

Paul Would Be Proud: The New Testament and Jewish–Gentile Respect

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Abstract

The article analyzes Jewish–Catholic relations with respect to New Testament interpretation, the apostle Paul, and theology. In the New Testament era, Paul promoted God’s openness to Gentiles. In recent decades, increasing numbers of Jewish scholars have engaged the New Testament and specifically Paul’s letters. This has called forth, for the most part, Christian hospitality toward Jewish interpretations. But the opportunities of this renewed relationship also bring new challenges for cultivating respect; the latter part of this article addresses four of these contemporary biblical, liturgical, legal, and theological topics.

Keywords

Catholic theology, circumcision, Jewish–Catholic relations, Jewish–Christian relations, Jewish studies, lectionary, New Testament, *Nostra aetate*, Paul the Apostle, Vatican II

Consider two classroom contexts, both of which are historically quite rare, but for me have been utterly normal. First is the course I teach most frequently, an undergraduate introduction to the New Testament. It focuses on a few main themes and covers them from multiple perspectives. In my portrayal of the New Testament, one of the top three themes, which all my students must analyze, is that of “Gentile inclusion.” Through the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, we continually return to

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it: How were these Jewish followers of Jesus reading—or not reading—the Gentiles into God’s unfolding covenant? The idea that Gentile inclusion lies at the crux of God’s word in the Christian Scriptures is not found in every introductory textbook, to be sure, but it has become for many contemporary scholars an aspect of “gospel truth.” It follows in part from the so-called “New Perspective” on Paul, about which more will be said presently. Before that, though, consider a different classroom scene.

This scene comes from my time during graduate school. One day during a doctoral seminar about the formation of the canon of the Christian Bible, I had arrived early to set up my materials for a presentation. Seated at the head of the table, watching my friends and colleagues walk into our professor’s stately and *wissenschaftlich* office, I became suddenly and profoundly moved by each of their distinct religious identities. In front of me sat an English Catholic, a mainline-Evangelical, a post-Evangelical agnostic, a High Church Episcopalian, an American Catholic, a Romanian Orthodox, and three Jews—modern Orthodox, Conservative, and a Reform rabbi, the last of these being my closest colleague in the study of the New Testament. One does not have to be much of a historian of religion to realize how unusual this classroom was, historically speaking. And this was not superficial diversity, but one borne out of study and deep engagement. Outside class, we had learned each other’s traditions; inside class, we had learned each other’s languages as best we could: Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, and several languages of eastern Christianity. Through our sustained interest in the traditions of the others, we developed—over time—the kind of respectful rapport in which early Christianity’s history, theology, and conflicts could be discussed truthfully and openly.

In what follows, I reflect on the interaction of these two classroom contexts.¹ What were the conditions of Jewish–Gentile respect in the time of the New Testament, and how does our rediscovery of those conditions relate to our contemporary conditions of Gentile–Jewish respect? Whereas “Gentile inclusion” was a central generative force of the New Testament itself, I argue that a kind of “Jewish inclusion”—Gentile hospitality to Jewish interpretations of that very text—has been a hallmark of recent scholarship. But the opportunities of this renewed relationship also bring new challenges for cultivating respect, and the latter part of this essay addresses four of these contemporary biblical, liturgical, legal, and theological tasks.

Jewish–Gentile Respect in the New Testament

What force generated the energy at the core of the New Testament? There are several defensible answers to this question, one of which is this: the impulse among certain

1. A previous version of this article was presented at the consultation, “Respect and Human Flourishing,” hosted by the Center for Faith and Culture at Yale Divinity School. I am grateful to Miroslav Volf, Jennifer Herdt, John Hare, Alon Goshen-Gottstein, and Gilbert Meilaender for their feedback, and also to my colleagues Elizabeth Johnson, Terrence Tilley, and Ben Dunning.

Jewish disciples of Jesus to include Gentiles in covenantal communities under the God of Israel. As a shorthand, biblical scholars often call this “Gentile inclusion.” Without this movement, the followers of Jesus-as-Messiah would have remained, in the annals of Jewish history, a regional Jewish sect, perhaps summarized as “Galileans” or “Nazarenes” alongside groups like the Essenes.² Openness to God’s elective grace among Gentiles likely began with the life of Jesus himself, although the evidence is mixed. The Gospels narrate Jesus’ theological engagement with, for example, the “Samaritan Woman at the Well” (Jn 4), the “Syro-Phoenician woman” (Mk 7:24–30), and the Gentile cities of the Decapolis, but overall Jesus’ prophetic message was aimed at the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24 NRSV, used throughout).

The strongest narrative of Gentile inclusion transpires over the long arc of Luke–Acts, the two-volume work of “apologetic historiography” that comprises about 25 percent of the New Testament.³ The portrayal of Jesus in Luke is resolutely Jewish—the Gospel’s narrative actually begins in the Jerusalem Temple—and his childhood is replete with indicators of Jewish identity and holiness. And yet already in those opening chapters, Luke foreshadows the ultimate mission of Gentile inclusion. The prophets in the Temple foresee Jesus as a “light for revelation to the Gentiles” (2:32). Then in Jesus’ first public speech, at the synagogue in Nazareth, Luke grounds the mission of Gentile inclusion firmly in the Jewish prophetic tradition (4:16–30). Jesus aims to fulfill the anointed mission of Isaiah 61:1–2, but, bracing himself for the incredulity of his neighbors, he also recalls the wonder-working prophecies of Elijah and Elisha, each of whom specifically aided Gentiles during times of great distress (1 Kgs 17:8–16; 2 Kgs 5:1–4). Other episodes unique to Luke, such as the redactions in the story of the centurion at Capernaum—he has the Jewish elders praising the Roman centurion, who “loves our people” and “built our synagogue”—demonstrate Luke’s overall goal of positively portraying Gentiles and Jewish outreach to Gentiles (Lk 7:4–5//Mt 8:6–7).

