

Catholic Christianity and Judaism since Vatican II

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In his survey of the development of official Catholic teaching about Judaism since Vatican II, Eugene Fisher quotes two judgements made on the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. The first is by Tom Stransky, one of the authors of the Declaration in 1965:

Only twenty years ago and only with fifteen long Latin sentences, the impossible became possible and the possible became act. 2,221 Council fathers, by their approvals, committed the Roman Catholic Church to an irrevocable act, a *heshbon ha-nefesh* – a reconsideration of the soul. The act began to shift with integrity 1,900 years of relationship between Catholics and Jews.

The second is from Cardinal Willebrands, one of the principal architects of Catholic-Jewish relations in the post-conciliar period: calling *Nostra Aetate* ‘an absolute *unicum*’, he said: ‘Never before has a systematic, positive, comprehensive and daring presentation of Jews and Judaism been made in the Church by a Pope or Council. This should never be lost sight of.’¹ Fisher himself, charting the development that begins with *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and unfolds in *Guidelines for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration* (1974) and *Notes on the Correct Way to present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis* (1985), sees in what he calls the ‘cautiousness of each of these steps taken on an official Catholic level not only the seriousness with which the topic is approached by the magisterium, but above all an indication of the irreversibility of the process itself’.² Twenty years later, on the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, it is impossible to dispute these three statements: *Nostra Aetate*, the unique statement about Judaism made at the highest level of Church authority, signals an ecclesial self-examination which bears all the marks of being irreversible.

The simple statement in *Nostra Aetate* 4 that the Council ‘remembers the spiritual bonds’ between the Church and the Jewish people

¹ Eugene Fisher in ‘The Evolution of a Tradition from *Nostra Aetate* to the *Notes*’, in International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, *Fifteen Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue 1970–1985: Selected Papers* (Rome 1988), 239–54.

² *Op.cit.*, 243.

set in motion a dynamic which can be characterised in two ways. First of all, it can be seen as the recovery of an insight embedded in the earliest Christian community that the Church has an intrinsic and living connectedness to Israel. This can be simply formulated: what comes to expression in Christ cannot be detached from what comes to expression in Israel and therefore Christ-centred life cannot be understood or practised without reference to Israel's relation to God. Because Christ and Israel are inseparably linked, so are Church and Israel. The historical witness to this religious alignment between Israel and the Church is the earliest Jerusalem community, the mother church of Christianity: composed of Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah, it saw no opposition between the observance of Israel's covenant with God (circumcision, Sabbath, Torah, Temple, feasts, rituals) and the living out of Christ-centred life.³

What Jacob Jervell called 'the mighty minority' (the earliest Jewish component of the Church) knew this and, through the New Testament, bequeathed to Gentile Christians a sense of the deep harmonic consonance with Israel which, even after centuries of Gentile Christian hostility towards Jews, cannot be eliminated from the Christian body.⁴ The Declaration evokes this for the contemporary Church when it says that 'the beginnings of the Church's faith and election are found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets', and that the roots of the Church lie in Israel, 'that good olive tree' from which the Church 'draws nourishment'. Within the dynamic of the Council concerned throughout with the nature of its mission to Gentile modernity, *Nostra Aetate* requires of the Church that it re-centre itself in relation to the continuing vocation of Israel as a condition of undertaking its Christ-given mission *ad gentes*.

But, as well as being the recovery of an insight embedded in the earliest Christian body, *Nostra Aetate* can also be seen as *the inauguration of a new Christian tradition* in which a mature Church, by now long separated from its earliest Jewish matrix, sets itself the task of relating positively to the Jewish religion and the Jewish people. Before *Nostra Aetate*, the dominant tradition envisaged, in varying degrees, a negative, contrastive relationship to Judaism: fulfilment in Christ took place over against a legalistic, ossified,

³ The important feature of the Jerusalem community is not its egalitarianism (Acts 4.32) – a disastrous withdrawal from economic production which seems to have reduced the community to penury, dependent on the 'collection' from diaspora churches – but its dedication to Torah observance: 'You see, brother,' they tell Paul when he comes to Jerusalem, 'how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the Law' (21.20).

⁴ J.Jervell, 'The Mighty Minority', *Studia Theologica* 34 (1980), 13–38. 'The Jewish Christians refuse to separate Christianity from the religious, political and cultural fate of Israel – and there is but one Israel' (21).

obsolescent Judaism that by its rejection of the Messiah had placed itself at the edges of divine mercy and embodies human resistance to God. The old tradition was famously characterised by Jules Isaac as ‘the teaching of contempt’. In this perspective, Judaism is consigned to the pre-history of Christianity, and is viewed as a transient prototype of the universal religion which will eventually be mediated by the Church, as a tradition whose significance lies only in its facilitation of what issues, separately, from it. Judaism is the husk, Christianity the seed, and once the seed germinates, the husk which has done its job can be discarded. Or to use another image: like the appendix in the human body, Torah-centred Judaism contributes nothing now to the functioning of the new Israel of God, in which Jew and Gentile are united in Christ (Gal 6.16), but is merely a relic of an earlier stage of religious development.

