

A JEWISH RESPONSE TO GAVIN D’COSTA

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The author suggests that Gavin D’Costa needs, first, to take seriously the history of the Christian contribution to Jewish suffering, which cannot be parenthesized as outside history, and, second, to reflect on the positive significance of the Jewish no to Jesus (Moltmann), since both Jews and Christians share the anticipation of the Messiah. The author calls for a “Jewish covenantal pluralism,” arguing that both Jews and Christians participate in God’s revelation and that both participations are in different ways intended by God.

I AM DELIGHTED TO HAVE the opportunity to respond to Gavin D’Costa’s article, “What Does the Catholic Church Teach about Mission to the Jewish People?,” a revision of the paper he presented at our public dialogue at the University of Bristol in September 2011. I should state at the outset that we both agree that mission is one of the most contentious and sensitive areas in Jewish-Christian relations.

For Jews, the difficulty begins with the word “mission,” which conjures up images of centuries of persecution by the church, epitomized by the expulsion of Jews from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492.¹ The Shoah in particular highlighted awareness of the immensity of the burden of guilt that the church carried not only for its general silence, with some noble exceptions during 1933–1945, but also because of the “teaching of contempt” toward Jews and Judaism that it carried on for so many centuries. It was this that sowed the seeds of hatred and made it so easy for Hitler to use antisemitism as a political weapon.² There remains

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¹ “Breaking with the policies of previous Iberian rulers, Ferdinand and Isabella decreed the expulsion of all confessing Jews from their lands following their conquest of the last Muslim kingdom in Spain, Granada, in 1492. This was seen as part of the recovery of Spain’s Christian identity, and the king and queen fervently hoped that many Jews would convert rather than depart, as many did” (David Abulafia, “Ferdinand the Catholic [1452–1516],” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn [New York: Cambridge University, 2005] 156).

² See Jules Isaac *Teaching of Contempt* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1964). I use the term *antisemitism* rather than *anti-Semitism*, as the former is becoming the standard term for “Jew-hatred.”

the ongoing presence (and in some regions of the world, growth) of anti-semitism and a need for vigilance, as Denis McShane, among others, has recently shown.³

I would like to make two preliminary remarks. First, as the Bishop Williamson affair in 2009 reminds us, antisemitism is not restricted to the secular sphere but remains present within the Christian church itself. The Vatican knew that Bishop Williamson was a notorious Holocaust denier, but Pope Benedict XVI apparently did not know that when he sought to bring the four bishops of the Society of St. Pius X back into the fold.⁴ As the Christian pioneer in combating antisemitism James Parkes put it, it was “the Christian Church alone, which turned normal xenophobia and normal good and bad communal relations between two human societies into the unique evil of antisemitism.”⁵

Taking seriously and grappling with a history of the Christian contribution to Jewish suffering is important. It is not simply a historical event (or a series of historical events) but is a theological challenge and cannot simply be parenthesized as history, outside the realm of theology. To put it another way, the charge of Rosemary Radford Ruether that antisemitism lay deep within Christian tradition needs to be answered: “Anti-Judaism developed theologically in Christianity as the left-hand of Christology. That is to say, anti-Judaism was the negative side of the Christian claim that Jesus was the Christ.”⁶ Ruether suggested that when Jews refused to accept the Christian teachings regarding Christ, Christians felt obliged to undermine their opponents’ views by promoting anti-Jewish Christian teaching and supersessionist polemic. While Ruether’s accusation may be exaggerated, it should not be ignored, and I would urge D’Costa to reflect on the impact of the Christian contribution to antisemitism for Christian self-understanding, including Christian mission, and especially mission to the Jewish people. This is not an abstract issue to be ignored.

Of course, many churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have begun the painful process of reexamining the sources of the teaching of

³ Denis MacShane, *Globalising Hatred: The New Anti-Semitism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008). See Runnymede Trust, Commission on Antisemitism, *A Very Light Sleeper: The Persistence and Dangers of Antisemitism* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1994).

⁴ Significantly (and unusually) there was enormous internal pressure to challenge the pope’s initial decision, and even cardinals, such as Walter Kasper, and many bishops, including, importantly, the German bishops, publicly vented their frustration, and Benedict acted relatively quickly on Williamson and apologized.

