Church in the economy of salvation, generally corresponds to Soulen’s category of “economic supersessionism.” Finally, the third category of texts that I identify, marginalizing the ongoing role and life of the Jewish people, evokes Soulen’s “structural supersessionism.”

It is not entirely surprising that a liturgy such as the Office of Readings, which draws deeply on the history of Christian thought, should have come to contain such texts; these three types of supersessionism have indeed characterized much Christian thinking about the Jewish people over the history of the Church. My proposal, however, is not to supersede “obsolete” Christian thinking by “modern” Christian thinking but to draw upon texts from the contested history of Christian perspectives on Judaism that would reflect the non-supersessionist commitments of contemporary Catholic teaching on Judaism. I offer this preliminary identification of problematic categories of texts and potential replacements, then, as part of a broader historical project that would reframe Catholic teaching on Judaism as perpetually contested throughout the history of the Church.

Punitive supersessionism is the belief that the Jewish people are rejected by God as a result of their disbelief in Jesus.¹³ Punitive supersessionism considers the sufferings of the Jewish people to be the result of God’s punishment for their sins:

¹² Soulen, ch. 1-2; also Michael Vlach, “Various Forms of Replacement Theology,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 20(1) (Spring 2009): 57-69; D’Costa, *The Catholic Doctrine*, 23ff.

¹³ Soulen, *The God of Israel*, 30; also D’Costa, *The Catholic Doctrine*, 23.

for instance, the great Christian historian Eusebius argued that the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans was a punishment for Jewish unbelief in Jesus.¹⁴ Eusebius' grand historical narrative—often echoed by later writers—is not strictly identical to the theory of Jewish deicide (since the Jewish people are charged with not believing in Jesus rather than with crucifying him), although they are closely correlated. While not directly addressed in the *Nostra Aetate* condemnation of the deicide charge, then, subsequent Catholic teaching has firmly argued against punitive supersessionism.

The Office of Readings as it is currently constituted does not reflect this official denial of punitive supersessionism. For instance, a homily read in the Office of Readings on Wednesday of Week 34 of Ordinary Time (“attributed to” the fourth century Egyptian bishop Macarius) makes exactly the Eusebian argument that God punished the Jewish people by destroying Jerusalem:

When God was displeased with the Jews, he delivered Jerusalem to the enemy, and they were conquered by those who hated them; there were no more sacrifices or feasts. Likewise angered at a soul who had broken his commands, God handed it over to its enemies, who corrupted and totally dishonored it. When a house has no master living in it, it becomes dark, vile and contemptible, choked with filth and disgusting refuse. So too is a soul which has lost its master, who once rejoiced there with his angels. This soul is darkened with sin, its desires are degraded, and it knows nothing but shame.¹⁵

This text not only adopts the punitive-supersessionist view of God's punishment on the Jewish people; it compares the faithless soul to the Jew. Indeed, writers of antiquity and the medieval period commonly used the image of the Jew to attack their Christian enemies. This demonization of the Jewish other often led to profoundly deleterious consequences for real Jews.¹⁶ As such, tropes that use the image of the punished Jew to describe the “disgusting” soul are inappropriate for liturgical use.¹⁷

There are other passages in the Office of Readings that use the trope of the Jew as the spiritually sick person. Even if these texts don't explicitly state the cause of the Jewish sickness, they generally conform with the punitive-supersessionist view that their own sins (deicide? faithlessness?) have caused the spiritual disgrace of the Jewish people. For instance, the Office of Readings contains the following line from St. Ambrose, the fourth century bishop of Milan and doctor of the Church:

¹⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, ch. 5-8.

¹⁵ LOTH vol. 4, 595-6: *Quemadmodum olim Deus infensus Iudas tradidit Ierusalem in spectaculum hostibus...sic etiam iratus animae...* (LH vol. 4, 499).

¹⁶ On this theme see Nirenberg, David, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013); Lipton, Sara, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014); etc.

¹⁷ See the condemnation of anti-Jewish attitudes in NA 4.