The problems with this ‘theology of supersession’ have been extensively discussed since *Nostra Aetate*, but a short consideration is in order here: because the particularity of Israel’s election has now given way to the particularity of the Church’s mission, the observance of Jewish life *post et extra Christum* can have no role in the working out of God’s purposes. If, however, Paul’s axiom is right that ‘the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Rom 11.29), then the salvific gifts Paul lists earlier in the letter, ‘the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of Torah, the worship and the promises’ (9.4), are still in place and it is therefore impossible for *post Christum* Judaism to be deleted from the script of divine history. As far as Paul is concerned, the privileges of Israel are sacraments of God’s faithfulness which are not nullified by Israel’s failure to recognise the coming of the Son of God in the flesh. Paul’s thinking on this matter is governed by the axiom that God’s action, before and after Christ, is internally consistent because God does not do divergent things and God does not change his mind. In the present age, Israel *remains*, consigned like Gentiles to disobedience (11.31) so that God will have mercy on all, and so, mysteriously, Paul says, we cannot avoid the judgement made in the spirit of eschatological hope that ‘all Israel will be saved’ (11.26). It follows that if salvation is still on offer to Israel, then we cannot think that ‘old’ Israel has been replaced by a ‘new’ Israel from which Jews are excluded. We might think that there is simply one *Israel of God* – to take Paul’s ambiguous phrase in Gal 6.16 – composed of Jews faithful to God in the form of their covenantal charter at Sinai and Jews and Gentiles united through faith in Christ as Messiah and Lord. For God’s purposes in this ‘time of Church and Synagogue’, both those who belong to Torah-focused Israel and those who hold that this historic Israel was reconfigured to include Gentiles through Jesus of Nazareth, constitute this differentiated people of God.

That surely is the meaning of Pope John Paul II's important statement in 1982: speaking of that the unique relations between Christianity and Judaism which are 'linked together at the very level of their identity', he said that these relations are 'founded on the design of the God of the covenant'. The Holy Father cannot mean relations which are sequential and linear, such as extend through time from Biblical Judaism to Christianity; he must have in view relations which are synchronous and contemporaneous with the Church. The logic of what he says is that if these synchronous relations between Judaism and Christianity belong within the dynamic of God's covenantal purposes, then the persistence of Jewish religion that does not lead to faith in Jesus Christ must be a feature of 'the design of the God of the covenant'. Therefore Christians, able no longer to hold that the Church has supplanted Israel, must recognise that God wills Israel's continuance 'in our time'.⁵ Since, then, the Church has not replaced Israel, how is the character of the Church in relation to Israel to be understood? James Dunn, writing about Paul's Gentile mission as a fulfilment of the promise of Abrahamic blessing to the nations (Gen 29.14), proposes that the Church does not replace the Jewish people: dependent on God's action in Israel, the Church is an expression of the dynamic within Israel and can only be understood as, in some measure, part of Israel:

Can Christians understand themselves except as part of Israel: as enlightened by Israel, as Abraham's seed and heirs of Israel's covenant promises, not instead of Israel but as part of Israel? But the question confronting Jews is equally profound. Can Jews understand themselves as Israel without being open to the possibility that Gentile Christians are also participants in that same Israel, again not instead of Israel but as part of Israel?⁶

Dunn's first question invites Christians to see themselves as that which, arising in Israel for the sake of the nations and permanently dependent on Jewish teaching and the divine promises made to the Jewish people, never ceases to be part of Israel. Whatever arises through Christ must be part of Israel because it quite simply cannot 'be' anything else.⁷ *Christianity cannot but see itself as springing from Israel for the sake of the nations and from the nations for the sake of Israel.* Dunn's second question invites Jews to consider that through Christ and the Church the boundaries of Israel

⁵ In this sense, the whole issue centres on who 'our' refers to in the phrase *Nostra Aetate* ('In Our Time'). The most intelligent book on the theological issues remains Clemens Thoma, *A Christian Theology of Judaism* (Stimulus Books, 1980).

⁶ J.D.G.Dunn, 'Paul: Apostate or Apostle of Israel?', *ZNW* 89 (1998), 256–71; 271.

⁷ Statements like these can properly be made, but they must not be understood as signalling a desire to blur the distinction between the Church and Israel. As will be clear from other remarks in this article, the Catholic Church now takes seriously Jewish otherness.

have been extended to include, potentially, all human beings in one reconfigured Israel of God (Gal 6.16).⁸ Neither question envisages the replacement of one tradition by the other. Dunn's first question to Christians explores what the Pope thinks of as a relation 'at the very level of identity', namely that the Church's connection to Israel goes beyond historical roots and extends into a conjoined, single mission on behalf of God. John Paul II's theme of the continuing significance of Jewish identity is taken up in the 1985 *Notes on the Correct Way to present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis* when they discuss the persistence of Jewish life since Christ:

The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without trace) is a historic fact and *a sign to be interpreted within God's design*. . . . We must remind ourselves how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity. . . .⁹

The simple question about the source of the spiritual fecundity can only be answered by reference to God, and so the matrix of the Church's identity shifts: it now has to develop an understanding of its relationship to a Jewish people whose persistence in history in 'the Christian centuries' is willed and enabled by God: that surely is what the Pope means. As with *Nostra Aetate*, the Pope's quiet words are potentially transformative for the Church's understanding of itself. Newman's remark about Scripture beginning 'a series of developments which it does not complete' can be applied to *Nostra Aetate*; we are not yet at the end of the series of developments inaugurated by this quiet Declaration.

