

Gifts and Calling: Coming to Terms with Jews as Covenantal Partners

PHILIP A. CUNNINGHAM

pcunning@sju.edu

Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA 19131

This article was generated from the February 2016 Saint Joseph's University "Consultation on the Newest Statements about the Christian-Jewish Relationship."

Introduction: A Thoroughly Catholic Text Expressed in a Catholic Manner

The document issued on December 10, 2015 by the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ) is in many ways a remarkable text. "'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra aetate* (no. 4)," (hereafter G&C) is arguably the most substantive and multilayered Church statement on Jewish-Christian relations composed by any ecclesiastical body since the Second World War.

It is that sophistication that is at once both the document's great strength and chief weakness. Written so that "the theological dialogue between Jews and Catholics should receive new impetus," it is also specifically "a Catholic text, formulated from a Catholic perspective, since it is normal that as believing Christians we clearly affirm our identity as a faith in dialogue with Judaism."¹ That seems reasonable enough. However, a statement that expresses itself in thoroughly Catholic ways could easily be misconstrued when read by interested Jews who have their own, often different, understandings of key, multivalent theological terms. This risk is compounded since G&C was primarily intended for the specialized audience of those active in the Catholic-Jewish dialogue, particularly "Catholic theologians engaged for a long time in [it]."²

Moreover, some formulations in G&C were originally composed during specific theological and ecclesiastical exchanges that occurred in the Catholic

¹ Norbert J. Hofmann, Press conference remarks introducing "Gifts and Calling," December 10, 2015. See <http://www.cjir.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analysis/crrj-2015dec10/1364-Hofmann-2015dec10>

² Ibid.

community between 2000 and 2015.³ The document regularly draws upon phrases, often without citation, written by the CRRJ's last two presidents, Cardinals Walter Kasper and Kurt Koch. Without familiarity with this context, readers can easily miss the nuances of phraseologies that were originally developed in particular situations but are now included in "Gifts and Calling."

In addition to the inherent complexity of theological terms that are linked in an intricate web of meanings, another possible source of misinterpretation is the distinctive Vatican "culture of discourse." In Catholic ecclesiastical parlance there is sometimes a preference for indirection rather than direct confrontation, a tendency that is intensified when discussing fresh theological questions that could have unforeseen effects. John Allen had this tendency in mind when he reported that two recent synods of bishops considered whether a process might be created to make sacraments accessible for divorced and remarried Catholics: "[Pope] Francis in that case deftly managed to thread the needle—certainly not delivering a firm 'no,' but making his apparent 'maybe' sufficiently nuanced and qualified that everyone can read it in their own way."⁴ While this could be said about any skillful leader who is trying to accommodate competing constituencies and positions, the desire to thread the rhetorical needle has a particular character in Catholic circles.

Until recently, for example, there has been a certain ecclesiastical etiquette that precludes one from directly contradicting the views of a fellow prelate if it can be avoided. Thus, Pope Benedict XVI did not publicly reprove a Melkite archbishop who in 2010 had said that for Christians there is no "chosen people" any longer because after Christ everyone is chosen. Benedict simply repeated that Jews are "the Chosen People" several times in a subsequent summative document.⁵

An even more pertinent example of this ecclesiastical etiquette is provided by an article published in 1994. Jesuit exegete Albert Vanhoye, secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission from 1992-2002 and elevated by Pope Benedict XVI to the College of Cardinals in 2006, reacted to Saint John Paul II's description of "the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God."⁶ He argued that it was only the covenant with Abraham that endured, especially in terms of divine promises, but that Sinai was effectively terminated after Christ. He concluded that John Paul did not mean that the Sinai covenant was still in effect.⁷ Later on, Pope Benedict again did not feel it necessary to publicly reject a Church official's opin-

³ For a streamlined overview "Chart of Selected Events in Catholic-Jewish Dialogue, 2000-2015," see <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analysis/1388-gifts-calling-backdrop>. For more details, see the complementary "The Sources behind 'Gifts and Calling'" in this issue of *SCJR*.

⁴ John L. Allen, Jr., "Pondering the Parallels between Paul VI and Francis," *Crux* (August 6, 2016), <https://cruxnow.com/analysis/2016/08/06/pondering-parallels-paul-vi-francis>

⁵ See Philip A. Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom: The Journey to Right Relationship between Catholics and Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, U.K.: William Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 226-228.

⁶ "Address to Representatives of the West German Jewish Community," November 17, 1980.