The Jew drinks and still thirsts, but when you drink you will be incapable of thirst.¹⁸

Similarly, the Office of Readings contains a sentiment from Origen, the prolific theologian of the third century:

It seems to me that Jesus meant the Jews in this episode to stand for sensual men and those desirous of carnal and sensual things.¹⁹

While modern scholars have addressed Jesus' criticisms of "the Jews" by historicizing it as an intra-Jewish argument, Origen instead used Scriptural passages on "the Jews" without any such nuance to deploy the trope of Jewish carnality.

Yet despite the lamentable history of Christian texts on the spiritual ill of the Jewish (or "Jewish") soul, there is also a tradition within Christian history of thinking about the Jewish soul not as dishonored or forsaken but as honorable. St. Ignatius of Loyola, for instance, exalted the dignity of the Jewish person, as seen in the following 16th century *exemplum*:

A statement was made that caused Ignatius to say he would count it a special favor of our Lord were he of Jewish lineage. He gave this reason: "What wonder! That a man can be related by blood to Christ our Lord and to our Lady, the glorious Virgin Mary!" He spoke these words with such an expression and an emotion so deep that tears sprang to his eyes. This impressed everyone profoundly. In connection with this incident I shall relate what Pedro de Zarate...told me. On hearing our Father make the same statement Pedro crossed himself; exclaiming "Judío!" he spat on the ground contemptuously. Our Father took him up. "Very well, Señor Pedro de Zarate, let us be reasonable. Hear what I have to say." And then he gave the Knight so many good arguments for his view that he persuaded Pedro to wish, too, that he had been of Jewish blood.²⁰

¹⁸ LOTH, vol. 3, 507; *Iudaeus bibit et sitit, tu cum biberis sitire non poteris* (LH vol. 3, 446). For Ambrose's negative theology of Jews and Judaism, see Doerfler, "Ambrose's Jews: The Creation of Judaism and Heterodox Christianity in Ambrose of Milan's 'Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam,'" *Church History* 80(4) (2011): 749-772, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000964071100120X>. But compare to Ambrose on the virtue of Jewish scholars in his commentary on psalm 118, in *A Word in Season*, vol. 1, 35-36. Also see Bute, *The Roman Breviary*, 592.

¹⁹ LOTH vol. 4, 201-202; *Corporis amantes ac rerum sensibilibus, nunc iam mihi videntur innui Iudaei* (LH, vol. 4, 163). Here again the import has been somewhat softened in the English translation. On this sort of strategic mistranslation, see Foederatio Internationalis Una Voce, "Positio N. 28: The Good Friday Prayer for the Jews in the Extraordinary Form," (February 2016); also Zachary Young, "The Intercessions for the Jewish People in the Liturgy of the Hours and the Roman Missal," *Antiphon* 29.3 (2025): 267-289, <https://doi.org/10.1353/atp.2025.a978469>. For more on Origen's attitudes towards Jews, see McGuckin, "Origen and the Jews," *Studies in Church History* 29 (1992), 7ff, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400011189>

²⁰ Translation from Brodrick, James, "St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jews," *The Bridge* 4 (1962): 300.

Some may find this passage problematic or inappropriate for liturgical use in that it regards Judaism as honorable due to the Jewishness of Christ—thus defining Judaism in terms of Christianity. However, as a text designed for use by Christians, this text recapitulates Scriptural and conciliar arguments about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.²¹ Jews need not accept every aspect of Christian views of Judaism; as long as any suggestion that Jewish value only comes after conversion is avoided, this text should be regarded as appropriate. This text is in conformity with contemporary Catholic theology, which firmly rejects the theory of the inherent dishonor of the Jewish person.

This text is especially valuable because it contextualizes the contest within the Church between hatred of Jews and veneration of Jews. Rather than eliding the stereotypes of Jews that have existed within the Church and ignoring their continued existence historical progressivism, this text demonstrates the history of Christian anti-Judaism and its opponents. By engaging the contested history of punitive supersessionism, this text meaningfully historicizes the ongoing Christian struggle against anti-Judaism.