If *Nostra Aetate* is to be successfully received by the Church, then this has to be worked out in a way consonant with normative Christian doctrine. There is no doubt that liberal Christianity has an easier time acknowledging the continuing significance of Judaism because it is all too willing to jettison the elements of definitiveness and unsurpassability attached to Christ as the unique self-expression proper to the being of God. This is not an option for Catholic Christianity. It has to work out a 'theology of Judaism' in ways that do not relativise the significance of Christ as the unsurpassable self-gift of God. This issue cannot be avoided because if Christian-Jewish

⁸ The important statement by Jewish scholars in 2000, *Dabru Emet*, responding to the theological recognition of Judaism by various churches, says that 'as Jewish theologians we rejoice that, through Christianity, hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel'. This generous statement is deeply controversial for many Jews because it seems to commit Jews to developing a Jewish theology of Christianity at odds with Jewish tradition. Does this dialogue distort Jewish identity? Jon Levenson thinks so: J. Levenson, 'How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue,' *Commentary* (December 2001), 31–7; 'Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Jon D. Levenson & Critics,' *Commentary* (April 2002), 8–21

⁹ *Notes on the Correct Way to present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis* (1985), 25. Emphasis added.

relations is to find a secure place at the heart of Christian self-understanding, it must be articulated in ways that do not ignore, but are consonant with, orthodox Christian beliefs about God, Christ and the saving value of Christ's death. The very possibility of this consonance was ruled out, of course, by Rosemary Radford Ruether's provocative argument that anti-Judaism is the 'left hand of classical Christology': the Church's claim that Jesus is the divine Son and Messiah whose death effects the world's salvation, brings with it a fierce hostility towards Jews who refuse this claim.¹⁰ And so, if the Church wants to establish positive relations with Jews, it must abandon its high Christology and soteriology, or at the very least, make them 'provisional' (whatever that means). Christians, it seems, can only develop a positive religious engagement with Judaism by abandoning their own foundational beliefs.

While Ruether's argument is unacceptable because it sets identity in inverse proportion to relationality – you can relate to another only by abjuring your own identity – it has the merit of focusing attention on the resources in orthodox Christianity to work out a positive theological relationship to Judaism while still holding to its classical positions which, of course, were framed in a theological perspective that assumed that the Jewish dispensation was only part of the pre-history of Christianity.

So how might Catholic Christianity deal with this? Later we will look at some of the issues in the category of 'covenant', but, first of all, Karl Rahner has something important to offer that can help Christians value Jewish particularity in the present age. In an interview in 1974 he considered the question of what is 'the fundamental and basic conception' within Christian theology. The issue, of course, is what is to be taken as the core, organising principle around which different theological themes are to be deployed, and obviously, the two main candidates for this central role are Incarnation and redemption through Christ's death, the first highlighting the mutual orientation of God and humanity realised in Christ, and the second highlighting the rupture caused by sin and the consequent need for atoning grace. Rahner's answer is surprisingly different: setting the discussion in the broad context of the God-world relationship, he sees it as a process of divine self-gift, in which there are central moments:

..the divinisation of the world through the Spirit of God is humanly and speculatively the more fundamental basic conception for Christianity, out of which the Incarnation and soteriology arise as an inner moment.¹¹

¹⁰ R.R.Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Search Press, 1975)

¹¹ P.Imhof & H.Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965–1982* (Crossroad, 1982), 126

Rahner goes on to speak about ‘the universality of the saving will of God who in his Spirit is everywhere the inner dynamism of world history – everywhere, that is, where human existence is being realized – with the particularity of the historical event of Jesus’.¹² Rahner places the self-communicating God at the ‘innermost heart’ of the world and its history – creation is an act of divine self-bestowal – and it is because of this sustaining divine presence that there are ‘inner moments’ within time and space, both the effects of the divine action and the means by which God’s self-communication is advanced towards its completion. Because the world is ‘spaced and timed’, Rahner says that there *must* be such moments in history. A sophisticated and Hegelian argument, of course, and although Rahner’s characteristic themes and ways of thinking may seem far from the topic of Christian-Jewish relations, they are highly relevant. He is trying in this interview to relate the particularity of God’s action in Christ to the over-arching framework of the Creator’s self-gift – ultimately to say why Christ matters to the way things are. He identifies the Incarnation of the divine Son and his saving death as an ‘inner moment’ intrinsic to the character of God’s relation to the world.¹³ For our discussion, the issue is how to locate, analogously, the particularity of Torah and Sinai and the religion which flows from it. Can this inner *Jewish* moment be said to have the same significance in relation to God’s self-communication with the world?