⁵ James Parkes, *Voyage of Discoveries* (London: Gollancz, 1969) 123.

⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Anti-Semitism and Christian Theology,” in *Auschwitz, Beginning of a New Era?: Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Eva Fleischer (New York: Ktav, 1977) 7.

contempt and repudiating them. This means, from a Christian perspective, that before dialogue with Jews and Judaism could take place, the history of the church and its attitude toward the Jews had to be publicly acknowledged. It involved a proper appraisal of antisemitism, anti-Judaism, and the significance of the Shoah. Christian institutional statements have consistently condemned antisemitism, and documents such as “We Remember” (1998)⁷ illustrate a willingness to tackle this subject. Most Christian theologians involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue have acknowledged that the slaughter of six million Jews would not have been possible were the roots of antisemitism not deep within the Christian tradition. Now, I suggest, similar reflection needs to be applied to topics such as mission.

The foundation document of the World Council of Churches (WCC) demonstrates the reason why this is necessary. In 1948, the WCC was founded in Amsterdam; it acknowledged the horrors of World War II that had but three years previously come to a close, and it condemned antisemitism. However, at the same time the document called for a redoubling of effort at the conversion of Jews. The report recommended that the churches should “seek to recover the universality of our Lord’s commission by including the Jewish people in their evangelistic work.” Indeed, WCC concluded that, in light of the Shoah, an even greater effort should be made to convert Jews, stating that “because of the unique inheritance of the Jewish people, the churches should make provisions for the education of ministers specially fitted to this task. Provision should also be made for Christian literature to interpret the gospel to Jewish people.”⁸

It is interesting that the 1948 assembly linked the two issues: the condemnation of antisemitism with an exhortation to preach the gospel to the Jews—on the one hand, a call “to denounce antisemitism”; on the other, a call for the conversion of Jews.⁹ At this time, Jews throughout the world were trying to recover from the Shoah. Their view of this report—if those who knew it existed—could only have been: the Nazis wanted Jewish bodies; the churches wanted Jewish souls.

My second preliminary remark is to express frustration with all Christian missionary activity that fails to reflect on (and understand the reasons for)

⁷ Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.” The document is published on the Vatican website along with Pope John Paul II’s letter to Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, president of the commission, about the document. This and all other church documents referenced herein are readily found on the Vatican website by searching their titles in an Internet search engine. All URLs referenced herein were accessed on March 22, 2012.

⁸ *The Message and Reports of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva, WCC: 1948) 78.

⁹ *Ibid.* 76–77.

the Jewish no to Jesus. It is true that there has been a massive shift in the Christian reading of the NT, that (for at least the last generation) acknowledged the positive significance of the fact that Jesus was a Jew¹⁰ and of the Jewish origins of Christianity; that Christians are taught that Jesus was born, lived, and died a Jew; that the first Christians were Jews. But few reflect on the fact that his mother was Jewish¹¹ or that the harsh criticism of the Pharisees in the Gospels has as much to do with the closeness and rivalry between the communities in which the texts were written (especially the Matthean community) as with anything that happened during the lifetime of Jesus. NT students may learn that Jesus was closer to the Pharisees than to any other Jewish group in the first century CE, but how many are taught to reflect on its significance when considering the polemic between them? I often ask my NT students, when we reflect on the polemic, “with whom do you argue most?” Their answers generally agree: “We argue with those to whom we are closest.”

The NT bears witness to the debates and arguments, which were serious, vigorous, and often bitter. Nevertheless, what has often been forgotten or neglected is the fact that the arguments were primarily between Jews, about a Jew, or about Jewish issues (even when they concerned Gentile converts). The problem of polemic is magnified when passages are read as if they were “Christian” arguments against Jews. To read them this way is to misread them and to ignore the context of the ministry of the earthly Jesus: first-century Palestinian Judaism. This misreading contributed to the “teaching of contempt” and an inability among Christians to take seriously the Jewish no to Jesus.