While punitive supersessionism regards the Jewish people as condemned, economic supersessionism regards the Jewish people as replaced.²² That which was once true of the Jewish people now applies to the Church; the Jewish covenant has been terminated and replaced with the Christian covenant. As such, the Jewish people have no ongoing role in the economy of salvation. As an example of this thinking, the fourth century Syriac writer Aphraat argued (in a passage read in the Office of Readings on the First Sunday of Lent) that:

We know, dearly beloved, that God established different laws in different generations which were in force as long as it pleased him. Afterward they were made obsolete.²³

Many other passages in the Office of Readings evoke this sense of economic supersessionism, which has deep roots in the history of Christian attempts to make sense of the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the following passage (from the fifth century bishop Faustus of Ruiz) is read on the day before the feast of the Baptism of the Lord:

²¹ In particular, the focus on Romans 9-11 is paralleled by *Nostra Aetate* 4. For reflections on the role of Romans 9-11, see John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2-6; Benedict XVI, "Grace and Vocation without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise De Iudaeis," trans. Nicholas Healy Jr., in *Communio* 45 (2018), 163-84, at 168. See the connection to Romans 9 as well as *Nostra Aetate*.

²² On the correlation between punitive supersessionism and economic supersessionism, see Soulen, *The God of Israel*, 29-30.

²³ From Wednesday of the First Week of Lent: *LOTH*, vol. 2, 115; cf. *LH*, vol. 2, 92-93: *et postmodum antiquatae sunt*. On anti-Judaism in Aphrahat, see Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 20," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10(3) (2002): 305-327, <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2002.0031>.

The old covenant, which Jews follow, is exhausted by its letter; the new covenant, which belongs to us, has the savor of life and is filled with grace.²⁴

While distinct from punitive supersessionism, the economic-supersession view that the Jewish people have been replaced often tends towards a negative view of Jews and Judaism. The categories of economic and punitive supersessionism often share considerable overlap, as demonstrated by a fifth century homily from Pope Leo the Great (read on the feast of the Epiphany):

A promise had been made to the holy patriarch Abraham in regard to these nations. He was to have a countless progeny, born not from his body but from the seed of faith. His descendants are therefore compared with the array of the stars. The father of all nations was to hope not in an earthly progeny but in a progeny from above. Let the full number of the nations now take their place in the family of the patriarchs. Let the children of the promise now receive the blessing in the seed of Abraham, the blessing renounced by the children of his flesh.²⁵

This theory of supersessionism not only posits the replacement of the Jewish people by the Church as the inheritors of the promises made to Abraham; it argues that this replacement was in response to the sins and failures of the Jewish people (“children of his flesh”).

Recent magisterial teaching on Judaism such as the 2015 Vatican document *The Gifts and the Calling*, however, has emphasized the continued vitality and relevance of the covenant made with Abraham’s children of his flesh.²⁶ God’s covenant with the Church has been regarded as augmenting, but not replacing, the Abrahamic covenant with the Jewish people. As such, there is a need to confront the economically supersessionist trope of Church-as-true-Israel in all its liturgical occurrences, both within and outside the Office of Readings.

While *The Gifts and the Calling* would be suitable for liturgical use, it is not necessary to erase the entire history of Christian thinking about Israel prior to the 1960s to confront economic supersessionism.²⁷ Against the view of historical progressivism, a variety of historical Christian thinkers have regarded Israel as joined

²⁴ LOTH, vol. 1, 620-621 (see also below for more from this reading). The Latin is: *descendit ad terras Ecclesiae ex gentibus congregandae* (LH, vol. 1, 531).

²⁵ LOTH, vol. 1, 560-561. The Latin is: *benedictionem...qua se filii carnis abdicant, filii promissionis accipient*: LH, vol. 1, 483. This text was originally redacted (i.e. omitting the supposed renunciation of the blessing by the Jews) in the edition prepared for the 1970 draft *Lectiones Patrum Et Lectiones Hagiographica Pro Officio Divino* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970). However, the published edition restored the full anti-Jewish import of the text. I have not encountered any accounts that might explain why this aspect of the passage was censored or readmitted.

²⁶ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable” (Rom 11:29) (December 10, 2015).