⁷ See Joseph Sievers, "A History of the Interpretation of Romans 11:29," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 14 (1997) 381-442:439.

ion. In January 2010 at the Great Synagogue of Rome he simply repeatedly mentioned Moses in reference to the Nazi “extermination of the people of the Covenant of Moses”; the “shining light” of the Decalogue, “which comes from the Torah of Moses”; and cited a rabbinic text as offering guidance for Jews and Christians on how to interpret a teaching of Moses that was confirmed by Jesus.⁸ Sensitivity to this Catholic culture of discourse is needed to grasp the sometimes elliptical language of ecclesiastical documents. This challenge is to some degree unavoidable, but even so it would be advisable for future Catholic documents to strive to use more accessible language in texts that will have diverse readerships.

With all this in mind, this essay will analyze the connotations of some of the more crucial terms and clusters of terms in G&C. Hopefully, it will clarify certain ambiguities, spotlight unresolved questions, and offer ideas for future development, often drawing on earlier Catholic texts. I believe G&C’s snapshot of current Vatican perspectives is a genuine effort to “come to terms” with the Church’s newfound appreciation of Jewish covenantal life—a challenge that requires it to redefine familiar terms or to invest them with new meanings and nuances.

1. Salvation

The word “salvation” appears forty-two times in G&C, including within phrases such as “plan of salvation” (six times), “history of salvation” or “salvation history” (four times), “work of salvation” (four times), and “universality of salvation” (four times). The document does not explicitly state which of several possible meanings of “salvation” is being used. Among the word’s possible connotations are salvation as redemption: being bought back or rescued or liberated from sin, slavery, condemnation, or meaninglessness; salvation as reconciliation with God or neighbor; salvation as sanctification or being made holy; and salvation as everlasting life because of God’s steadfast love.⁹ In some strands of Christianity the word “salvation” has become almost equivalent to Christian identity itself, as in the proverbial question: “Are you saved?”

Even so, despite the lack of a precise definition, readers can discern some major features of G&C’s understanding of salvation. Drawing together different paragraphs in the document, it seems that “the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ” (Preface; §38)—a “universality for all peoples” (§33)—is seen as the divine “plan of salvation for all peoples” (§36, see also §42). In that plan “the covenant people of Israel” have an “enduring role” (§43). The “plan of salvation,” says G&C, begins with God’s calling of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) in order “to reveal [Godself] and speak to humankind, redeeming it from sin and gathering it

⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, “Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome,” January 17, 2010, §§ 3, 6, 7, respectively.

⁹ See Clark Williamson, “What Does It Mean to Be Saved?” in Philip A. Cunningham, ed., *Pondering the Passion: What’s at Stake for Christians and Jews?* (Lanham, MD.: Rowan and Littlefield, 2004), 119-128.

together as one people” (§21). The “ultimate goal [is that] the whole of humanity is gathered together and led to [God]” (§22).

But how does G&C relate Jewish covenantal life today to salvation? The document does not answer this question unequivocally, but it offers important indications.

In its references to salvation, G&C often refers to the continuing covenantal life of the Jewish people, as when it notes that “like the Church itself even in our own day, Israel bears the treasure of its election in fragile vessels” (Ibid.). Because the document’s premise (as reflected in its title) is that “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable,” G&C does not conceive of “salvation history” in the stridently supersessionist way that had prevailed among Christians for so long.¹⁰

In discussing the “two ways by which God’s [Jewish and Christian] people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own,” G&C affirms that a “response to God’s word of *salvation* that accords with one or the other tradition can thus *open up access* to God, even if it is left up to his *counsel of salvation* to determine in what way he may intend to *save* mankind in each instance” (G&C, §25, italics added). In this carefully constructed sentence, the CRRJ admits that it doesn’t know how the Jewish “instance” of encountering God’s scriptural “word of salvation” will “save” Israel. It is content to say that a cryptic divine “counsel of salvation” will make it so.

The same vagueness regarding Judaism and soteriology is evident in G&C §36. On one hand, the CRRJ reiterates the previously noted Christian claim that “salvation” (however precisely defined) is made universally available by Christ: all people are gathered together and led to God by Christ. Thus, it concludes, “there can be only one path to salvation.” On the other hand, G&C rejects the assertion that “Jews are excluded from God’s salvation because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God.” Herein lies a tension. Either “Jews are participants in God’s salvation” without Christ (thus undermining the central Christian claim that Christ is the universal mediator of “salvation”) or “Jews are participants in God’s salvation” because of a grace God bestows in ways God alone knows but still somehow involves Christ.¹¹ The Commission obviously chooses the latter alternative by invoking the category of mystery¹² to declare: “That the Jews are participants in God’s salvation [note the careful phrasing] is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery” (§36). Perhaps it would be better not to speak of “paths to salvation” and

¹⁰ See Mary C. Boys, *Biblical Interpretation in Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1980).