Having offered these preliminary remarks, let me suggest that the beginnings of a shift in Christian thinking can be noted, illustrated by the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s (PBC) “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible” (2002), which deals with eschatological expectations and states that “Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain.” It explicitly teaches that Jews, alongside Christians, are commended for keeping alive the messianic expectation. The difference is that for Christians “the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us” (no. 21).¹² It builds on the work of a small number of Christian scholars, such as

¹⁰ Géza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York: MacMillan, 1973) and Edward P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985) are now standard texts for NT students.

¹¹ See Edward Kessler, “Mary the Jewish Mother,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76 (2011) 211–23, reminding readers that the mother of Jesus was also a Jew—a first-century Palestinian Jewish woman.

¹² Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger not only endorsed the document but also in the preface quoted and commended this phrase.

Jürgen Moltmann, who see positive value in the Jewish no. He affirms that the OT and postbiblical Judaism hold positive significance for the church. For Christians the significance of the Jewish no to Jesus was that they should postpone the question of who will be revealed as Messiah to the end of time, and learn from Jews what it means to live in the present in an unredeemed world.¹³ Philip Cunningham has suggested that Christian theologians should reflect on the possibility that the Jewish no is in accord with God's will. "God did not 'choose to reveal his Son' (as Paul put it) to everyone, but was selective, as Paul himself recognized. I think Christians today need to think about this."¹⁴

The PBC's document marks an interesting development and may provide the basis for a positive reassessment for a Christian theology of Judaism. *Nostra aetate* did not mention the Jewish no to Jesus, while the 1974 "Guidelines" called on Catholics to understand the difficulties for the "Jewish soul" with its "pure notion of divine transcendence when faced with the mystery of the incarnate word."¹⁵ The 1985 "Notes" suggested that the Jewish no was "a sign to be interpreted within God's design,"¹⁶ but the PBC developed this idea more fully. The acknowledgement of the legitimacy of a Jewish understanding of waiting for the Messiah associates Jewish expectations of the coming of the Messiah with the second coming of Jesus. Both Jews and Christians share this anticipation and may—in theory at least—be viewed as right all along.

According to the present pope, Jews and Christians represent one people of God who are identical in some respects and different in others. Although both differ substantially, they nevertheless share sufficient common ground to make it possible for the same covenant to be applied to both.¹⁷ This

¹³ Moltmann's view seems to have influenced the PBC's document. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1974).

¹⁴ Email message from Philip Cunningham to me, received and quoted with approval on January 20, 2011. I would like to thank Professor Cunningham for his comments on my paper.

¹⁵ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration 'Nostra aetate' (n. 4)" (1974) sec. I.

¹⁶ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church," (1985) VI.1.

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Many Religions—One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World*, trans. Graham Harrison, foreword Scott Hahn (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999). Note the similarity to the German Rhineland Synod, which in "Towards a Renewal of the Relationship between Christians and Jews" (1980) declared: "We believe in the permanent election of the Jewish people as the people of God and realize that through Jesus Christ the Church is taken into the covenant of God with his people" (no. 4.4), <http://www.jcrelations.net/Towards+Renovation+of+the+Relationship+of+Christians+and+Jews.2388.0.html?L=3>.

implies that Jews and Christians share integrally in the ongoing process of humanity’s salvation.

Of course, at the end time the church expects Jews to realize the truth of Christian claims and, in Paul’s words in Romans 11, “be jealous” and convert. Does such an eschatological expectation cause difficulty for Jewish-Christian relations? No, I do not think so, because Judaism also expects the *eschaton* to reveal the truth of its proclamations. In other words, Jews have their own eschatological expectations. This may provide a middle ground between D’Costa’s position and my own.

COVENANT AND PEOPLEHOOD: SOME JEWISH PERSPECTIVES

D’Costa has suggested that contemporary Christian understandings of mission in relation to Jews¹⁸ remain ambiguous but can be placed in three main categories: first, those who particularly target Jews for conversion;¹⁹ second, those who witness to faith in Christ, without targeting Jews specifically, and believe in sharing the Christian faith with all people; and third, those who have no conversionary outlook toward Jews, and who understand mission as shared, a “common mission” in an unredeemed world. D’Costa proposes the second option, whereas I would support the third.

