

# “Gifts and Calling”: The Fruits of Coming to Know Living Jews

RUTH LANGER

ruth.langer@bc.edu

Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

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As the gentile Church became dominant during the first few centuries of the Common Era, it generated a growing literature against Jews, but the Jews described were generally Christian constructions that had little to no connection to any Jewish reality.<sup>1</sup> Until modernity, we find few records of actual encounters between Christians and Jews where Christians were genuinely interested in learning about Jews’ self-understanding—except where they were seeking tools for more effective missionizing.<sup>2</sup> Little changed even in the modern period, as the sad history of the churches and the Shoah demonstrates. In the process of implementing *Nostra Aetate*’s teachings about Jews and Judaism, the Catholic Church came to realize that its leaders and laity needed to come to know Jews. This process has deeply transformed Catholic-Jewish relations, a transformation that permeates the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews newest document, issued in December 2015, “‘The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4).”<sup>3</sup> This essay will first trace the emergence of this living engagement and then turn to an analysis of how it has shaped this new document.

## **Background: *Nostra Aetate* and its Implementation— From Constructed to Living Jews**

On June 13, 1960, Holocaust survivor Jules Isaac challenged Pope John XXIII to include a new teaching about Jews and Judaism in the work of the Sec-

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<sup>1</sup> See Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), “Introduction.”

<sup>2</sup> So, for example, the medieval Dominican studies of Judaism, most famously Raymond Martini’s massive missionary manual, the *Pugio Fidei*. So too most early modern Christian Hebraist studies of Judaism. See Yaacov Deutsch, *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Avi Aronsky (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Henceforth G&C with paragraph numbers indicated in the text.

ond Vatican Council. However, it was much easier for him to convince the Pope of the need for this new teaching than for the Church to formulate it. Cardinal Augustin Bea, whom Pope John XXIII tasked with drafting a document on the Jews, consulted extensively, both with Jews and with Christians, many of them converts from Judaism.<sup>4</sup> The resultant text of what became *Nostra Aetate*, 4 (and *Lumen Gentium*, 16) had to pass muster, though, with the international community of bishops who with a few exceptions lacked this personal encounter with Jews. Many were also deeply steeped in the inherited anti-Jewish reflexes that Isaac had named to the Pope. One critical result was that, while the conciliar documents themselves carefully reinserted Christianity back into its Jewish roots and condemned many aspects of Christian anti-Judaism, they did not engage with Judaism itself with any specificity, even from an inner-Catholic perspective.

Consequently, one possible reading of the Council's positive teachings about Jews and Judaism is that they pertain only to pre-Christian times and say nothing about Judaism's subsequent theological status.<sup>5</sup> If so, Catholics might still teach that all post-biblical forms of Judaism are not according to God's will. This is not a neutral stance, but is instead potentially quite dangerous. This Christian assessment of contemporary forms of Judaism fueled some of the most virulent excesses of institutionalized medieval Christian anti-Judaism, some of the predecessors of the Shoah. Augustine (d. 430 CE) had taught that as "living letters of the law," Jews had a positive purpose in God's plan; as such, they should be tolerated in Christian society as witnesses to the suffering reserved for those who reject Christ. In the medieval period, when Christians discovered that Jews lived according to rabbinic interpretation of the Bible, even this toleration broke down, and the era of expulsions, forced conversions, ghettoization, and other persecutions began.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if *Nostra Aetate*, 4 accepts the validity of God's biblical covenant with Israel but does not speak about contemporary Judaism, it fails to fulfill Pope John XXIII's mandate.

While conciliar documents are of utmost authority for the Catholic Church, what ultimately matters most is how they are interpreted and implemented. Otherwise, they remain just words on paper. Inevitably, various bodies in the Church, from the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ), to

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<sup>4</sup> John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 5, makes the point that "it was Christians whose family members were Jews who keenly felt the contempt contained in traditional Catholic teaching," making them, especially converts to Christianity, the first and the most persistent to call for changes. For details of the direct role of these advisors to Cardinal Bea, see ch. 8, "The Second Vatican Council."

<sup>5</sup> Gavin D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), makes this point multiple times in his Ch. 3, "The Council and the Jews: A 'Dramatic Change' in Doctrine?" See for instance pp. 122, 133–134 (discussing the debates over the third draft in September 1964), and 140 (discussing the final draft's deliberate vagueness on the question).