It must be significant that the Incarnation of the divine Word takes place within the context of God’s action within Israel (Gal 4.4) and that the divine Son’s witness to the truth of God is conducted as ‘a servant of the circumcision’ (Rom 15.8). If Christians take their canon of Scripture seriously, surely they are compelled to hold that the Sinai covenant, the giving of Torah and the practice of Jewish religion are also such an ‘inner moment’, a privileged effect of God’s self-giving action by which God makes Israel an efficacious sign of himself? In which case, this divine action in Israel is integral to the ‘divinisation of the world’. What comes to expression in Christ is grounded in the

¹² *Op.cit.*, 129. Rahner’s sentence here is grammatically unclear; I transcribe it as it is printed. The issue is the relation of Incarnation to creation. Rahner in other writings will suggest that the Incarnation is not added on to the relation of God and the world, but is an intrinsic feature of that foundational relation: there is no ‘world’ without the ‘Word’. Rabbinic Judaism has analogous *theologoumena* about the role of Torah in God’s act of creation.

¹³ Orthodox Christian faith understands the divine action here to be so intense that Jesus of Nazareth, unreservedly of one reality with the cosmos as we are, can be the divine self-expression, the Logos of God made flesh. It is important that the Greek adverbs which regulate the relation of the natures of Christ in the Chalcedonian Definition – without confusion, without change, without division, without separation – also regulate the relations of God and the world. The ontology of Incarnation respects the ontology of creation.

‘inner moment’ of God’s action towards Israel, and therefore there is an inseparable link between what God does in the Incarnation of his Word in Christ and what God does in establishing Israel as the sign in history of his love and purposes. Now if we read Paul correctly, this ‘inner Jewish moment’, such as he describes in Romans 9.4 (‘the adoption, the glory...’), does not fall into desuetude because it is an irrevocable feature of God’s action (11.29) that moves the world towards the consummation of God’s self-gift: for Christians, this is mysteriously ‘resurrection’ and for Jews it is ineffably the life of the world to come.

If these inner moments of God’s action are effective signs (sacraments) that advance the world towards resurrection and witness to such a hope, then it should not surprise us that this ‘inner Jewish moment’ will continue right to the end, ‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in’ (Rom 11.25). Then the surprising thing is not that Torah-centred Israel survives, but that anyone thought that it wouldn’t. The inner moments by which God’s self-gift is advanced and deepened are never left behind but co-exist with other such moments because they achieve their effects not only in their immediate historical contexts but throughout the history that follows. Torah and Sinai and Christ and Church resonate with one another and are, as it were, permanently decisive moments in the unfolding of God’s purposes. By their retention of the Jewish Scriptures within their canon, Christians are not simply preserving this as an historical record of earlier stages in God’s action, they are asserting a continuing value to this witness and these experiences for the nourishment of Christian faith. If inspired Jewish writings have this role beyond their immediate historical context, might not Christians also see a related sign of the efficacy of the ‘inner Jewish moment’ in the continuing ‘spiritual fecundity’ of the Jewish people? Why the ‘Book’ and not the ‘People’? Franz Mussner’s words need to sink deeper into Christian thinking: ‘Israel has a significant and comprehensive salvific function in the world even *post Christum*’.¹⁴

But this Israel certainly stands in tension with what arises through the ministry of Christ. The ‘inner moment’ of God’s action within the life of Israel (and we can summarise this as the formation of a witnessing and covenantal people, governed by Torah, with a universal mission) has historically been in conflict with the other ‘inner moment’ centred on Christ and the messianic offshoot from this people that claims that God’s faithfulness to Israel culminates in Jesus of Nazareth. Franz Rosenzweig’s words that God cannot dispense with either Jews or Christians, but ‘has set enmity between the two for all time and yet has most intimately bound each to each’ delineates

¹⁴ F.Mussner, *Tractate on the Jews: the Significance of Judaism for Christian Faith* (SPCK, 1984), 51.

what our shared history repeatedly confirms.¹⁵ But at its best, Catholic Christianity holds that all the features of God's revelation, such as Torah and Christ, Sinai and Calvary, however conflictual they may seem in their refraction within human history, belong together as aspects of God's self-gift and must not be set in opposition to, or divergence from, one another, because God's action is always unitary and is never at variance with itself. There can be no opposition because the God who gives Torah and establishes eternal covenants through Abraham and Moses is the same God who acts through Jesus: these are the 'inner moments' within the dispensation of divine love which belong together and they are not divergent or conflictual in their relationship.

The strong temptation, of course, is to set the features of God's action in a competitive and contrastive opposition to one another: in the first century CE, Jewish and nascent Christian communities defined their religious principles in relation both to the inherited Biblical tradition and to the new situation in which they found themselves. With rapid historical consolidation, normative oppositions were set up which freeze both communities in mutual distrust. Paul's letters witness to the ruptures that take place as Jews zealous for Torah fidelity take violent action against those who are judged to break the ancestral faith (Saul/Paul himself was one of those, Phil.3.5–6) and as Gentiles are controversially admitted to the Christian community without being obliged to observe the rites of Torah (Gal.3ff). Fractious siblings in the early decades of the Common Era become divided claimants in a struggle for religious legitimacy, especially after the sack of Jerusalem in 70 CE. In a rapid process of Christian consolidation, a contrastive relation between the Sinai covenant and Christ was too quickly adopted and inscribed in some parts of the New Testament.