First we need to outline the tension that D’Costa tries to unpack, demonstrated by *Nostra aetate*, the most influential of all the recent church documents on Jewish-Christian relations. *Nostra aetate* states that on the one hand, “the Church is the new people of God,” while on the other hand “God holds the Jews most dear because of their Fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues (cf. Rom 11:28–29)” (no. 4). The tension between the two statements is based on the identity of the people of God—both Jews and Christians have traditionally claimed *exclusively* to be the true Israel. The claim to be the people of Israel is regarded by Jews as the very core of their self-understanding, yet for nearly two millennia the church also saw itself as the True Israel and the heir of all the biblical promises toward Israel. From a Jewish perspective, the claim to be Israel is based on the idea of covenant. *Berit* is key to my reflections on D’Costa’s article and refers to God initiating a covenant with a community

¹⁸ As far as possible I omit the phrase “the Jews” because of the pejorative meaning the phrase carries in popular Christian culture. The religion correspondent of the London *Times*, for example, has argued that *Hoi Ioudaioi* still echoes today and prefers where possible to use “Jewish people” instead of “the Jews.”

¹⁹ This category includes those Evangelicals who, alongside believing that it is the divinely mandated mission of the church to preach the gospel to Jews, seek to increase their understanding of the Jewish roots of Christianity, which has led to some intriguing alliances between Evangelical organizations and Orthodox Jewish groups, particularly in the United States.

of people, but with a community that accepts certain obligations and responsibilities as covenant partners.

A covenant is not, as is sometimes mistakenly assumed, a contract or a transaction but is an agreement dependent upon a relationship. Some exegetes hold to the view that *berit* is better translated by “obligation,” because it expresses the sovereign power of God, who imposes his will on his people Israel: God promises in a solemn oath to fulfill his word to his people Israel, who are expected to respond by faithfulness and obedience. Jonathan Sacks explains:

In a covenant, two or more individuals, each respecting the dignity and integrity of the other, come together in a bond of love and trust, to share their interests, sometimes even to share their lives, by pledging . . . faithfulness to one another, to do together what neither . . . can do alone. . . . A contract is about interests but a covenant is about identity. And that is why contracts benefit, but covenants transform.²⁰

The language of covenant represents a shift from description to prescription, from what *is* to what *ought* to be; from what human beings *are*, to an ethical statement about what we *may or may not do*.²¹ From a Jewish perspective, this is a move from things seen to things heard; from the visual to the practical construction of what we might call the proto-Big Society. The key metaphors in Judaism are auditory. In the Talmud, phrases referring to knowledge, understanding, or tradition are often variants of the verb *shema*, “to hear.” The key biblical command is “Hear, O Israel” (Deut 6:4). The God of the Hebrew Bible is invisible. All visual representations are forbidden, some idolatrous. Even the texture of biblical narrative is nonvisual. We have no idea of what Abraham or Moses looked like. God showed himself to Moses and the Israelites not in the image but in the call. When Elijah perceived God, he heard only a still small voice (1 Kings 19:11–13).

In addition, the Bible is not *history*—what happened sometime else to someone else—but is read in terms of *memory*, my story, what happened to my ancestors and therefore, insofar as I carry on their story, to me. The Torah speaks not of moral truths in the abstract but of commands, that is, truths *addressed to me*, calling for my response. Consequently, much of the Torah is written in the form of narrative, celebrating the concrete, not the abstract; the particular, not the universal.²²

²⁰ Jonathan Sacks, “The Relationship between the People and God,” address to Lambeth Conference 2008, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1063/the-relationship-between-the-people-and-god>.

²¹ David Hume first articulated this as the “is-ought problem” in his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: John Noon, 1739). Although claims about what *ought* to be are made on the basis of what *is*, the logic on which the move from description to prescription is based is uncertain.

²² See Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998).

Narrative truth is not like scientific or logical truth. It does not operate on the either/or of truth and falsity. Narratives contain multiple points of view. For Jews, they are open—essentially, not accidentally—to more than one interpretation, more than one *level* of interpretation. Nor does the validity of one story exclude another. Stories, including historical narratives, do more than reflect facts about the world. They offer interpretations of the world. They attempt to *make sense* out of the raw data of events.