²⁷ The *Liturgy of the Hours* contains as readings addresses from Popes Paul VI and John Paul II and writings by recently canonized saints, in addition to Vatican II documents. There is no barrier preventing the inclusion of recently published documents into the set of readings. For these readings as

to God through an irrevocable covenant (even if these passages have often been buried and de-emphasized in more anti-Jewish eras). For instance, in the third century, the bishop St. Cyprian of Carthage argued in a treatise on the names to be used in baptism:

For the case of the Jews under the apostles was one, but the condition of the Gentiles is another. The former, because they had already gained the most ancient baptism of the law and Moses, were to be baptized also in the name of Jesus Christ, in conformity with what Peter tells them in the Acts of the Apostles, saying, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost...²⁸

Cyprian regarded the Jewish covenant not as obsoleted by Christianity but as intimately connected to the practice of Christianity. While this text may seem uncomfortable due to its references to the baptism of Jews, the intent here is not to proselytize but to affirm the grace held (once and always) by the Jewish people. The text elaborates the theme of *Nostra Aetate*: that in order to understand itself, Christianity needs to turn to Judaism—not as a past phenomenon as in the theory of economic supersessionism, but as a lived religion that is at the heart of the “mystery of the Church.”²⁹ While it raises significant theological questions, these exegetical words of St. Cyprian might be suitable for incorporation into Christian liturgical texts.

Other patristic texts that emphasize the ongoing validity and goodness, not abrogation, of the Jewish covenant include the following widely-circulated text attributed to the sixth century bishop St. Remigius:

By the two brothers, two people are signified born of one God their Father; He saw them when He looked on them in His mercy. In Peter, (which is interpreted ‘owning,’) who is called Simon, (i. e. obedient,) is signified the Jewish nation, who acknowledged God in the Law, and obeyed His commandments; Andrew, which is interpreted ‘manly’ or ‘graceful,’ signifies the Gentiles, who after they had come to the knowledge of God, manfully abode in the faith...By James is understood the Jewish nation, which through their knowledge of God overthrew the Devil; by John the Gentile world, which was saved of grace alone.³⁰

“historical” rather than “patristic,” to enable more recent inclusions, see Bugnini, *History of the Reform*, 543.

²⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle 72 (translation from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, via *New Advent*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050672.htm>).

²⁹ For exposition of this phrase from *Nostra Aetate*, see Mark Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery: Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

³⁰ Remigius; cited in Thomas Aquinas’ *Catena Aurea* on Matthew 4.

Remigius's exposition, like that of Cyprian, speaks of the Jewish people not as obsolete but as richly relevant for the Christian understanding. This text, imbibed by Christian theologians for centuries through its inclusion in the *Catena Aurea* of St. Thomas Aquinas, remains suitable for contemporary liturgical reading.

Yet while texts like those of Cyprian and Remigius avoid the pitfalls of economic and punitive supersessionism, they veer dangerously close to a third problematic perspective that Soulen identifies as structural supersessionism. Structural supersessionism erases Jewish particularity by overly insisting on the universality of God's covenant.³¹ Even if the Jewish covenant is not denigrated or replaced (as in the cases of economic supersessionism and punitive supersessionism), structural supersessionism would regard the Jewish covenant as having no abiding relevance.

Structural supersessionism has proven even more difficult to confront than economic and punitive supersessionism. In large part, this is because it has been difficult for the Church to articulate what the unique role of the Jewish people might be in the light of the Christian revelation. Recent theologians have attempted to reconcile the Church's affirmation of the salvific universality of Christ with acceptance of the Jewish people's self-understanding in a variety of ways, none of which have received formal ecclesiastical approbation.³² Yet even though magisterial teaching on the ongoing role of the Jewish covenant remains to be fully articulated, it is important for liturgical texts to reflect the theological sense that the Jewish people retain an ongoing election before God.