The book of Acts continues the trajectory, beginning with a geographical thesis statement of Gentile inclusion: Jesus’ disciples will be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Many factors are at work in Acts’ sophisticated rhetorical portrayal of Gentile inclusion. Indeed, one can analyze the entire book through that lens. But the narrative hinges on chapters 10–15, a unit that begins with the archetypal conversion of Cornelius (another centurion and Gentile), encompasses Paul’s first missionary journey, and ends with the “Jerusalem Council,” which confirms the possibilities and protocols for admitting Gentiles into the covenantal community. In his book *Scripture and Discernment*, Luke Timothy Johnson interprets this narrative as the church’s first big decision, thereby serving as a

2. E.g., Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.7.6, calls them “Galileans,” and “Nazarenes” (*Nozrim*) is common in rabbinic literature.

3. This genre is explained in Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke–Acts, and Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), with a definition on p. 17: it is “the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group’s own traditions but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world.”

paradigm for subsequent decision making. The conversion of Cornelius and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the unbaptized Gentiles (10:1–48) generated a crisis for these Jewish messianists’ self-understanding. How can Jews and Gentiles have “fellowship” together?

If both Jews and Gentiles are to be considered part of “God’s people,” will it be on even or uneven footing? On what basis will Gentiles be recognized and associated with? On the basis of their belief in the Messiah and the gift of the Holy Spirit, or on the basis of being circumcised and observing the law of Moses? Will the church split into two ethnically and ritually distinct bodies? Is [the Lord] a tribal deity, or Lord of all? Will fellowship be determined by faith, or by precedent; by the experience of God, or by the rules of the community? . . . Will the church decide to recognize and acknowledge actions of God that go beyond its present understanding, or will it demand that God work within its categories?⁴

Virtually all the issues that gave birth to Christianity here find voice: rituals of initiation, table fellowship, particularity versus universalism, organization and governance, scriptural interpretation and prayer, ecstatic spiritual experience, and submission to God’s sovereignty. Luke’s masterful hand guides the reader through a detailed process of communal discernment, and the unfolding of Gentile inclusion—no, a Gentile does not need to follow all Jewish rituals when becoming a “Christian”—takes place in an “orderly” manner, just as Luke promised from the beginning (Lk 1:3).

Most scholars would say it is *too* orderly. Do communities really make major decisions in this way? When contemporary churches and synagogues have discerned admitting women to positions of authority or sanctifying same-sex marriages, do not sharp disagreements and even divisions occur? In fact, under the manicured surface of Luke’s tidy narrative, a faint vestige of conflict is visible. Immediately after the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas split up. Though they had traveled together on the first missionary journey, a “paroxysm” caused them to “part company” (Acts 15:39). Paul becomes the hero and Barnabas vanishes into obscurity. What drove a wedge between them? According to Acts’ account, they disagreed about a personnel matter—whether to bring along John Mark on the journey (15:37–38). According to Paul’s own letters, though, the paroxysm concerned Barnabas’s hypocrisy on the issue of Gentile inclusion. Barnabas had previously been committed to Paul’s mission among the Gentiles (Gal 2:9), but when pressured at Antioch by a faction opposed to Gentile inclusion, Barnabas joined Peter in refusing to dine with Gentiles (2:11–13).

On the whole, Paul’s letters reveal much more conflict in the process of Gentile inclusion. Historians find a ring of authenticity in the messy working-out of Paul’s community building, just as they have grown suspicious of Luke’s linear narrative *ex post facto*. Paul’s letters show that the energy at the core of the New Testament is tense: how can followers of Jesus honor both the particular election, covenant, and

4. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 90–91.

obligations of the Jewish people and their belief that through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, God has inaugurated the ultimate in-gathering of all nations?

This way of framing the question is indebted to what scholars have called the “new perspective” on Paul. The new perspective has many features and definitions, but its central idea is this: Paul’s message is not about Jewish “legalism” or “works righteousness” versus Christian “grace” or “justification by faith.” Rather, it is about the status of the Gentiles after the Messiah has come. Whereas the traditional reading, often traced through Augustine and Luther, emphasized the justification of an individual sinner before God, new-perspective scholars focus on communal relations between Jews and Gentiles in the messianic age. Stated another way, Christians have usually thought that a main question for Paul was, how can an individual be saved? And indeed some texts can be found to support that emphasis. But the more pressing questions for Paul were, how is it that the *Gentiles* are going to be brought into God’s covenant? And how can I shepherd *communities* of Jews and Gentiles forward *together* toward redemption?

Krister Stendahl is customarily cited as the beginning of the new perspective, especially through a collection of essays, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*.⁵ Stendahl takes seriously what Paul had been telling us all along: he was the distinctive apostle to the *Gentiles*, and everything he wrote ought to be interpreted with that in mind. Paul’s “conversion,” therefore, was not one from Judaism to “Christianity” (which in any case was a term and concept that was not a foregone conclusion in Paul’s lifetime). Rather, Stendahl prefers to interpret Paul as “called rather than converted,” situating him in the line of Israelite prophets and specifically as one called to bring faith in the one true God to the polytheistic lands of the world.⁶ In a more recent book, John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed express their sense of Paul’s conversion in this way: “converted not from Judaism to Christianity, but from violent opponent and persecutor of [Gentile] inclusion to nonviolent proponent and persuader of [Gentile] inclusion.”⁷

The culminating text of Paul’s career, from the vantage point of the new perspective, is thus Romans 9–11. More will be said later about this unit, which is, in the words of James D. G. Dunn, “the real climax of Paul’s attempt to understand the place of Jew and Gentile within the purpose of God . . . how it was that Gentiles as Gentiles could be accepted by the God of Israel.”⁸ Paul believed—and here “believed” is an

5. Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). Other leading scholars of the new perspective are E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright. Dunn coined the term and has carried it forward in, e.g., *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

6. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* 7.