The Rabbinic Bible, the *Mikraot Gedolot*, with its commentaries spanning the centuries ranged around the biblical text, is a starting point. The *Mikraot Gedolot* is rightly regarded as a celebration of the relativity of exegesis and of the enduring, elusive nature of the debate about meaning. The willingness to see a multitude of different possible meanings is in marked contrast to the single “authentic” meaning, backed by clerical or scholarly authority.²³

Hence the profound difference between thinking that if my faith is true and conflicts with yours, then yours is false. *Faith as covenant* means that if I and my fellow believers have a relationship with God, this does not entail that you do not. I have my stories, rituals, memories, prayers, celebrations, laws, and customs; you have yours. That is what makes me, me and you, you. The truth of one does not entail the falsity of the other. Indeed the very words “true” and “false” seem out of place, as if we were using words from one domain to describe phenomena belonging to another.

Truth cannot coexist with falsehood and generates narratives of displacement. If I am convinced that I possess the truth while you are sunk in error, I may try to persuade you; but if you refuse to be persuaded, I may conquer or convert you, imposing my view by force in the name of truth. This thinking leads *in extremis* to the mind-set of “I’m right; you’re wrong; go to hell!”

From a Jewish perspective, *all* relationships between God and humanity are covenantal. None excludes others. God may be with us but also with those who are not like us; with friends but also with strangers. That is why the Torah commands on 36 separate occasions to love the stranger.

Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, argues that both Jews and Christians participate in God’s revelation, and both are, in different ways, intended by God. Only for God is the truth one; earthly truth remains divided.²⁴ Contemporary adherents of this position include me and Israeli

²³ The rabbinic basis for this is found in the following passage: “In the School of Rabbi Ishmael it is taught: ‘See, My word is like fire, an oracle of the Eternal, and like a hammer that shatters a rock’ (Jeremiah 23:29). Just as a hammer divides into several sparks so too every scriptural verse yields several meanings” (BT Sanhedrin 34a).

²⁴ Rosenzweig was influenced by Rabbi Jacob Emden who viewed Christianity as a legitimate religion for Gentiles. In *Seder Olam Rabbah Vezuta* (1757), Emden wrote positively about Jesus and Paul, using the NT in his argument that they had

scholar David Hartman who argues that a covenant between people and God is predicated on a belief in human dignity. Other religions, especially Christianity and Islam, have their own covenants with God and are called to celebrate their dignity and particularity.

This approach may best be called “Jewish covenantal pluralism.” It begins with the Covenant with Noah: “The children of Noah [that is, people other than Israel] were given seven commandments: Laws [i.e., to establish courts of justice and the prohibitions of] idolatry, blasphemy, sexual immorality, bloodshed, theft, and [eating] the limb from a living animal.”²⁵ These laws are an attempt to formulate moral standards for the world without a concomitant demand for conversion to Judaism. As such, they acknowledge the right of peoples to their own formulation of faith, provided only that a minimum standard is met. As Rabbi Johanan of Tiberias said: “Whoever denies idolatry is called a Jew.”²⁶ Therefore, the rejection of idolatry, rather than any doctrinal definition of God, is key, and these seven commandments provide a theological basis on which to affirm Christianity.

A Jewish covenantal pluralist may also turn to the concept of “righteous Gentiles,” referring to Rabbi Joshua ben Hananya who propounded the view, later generally accepted, that “the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come,”²⁷ though they were not converted to Judaism. Judaism does not have an equivalent to Augustine’s *extra ecclesiam non est salus* (“there is no salvation outside the church”), and the concept of “righteous Gentiles” provides an opportunity for an affirmation of Christianity.

Finally, briefly, one may refer to the principles of *tikkun ‘olam* (“establishing the world aright”), *darchei shalom* (“the ways of peace”), and *kiddush Hashem* (“sanctifying God’s name,” i.e., behaving in a manner that brings credit to God), all of which can be brought to govern the Jewish relationship to Christianity

COVENANT AND MISSION: A CHALLENGE FOR CHRISTIANS

In the NT, the OT covenant is reinterpreted through the experiences of the early Christian community. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, a new phase in the story of Israel begins. The change in emphasis marked by the translation of *berit* into the Greek *diathèkè* (“decree”) in the Septuagint developed still further in the NT, where the concept acquired the meaning of a definitive “last will and testament” on the part of God. The Vulgate translation used the word *testamentum*, which became the

not sought to denigrate Judaism and that their teachings were primarily concerned to communicate the Noachide laws to Gentiles.