Theological analysis of the distinctive role and calling of Jewish Christians has helped the Church confront structural supersessionism.³³ While structural supersessionism would regard the Jewishness of Jewish Christians as essentially irrelevant, analyses of the Jewish Christian vocation have served to assert the ongoing importance of the particularity of Judaism. To be sure, the existence of Jewish Christians has been a controversial topic for some, to whom the idea harkens back to past ages of proselytism. However, meditations on the vocation of Jewish Christians (however uncomfortable their existence might make either side) are not a call to Jews to convert *en masse* but rather an analysis of the particular situation of some few liminal individuals and communities. Historically, Christian perspectives on Jewish Christians have been enormously influential in shaping Christian perspectives of the Jewish people at large.

An effort to identify and address the liturgical loci of structural supersessionism, then, might be mediated through liturgical texts that address the idea of Jewish Christianity. Liturgical texts that engage the possibility of Jewish Christianity are

³¹ See Soulen, *The God of Israel*, 31-32; also Vlach, "Various Forms of Replacement Theology," 64-66.

³² For "salvific universality," see *Dominus Iesus*. Theologians working on these topics include Mark Kinzer, *Stones the Builders Rejected* (Eugene: Cascade, 2024); Angela Costley and Gavin D'Costa, eds., *From Sinai to Rome* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2025); and others.

³³ Michael Wyschogrod, "Israel, Church, and Election" in *Brothers in Hope*, ed. John M. Oesterreicher (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 83; Michael Wyschogrod and David Berger, *Jews and Jewish Christianity* (New York: KTAV, 1978), 64ff; Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery*; Kinzer, *Stones the Builders Rejected*; Soulen, *The God of Israel*, 11-12; also Levine, "Supersessionism."

really affirming the ongoing significance of Jewish particularity; even if these texts might articulate concepts less completely than texts by contemporary Jewish thinkers (as suggested for inclusion of the Office of Readings by Paul Griffiths), they are certainly likely to do it in a way more amenable to Christian liturgical use.³⁴ Conversely, liturgical texts that deny the possibility of Jewish Christianity are enacting structural supersessionism by denying the significance of Jewish particularity.

Of the latter sort of liturgical text there are many examples. Texts that assert the nature of the Church as essentially Gentile (and not Jewish in its origins, let alone in its continued existence) can be found in various places in the Office of Readings. For instance, on the Third Sunday of Lent, the following homiletic passage from the 5th century theologian St. Augustine is read:

*A woman came. She is a symbol of the Church not yet made righteous. Righteousness follows from the conversation. She came in ignorance, she found Christ, and he enters into conversation with her. Let us see what it is about, let us see why a Samaritan woman came to draw water. The Samaritans did not form part of the Jewish people: they were foreigners. The fact that she came from a foreign people is part of the symbolic meaning, for she is a symbol of the Church. The Church was to come from the Gentiles, of a different race from the Jews.*³⁵

In addition to its deeply historically problematic denial of the Jewish roots of Christianity, this passage embodies structural supersessionism in its denial of the ongoing existence of Jews and Jewish Christians. Many other passages in the Office of Readings make similar assertions. In a sermon read on the Saturday before the feast of the Baptism (quoted earlier in part above), a passage from Faustus of Riez is read:

*Like a bridegroom coming from his marriage chamber our God descended to earth in his incarnation, in order to be united to his Church which was to be formed of the pagan nations. To her he gave a pledge and a dowry: a pledge when God was united to man; a dowry when he was sacrificed for man's salvation. The pledge is our present redemption; the dowry, eternal life.*³⁶

Embodying the economic supersessionism of replacement in addition to the structural supersessionism of the denial of Judaism in the Church, Cyril of Alexandria

³⁴ See Paul Griffiths, *Israel*, 210. This interesting idea would, however, transcend the parameters of liturgical reform, which specified that the text should be by orthodox Christian authors (Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, 539; 544). While texts of some antiquity need not necessarily be by saints, they need to be authored by Christians.