7. John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2009) 6, italics removed from original. I should note that not all scholars of Paul are persuaded by new-perspective arguments; see essays in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

8. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) 501.

understatement, for he risked his life on this conviction—that God’s promise to all the nations was in the process of fulfillment, and that “what was at stake was nothing less than God’s own integrity, the faithfulness of God” to God’s promises.⁹ Another leading scholar aptly summarizes Paul’s radical, apocalyptic vision for the Gentiles—while still himself remaining a Jew:

Paul’s experience of the risen Jesus leads him to move up the apocalyptic clock. . . . Resurrection was not something that was supposed to happen one individual at a time; it was envisioned as a collective experience that marked the end of time and the final reckoning of the wicked and the righteous. . . . Once he believed the end of time was much closer than he had previously thought, he necessarily had to revise his understanding about some other things, most importantly, the Gentiles. One of the most powerful beliefs associated with the end times is that all the nations—that is, all the Gentiles—would flock to Zion in recognition of the one, true God, the God of Israel, renouncing once and for all other gods. . . . The utopian monotheist vision requires gathering different peoples together, not their separation.¹⁰

Who offered this particular expression of the new perspective on Paul’s conversion? The quotation comes not from Stendahl, a Lutheran bishop, or Catholics like Johnson and Crossan, but from Pamela Eisenbaum, a Jewish New Testament scholar who is a tenured professor at a Christian seminary. While teaching and writing primarily about Paul’s movement toward “Gentile inclusion” in the first century, her academic position thus embodies the Gentile movement of “Jewish inclusion” in the 21st century.

Gentile–Jewish Respect in the Contemporary Reception of the New Testament

The existence and even prominence of Jewish New Testament scholars such as Eisenbaum has begun to feel normal to mainstream Christian scholars. The vast majority of the past 2,000 years, however, experienced little Jewish engagement with the New Testament and little Christian respect for such engagement. Indeed Christian disrespect for Jewish interpretations of the “Shared Testament”¹¹ of Scripture began

9. Ibid.

10. Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009) 149.

11. When speaking and writing in Jewish–Gentile contexts, I use the term “Shared Testament” to designate the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures). The term was coined in Philip A. Cunningham, *Sharing the Scriptures* (New York: Paulist, 2003). Labels for the Jewish and Christian Bibles are each imperfect in their own way, however. The term “Old” Testament has sometimes been interpreted by Jews to imply supersessionism, that something old was replaced by something new. The term does not need to be pejorative, though, since for most of human history, for something to be “old” was usually a positive quality. One of the things Gentiles in antiquity respected about Jewish writings and customs was precisely their old-ness. Some Christians have opted, then, for the term “First” Testament, but this nonetheless would imply a “Second” one. I think “Shared” Testament is the best

already in the second century, with vehement texts such as the *Epistle of Barnabas* and Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. The imitation of such supersessionist texts over the centuries solidified a sorry state for Jewish-Christian relations. Besides a few exceptions, Jews tended not to read the New Testament at all—and who could blame them? From late antiquity to the modern era, an attitude of contempt—the opposite of respect—for Jews and Judaism was disseminated widely among Christians. In the pivotal formulation of French historian Jules Isaac, the Christian “teaching of contempt” maintained that Judaism at the time of Jesus was a degenerate and soulless legalism, the dispersion of the Jews was divine punishment for their misdeeds, and that the Jews had killed Christ and thus committed deicide.¹² Isaac, whose wife and son were executed in the death camps of the Nazis, made it his mission to help Christians understand their own theological soil that allowed the seeds of such contempt to flourish. His book, *The Teaching of Contempt*, held a mirror up to the Christian theologians of Europe, who were just beginning to process their guilt, and they were horrified at what they saw.

Isaac was able to turn his analysis into activism by securing a private audience with Pope John XXIII, who had announced the convening of Vatican II. Through that encounter, the pope was persuaded to get the issue of the Jews—their status before God and their relationship to Christianity—on the council's agenda.¹³ The document's drafts began in 1961 as *Decretum de Iudaeis* (Declaration on the Jews) but ultimately became *Nostra aetate*, Declaration on the Church's Relationship to Non-Christian Religions. It is no secret, though, that its section on the Jews was always and remains the center of the text.¹⁴ Promulgated on October 28, 1965, *Nostra aetate* provided the foundation on which most subsequent Christian theological engagement with Judaism has been built: “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29); the death of Jesus cannot be blamed on all the Jews of his day, and certainly not on subsequent generations; and “the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as

option, but it works perfectly only for Protestants, who use the Hebrew Scriptures and not the Septuagint (as do Catholics and Eastern Orthodox). Finally, the terms “Jewish Bible/Scriptures” and “Christian Bible/Scriptures” do not solve the problem because the latter can lead to a Marcionite view of the Christian canon (the older Scriptures are *theirs*; the newer are *ours*). For my own part, I use “Tanakh” or “Bible” in Jewish-only contexts, “Shared Testament” in Jewish-Christian contexts, and “Old Testament” in Christian-only contexts, with the caveat that the term “Old” is not pejorative but positive.

12. Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Boston: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1964).
13. An excellent new history of behind-the-scenes relationships between Catholics and Jews in this period is John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2012).
14. The working drafts of the document (officially in Latin) are available in English in Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hoffman, and Joseph Sievers, eds., *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome* (New York: Fordham University, 2007) appendix 1.

if this followed from the Holy Scriptures” (no. 4).¹⁵ Jules Isaac could hardly have written it better himself. The document was ratified by a vote of 2,221 to 88.