²⁵ Tosefta, *Avoda Zara* 9.4.

²⁶ BT *Megilla* 13a.

²⁷ Tosefta, *Sanhedrin* 13.

official designation of both parts of the Christian Bible—the OT and the NT—with its inescapable implication of supersessionism.²⁸

The early church, based on its interpretations of the Epistle to the Hebrews, regarded the old covenant of Israel as definitely abrogated.²⁹ The text on the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31–34 was understood as not only pointing to fulfillment in Christ but also to the replacement of Judaism. With the coming of Christ, the church had taken the place of the Jewish people as God's elect community—a theology of replacement, based upon the abrogation of God's covenant with the Jewish people.

Beginning in the first half of the 20th century, but especially after the Shoah, Christian theologians became aware of the inadequacy of replacement theology. As D'Costa has shown, by acknowledging the spiritual patrimony between Christians and Jews, the Roman Catholic Church at Vatican II explicitly disowned replacement theology.

However, there is less agreement about what replaces replacement theology, for it is easier to deconstruct than to construct. D'Costa suggests that “fulfillment [theology] avoids supersessionism and abrogation.” Yet, although fulfillment theology is not the equivalent of replacement theology, I wonder, in practice, how much room is between them. Those who support the “fulfillment theology” approach surely need to explain how “replacement” does not automatically follow, because it seems all too easy to slide from the “fulfillment” of the Jewish Scriptures to the “replacement” of the Jewish people.

Perhaps we could consider whether the replacement of replacement theology entails some *affirmation* of the continuing validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people and of Jews *continuing* in a covenantal relationship. Constructing a new and positive theology of the church and the Jewish people remains an unresolved and formidable undertaking, perhaps because, as Johann Baptist Metz has argued, the restatement of the church's relationship with the Jewish people is a fundamental revision of Christian theology.³⁰

German scholar Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt suggests that covenant is the most constructive biblical concept to develop a positive Christian identity in relationship with the Jewish people. In his view, the church can hope to become partners in a covenantal relationship with the people of

²⁸ Simon Schoon, “Covenant,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* 109–11.

²⁹ For a nonsupersessionist reading of Hebrews, see Jesper Svartvik's “Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews without Presupposing Supersessionism,” in *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships*, ed. Philip A. Cunningham et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) 77–91. My thanks to Philip Cunningham for pointing out this article to me.

³⁰ John T. Pawlikowski, “Christ and Christology,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* 85–89, at 87.

Israel only if they are willing to accept the burden of Israel in sanctifying the name of God in the world, if they join in the calling of Israel to restore the world, and if they are ready to embark with the people of Israel on its journey to the “new covenant” with God that lies ahead.³¹

For most institutional statements, Christian scholars appeal to Romans 9–11 where Paul struggles with the meaning of the covenant of Israel and the election of the church. A significant rereading began in 1974 when Lutheran scholar Krister Stendahl published his *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, arguing that Paul did not accept the idea that Jews as a people and their religion are totally and forever outside the people of God. According to Stendahl, Paul suggests that both Israel and the church are elect, and both participate in the covenant of God. Paul affirmed that the Jewish people, despite their disobedience toward Christ, are still the elect people of God, and that Christian Gentiles are grafted in. In other words, while Paul argued that unbelieving Jews are in a state of disobedience regarding Christ, he unreservedly affirmed their continued election.

In Romans, Paul asked what of the ongoing validity of God’s covenant with the Jewish people? Did the church simply replace the “Old Israel” as inheritors of God’s promises? If so, does this mean that God reneges on his word? If God has done so with regard to Jews, what guarantee is there for the churches that he will not do so again—this time to Christians? This interpretation of Romans 9–11 echoes my Jewish covenantal pluralism, outlined above.