¹¹ The latter recalls *Dominus Iesus*, §21, which cited Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, §7 in saying: “With respect to the way in which the salvific grace of God—which is always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the Church—comes to individual non-Christians, the Second Vatican Council limited itself to the statement that God bestows it ‘in ways known to himself.’”

¹² “Mystery” in the theological sense refers to a reality that cannot ultimately be compassed by mortal minds, not to something that cannot be grasped at all.

instead ask how people are introduced to God, a dynamic that the Church understands as always an activity of Christ (see section 4 below).

Such circumlocutions as “Jews participating in God’s salvation” or as having “access to [a saving] God” are characteristic of Catholic ecclesiastical discourse when trying to “thread the needle” on questions that are being reexamined and rearticulated. The same holds true with the assertion that this Jewish “participation” is “unfathomable.”

It is noteworthy that G&C did not adduce Cardinal Walter Kasper’s earlier and more direct formulation that “God’s grace, which is the grace of Jesus Christ according to our faith, is available to all. Therefore, the Church believes that Judaism, i.e. the faithful response of the Jewish people to God’s irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them, because God is faithful to his promises.”¹³ However, it seems plain that G&C wishes to affirm that Jews are “saved” (however defined) by virtue of their covenanting with a saving God through a grace that Christ mediates even if Jews do not conceive of their invitation to relationship with God in Christ-shaped ways. This conclusion is quite apparent in §24, even if it, too, speaks somewhat indirectly:

God revealed himself in his Word, so that it may be understood by humanity in actual historical situations. This Word invites all people to respond. If their responses are in accord with the Word of God they stand in right relationship with him. For Jews this Word can be learned through the Torah and the traditions based on it. The Torah is the instruction for a successful life in right relationship with God. Whoever observes the Torah has life in its fullness (cf. *Pirque Avot* II, 7). By observing the Torah the Jew receives a share in communion with God.

There is an underlying respect for the Jewish tradition in evidence here, not only in the citation of a rabbinic text as having some religious authority even for Christian readers, but also in G&C’s restraint in not defining what “observing the Torah” means concretely. Presumably, that is a matter for how “Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.”¹⁴

Most significantly, this paragraph has unmistakable soteriological cadences. Jews are able to stand in “right relationship” or share “in communion with God” or to have “life in its fullness” (evoking John 10:10) because of the positive assertion (quoting Pope Francis) that “for Jews the Word of God is present above all in the Torah.” In whatever fashion “being saved” is conceived, it is unthinkable that Jews do not experience it given their Torah-mediated communion with a saving God that provides life in its fullness.

I interpret G&C’s elliptical language about Jews and salvation as evidence of the Commission’s theologically “coming to terms” with the Church’s renewed

¹³ Kasper, “*Dominus Iesus*,” paper delivered at the 17th meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, May 1, 2001.

¹⁴ Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 4” (Dec 1, 1974), Preamble.

appreciation that “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” To summarize its discussion of this particular term, it might be proposed that the CRRJ views the People Israel as already proleptically¹⁵ participating in the “ultimate goal” of God’s salvific plan as G&C described it earlier: they have been gathered together and led to God (§22). Like Christians, Jews live in expectation that their covenanting with a faithful God who will bring them into *Olam Haba*, the messianic age.

2. Evangelization, Mission, Witness, and Dialogue

This cluster of terms can be understood in nearly contradictory ways. To sketch the alternatives in binary fashion: Does “evangelize” mean that Christians should: (A) encourage Jews to be baptized or (B) work with Jews in service to the Reign of God? Does “mission” to Jews after *Nostra aetate* mean: (A) to seek to bring them to faith in Christ or (B) to engage in mutually enriching religious dialogue with them? Does “witness” mean that Christians explain their faith to Jews: (A) to bring them to faith in Christ or (B) to share reciprocally the experience of covenantal relationship with God? Do Catholics “dialogue” with Jews (A) in the hope that they will turn to Christ or (B) to deepen a relationship of mutuality? Framing the questions in this way demonstrates that however they are conceived the four terms are so closely intertwined that the definition of any one of them inevitably impacts how the other three are understood.