Nostra aetate overturned centuries of faulty interpretation, but it did not endorse positive respect for Jewish readings of the New Testament. A major surgery had been performed, removing a cancer from the heart of Christianity, but a program of rehabilitation was not prescribed. The long pontificate of John Paul II was crucial in allowing time for the new relationship of respect to heal, grow, and learn to walk. *Nostra aetate* had not given John Paul II much raw material to work with, but he used it all, constantly repeating the phrases “irrevocable” and “never rejected.”¹⁶ In 1986, he signaled a way forward with a key metaphor: at a speech in the synagogue in Rome, as the first bishop of Rome to visit there in ages, he addressed the Jews as “our elder brothers.” This small phrase hearkened back to Paul’s theology of Israel, since his vision was centered on the brotherhood of Jews and Gentiles under Abraham, a kinship that Paul believed the messianic age had newly ushered into the world. John Paul II also brought the term “covenant” back to the center of Gentile–Jewish respect. Standing before the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 2000, he placed a prayer in the wall that asked forgiveness for those who had harmed “the people of the covenant”—not *their* covenant or the *old* covenant, but simply *the* covenant.¹⁷ As for that return to covenant that John Paul II uttered in prayer, Christian theologians in the field of Jewish–Christian relations are still working out its details in doctrinal theology.¹⁸

Renewed respect for Jews as covenanters with God and for the living traditions and beliefs of Judaism does not necessarily imply respect for Jewish interpretations of Christian Scripture. The latter phenomenon has occurred through a combination of factors: the “improved social position of postwar Jewish communities”; the professionalization of a critical mass of Jewish scholars trained *alongside* Gentile scholars in elite graduate programs; and the Christian self-scrutiny of anti-Jewish interpretive tendencies, a situation that obtains in large part because of post-Shoah commitment to dialogue.¹⁹ A major moment in the trend was the rise of Samuel Sandmel, a rabbi and New Testament scholar, to President of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1961.

15. *Nostra aetate*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html. All URLs cited herein were accessed September 29, 2014.

16. On this period, see the collection of documents published by the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1998).

17. The pilgrimage of John Paul II is covered well in Lawrence Boadt and Kevin di Camillo, eds., *John Paul II in the Holy Land: In His Own Words* (New York: Paulist, 2005).

18. See, e.g., Mary C. Boys, ed., *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity’s Sacred Obligation* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); and Philip A. Cunningham et al., eds., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

19. On these points see Stefan Meissner, *Die Heimholung des Ketzers: Studien zur Jüdischen Auseinandersetzung mit Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 138–43; quotation and

From that point, the ranks of Jewish New Testament scholars filled in slowly but steadily. Review articles by Eisenbaum and Alan Segal chart dozens of influential voices who have made the trend feel almost inevitable.²⁰ The scholarly dynamo Amy-Jill Levine even became one of the editors of the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. And so, it was a non-event when, 50 years after Sandmel's presidency, Adele Reinhartz—a Jewish specialist in the Gospel of John—became editor of the Society's flagship journal.

The publication of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* in 2011, however, was something of an event, and rightly so.²¹ It combines running commentary from a Jewish perspective on every book of the New Testament with 30 essays on topics of special relevance for Jewish readers. The star-studded list of contributors to the book—no fewer than 50 Jewish scholars—attests to a unique moment in the shared history of Jews and Christians. The *New York Times*, for instance, treated the book not just as a text to be reviewed but as a news story in the “A” section of its pages.²² Even 20 years ago, it would have been impossible for the editors, Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, to find 50 Jews with elite doctoral training in the New Testament, much less to engage them in a cooperative venture. The book is a culmination of years of Jewish–Christian interaction at graduate theology and religion programs in Europe, Israel, and North America. It signals the deep respect that Gentiles have developed for Jewish engagement with Christian Scriptures.

But the audience that profits most from this book in the long run will be Jews who have been open to learning from the New Testament but have also been justifiably wary of proselytism. In 2012 just such a group, a long-standing adult education class from a conservative synagogue in Manhattan, contacted me.²³ The rabbi and education director wanted to meet with me to find out whether I might be a right fit to teach a semester-long course at their synagogue on the New Testament. After vetting me, they let me know what a unique and potentially controversial move this was in their

some framing are from Daniel R. Langton, *The Apostle Paul in the Jewish Imagination: A Study in Modern Jewish–Christian Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2010) 93.

20. Pamela Eisenbaum, “Following in the Footnotes of the Apostle Paul,” in *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York: Routledge, 2004) 77–97; and Alan Segal, “Paul et ses exégètes juifs contemporains,” *Recherche de science religieuse* 94 (2006) 413–41.
21. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 2011). These two paragraphs bear some similarity to the review I wrote: “A Moment in Our Shared History,” review of Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, *Tablet* 266.8954 (July 7, 2012) 21.
22. Mark Oppenheimer, “Focusing on the Jewish story of the New Testament,” *New York Times*, November 26, 2011, A13.
23. The congregation, Tifereth Israel, usually goes by the name Town & Village Synagogue (T & V), standing as it does at the intersection of Stuyvesant Town and the East Village. The class occurred in fall 2012.

community; many members were scarred by painful experiences of Christian proselytism in the past. But the work of Levine and Brettler had created a new opportunity that the synagogue did not want to miss—a way to learn the New Testament, and learn about Christian friends and neighbors, through a scholarly version edited by Jews. In other words, the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* has made the New Testament safe again for Jews.

Eisenbaum reminds us Gentiles, though, that we ought not make assumptions about precisely how Jewish identity correlates to New Testament interpretation—and I would add that we should guard against an exoticization of “the Jewish reader.” To the contrary, Eisenbaum presents herself as an “insider” in the field. Her training, credentials, affiliations, and scholarly relationships are similar to those of her Gentile peers, and more importantly, she “feels like an insider” with her subject matter, which in the first century is not unambiguously “Christian.”

If the religious identity of the scriptural texts themselves is open to question . . . then modern Christian scholars cannot claim exclusive insider status vis-à-vis the New Testament. Both Jewish and Christian scholars would seem to be able legitimately to claim that, at least to a certain degree, all these ancient sacred texts are in some way part of their heritage.²⁴

Some of us use the term “Shared Testament” to describe the “Old”; but for Eisenbaum, even the “New” Testament feels shared.