³⁵ LOTH, vol. 2, 212: *ventura enim erat Ecclesia de gentibus, alienigena a genere Iudaeorum* (LH vol. 2, 175). Augustine's views on the Jews were nuanced; see below and Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

³⁶ LOTH, vol. 1, 620-621 (see also above for more from this reading). The Latin is: *descendit ad terras Ecclesiae ex gentibus congregandae* (LH, vol. 1, 531).

wrote in a sermon read in the Office of Readings on Wednesday of Week 17 of Ordinary Time:

But now the Savior has built a second holy assembly, our Christian Church, from the Gentiles.³⁷

While structural supersessionism might seem convenient and lend itself to a popular dual-covenant salvation theology wherein the Church is simply not relevant for the Jewish people, the reality is that structural supersessionism can only lead into other types of supersessionism (as seen here). If Christians view themselves as originating outside of Judaism, Judaism becomes a target for hostile ideas rather than a brother, even a brother with whom there are significant disagreements. Indeed, while there has always been heated intra-Jewish polemic, the origins of Christian anti-Judaism are found in the adaptations of this polemic by a predominantly Gentile church to use against the Jews: no longer as brothers, but as enemies.³⁸ The mystery of the connection between the Church and the Jewish people, reflected by *Nostra Aetate*, should then be highlighted and not suppressed.

In contradiction to these liturgical texts asserting the Gentile nature of the Church and the essential separability of Judaism and Christianity, *Nostra Aetate* asserted:

As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock....

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "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" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's mainstay and pillars, as well as most of

³⁷ LOTH, vol. 3, 556-7; Lat. *Secundam ex gentibus aedificavit Servator, sanctam nostram christianorum Ecclesiam* (LH, vol. 3, 491). This sermon continues to assert the rejection of "*illa, quae in Iudaea erat*," favorably translated by the LOTH as "the single church which was in Judea" (i.e. the Jewish Christian church) but more likely referring to the Jewish people as a whole. For anti-Judaism in Cyril, see Dov Weiss, "Cyril of Alexandria's Critique of 'Jewish' Parental Sin," *Medieval Encounters* 28.3 (2022): 221-241, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700674-12340138>; also compare to the more positive texts by Cyril in *A Word in Season*, vol. 1, 68-69 or 214-215 that might be more suitable for inclusion like the others suggested, but contrast to the more negative texts: i.e. *AWIS* vol. 2 45-46.

³⁸ See Paula Fredriksen, "Augustine and 'Thinking With' Jews: Rhetoric Pro- and Contra Iudaeos," *Ancient Jew Review* (2018); also John S. Kloppenborg and John Marshall, "Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism and the Historical Jesus" (London: Bloomsbury, 2005); Terrance Donaldson, "Supersessionism and Early Christian Self-Definition," *Journal for the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting* 3, 7; also Soulen, *The God of Israel*, 11-12.

the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people....³⁹

Nostra Aetate, itself suitable for liturgical citation in the Office of Readings, was not progressing beyond old doctrine in asserting the Jewish (not extraneous) nature of the Church. Rather, the Second Vatican Council was drawing upon a rich line of patristic and medieval thinking about the vocation of Judaism. This line of thinking can and should be amplified in order to confront structural supersessionism. For instance, Augustine argued:

Then the second stage [of the world] extends from that period on to Abraham, who was called the father indeed of all nations which should follow the example of his faith, but who at the same time in the way of natural descent from his own flesh was the father of the destined people of the Jews; which people, previous to the entrance of the Gentiles into the Christian faith, was the one people among all the nations of all lands that worshipped the one true God: from which people also Christ the Savior was decreed to come according to the flesh.⁴⁰ ... In this manner the doctrine of the apostle...set Christ in the centre of [Jews and Gentiles] like the corner-stone (in accordance with what had been announced beforetime by the prophet), in whom both parties, like walls advancing from different sides, that is to say, from Jews and from Gentiles, might be joined together in the affection of kinship.⁴¹

The great medieval doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, also reflected upon the Judaism of the Church:

It was fitting that Christ's preaching, whether through Himself or through His apostles, should be directed at first to the Jews alone. First, in order to show that by His coming the promises were fulfilled which had been made to the Jews of old, and not to the Gentiles. Thus the Apostle says "I say that Christ ... was minister of the circumcision," i.e. the apostle and preacher of the Jews, "for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."