The most striking example is the Epistle to the Hebrews which sees the covenant through Christ as 'better' than the first: Christ's ministry is 'as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second' (Heb 8.6–7). Hebrews finds the Sinai covenant wanting because it is obsolescent and ineffective, contrasted with the definitive effectiveness of the covenant which Christ mediates. The suggestion is not that the Sinai covenant is deepened, confirmed or extended, but that it is abrogated in favour of the new covenant inaugurated by Christ: 'In speaking of a new covenant God makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away' (Heb 8.13). Is Hebrews too keen to establish contrasts

¹⁵ F.Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 415.

between 'old' and 'new', type and fulfilment, promise and realisation, abrogation and replacement?¹⁶ Is its argument for the priesthood of Christ predicated too strongly on a hermeneutic of 'correspondence, contrast and superiority'?¹⁷ Is its rhetoric of consummation too strong, its picture of history's resolution too tidy (12.22: 'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God...') to allow for anything else to happen (or continue) before Christ returns to save those who wait for him (9.28)?

By contrast, the instinct of Catholic Christianity expressed in *Nostra Aetate* refuses to relate these inner moments in a single pattern of superiority and supersession and it never envisages the category of abrogation. Catholic Christianity, when it exhibits a proper reverence for God's action, always chooses the *lectio difficilior*, the more difficult construal of divine truth because only in that way can an over-simplistic account of God's revelation be avoided. Newman's comment is particularly apposite here:

Whatever is great refuses to be reduced to human rule, and to be made consistent in its many aspects with itself. Who shall reconcile with each other the various attributes of the Infinite God? And, as He is, such in their several degrees are His works.¹⁸

In other words, God's work, although unitary, will be internally diverse and it will not be given to us easily to arrange them in a system in which perceived discordances will be removed, just as we should not expect ever to know the harmony of divine justice and mercy. At its best, Catholic Christian theology respects the varied dimensions of the mystery it contemplates but cannot regulate, revering the mystery of God's love with a sense that all its historical aspects (Sinai and Christ, Israel and Church, Torah and Gospel, Jewish Scriptures and Christian Scriptures), however divergent they may appear at particular times, must not be set in mutually exclusive opposition. Its instinct is to hold together the constitutive aspects of God's revelation because in their unity the aspects are all willed by God for his purposes. God's action is unitary, an undivided stream of self-gift whose effects are multiple because the creation is diverse. Catholic Christianity wants

¹⁶ Against Pope John Paul's statement at Mainz in 1980 ('...the people of God of the Old Covenant which has never been revoked'), the Jesuit exegete Albert Vanhoye makes a vigorous defence of the idea that, for Paul, the author of Hebrews and orthodox Christian faith, the Sinai covenant is certainly revoked. Cf A.Yanhoye SJ, 'Salut universel par le Christ et validité de l'Ancienne Alliance', *NRT* 116 (1994), 815–35. Vanhoye is attacked by a Catholic layman, Emmanuel Main (*NRT* 118 (1996), 34–58) and a Jewish scholar, M.R.Macina, who calls on the Pope to enforce theological discipline on this matter (*Istina* XLI (1996), 347–99. For a lucid exposition of the Papal position, Cf. N.Lohfink, SJ, *The Covenant Never Revoked* (Paulist Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Susanne Lehne, *The New Covenant in Hebrews* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 44: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 117.

¹⁸ J.H.Newman, Preface to the Third Edition of *The Via Media* (London, 1877), xciv.

on the one hand to recognise the unity of God's action – hence Judaism and Christianity are not opposing realities but have divinely willed pathways between them – and on the other hand to find ways of acknowledging the difference among the aspects without imposing a regimented scheme on them.

For Aquinas, the divine action in Israel and Christ is not internally divergent or contrastive but is unitary and consistent. Both Old and New Law are directed towards the same end, *ut homines subdantur Deo* ('that human beings should submit to God') (*S.T.* 1a 2ae q.107, a.1), for it is the one God who is author of both Covenants (*est autem unus Deus, et novi, et veteris testamenti*). And so, Torah and Christ belong together within the dynamic of God's unitary self-gift to the world and this must not be lost sight of. It is rarely noted that it is Paul, the one who anguishes most intensely in the New Testament about these matters, who presents us with the clearest exposition of the significance of the Incarnation for Torah-observance: 'God sent his own Son.. in order that the requirement of the Torah might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Rom 8.3-4). In other words, the Son of God comes so that Torah can be fulfilled by those who follow him.

The presupposition, of course, is that the Son of God himself fulfils Torah, and in his visit to the Rome Synagogue in 1986, Pope John Paul made a simple, pregnant statement about this which is of great import for how Catholics are to think of the meaning of Christ's life and death: 'Jesus carried to its extreme consequences the love demanded by Torah'.¹⁹ This should be related to the light of the statement in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 'His [Christ's] religious life is that of a Jew obedient to the law of God' (531), a statement which is surely inspired by Aquinas' teaching that 'Christ conformed his conduct in all things to the precepts of the Law' (*S.T.*, 3a, q.40.a4). The *Catechism* goes on to say that Jesus 'was to fulfil the Law by keeping it in its all-embracing detail – according to his own words, down to "the least of these commandments"'. He is in fact the only one who could keep it perfectly' (578). 'In Jesus, the Law no longer appears engraved on tables of stone but "upon the heart" of the Servant who becomes "a covenant to the people", because he will "faithfully bring forth justice"' (580). In this light, Paul's remarkable statement in Romans gains in significance: 'Christ became a servant of the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy' (Rom 15.8).