One might argue against Paul by saying that if Jews have not kept faith with God, then God has a perfect right to cast them off. It is interesting that Christians who argue this way have not often drawn the same deduction about Christian faithfulness, which has not been a notable and consistent characteristic of the last two millennia. Actually, I would suggest, God seems to have had a remarkable ability to keep faith with both Christians and Jews when they have not kept faith with God,³² a point of which Paul is profoundly aware in Romans 9–11. He goes out of his way to deny claims that God has rejected the chosen people, and asserts that their stumbling does not lead to their fall. He also offers a severe warning that Gentile Christians should not be haughty or boastful toward unbelieving Jews, much less cultivate evil intent and engage in persecution against them. This

³¹ Kirsten Hannah Holtschneider, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust: Theology and the Construction of Collective Memory* (Münster: Lit, 2001) 105.

³² It would perhaps be useful to remind Jews and Christians of biblical texts such as Isaiah 54:5: “For He who made you will espouse you— / His name is the Lord of Hosts; / The Holy One of Israel will redeem you / Who is called God of all the Earth / The Lord has called you back / As a wife forlorn and forsaken. / ‘Can one cast off the wife of his youth?’ says the Lord” (Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

critical warning remained almost totally forgotten by Christians who tended to remember Jews as “enemies” but not as “beloved” of God and have taken to heart Paul’s criticisms and used them against Jews while forgetting Paul’s love for Jews and Judaism.

In Paul’s view it was impossible for God to elect the Jewish people as a whole and then later displace them. If that were the case, God could easily do the same with Christians.³³ In Paul’s view, the hardening took place so that the Gentiles would receive the opportunity to join the people of God. The church’s election, therefore, derives from that of Israel, but this does not imply that God’s covenant with Israel is broken. Rather, it remains unbroken—irrevocably so (Rom 11:29).

Yet, we must also acknowledge ambiguity, because (not for the first time) Paul offers two approaches: the first says that the branches [Jews] have been cut off because of their refusal to believe (Rom 11:17, 20), but “a remnant remains, chosen by grace [Christians]” (Rom 11:5). A second response says that Jews, who became “enemies as regards the Gospel,” remain “beloved as regards election, for the sake of the ancestors” (Rom 11:28), and Paul foresees that they will obtain mercy (Rom 11:27, 31). Jews do not cease to be called to live by faith in the intimacy of God, “for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). This is the tension that sits at the heart of the Christian theological ambiguity about mission in relation to Jews and Judaism.

MISSION AND JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

This ambiguity is mirrored historically: on the one hand the church sought to bring as many Jews as possible into the fold, at times by force; on the other hand, it had respect for the tradition that was at the root of Christian faith. The church sought to preserve the identity of the Jewish people, because Jews were the recipients of God’s providential care as the chosen people, and eschatologically they had a role in the final act of redemption. This raised a tension between belief that the conversion of Jews was an essential part of Christian mission and not wanting to thwart God’s final salvific plan.³⁴

Adding to the complexity is the fact that missionary theology rests on Christian claims that salvation is possible only through Christ. The Vatican document *Dominus Iesus* (2000) reiterated that all salvation ultimately

³³ Perhaps the challenge posed by Islamic supersessionism for Christians in dialogue with Islam is a sobering reminder of the intrinsic difficulties of replacement theology.

³⁴ See Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: The Story of Christianity’s Great Mind and His Defense of Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

comes through Christ, and that those who do not acknowledge this stand in considerable peril of their redemption. However, Cardinal Walter Kasper, former head of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (2001–2009), advanced the notion that Jews are unique because they are the only non-Christian religious community to have authentic revelation. Consequently, the universal saving significance of Christ “does not mean that Jews have to become Christian in order to be saved.” Kasper's successor, Cardinal Kurt Koch, continues this view; as a justification for this position he quoted John Paul II's remark about the Jewish religion being “intrinsic” to Christianity.³⁵ However, this view seems to have become somewhat marginalized in the Holy See under the papacy of Benedict XVI, as the prayer for the Jews in the 2008 revised Tridentine Rite for Good Friday demonstrates. The reason the Tridentine Rite touched a raw nerve in Jewish-Christian relations is that the prayer expressly looks toward their conversion.

From 1965 to 2008, official Catholic teaching was clear, for, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 839, “the Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation.” The one prayer for Jews in Catholic liturgy was called the Good Friday Prayer for the Perfidious Jews, which in the 1962 Latin missal (from which the phrase “perfidious Jews” had already been deleted in 1961), reads:

Let us pray also for the Jews:
 that almighty God may remove the veil from their hearts;
 so that they too may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Let us pray. Let us kneel. Arise.
 Almighty and eternal God, who doest not exclude from thy mercy the Jews:
 hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people;
 that acknowledging the light of thy Truth, which is Christ,
 they may be delivered from their darkness.