Opportunities and Challenges

Outreach to Those in the Pews

The emergence of Jewish–Gentile respect in the scholarly realm has brought about new circumstances—opportunities and challenges—for Gentile Christian scholars of the New Testament. One of these circumstances, perhaps the most important one, is easily overlooked: despite over 50 years of blossoming Jewish–Gentile respect among theological scholars, the general public in both Jewish and Christian traditions knows very little about these changes. Most Christian scholars of the Bible now maintain very different views on Jews and Judaism than do our brothers and sisters in the pews. Publishing and other forms of outreach about this work are crucial. After all, it remains the case that the vast majority of Christians in the world do not personally know even one Jewish person. They meet Jews primarily through their Christian Bibles, through preaching about the Bible, or through exposure to political news about the state of Israel. Rabbi David Rosen, the director of international interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, has recently expressed this concern:

While the teachings of the [Catholic] Magisterium towards Jews, Judaism, and Israel are overwhelmingly positive, there are many parts of the Catholic world where pre-Conciliar

24. Eisenbaum, “Following in the Footnotes” 82.

attitudes still prevail and where anti-Judaism if not anti-Semitism is still to be found. This is especially so in many parts of Latin America where, other than in the main cities of Argentina and Brazil, Jews often hardly feature at all on the “Catholic radar screen.”²⁵

A great benefit that theological scholars can bring to the world, then, is an unveiling and invitation to the renewal of Jewish–Christian relations of the past 50 years.²⁶

The disconnection between the scholarly discourse of Jewish–Gentile respect and the general opinion in the pews was a great catalyst for Levine and Brettler’s *Jewish Annotated New Testament*. While that text has gone a long way toward spreading the Jewish message of the New Testament and encouraging Gentile hospitality toward Jewish engagement with it, there are other steps that must be taken by Christians on our shared journey. Elsewhere, for example, I have argued for the necessity of lectionary reform in the Catholic Church, specifically with an eye toward how lectionary choices represent Jews and Judaism in worship and how lectionary pairings establish relationships between the Shared Testament and the New Testament.²⁷ Many Christians interact with the Bible only through liturgy, and, barring contact with contemporary Jews and Judaism, the whole Jewish–Christian relationship is thus symbolized for them by the interaction between those two testaments. But if the hermeneutic relationship is based solely on “Gospel overcoming Law” or “prophecy finding fulfillment,” then the actual social relationship will not be able to flourish. Although interest in lectionary reform, especially with regard to its choice of Old Testament lections, has been articulated at the highest levels of the Catholic Church, change is not likely coming soon.²⁸ Until then, Christians have ample resources in the form of lectionary commentaries that aim to prevent supersessionist preaching, which falls into the traps set by lectionary pairings.²⁹

25. From an interview with Lisa Palmieri-Billig in *La Stampa*, September 18, 2013, <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/inquiries-and-interviews/detail/articolo/jews-disegni-david-rosen-vatican-ii-27954/>.

26. The Council of Centers on Jewish–Christian Relations has spearheaded this effort, especially through the resources of the website, *Dialogika*, <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources>.

27. Michael Peppard, “Do We Share a Book? The Sunday Lectionary and Jewish–Christian Relations,” *Studies in Christian–Jewish Relations* 1.1 (2005–2006) 89–102.

28. In the final propositions of the Synod of Catholic Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (Vatican, October 5–26, 2008), Proposition 16 states, “It is recommended that an examination be carried out of the Roman Lectionary to see if the current selection and ordering of the readings is truly adequate to the mission of the church in this historical moment. In particular, the bond between the Old Testament and the pericopes of the Gospels should be reconsidered, so that they do not imply an overly restrictive reading of the Old Testament or an exclusion of certain important passages” (translated from Italian by *National Catholic Reporter*, October 27, 2008: <http://ncronline.org/news/synod-final-propositions-synod-bishops-bible>).

29. E.g., Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free: Preaching without Anti-Judaism* (New York: Paulist, 2009), and others in the series. For a compendium of advice with summaries of post-*Nostra aetate* developments in Catholic teaching, see John T. Pawlikowski and James A. Wilde, *When Catholics Speak about Jews: Notes for Homilists and Catechists* (Chicago: Liturgy Training, 1987).

Catholics should encourage reform not only because of concern about how Jews and Judaism are presented in our Sunday assembly.³⁰ The lectionary as it stands can also encourage heresy within its own body of believers, namely, Marcionism, among the earliest and most seductive of all heresies. The ghost of Marcion, who, in the second century, taught that the God of the Old Testament was a different, inferior God to the God of the New Testament, has always been with us. Although these views were rejected by what became Christianity as we know it, Marcion's theological denigration of the Shared Testament has never fully been eradicated from the church. Every time a Christian utters the phrase "Old Testament God" and "New Testament God"—something that happens all too frequently—Marcion is still haunting us. Why do we make our task more difficult by using a booby-trapped lectionary? In the long run, a slightly revised lectionary would result in better teaching and preaching, continue the renewed tradition of Jewish–Gentile respect, and for Christians could approach a more proper depiction of God each Sunday morning.

Jewish Readings of the New Testament Are Not Predictable

A second aspect for which Christian scholars ought to be prepared in this era of Jewish–Gentile respect is the unpredictability of Jewish responses to the New Testament. In situations of mutual respect among worthy peers, one party cannot control, much less predict, how the other party will respond to given circumstances. The unpredictability of God's work in the world has been a part of Christian witness from the beginning. In the book of Acts, it was God who took the lead in opening up the Jewish covenant to Gentiles, when the Holy Spirit came upon a group of Gentiles before they had even been baptized (Acts 10:44–48). The results of attempts at Gentile inclusion could not be foreordained. Likewise in our own era, what transpires when Jews and Gentiles read the same Scripture often cannot be predicted. From the Christian's perspective, for whom the New Testament is so familiar, it is difficult to know which texts will be taken as inspiring or beautiful or exhortative and which will be viewed as tainted or painful or horrific.

During my aforementioned New Testament class at the synagogue, I had been prepared for poignant discussions of the tainted texts for Jewish–Christian relations: the harsh rhetoric of Matthew 21–23; the conflation of Jesus' enemies with the general term "Jews" in the Gospel of John; or the supposedly anti-Law passages in Paul's letters. But for some responses I was unprepared. An amusing and revelatory comment came on the second day, after reading the Gospel of Mark: "I got to the end," reported one student, "and I looked back and thought, 'Where was the *good* news?'" This witty encapsulation of the motif of necessary suffering in Mark will be with me forever. But a more intense and uncomfortable class meeting occurred in response to the books of

30. This paragraph is adapted from one my blog posts at dotCommonweal (February 14, 2012), <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/booby-traps-lectionary-or-expelling-ghost-marcion>.