<sup>6</sup> This is the argument of Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law...*, especially "Part Four: The Friars Reconsidered," which revisits his *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982). Christian attention to what Jews actually do and believe begins in the thirteenth century. See my *Cursing the Christians?: A History of the Birkat HaMinim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 3, for liturgical data that verifies his insights.

national councils of bishops, to local dioceses and parishes, have lifted up some elements of *Nostra Aetate*, 4 more than others. One of the factors shaping such choices has been the spread of face-to-face deep engagement with contemporary Jews wherever possible.

This engagement with living Jews and Judaism began for a few Catholic leaders in the actual process of drafting what became *Nostra Aetate*, and they embedded in it a recommendation that Catholics achieve “that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.”<sup>7</sup> It could be debated whether this actual encounter of “fraternal dialogue” is here a secondary, less esteemed category than the book-oriented “biblical and theological studies” that do not necessarily require a Jewish presence.

The US Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs soon provided the broadest possible reading of this recommendation in their March 1967 “Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations.”<sup>8</sup> The American bishops had strongly supported the process that led to *Nostra Aetate*.<sup>9</sup> After the council, they were conscious of their responsibility, as Catholics living in proximity to the largest Jewish community of the time, to continue this leadership. Their document calls not only for dialogue and study by those theologically equipped to do so, but also for effective fostering of Catholic-Jewish understanding “at the popular level by means of so-called ‘open houses’ in places of worship, mutual visits to schools, joint social events, and ‘living room dialogues’.” These are to be “pressed forward without delay.”<sup>10</sup> Naturally, this remained only a call for dialogue, one that could not yet show its fruits. However, by emphasizing dialogue and face-to-face encounters, these bishops obviously intended to engage with the Jews and Judaism of their own day.

The most important language mandating direct engagement with Jews appears in the CRRJ’s first international implementation document for the new way of approaching Jews and Judaism, its December 1974 “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4.” Reiterating language coined first by the French bishops in an April 1973 Statement, the “Guidelines” introduction ends with the directive, “Christians must ... strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism; they must strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.” While “basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism” could refer to Judaism in some historical form, learning the “essential traits” by which “Jews define themselves

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<sup>7</sup> All Catholic documents are cited from the versions posted on “Dialogika: The English Language Supersite for Resources and Research in Christian-Jewish Relations,” at <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources>. I have not included specific URLs here.

<sup>8</sup> This document was updated and reissued in 1985.

<sup>9</sup> As documented by James Rudin, *Cushing, Spellman, O’Connor: The Surprising Story of How Three American Cardinals Transformed Catholic-Jewish Relations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Recommended Programs 6 and 9.

in light of their own religious experience" requires an engagement with contemporary Jews. Indeed, Part I of the document, on "Dialogue" continues:

From now on, real dialogue must be established. Dialogue presupposes that each side wishes to know the other, and wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other. It constitutes a particularly suitable means of favoring a better mutual knowledge and, especially in the case of dialogue between Jews and Christians, of probing the riches of one's own tradition. Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is; above all, respect for his faith and his religious convictions.

This first section concludes with a tentative call for common prayer, especially in the context of joint social action.<sup>11</sup>

This call for understanding contemporary Jews is perhaps one of the most widely cited elements of this document. The American bishops heard this directive and elaborated on it in their 1975 "Statement on Catholic-Jewish Relations," issued both to mark the tenth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* and to implement the 1974 Vatican "Guidelines" in the American context. Their statement reflects on the fact that in the previous decade, "An age of dialogue was begun. Conversations between Catholics and Jews proliferated rapidly in many forms. Productive meetings took place on every level..." Towards the end of this text, a fruit of these dialogues becomes evident. The bishops state, "To revere only the ancient Jewish patriarchs and prophets is not enough...The [Vatican] Guidelines ... urge us to see post-biblical Judaism as rich in religious values and worthy of our sincere respect and esteem."

After citing the key sentences from the "Guidelines" about striving to comprehend Jewish self-understanding, the bishops continue:

In dialogue with Christians, Jews have explained that they do not consider themselves as a church, a sect, or a denomination, as is the case among Christian communities, but rather as a peoplehood that is not solely racial, ethnic or religious, but in a sense a composite of all these. It is for such reasons that an overwhelming majority of Jews see themselves bound in one way or another to the land of Israel. Most Jews see this tie to the land as essential to their Jewishness. Whatever difficulties Christians may experience in sharing this view they should strive to understand this link between land and people which Jews have expressed in their writings and worship throughout two millennia as a longing for the homeland, holy Zion.