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II said things in this area for which the Church's theology is relatively unprepared. But of course it is only right that Popes should take the Church where the Church needs to go – in the direction of dialogical theological thinking – and it is no bad thing for theologians to be pressed to catch up with theologically prophetic Pontiffs.

Christ's universal witness to divine truth is exercised within the context of his membership of Israel – he is the servant of his people – shaped and framed within the covenantal bond between God and Israel.

The Pope's statement and the others from the Catechism invite Catholics to see the whole of Jesus' life as a faithful observance of Torah, a perfect enactment of covenantal *halakah*. But the Pope's statement goes further than the Catechism: it suggests that the whole of Christ's dedication to the Father and his self-offering in death is an enactment of Torah-fidelity. What is embedded in Israel as gift and call, covenantal love and obedience, is so intensified in his identity and life, is so internalised and lived out in all its consequences, that it is taken by the divine Son as the form of his self-giving to the Father for the sins of the world. Christ's faithfulness to Torah, lived out in selfless dedication to God and culminating in the Cross, is the performative act that declares and renders the saving mystery of God among us. So the salvation that comes to the world through him cannot be separated from its source in covenant and Torah: Israel's covenant and Torah inform the shape of the Messiah's saving work. If we want a formula to focus the mind, it might be: *Christ saves by fulfilling Torah*.

Pope John Paul is surely evoking Aquinas' view that Christ's death marks a consummate observance of all the aspects of Torah. The key passage here is in Aquinas' treatment of the Passion in the *Tertia Pars* where in question 47, he applies Christ's last words, 'It is consummated' to what he regards as the internal division within the Torah of three aspects: moral, ceremonial and judicial Law. Christ fulfils all three in his death:

Because the Old Law was ended by Christ's death, according to his dying words, 'It is consummated', it may be understood that by his suffering he fulfilled all the precepts of the Old Law. He fulfilled those of the moral order which are founded on the precepts of charity, inasmuch as he suffered both out of love of the Father. . . and out of love of neighbour. . . Christ likewise by his Passion fulfilled the ceremonial precepts of the Law, which are chiefly ordained for sacrifices and oblations, insofar as all the ancient sacrifices were figures of that true sacrifice which the dying Christ offered for us. . . Christ also by his passion fulfilled the judicial precepts of the Law, which are chiefly ordained for making compensation to those who have suffered wrong. . . (S.T. 3a, q.47, a.2, ad.1)

What will be powerfully elaborated in the Epistle to the Hebrews and throughout Christian soteriology through the metaphor of Christ's High Priesthood is grounded in this antecedent connection between Christ and Torah observance and fulfilment. Christ's priestly work is conducted within the Mosaic dispensation, and this has consequences

for how Christian life is related to Torah, as Matthew Levering suggests:

..the Mosaic Law in a real sense... *is still observed by Christians...* Aquinas' account of salvation is built around the idea that Christians, as members of the Mystical Body of Christ, share in the redemptive acts of their Head (Christ). Christians share, and all human being potentially share, in Christ's fulfilment of all aspects of the Mosaic Law.

In Christ, the Mosaic Law (and the covenant with Israel) is not revoked. Instead, the Mosaic Law is brought to its proper "end" – Christ – in whom all people (Jews and Gentiles) now may perfectly fulfil the law... For Aquinas, the Mosaic Law has been fulfilled by Christ, so people observe it by conformity with Christ in the community of the Church... When Christ fulfils the Mosaic Law, he does not simply discard it as a mere tool. Rather, the Mosaic Law retains its honoured place, although it is observed by sharing (by faith) in Christ's passion.²⁰

Returning to the Pope's 1986 statement that Christ took to its extreme consequences the love demanded by Torah, we can say that what is given to Israel as moral, ceremonial and judicial Torah is taken into Christ's self-offering in death so completely it has saving consequences for all human beings. Thus through their liturgical life and their related life of discipleship, the members of Christ's Body are enabled to have a living connection to the pattern of a witnessing people presented in Torah. For Christians, being in Christ, living morally and spiritually and liturgically in Christ, is fulfilment of Torah. This perspective is important for Christian-Jewish relations because it affects how the Christian Church situates itself vis-à-vis Biblical Judaism, the heritage we have in common with Jews. If Aquinas' view is adopted, then since the first Century of the Common Era there are two religious traditions – internally diverse of course – which are called to live in ways that fulfil the whole of Torah.

Both communities participate in authentic ways in the dynamic by which divine law leads human beings to final union with God. Like the Old Law from which it springs, the New Law is directed towards the greater fulfilment of heaven. So a simple linear supersessionism by which the Old is fulfilled in the New is impossible because the that is given in the New also requires fulfilment in the world to come. The life of both communities, then, is structured by a mode of divine Law leading to communion with God and so for both Jews and Christians, Torah observance, differently understood of course, leads to the life of the world to come.