Luke and especially Acts. Studying with critical, educated, faithful Jewish students showed me that Luke's overall method can be viewed as perhaps more anti-Jewish than that of Matthew, John, or Paul. From a Jewish perspective, Luke–Acts is a “bait and switch.” Luke establishes Jesus' Jewish credentials more strongly than any other Gospel at the beginning, with the focus on the Temple, the Jewish rituals, and so on. My class thought Mary's prayer, the Magnificat (Lk 1:46–55), was among the most beautiful and recognizably Jewish parts of the whole New Testament. But then all of a sudden in Jesus' synagogue speech (Luke 4:16–30), the foreshadowing of the ultimate mission to the Gentiles occurs, and the Nazareth crowd becomes an angry mob trying to kill Jesus. Later the speeches of Peter and Stephen in Acts have little nuance in their blaming of the Jerusalem Jews for the death of the Messiah. The culpability of Roman officials is virtually nonexistent in Luke's accounts. Finally, according to Acts Paul gives up on the Jews rather early in his career; he unequivocally says, “Since you reject [the word of God] and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). According to Paul's own letters, he is still struggling at the *end* of his life with the mystery of Jewish–Gentile respect under the reign of one God, but his character in the middle of Acts issues a loveless, supersessionist dismissal of the Jews.

In the realm of professional scholarship, contemporary Jewish responses to the New Testament are no more predictable than in the synagogue classroom. As Pamela Eisenbaum has demonstrated, the Jewish identities of scholarly interpreters have not been determinative of their conclusions about, for instance, Paul. Three important books about Paul were published in the early 1990s by Jewish scholars, but each of them argues for a different take. Alan Segal's *Paul the Convert* pushes back against the dominant new perspective readers of Paul, arguing that Saul the Pharisee did in fact become an apostate through conversion, albeit a gradual one, and that his “positive statements about Torah and Judaism” are “remnants of the apostle's former Pharisaic self.”³¹ In *A Radical Jew*, Daniel Boyarin defends the new perspective and rejects the “conversion” model, and yet he concurs with a traditional Christian reading on a key point: Boyarin thinks Paul was very much “motivated by a Hellenistic desire for the One, which among other things produced an ideal of a universal human essence, beyond difference and hierarchy.”³² His attraction to this aspect of Paul's thought aligns him with recent philosophical approaches to Paul as the founder of theological

31. Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1990); summary quote from Eisenbaum, “Following in the Footnotes” 89.

32. Daniel Boyarin: *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997) 7. More recently, (Rabbi) Joshua Garroway has used ethnic hybridity theory to interpret Paul's communities as “Gentile-Jews,” an unstable category of identity in transition (*Paul's Gentile-Jews: Neither Jew nor Gentile, but Both* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012]).

“universalism.”³³ Mark Nanos, on the other hand, in *The Mystery of Romans*, portrays Paul as thoroughly, unabashedly, and never-anything-but Jewish—a messianic Jew who continues in observance of Torah.³⁴ In a similar vein, one could contrast the approaches to Jesus’ Jewishness in the Gospels as discussed by Paula Fredriksen, Amy-Jill Levine, and Adele Reinhartz.³⁵

There is thus no essential quality of Jewishness in Jewish scholarly conclusions about the New Testament. What has changed significantly, rather, is the pervasive awareness among both Jews and Gentiles of living, theologizing, and writing against the horizon of the Shoah. In almost every scholarly context in which I function, I can now presume that some segment of the audience will be Jewish, and that most of those persons will have a direct connection to the Shoah. These facts refine theological thinking about the foundational texts of Jewish–Christian relations. In short, the emergence of diverse, elitely trained Jewish New Testament scholars has brought new focus to the types of questions being asked, broadened the set of Jewish *comparanda* from antiquity, sensitized Christians to the reception of their scholarship by Jews, and thus invigorated a field of study—without manufacturing predetermined results.

Does Circumcision Make a Difference?

As a third issue of Gentile–Jewish respect, I raise one that is both ancient and timely: the movement in some predominantly Gentile countries to ban circumcision. Non-Jewish interest in the Jewish ritual of circumcision goes back to Greek and Roman travelers, who were, at a minimum, curious and in some cases horrified by the ritual removal of the male foreskin.³⁶ Ancient ethnographers associated the practice with Ethiopians, Phoenicians, Egyptian priests, and Hebrews. The Greeks, who were well

33. This issue has been taken up by several contemporary philosophers, e.g., Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2003). Some responses from New Testament scholars to Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek, among others, were collected in John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff, eds., *St. Paul among the Philosophers* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2009).

34. Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1996). Nanos here stands in for the so-called “radical new perspective” on Paul, represented also by Eisenbaum along with Lloyd Gaston, John Gager, and others. In this view, Paul’s negative comments about the Torah are intended for Gentile ears, and thus there exists a “two-track” model of salvation. One can adopt most of the new perspective, though, without assenting to these positions.

35. See their essays in Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz, eds., *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); and Amy-Jill Levine, *A Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2009); and Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (London: Continuum, 2002).

36. E.g., Strabo, *Geography* 16.2.37.

known for idealization of the nude male form, considered the custom barbaric.³⁷ According to medical historian Frederick Hodges, “in the Greek cultural constellation of symbols, the image of the exposed glans was remarkable for the intensity and sheer abundance of negative imagery associated with it.”³⁸ The Jews’ own justificatory narratives for circumcision are virtually prehistoric. Undoubtedly circumcision marks the covenant with Abraham by the time of the authoring of Genesis (Gen 17:9–4), but other narratives from the Torah hardly supply readers with a clear etiology or function. The brief episode in which God “tried to kill” Moses, and Zipporah saves him by circumcising their son and rubbing it on Moses, remains enigmatic (Exod 4:24–26). Centuries later, when the message about the God of the Judeans was spread to gentile lands by the followers of Jesus, the question of proselyte circumcision for Gentiles was prominent. Several New Testament texts deal with it, and Christians—at least Paul’s ideal Christians—ultimately championed the view that circumcision was among the *adiaphora* for Gentiles: it made “no difference.” “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing,” wrote Paul, although he was himself circumcised. “Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called” (1 Cor 7:19–20).