This is the sole element of Jewish self-understanding that the bishops include in such detail. It is likely that they had learned through experience just how im-

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<sup>11</sup> "In whatever circumstances as shall prove possible and mutually acceptable, one might encourage a common meeting in the presence of God, in prayer and silent meditation, a highly efficacious way of finding that humility, that openness of heart and mind, which are necessary prerequisites for a deep knowledge of oneself and of others. In particular, that will be done in connection with great causes such as the struggle for peace and justice."

portant this was to the Jewish community, and that this responds to the Jewish criticism, voiced not much earlier, that the 1974 “Guidelines” omitted precisely this point.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, this remains a delicate issue. Rabbi David Rosen criticized this same omission in G&C in his statement at the press conference at which the document was made public.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, answering the “Guidelines” mandate to come to know Jews personally requires the presence and participation of Jews. This may explain why the German Bishops Conference could not make it an explicit element of their otherwise wide-ranging and important 1980 statement “The Church and the Jews.”<sup>14</sup> However, the Vatican continued to voice this call. Addressing a gathering of Episcopal Conference delegates and consultants of the CRRJ on March 6, 1982, Pope John Paul II explicitly commended those gathered for their engagement in serious, substantive dialogue with Jews; he commented that it benefits the Church to assess Jews’ and Christians’ common spiritual patrimony “carefully in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people *as they are professed and practiced still today*” [emphasis mine].

The CRRJ attended to contemporary Jews’ self-understanding in its next official publication, its 1985 statement “Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church,” before reiterating the language of the “Guidelines.”<sup>15</sup> (This document also includes a first, carefully guarded statement from the Vatican about Jews’ religious attachment to Israel, one that echoes elements of the American 1975 statement.) While there have been a few additional documents from various Vatican offices since 1985 that contribute to Catholic-Jewish relations, they do not add to the “Guidelines” mandate to understand Jewish self-experience. It has, though, been regularly invoked by popes, especially John Paul II<sup>16</sup> and later by Benedict XVI<sup>17</sup> and Francis,<sup>18</sup> and cardinals, especially the presidents of the CRRJ.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Jewish Leaders Welcome, with Some Reservations, New Vatican Guidelines, Meeting Set in Rome,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [JTA] (January 6, 1975), <http://www.jta.org/1975/01/06/archive/jewish-leaders-welcome-with-some-reservations-new-vatican-guidelines-meeting-set-in-rome>. Compare the even more critical response of Israeli religious leaders, “Raphael, Goren Rap Vatican Guidelines on Jewish-Christian Relations,” *JTA* (January 8, 1975), <http://www.jta.org/1975/01/08/archive/rafael-goren-rap-vatican-guidelines-on-jewish-christian-relations> (both accessed February 18, 2015). See also the articles run in 1975 in *The New York Jewish Week, Manhattan edition*.

<sup>13</sup> “Reflections from Israel,” (December 10, 2015), on Dialogika. See below for a critique of G&C’s discussion of covenant, which is where Israel should have appeared.

<sup>14</sup> In English translation on Dialogika.

<sup>15</sup> In paragraphs 3 and 4 respectively.

<sup>16</sup> In the Vatican on Mar 12, 1979; in Mainz, Germany on Nov 17, 1980; in Miami on Sept 11, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> At the Great Synagogue of Rome, Jan 17, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, §249.

<sup>19</sup> Cardinal Walter Kasper: ICCJ meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay, July 12, 2001; Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Nov 21, 2001; Cardinal Kurt Koch: Angelicum University, Rome, May 16, 2012. See also CRRJ, “Notes” (1985), I, 4.

### The Impact of Understanding Jews on "Gifts and Calling"

The fruits of dialogue, including a growing comprehension of Jewish self-understanding, permeate "Gifts and Calling." These create the conditions that allow it to address its central and more challenging topics, the ones for which it presents contemporary theological conundrums and calls for further reflection. The document consistently acknowledges and engages with Jewish self-understanding, even when turning to topics on which Catholics and Jews differ. This gives its discussions integrity and creates grounds for further dialogue.