²⁰ M.Levering, *Christ's Fulfilment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 28–30. Cf. his article, 'Israel and the Shape of Thomas Aquinas's Soteriology', *The Thomist* (1999), 65–82 & H.Schoot & P.Valkenberg, 'Thomas Aquinas and Judaism', *Modern Theology* 20 (2004), 51–70.

It is said that a composer creates his own audience: so, Beethoven's music creates the community of listeners who learn how to listen to Beethoven. Similarly, God's revelation creates the community of those who come to receive it. Rabbi Mark Solomon speaks about 'the sense in which the Jewish people and the Church, respectively, come to embody the Torah and Christ, and thus manifest the divine presence and action in the world'.²¹ His suggestion is that Torah is subsequently embodied in the faith and life of the Jewish people and Christ is subsequently embodied in the faith and life of the Christian Church. Within God's action, Torah creates the community of Jewish interpreters who express their response to Torah in the Mishnah, Talmud and the commentaries that surround them. And within the same dynamic, the community of the Church is created, the men and women who in their lives and teaching give expression to the way in which Christ interprets 'the love demanded by Torah'. Both Torah and Christ are generative moments in the process by which humanity becomes the responsive audience that God creates.

The relation between them can be fruitfully explored in relation to the Biblical treatment of Wisdom. Ben Sirach speaks of Wisdom, active in all the aspects of God's dealings with the creation, seeking a dwelling place on earth:

Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent. He said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, And in Israel receive your inheritance.' . . . Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting place, and in Jerusalem was my domain. I took root in an honoured people, in the portion of the Lord, his heritage. . . . All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us. (Sir.24.8ff)

Wisdom's dwelling place in Israel is to be found in Torah, the 'book of the covenant of the Most High God'. Wisdom is given a form of presence in Israel in the book of the covenant, and through Torah divine Wisdom forms Israel as God's own people. This is an important *theologoumenon* because it invites Christians to think of Torah as a divinely sustained form of Wisdom's presence, as the *enbibliation*, the *enbookment* of divine Wisdom. The Torah is the Word/Wisdom of God in its modality of forming Israel to be a partner in the covenant and the light to the nations. The Christian hymn inspired by this poem, the Prologue to the Gospel of John, deliberately evokes these themes, and says that divine Wisdom comes to human beings in the person of Jesus who radiates the divine glory. If Torah is the *enbibliation* of Wisdom which forms Israel, Christ is the

²¹ M.Solomon, 'Christ Through Jewish Eyes' in D.Goldberg & E.Kessler (eds.), *Aspects of Liberal Judaism: Essays in Honour of John D.Rayner* (Valentine Mitchell, 2004), 184–201; 200.

enfleshment of the same divine Wisdom so that all might see the divine glory:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. It was in the beginning with God. And all things came into being through it... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1.1ff)

Torah and Christ, then, are not divergent and oppositional revelations, as though one is for Israel and the other for Gentiles, but are inseparable forms of divine Wisdom's presence and action. Using the terms we borrowed earlier from Rahner, it might then be open to Christians to think of Torah and Christ as the *inner moments* in God's action in which the divine self-gift becomes 'enbibliated' and 'enfleshed', *for Israel and for all*.

This approach seems to me to offer more possibilities than the more common discussion which focuses on a distinction of covenants and different constituencies: a covenant through Moses for Jews and a covenant through Christ for Gentiles.²² So, the particular covenantal dynamic from Abraham to Moses gives rise to the Sinai covenant only for the people of Israel, and the universal covenantal dynamic, begun with Noah and culminating with Christ, gives rise to a separate covenant offered by God to Gentiles. This is the oft cited 'dual covenant' scheme in which God has one way of dealing with Israel and a different way of dealing with Gentiles. It has the effect of tidiness and of giving scope to the continuing particularity of Israel, but there are difficulties with it for Christians which cannot be ignored.

First of all, the whole of the New Testament opposes such a bifurcation: no text in the Christian Scriptures supports such a religious and ethnic division of separate dispensations of grace. Secondly, it ignores the role of Jesus as an active participant in Israel's covenantal life with God. A liberal Christian theology which sees the Gospel and Christian life as a corrective adjustment of Israel's covenant and Torah can only be cast out by prayer and fasting, and one of the benefits of recent scholarship is that Christians now have a better sense of Jesus the faithful Jew whose life is shaped by Israel's covenant. *What arises in Jesus and comes to all flows from Israel's covenant*: there is a deep relatedness between Jesus and Israel, and that is why if we speak of a covenant established through Jesus, it is not a separate thing from the Sinai covenant.

To develop this, we should return to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: it sees a positive significance in the fact that when the Son of God enters human history, he is born under the Jewish law,

²² J.Pawlikowski, 'Christian Theology and the Jewish Covenant' in *What are they saying about Christian-Jewish Relations?* (Paulist Press, 1980), 33–37

circumcised into the covenant God makes with Israel and is trained in the observance of the Torah. He celebrates the Jewish feasts and exercises his ministry in both the synagogues and the temple. He comes, as Paul says, as a 'servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God' (Rom 15.8). Consequently, nothing in his ministry and teaching annuls the validity of those features of Jewish religion that Paul lists as 'the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Torah, the worship and the promises'. He draws this framework of blessings, practices and guidance into his life and confirms them by offering himself to the Father as a faithful Jew whose identity is rooted in Israel's experience of covenantal faith. So what arises through his ministry cannot be separated from its source without severing the person from his context and without severing his witness from Israel's witness.