Secondly, in order to show that His coming was of God; because, as is written: "Those things which are of God are well ordered. Now the right order demanded that the doctrine of Christ should be made known first to the Jews, who, by believing in and worshipping one God, were nearer to God, and that it should be transmitted through them to the Gentiles: just as in the heavenly hierarchy the Divine enlightenment comes to the lower angels through the

³⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, 4. While no passages from *Nostra Aetate* are read in the Office of Readings, a number of passages from other Vatican II documents are read. *Nostra Aetate* is included in AWIS vol. 2, 62-63.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *De Catechezandis Rudibus*, ch. 22 (<https://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship/augustine-hippo>)

⁴¹ Augustine, *De Catechezandis Rudibus*, ch. 43 (<https://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship/augustine-hippo>)

higher.” Hence on Mt. 15:24, “I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost in the house of Israel,” Jerome says: “He does not mean by this that He was not sent to the Gentiles, but that He was sent to the Jews first.” And so we read: “I will send of them that shall be saved,” i.e. of the Jews, “to the Gentiles ... and they shall declare My glory unto the Gentiles.”⁴²

Yet the assertion of the past Jewish nature of the Church (that is, of the existence and role of Jewish Christians in the 1st century) is inadequate for the confrontation of structural supersessionism. Structural supersessionism is perpetuated by texts like those of the 16th century bishop and martyr St. John Fisher, which argue for the essentially Gentile nature of the contemporary church. In a commentary read in the Office of Readings on Friday of Week 3 of Ordinary Time, Fisher exposted:

Then he also took pity on us, *when we were pagans who went off to mute idols wherever we were led*. He severed us from the wild olive tree of paganism and, breaking our natural branches, he grafted us onto the true olive tree of Judaism and made us share in the root of his grace and richness.⁴³

While the inclusion of a passage asserting the goodness of Judaism is welcome, the identification of “us”—the Church—with paganness is problematic for inclusion in a universal lectionary. Fisher was writing to an audience that was indeed descended entirely from Gentiles, the Jews having been expelled from England many centuries prior. Yet in the universal church, now as at every time, there has been an ongoing Jewish component—as St. Ignatius of Loyola was so keenly aware (in the text discussed above).

Other suitable texts that emphasize the ongoing vocation of the Jewish people (as seen through Jewish Christians) would better address structural supersessionism. For instance, the 15th century Jewish Christian Paul of Burgos argued that:

Jacob is not ashamed because it is clear that the leaders of the early church were from his stock. ... In the subsequent history of the Church, although few Jews have held the faith of Christ, those few Jewish Christians have been notable people who have well-governed the church.⁴⁴

⁴² *Summa Theologiae*, Tertia Pars, Q. 42 (translation from <https://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/TP/TP042.html#TPQ42OUTP1>)

⁴³ LOTH, vol. 3, 134: *deinde et nos, cum iam gentes essemus, ad simulacra muta, prout ducebamur, euntes, ex naturali gentilitatis oleastro excisos...* (LH vol. 3, 110). My emphasis.

⁴⁴ Pablo de Santa Maria, *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (Burgos: Iuntam, 1591), 532. For a thorough analysis of this text’s remarkable continuity with contemporary Jewish ways of understanding Jewish peoplehood, see Yosi Yisraeli, “Constructing and Undermining Converso Jewishness: Profiat Duran and Pablo de Santa Maria,” in Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin, *Religious Conversion: History, Experience and Meaning* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014). While in the past Paul of Burgos/Pablo de Santa Maria has been reputed as an anti-Jewish thinker, recent scholarship such as by Yisraeli has convincingly argued that Paul was attempting to build bridges between Judaism and Christianity. See Yosi Yisraeli, “Between Jewish and Christian Scholarship in the Fifteenth Century: The Consolidation a “Converso Doctrine” in the Theological Writings of Pablo de Santa Maria” (PhD Diss., Tel Aviv University, 2014); Zachary

The incorporation of similar texts by Paul and by others who would not refer to Jews as the problematic “them” compared to “us,” but would use a shared “we,” is very desirable.⁴⁵ The conception of the church as originally Jewish and both Jewish and Gentile is not only more historically accurate, but a necessary belief for the furthering of Jewish-Christian relations.