G&C opens with a historical survey of the past half-century in which it lifts up precisely our theme. It relates that "[t]he fundamental esteem for Judaism expressed in 'Nostra aetate' (No. 4)...has enabled communities that once faced one another with scepticism<sup>20</sup> to become—step by step over the years—reliable partners and even good friends, capable of weathering crises together and negotiating conflicts positively" (§2). This sentence rephrases *Nostra Aetate's* "esteem for Judaism" as "reliable partners and even good friends," i.e., relationships with living people rather than an attitude to a religion. When G&C's historical survey then says that "becoming acquainted with Judaism as it defines itself" is the "crucial and new concern" of the 1974 "Guidelines," it must mean the contemporary religion. The rest of the "Guidelines" receives little comment (§4). The summary of the 1985 "Notes" focuses on the element that arose from that search for understanding, i.e. the role of the land and state of Israel (§5).

After attention to the work of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in engaging with Jewish texts, G&C turns to the occasions for direct personal interaction that have been developed (§§8-12) and affirms that all these forms of dialogue have created "the awareness that Christians and Jews are irrevocably interdependent, and that the dialogue between the two is not a matter of choice but of duty as far as theology is concerned" (§13). This it explains through the words of Pope Francis: the "rich complementarity" between Jewish and Christian communities allows them to read their shared texts together and together to serve the world (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 249). This complementarity, though, is grounded in an understanding of living Judaism. The citation from the pope's encyclical begins with an important acknowledgement: "it is true that certain Christian beliefs are unacceptable to Judaism." Christians are coming to understand Jewish theological limits and to find ways to work together in spite of them.

The fruits of this interface with real Jews and Judaism instead of a Christian construct play themselves out in a variety of dimensions as the document proceeds. It is obviously still central to Part 2's discussion of the special theological status of dialogue with Jews for Christians. *Nostra Aetate* had retrieved the historical Jewish setting of the New Testament, but G&C adds an adjective, insisting

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<sup>20</sup> This word grossly underplays the historical reality of Christian-Jewish relations through the centuries!

that one must understand Jesus and his disciples' teaching "in the context of the *living* tradition of Israel" (§14). This necessarily still requires an understanding of first-century Judaism, but one explicitly characterized positively.

G&C employs factual, informational tones throughout to describe the differences between contemporary Jewish and Christian understandings. For instance, in §14, G&C says that for Christians, simply understanding the historical Jesus is necessary but insufficient. However, the christological teachings are "beyond the horizon of Jewish expectation....The figure of Jesus thus is and remains for Jews the 'stumbling block', the central and neuralgic point in Jewish-Catholic dialogue." This leads to another level of understanding. Christian self-understanding must "refer to the Judaism of Jesus' time and to a degree also the Judaism that developed from it over the ages...[since] coming to terms with Judaism in one way or another is indispensable for Christians." The "living" tradition of Israel is thus not confined to the first century. G&C definitely requires "coming to terms" with first-century Judaism and also encourages Catholics to engage later Jewish self-understandings "to a degree." This is realistic, especially given the virtual impossibility of fully understanding the diversity of Judaism.

Paragraph 15 characterizes the relationship between Christianity and this living Judaism, presenting rabbinic Judaism as, like Christianity, a child of the Judaism of the early first century, their common mother. As is the "normal course of events for siblings...they have developed in different directions." This is simultaneously language of difference and parity, and hence of legitimacy. Paragraphs 16-17 illuminate the consequences of this new understanding by placing it in deliberate contrast with its polemical predecessors. Section 2 concludes by citing Pope John Paul II's 1986 speech in the Great Synagogue of Rome, identifying Jews as the Church's "dearly beloved brothers" and even its "elder brothers" (§20).<sup>21</sup>

Positive and deep engagement with living Jews has challenged significant aspects of received Catholic theology. The resultant tensions begin to be evident in Section 3, and grow even deeper as the document progresses to its central topics. In their discussion of revelation, the authors ask how the positive understanding of post-biblical Judaism that emerges from dialogue and joint study coheres with the Church's self-definition as the "new people of God" (*Lumen Gentium* 9 and 13)? *Nostra Aetate*, 4, offers an answer, stating: "Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures." No Catholic post-conciliar documents on Jewish-Christian relations prior to G&C (§23) cite this entire sentence and none explains its contrast between Jews and the Church.<sup>22</sup> Fifty years later, after dialogue with living Jews, and in a document that funda-

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<sup>21</sup> I welcome that G&C employs the non-gendered "siblings" and moves to the historically more accurate metaphor of a common parent.