Gentile indifference toward the practice has been the norm in many times and places in Western history, but recently Jews have feared movements toward banning the prescribed ritual. In 2012 a court ruling in Köln, Germany, temporarily banned infant circumcision, before being later overruled. Even the possibility awakened dormant fears of anti-Semitism, and Jewish leader Charlotte Knobloch wrote an incisive editorial in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “Wollt ihr uns Juden noch?” (“Do you still want us Jews?”):

For six decades I have had to justify myself because I stayed in Germany—as a remnant of a destroyed world, as a sheep among wolves. I was always happy to carry this burden because I was firmly convinced that this country and these people deserved it. For the first time my foundations are starting to shake. For the first time I feel resignation. I earnestly ask whether this country still wants us.³⁹

Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, also have significant political parties pushing for the ban on circumcision. The notion of making illegal a prescribed ritual for 50 percent of a well-established religious group seems, at first glance, unlikely to gain support in a modern Western democracy. Yet when couched in the language of “genital mutilation,” which associates the practice with female genital

37. See Menachem Stern, ed., intro., trans., comm., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–) nos. 1, 115, 118, 124, 176, 301, 375, etc.

38. Frederick M. Hodges, “The Ideal Prepuce in Ancient Greece and Rome,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75 (2001) 375–405, at 394.

39. Charlotte Knobloch, “Wollt ihr uns Juden noch?,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 25, 2012, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/beschneidungen-in-deutschland-wollt-ihr-uns-juden-noch-1.1459038> (translation mine).

mutilation, and when positioned as an issue about the human right to bodily integrity, the secular stance of human rights for children has gained ground against the competing stance of religious rights for a minority group. The outcomes of various national movements to ban circumcision cannot yet be known, but the issue appears to be gaining some momentum. During the process of the debate, Christian engagement with the New Testament may play a role, since it involves the most tangible contemporary issue of Gentile–Jewish respect about which Christian Scriptures speak definitively. Not only does Paul argue for its “indifference,” but arguing for a ban on circumcision would also put a Christian in the awkward position of outlawing the choice that Mary made for her infant son, Jesus (Lk 2:21).

Both Fulfilled and Unfulfilled

A fourth feature of the new relationship is deeply theological: Christians will continue to reimagine the mystery of redemption in light of respect for the ongoing Jewish covenant. This project takes many forms, but at bottom it begins for Christians with a recovery of balance between notions of the “already” and the “not yet” of redemption. Rosemary Radford Ruether in *Faith and Fratricide*, her seminal work on Christian anti-Semitism, describes the already as “fulfilled messianism”: it focuses on what God has already done through Jesus; it emphasizes the assurance of individual salvation; it deemphasizes the second coming of the Messiah; and it exaggerates the church’s absolute role in history.⁴⁰ These factors ought to be balanced with the not yet of “unfulfilled messianism,” which is also the heritage of Christian faith: it acknowledges the uncertain horizon of eschatological judgment; it seeks to imitate the life, message, and resurrection of Jesus as a “paradigm of hoping.”

Ruether further argues that Christians have repressed their despair about the failure of the Messiah to bring about all the marks of the messianic age on earth. The Jewish people say no to a messianic age filled with misery.⁴¹ The Jewish no, however, can act as a prophetic critique and have the positive effect of reminding Christians of the unfulfilled aspect of redemption. At its core, Christian faith has always needed to balance the fulfilled and unfulfilled aspects of messianism. Christian theology necessarily lives with the already and the not yet—the tension is built into our texts, our worship, our calendar. When Christians read the New Testament with other Christians, we gravitate toward the already. When we read with Jews, we feel the pang of the not yet, and it rouses us from complacency. Orthodox rabbi Irving Greenberg, who has worked steadily toward improved Jewish–Christian relations, states, “Since no religion can keep these tensions in perfect balance, the dual differing emphasis in the witness of

40. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

41. A more recent reflection on this topic from a Jewish perspective is found in Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004) esp. 192.

Judaism and Christianity, properly (not destructively) pursued, can better keep humanity on track as we work for the perfection of the world.”⁴² The more fully Christians internalize this critique, the better will relations of Gentile–Jewish respect spread.

When I speak on this topic to Christian audiences, I often receive a question or comment implying that such a stance toward Judaism is wishy-washy or unorthodox. In fact, the Catholic Church’s Pontifical Biblical Commission, a body of theologically trained biblical scholars appointed by the Vatican, articulated this very viewpoint in its 2001 document:

What has *already* been accomplished in Christ must *yet* be accomplished in us and in the world. The definitive fulfillment will be at the end with the resurrection of the dead, a new heaven and a new earth. Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulant to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like them, we too live in expectation.⁴³

Thus the period of Gentile–Jewish respect and Jewish readings of the New Testament have encouraged more sophisticated Christian theological reflection on the concept of fulfillment.

Christians can further develop the conditions for respect regarding redemption by deemphasizing the concept of *Heilsgeschichte* (“salvation history”) in our biblical interpretation and theology.⁴⁴ Unlike our current stance, the salvation history narrated by Luke–Acts and adopted by the early proto-orthodox tradition had little regard for postbiblical Jews, even though Judaism is the “root” that Christianity needs to flourish (Rom 11:18). Terrence Tilley has recently argued that salvation history, as a concept for Christians or Jews, involves neither adequate narrative theology nor the critical faculties of contemporary historiography.

To speak descriptively, *Heilsgeschichte* has the narrative structure of a myth, unverifiable, unfalsifiable, unwarrantable by evidence and argument. As historical claims are verifiable, falsifiable, and warranted by evidence and argument, this narrative is not history in the contemporary senses of “history” at all. It does not solve a theologian’s problem of how to parse the religious belief in a God who acts.⁴⁵

The dominance of *Heilsgeschichte* has also had negative effects on the Christian doctrine of God. When Christians imagine, for example, God functioning in the Old

42. Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth* 230.

43. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* II.A.5, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html(emphasis original).

44. Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1954).

45. Terrence W. Tilley, “Has Salvation a History?,” in *Tradition and the Normativity of History*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Terrence Merrigan, with Colby Dickinson (Leuven: Peeters, 2013) 99–121, at 105–6. See Bradford E. Hinze, “The End of Salvation History,” *Horizons* 18 (1991) 227–43.

Testament, Jesus in the Gospels, and the Holy Spirit in the rest of history, trinitarian theology leans toward a kind of epochal modalism, in which each Person of the Trinity governs a distinct historical period. The honoring of God’s enduring covenant with Israel, however, eliminates the viability of such modalism. Recent trinitarian conceptions, such as that of David Kelsey, can provide better grounding for Gentile–Jewish theological respect.⁴⁶ Kelsey’s doctrine of God as creator, reconciler, and consummator maintains Christian theological convictions, while also being clearly explicable through the texts of the Shared Testament. This enables Christians both to revivify interpretation of the Scriptures and also to articulate a theology recognizable to Jewish companions.

In the end, the locus for reimagining redemption is unavoidably the theology of Paul’s letters. But whereas previous generations of Christians (and Jewish readers of the New Testament) had found the key to Christian soteriology in an individualistic reading of Galatians and Romans 3–8, the new perspective on Paul and the growth of Gentile–Jewish respect have found their origin rather in Romans 9–11. These three chapters were the source text for the reconceived relationship to Judaism outlined in *Nostra aetate*, and they offer the most mature reflection in the New Testament on the Jewish–Gentile relationship. Here Paul emphasizes God’s election of and enduring faithfulness to Israel, God’s freedom to judge and show mercy, God’s will to save all, and the dependence of Gentiles on Israel for covenantal relationship to God.

More importantly, Paul ultimately shows the failure of logical discourse before the mystery of God’s election, judgment, and grace. That is to say, after eleven chapters of scriptural exegesis and logical diatribe, he nonetheless finishes the argument with less didactic rhetorical forms—an allegorical image and a doxology.⁴⁷ The allegory of the olive tree (Rom 11:16–24) grants status and life to the “grafted” branches of the Gentiles; at the same time, it resists the Christian triumphalism of fulfilled messianism, since the “root” of Israel cannot be neglected. Then Paul’s last word on the subject of Jewish and Gentile redemption, the culmination of his life’s work, takes the form of an apophatic doxology. Out of faithfulness to his ineffable conversion experience—a conversion from violent opposition against Gentile inclusion to zealous evangelization toward Gentile inclusion—Paul concludes with certainty that Jews and Gentiles will be saved, but he does not know how.⁴⁸ The how of the not-yet redemption is buried in “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of

46. David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

47. This point has been repeatedly emphasized by Cardinal Walter Kasper, e.g., in “The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish–Christian Dialogue,” a speech delivered at the Centre for the Study of Jewish–Christian Relations, Cambridge, UK, December 6, 2004, <http://www.cccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kasper/652-kasper04dec6-1>.

48. This sentence alludes to the quotation of Crossan and Reed above, from *In Search of Paul* 6.

the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (Rom 11:33–34). To echo Cardinal Walter Kasper, the Vatican's long-time liaison to the Jews, if even Paul did not pronounce on the *how* of Jewish–Gentile redemption, then probably no one is in a position to do so.

Cultivating Respect

The faithful, yet ultimately apophatic, stance of Paul in Romans 9–11 serves still as a guide for Christian leaders who dialogue with Jews. For instance, Pope Francis was recently asked a series of questions by the Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica*, one of which concerned Christian attitudes toward Judaism. What has come of the promise made to the Jews by God? The pope echoed Paul:

This question, believe me, is a radical one for us Christians because with the help of God, especially in the light of the Second Vatican Council, we have rediscovered that the Jewish people remain for us the holy root from which Jesus was born. I too have cultivated many friendships through the years with my Jewish brothers in Argentina and often while in prayer, as my mind turned to the terrible experience of the Shoah, I looked to God. What I can tell you, with Saint Paul, is that God has never neglected his faithfulness to the covenant with Israel, and that, through the awful trials of these last centuries, the Jews have preserved their faith in God. And for this, we, the Church and the whole human family, can never be sufficiently grateful to them. Moreover, persevering with faith in the God of the Covenant, they remind everyone, including us Christians, that we wait unceasingly as pilgrims for the return of the Lord, and that therefore we should be open to him and not remain entrenched in our achievements.⁴⁹

The deep Gentile–Jewish respect on display here (“we can never be sufficiently grateful to them”) stems not just from scriptural reflection or conciliar documents, but more profoundly from the years of sustained personal communication between then-Cardinal Bergoglio and Jews in Argentina, especially Rabbi Abraham Skorka, with whom he authored a book of substantive dialogues.⁵⁰ Pope Francis gained the proper balance of unfulfilled messianism (“we wait unceasingly . . . we should . . . not remain entrenched in our achievements”) by cultivating respect for the enduring vitality of a Jewish brother or sister’s faith.

In antiquity it was daring, even audacious, for Jews such as Paul to read the Gentiles into God’s covenant. Some contemporary Christians have considered it no less audacious to read the Jews into God’s covenant, even when our own sacred texts point the way. For these reasons, Jewish–Gentile relationships of intellectual and spiritual maturity remain the lifeblood of our respect and mutual flourishing. Now, as then, the

49. Originally published as “Papa Francesco scrive a Repubblica: ‘Dialogo aperto con i non credenti,’” *La Repubblica*, September 11, 2013; ET, “Letter to a Non-Believer,” http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/letters/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130911_eugenio-scalfari_en.html.

50. ET, Jorge Mario Bergoglio and Abraham Skorka, *On Heaven and Earth* (Colorado Springs: Image, 2013).

covenants are in horizontal relation with each other, as well as vertical with God. It takes work, though, and commitments of time to nurture spiritual relationships among Jews and Gentiles of which Paul would be proud. Like olive trees, they must be cultivated; and if untended, they will be broken.

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