This issue is awkward for some Jews, who often associate Jewish Christians with proselytism. Yet while Jewish Christians have indeed sometimes been guilty of proselytism, Jewish Christians have also often acted in ways reflective of their continual bond with Israel.⁴⁶ In some instances, Jewish thinkers have come to recognize the actions of these Jewish Christians even as they problematize them.⁴⁷ While the contemporary Christian rejection of proselytism should be upheld, it would be a historical and theological mistake to ignore the reality of the fact that there are—and always have been—Jews in the church. Moreover, the existence of such Jews and the acknowledgment of their particular calling counteracts the claims of structural supersessionism by upholding God’s particular choice along with God’s universal calling.

There are, then, texts that reflect upon the Jewish covenant in a positive light. We might simply choose to erase all ancient texts that reference the Jewish people and the Jewish covenant, given the prevalence of negative texts and the tendency even of more positive texts to refer to Judaism in terms that center Christianity. Such an approach, however, would fall into the error of historical progressivism. Christians cannot erase the anti-Jewish strain in history by becoming anti-historical. The way to confront anti-Jewish thinking is instead to understand the complexity of the past and yet draw out aspects of that past that concord with recent magisterial teaching. This act of historical engagement and of reinterpretation of the past is, I argue, both viable and necessary.

In proposing the selective replacement of anti-Jewish texts in the Liturgy of the Hours, I am not advocating for another round of historical progressivism. I am rather recognizing that—out of the extremely broad corpus of Christian writings that could be included in the Office of Readings—the Church has always has the power

Young, “Re-Narrating Judaism: A New Reading of the *Additiones* of Pablo de Santa Maria,” *Church History* (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640726103655>; Zachary Young, “‘We are Descended from Levitical Blood’: Early 15th Century Typologies of Office and the Construction of Converso Post-Supersessionism,” forthcoming in *Medieval Encounters*.

Paul of Burgos has not been canonized as a saint; texts by non-saints were regarded as admissible only if the saints belonged to “the period of the Fathers” (Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, 544). While Paul lived in the 14th and 15th centuries, some of his texts are included in the *Patrologia Latina* (PL 113: 35ff).

⁴⁵ The only such individual included in the Liturgy of the Hours is St. Edith Stein (August 9th), in the hagiographical cycle.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Connolly, *Enemy to Brother*, highlighting the pivotal role of Jewish Christians in enacting *Nostra Aetate*.

⁴⁷ For examples of this very complicated perspective, see Batnitzky, “The Holocaustum of Edith Stein,” *Liberties* 3(1) (Autumn 2022); also Rashi’s perspective on Peter and Paul as Jewish emissaries on a mission to separate the new church from the Jewish people.

and responsibility to shape the essential narratives of Christianity by judicious selection of texts to be included. Since the breadth of the tradition is inaccessible to all but patristic scholars, the Office of Readings (and its predecessor, the night office known as Matins) have curated some of the most important themes that the Church finds worthy of meditation.

Anti-Jewish supersessionism should not be one of these key themes reflected upon and reinforced by clerics every time they cycle through the texts of the Office. But neither should be a sanitized version of Christianity that scrubs all mentions of Judaism. Instead, the Office of Readings deserves rich texts that grapple with the Christian relationship to Judaism, with issues of calling and chosenness and faith. By advocating for the inclusion of these texts rather than one-dimensional anti-Jewish texts, I propose not a continuation of supersessionism but rather an embrace of the fullness of the Christian tradition.

Some might challenge the appropriateness of such complex texts for liturgical reading. The liturgy is supposed to be a moment of prayer rather than an exercise in intellectual debate. And yet the liturgy has historically been a key locus for shaping Christian attitudes towards Judaism. The Office of Readings in particular has had a function not just of prayer but of didactic education, of reflection upon the shared magisterium, and of shaping the Christian understanding of history. It would be fitting, then, to make the Office of Readings a locus for disseminating the Catholic magisterial teaching on Judaism—a magisterium recently restated with greater force, but yet found within historical and modern Christian texts that are well suited for inclusion in the Office.