<sup>22</sup> That Jews are not to be "presented as rejected or accursed by God" has been reasonably widely cited in Church documents, mostly in summaries of *Nostra Aetate*'s key teachings or in protest against some action deemed to violate it. See *Dialogika*, which does not include the numerous relevant writings of theologians.

mentally calls for further reflection rather than offering authoritative answers, G&C tackles this conundrum. Its two axes revolve around *Nostra Aetate*'s affirmation that the Church is "the new people of God" and the newer, explicit claim that "[t]he Church does not replace the people of God of Israel."<sup>23</sup> There is no hint here (or anywhere else in G&C) of the pre-conciliar replacement theology that understood the Church itself to be not only the new people of God but the new Israel. Consistent with Jewish self-understanding, the people Israel now are always Jews, and Jews too are people of God.

What remains unclear in Christian theological terms is the implications of this for Jews' salvation. Paragraphs 24-26 suggest an answer, based on an understanding that has become a commonplace as a result of study with Jews and of locating the New Testament in its Jewish context. The prologue to the Gospel of John, Jewish Aramaic translations of the Bible, and later midrash (cf. Genesis Rabba 1:10) all use "Word" as a metaphor, analogy, or name for God. In Jewish tradition, this Word is also God's wisdom, i.e., Torah, and in Christian tradition, it is Christ.<sup>24</sup> G&C not only acknowledges this analogy and cites Pope Francis' affirmation of it, but states:

For Jews, this Word can be learned through the Torah and the traditions based on it. The Torah is the instruction for a successful life in right relationship with God. Whosoever observes the Torah has life in its fullness (cf. Pirque Avot II, 7). By observing the Torah the Jew receives a share in communion with God (§24).

Most significant here is that the Commission refers to a specific rabbinic text, demonstrating the benefit of turning to Jewish tradition to understand Judaism. The text, Pirque Avot, is the most widely studied and hence the most influential tractate of the Mishnah among Jews. It thus shapes Jewish understandings in a particularly fundamental way.<sup>25</sup>

The affirmation that the Christian Old Testament is genuinely open to both Jewish and Christian ways of interpretation opens the challenge of understanding how Jews are participants in God's salvation (as §36 puts it). Paragraphs 25-26 reach for a resolution, asserting first that both traditions of scriptural interpreta-

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<sup>23</sup> Note that this phrase, while still not phrased in the positive, now describes what the Church does not do rather than what Israel is not. The answer that follows includes a discussion of the meaning of fulfillment that is important but ancillary to this essay. See the essays by Cunningham and Madges in this symposium.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Adele Reinhartz's commentary on John 1:1-3 in the *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 157. For a more detailed treatment, see Daniel Boyarin, "The Gospel of the *Memra*: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John," *Harvard Theological Review* 94:3 (2001): 243-84 or the similar chapter in his *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> While the use of this text is symbolically significant, deeper study of it would have led the Commission to present it with somewhat different language. See the forthcoming Christian commentary on this text by Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski.

tion are legitimate responses to God's word, salvific within their own contexts. Following from this, §26 seeks to demonstrate how Torah and its Jewish interpretations may serve Christian theology, alluding to multiple Jewish (read: rabbinic) teachings. One has the sense that the document's drafters are lifting up somewhat superficial parallels from Jewish teachings in their seeking to engage with Judaism—but this may be more a relic of the need to keep G&C relatively brief.<sup>26</sup> They conclude, "The Hebrew *dabar* means word and event at the same time—and thus one may reach the conclusion that the word of the Torah may be open for the Christ event." Standing alone, this sentence might suggest an evangelizing intent, but in the context of this section and of the larger document, it seems more likely that this refers to the relevance of Torah's word for Christians themselves, G&C's primary audience. The reiteration of "may" here echoes the uncertainty in §14's point that "coming to terms with Judaism *in one way or another* is indispensable for Christians."

The following sections turn to the inner-Christian theological challenges that result from coming to know Jews and Judaism, particularly how the Old and New Covenants can be understood as unified, once they integrate living Judaism (Part 4), how Jews can be saved if all salvation is through Christ (Part 5), and Christians' obligation to evangelize Jews (Part 6). Isolated points in these discussions directly suggest actual lessons learned about Jewish self-understanding, the most important being the opening sentence of Part 6: "It is easy to understand that the so-called 'mission to the Jews' is a very delicate and sensitive matter for Jews because, in their eyes, it involves the very existence of the Jewish people" (§40).