In the 1970 English missal, the prayer was revised, asking that Jews will be deepened in the faith given them by God:

Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God,
 that they may continue to grow in the love of his name
 and in faithfulness to his covenant.
 Almighty and eternal God,
 long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and his posterity.
 Listen to your church as we pray that the people you first made your own
 may arrive at the fullness of redemption.

³⁵ Cardinal Kurt Koch, “Theological Questions and Perspectives in Jewish-Catholic Dialogue,” keynote address for the tenth annual meeting of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations (2011), <http://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kurt-cardinal-koch/987-koch2011oct30>.

The 2008 Tridentine rite prayer, which retains the pre-Vatican II heading, "Prayer for the Conversion of the Jews" was reformulated as follows:

We pray for the Jews.
 That our God and Lord enlighten their hearts
 so that they recognize Jesus Christ, the Savior of all mankind.
 Let us pray. Kneel down. Arise.
 Eternal God Almighty, you want all people to be saved
 and to arrive at the knowledge of the Truth,
 graciously grant that by the entry
 of the abundance of all people into your Church,
 Israel will be saved. Through Christ our Lord.³⁶

With the publication of the revised prayer, the Roman Catholic Church holds two contrasting positions and no longer has a clear consensus in this area. I am reminded of the concern Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle expressed at Vatican II: "This word 'conversion' recalls to the Jewish mind the memory of persecutions, sorrows, and even forced denials of all the truths that a Jew subjectively and in good faith sincerely loves. . . . The destiny of the Jewish people depends completely on the dispositions of divine Providence and the grace of God. Therefore, if we express our hope in words that lead the Jews to interpret them as a definite and conscious intention to work for their conversion, we will build another high wall that separates us from a holy and fruitful dialogue with the Jewish people."³⁷ His words resonate today.³⁸

The issue at stake is whether Christianity can differentiate itself from Judaism without asserting itself as either opposed to Judaism or simply as the replacement of Judaism. Perhaps the term "unabrogated covenant," rather than "fulfillment," should become the starting point, not the end point, of a renewed Christian theology of Judaism. It may help Christian theologians

³⁶ For the English translations of the 1962 Tridentine prayer and the modified version decreed by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 see <http://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-benedict-xvi/425-b1608feb5>.

³⁷ Speeches by Council Fathers on The Second Declaration on Jews and Non-Christians, Vatican II, Session III (1964), <http://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/second-vatican-council/na-debate/1020-v21964sept29b#o Boyle>.

³⁸ The Roman Catholic Church seems to have moved some distance from the "common mission" approach of the Anglican Communion: "There are a variety of attitudes towards Judaism within Christianity today. . . . All these approaches, however, share a common concern to be sensitive to Judaism, to reject all proselytizing, that is, aggressive and manipulative attempts to convert, and, of course, any hint of antisemitism. Further, Jews, Muslims and Christians have a common mission. They share a mission to the world that God's name may be honoured" ("Jews, Christians, and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue," Appendix 6 of the Lambeth Conference [1988], <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/the-holy-land/info/lambeth1.cfm>).

such as D'Costa consider how a negative formulation (“unabrogated covenant”) can be proclaimed positively. The suggestion of “covenantal pluralism” is one Jewish theological approach, and doubtless my Christian partners in dialogue will develop their own. I hope that by explicitly acknowledging that the end time will arrive at a time of God’s choosing, when both Jewish and Christian proclamations will be judged by the Judge of Judges, they may yet be successful in creating the theological space in which we can affirm each another and establish a relationship based not on a lack of hostility but on common values; not on a lack of suspicion but on creating trust.³⁹

³⁹ A new Anglican-Jewish document entitled “Jews and Christians: Perspectives on Mission” has recently been published under the auspices of the Lambeth-Jewish Forum (autumn 2011). The document became available soon after this article was finalized, so I have not been able to include it in my reflections. Nevertheless, the reader may wish to review its contents: <http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/uploads/Woolf%20Mission%202011%20print%20version.pdf>.