But if this approach is permitted, then Christ's contribution to humanity's relationship to God is that what is embedded in Israel as gift and call, covenantal love and obedience, is so intensified in his identity and life, is so internalised and lived out in all its consequences that it becomes significant for all human beings. This is not a separate covenant, as though the covenant through Christ's death abrogates the earlier covenants given to Israel, but Jesus lives out Israel's covenant in a way that comes to touch all. The ripples from his faithfully Jewish life spread to the farthest edges of the Gentile world. In this way, the word 'and' in the phrase 'the Sinai covenant and the covenant through Jesus', contains a deep relatedness which Christian theology has only just begun to explore and which it must not deny.

There is a single stream of divine self-gift which comes to the world; it unfolds in the life of Israel under the metaphor of covenant, is actualised in the religious observance of Israel and in the person of Jesus is lived out faithfully with consequences for all human beings in their relationship with God. Israel shares in that self-gift and so does the Church, although their understanding of its character differs. Rather than speak of two covenants, one for Jews and another for Christians (normally understood as Gentiles), it seems better to speak of a differentiated participation by Jews and Christians in the one self-gift of God, focused on Torah and Christ because both are constitutive inner moments within God's self-gift.

Cardinal Walter Kasper says that 'Judaism is as a sacrament of every otherness that as such the Church must learn to discern, recognise and celebrate'. A simple reading of this is that Judaism is the 'sign' of the otherness which Christians need to learn to value. Yet, as Schoot and Valkener point out, there is also a significance in the use of this high ecclesial category of 'sacrament' to refer to Jewish religion

and identity.²³ If Judaism is, in Rabbi Norman Solomon's words, 'a world religion combined with a prototype people,' Catholic Christianity is coming to see the continuing life of this prototype people, with all that sustains them, as a sacrament, not simply of otherness, but also more importantly of God.²⁴ This religion continues to witness to God in ways that God established and sustains and so it is a living, efficacious sign of God, linked to Christianity, as Pope John Paul said, 'at the very level of identity'. Catholic Christianity is also coming to recognise that its own identity is not separable from this prototype people's continuing relationship with God.

At the beginning of this article, I suggested that the development could be seen as the recovery of an insight embedded in the earliest Christian community that the Church has an intrinsic and living connectedness to Israel. It is instructive at the end of this discussion, to read a remarkable passage from the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*. This is a Jewish-Christian text, (c. 200CE), offering an early challenge to a growing (Gentile) Christian supersessionism. God, it suggests, communicates through two forms of the one teaching, one through Moses and one through Jesus:

For on this account Jesus is concealed from the Jews, who have taken Moses as their teacher, and Moses is hidden from those who have believed Jesus. For there being one teaching by both, God accepts him who has believed either of these. But believing a teacher is for the sake of doing the things spoken by God. . .

Neither, therefore, are the Hebrews condemned on account of their ignorance of Jesus, by reason of Him who has concealed Him, if, doing the things commanded by Moses, they do not hate him whom they do not know. Neither are those from among the Gentiles condemned, who know not Moses on account of Him who has concealed him, provided that these also, doing the things spoken by Jesus, do not hate him whom they do not know. . . . If anyone has been thought worthy to recognise both as preaching one doctrine, that man has been counted rich in God, understanding both the old things as new and the new things as old. (8.6-7)²⁵

This text, when read in the light of what *Nostra Aetate* has set in motion in contemporary Catholicism, brings significant insights to our present discussion. God wills to teach Jews through Moses and others through Jesus; the distinction is not in the content of

²³ 'Address on 37th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*' quoted in Schoot & Valkenberg, op. cit., 67

²⁴ Norman Solomon, *Judaism and World Religion* (Macmillan, 1991), 8.

²⁵ Ascribing this to *Kerygmata Petrou* (200CE), Wilson speaks of this 'remarkable' account in which 'Judaism and Christianity are placed on a par, two variants of the same revelation, the same '*Ur-religion*' that has existed since the creation of the world'. (S.G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 C.E.* (Fortress Press, 1995), 152.

what is conveyed because there is only 'one doctrine', but seems to be between different modes of conveying the one teaching given by both Moses and Jesus; in our discussion, we have insisted that God's work of self-communication, although focused on different inner moments, is unitary and not divided. The passage also cautions against speaking inappropriately of 'old' and 'new', presumably because, crudely applied, these categories will tend to consign Moses' 'old' teaching to obsolescence and detach Jesus' 'new' teaching from its context in Mosaic Law. Instead, 'the man rich in God' will see Moses' teaching and Jesus' teaching as equally and simultaneously old and new in the present age. The condition for the effective reception of both forms of the one teaching is that the members of each community must not hold in disdain the teacher given to the other community. And so, the 'teaching of contempt' must be eliminated as a condition of understanding how God has bound these two communities together for his purposes and deals with them in linked ways. *Nostra Aetate*, pointing to the spiritual bonds between the Church and the Jewish people, makes these old (and new) issues central to how contemporary Catholic Christianity develops in relation to Judaism.

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