It is also in these sections at the heart of G&C that one finds comments that most seriously point to the need for still deeper understanding of Jews and Judaism, especially the Jewish concept of covenant. The most important of these appears in in §§32-33.<sup>27</sup> Its overarching statement, "Each of these covenants incorporates the previous covenant and interprets it in a new way," does recognize that only Christians recognize the New Covenant as the "final eternal covenant and therefore the definitive interpretation of what was promised by the prophets of the Old Covenant." However, its listing of Old Testament covenants moves from Abraham, to Sinai, to Noah, and seems to say that the last extended Israel's particular covenants "with the rainbow as its sign (cf. "Verbum Domini," 117), to the whole of creation (cf. Gen 9:9ff)" (§32). However, Pope Benedict XVI in his apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* simply acknowledged a "Judeo-Christian tradition" of reading the Noahide covenant as referring to a universal relationship

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<sup>26</sup> David Berger, at the February consultation that led to this symposium, invoked Nachmanides at the 1263 Barcelona disputation, suggesting that this paragraph uses midrashic texts according to the methods of medieval Christian disputants, cherry-picking relevant sentences without attention to their larger contexts or to the non-authoritative nature of midrash.

<sup>27</sup> The assertion at the beginning of Part 5 that "there cannot be different paths or approaches to God's salvation" also would benefit from discussion. However, it is a doctrinal mandate (see, for example, "Notes," I, 7, and the sources it cites). G&C is indeed struggling to make the new understandings of Jews and Judaism coherent with this.

with God,<sup>28</sup> a fundamentally accurate observation. He said nothing about its being an extension of the Sinai covenant. This is a point of significant difference in Jewish and Christian understandings of covenant. For Jews, the Noahide covenant is a *pre-Abrahamic* covenant of continuing universal validity. God expands its contents but narrows its human participants first to Abraham's family and then again to Israel alone at Sinai. Ultimately, in Jewish understanding, Israel's covenant with God is particular and God has other relationships with the rest of humanity; G&C tries to subsume Jewish understanding into the Christian doctrine that the new and eternal, single covenant is a universal one.

G&C's discussion of covenant does not engage with Jewish understanding sufficiently at several other key points where our traditions' understandings differ significantly. Most importantly, it barely mentions the Sinai covenant and its constitutive role for Judaism, in spite of all its earlier discussions of Torah. Similarly, these paragraphs conclude with an assertion that the essence of the shared Abrahamic covenant is its universality, something that Israel is in danger of forgetting without the Church (§33). In Jewish understanding, the key elements of the Abrahamic covenant are the promises of offspring, i.e., peoplehood, and homeland, and the human response of male circumcision. Without the particularism of peoplehood reinforced by homeland,<sup>29</sup> Israel would cease to exist and would lose any potential to be a blessing to others. A yet deeper understanding of Judaism would engage with Jewish interpretations of shared texts like the prophetic predictions of a new and eternal covenant and show sensitivity to the relative authority of pentateuchal over prophetic texts in rabbinic Judaism.

G&C's final section points to work yet to be done by Jews and Christians together at all levels. The impact of dialogue and engagement with Jews in the wake of *Nostra Aetate* has been substantial, and its effects are deeply evident in the ways that the framers of this reflection approached their undertaking and in the final result. There has been significant progress, expanding knowledge, and growing sensitivity towards the task identified, in the wake of *Nostra Aetate*, of "striv[ing] to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience." As, proverbially, two Jews will hold three opinions on just about anything, and as Jews often think in categories other than "religious experience," this has not been an easy process, especially for Catholic theologians accustomed to authoritatively decreed definitions of doctrine. Thus, there remains much to do to build on the foundation of the last fifty years and to bring new generations into the discussion. But there is no question that the fruits of deep encounters with living Jews have shaped this reflection in substantive and extremely positive and important ways. These engagements have led to its need to reflect publicly on challenging questions that will, hopefully, enliven the work of dialogue for years to come.

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<sup>28</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html).

<sup>29</sup> Homeland exists as a Jewish theological category even in absence from it.