Suspicion about what Catholics might really mean by these expressions imperils both positive relations between Catholics and Jews and the attainment of trusting dialogue.¹⁶ This is because, as G&C recognizes, how the Church speaks of its faith in Christ to Jews “involves the very existence of the Jewish people” (§40). Particularly after the Shoah, when Jewish survival has been considered by

¹⁵ In Christian theology, a *prolepsis* is an anticipatory experience in the present of a reality to be fully realized in the future. It is a manifestation of the life of the Age to Come prematurely in human history today.

¹⁶ This reality was illustrated in the United States in the summer and fall of 2009. A statement prepared by staff at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops remarked that: “Though Christian participation in interreligious dialogue would not normally include an explicit invitation to baptism and entrance into the Church, the Christian dialogue partner is always giving witness to the following of Christ, to which all are implicitly invited.” In response, American Jewish leaders unanimously declared that “once Jewish-Christian dialogue has been formally characterized as an invitation, whether explicit or implicit, to apostatize, then Jewish participation becomes untenable.” Leaders of the Bishops’ Conference replied that “Jewish-Catholic dialogue, one of the blessed fruits of the Second Vatican Council, has never been and will never be used by the Catholic Church as a means of proselytism—nor is it intended as a disguised invitation to baptism.” They also took the unusual step of excising mention of implicit and explicit invitations to baptism from the online version of the original clarification. For all the relevant texts, see <http://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-todays-dialogue/conversion>. For a fuller narrative see: Philip A. Cunningham, “‘God Holds the Jews Most Dear’: Learning to Respect Jewish Self-Understanding,” in Gilbert Rosenthal, ed., *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 55-56.

some Jews to be tantamount to a divine commandment,¹⁷ the thought that the Church might in any way continue the long history of trying to convert them to Christianity is unspeakably odious to the vast majority of Jews.

It is little wonder, then, that the public media paid great attention to G&C's sentence that "the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed at Jews" (§40).¹⁸ However, some questioned whether such headlines as "Vatican says Catholics should not try to convert Jews" were accurate. As one commentator stated: "What the document says is that the Catholic Church rejects 'specific *institutional* mission work'...aimed at Jews. Individual Christians, on the other hand, are still encouraged—'called,' as the document puts it—to reach out and preach or 'bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews.'"¹⁹ Conflicting readings of the document on this crucial point are made possible by G&C's lack of clarity about the meanings of "mission" and "witness" and suspicions about the adjective "institutional."

Regrettably, prior ecclesiastical documents did not employ these and related terms with any consistency.²⁰ G&C would have benefited from utilizing the understandings put forth in the 1991 Vatican statement, "Dialogue and Proclamation" (D&P). That text distinguished between "*Evangelizing mission*, or

¹⁷ Most famously, Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 213.

¹⁸ E.g.: Gia Pianigianidec, "Vatican Says Catholics Should Not Try to Convert Jews," *The New York Times* (Dec. 10, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/11/world/europe/vatican-says-catholics-should-not-try-to-convert-jews.html?_r=0; Philip Pulella, "Vatican Says Catholics Should Not Try to Convert Jews, Should Fight Anti-semitism," *Reuters* (Dec. 10, 2015), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-jews-idUSKBN0TT1BK20151210>; Bill Chappell, "Catholics Should Not Try To Convert Jews, Vatican Commission Says," National Public Radio (Dec. 10, 2015), <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/12/10/459223058/catholics-should-not-try-to-convert-jews-vatican-commission-says>; and "Catholics Should Not Try to Convert Jews, Vatican Says," *BBC* (Dec. 10, 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35061357>.

¹⁹ J. J. Goldberg, "What New Vatican Memo Really Means for Jews for Jesus—and Us," *Forward* (Dec 18, 2015), <http://forward.com/opinion/327449/what-everyones-getting-wrong-about-that-vatican-memo-on-converting-jews/>.

²⁰ This is true even when key terms are in the titles of pertinent texts. Thus, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (D&P), of May 19, 1991, reworked the vocabulary found in one of its main source texts: the PCID's own 1984, "The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission" (D&M). D&M spoke of the Church's "mission" similarly to the later D&P's "evangelizing mission" as "the commitment to mankind, to social justice, to liberty and the rights of man, and the reform of unjust social structures" as essential to the mission of the church" (§12). However, D&M used "evangelizing" synonymously with D&P's "proclamation" when it stated (quoting the Second Vatican Council's *Ad Gentes*, §6): "The special end of this missionary activity is the evangelization and the foundation of the church among peoples or groups in which it has not yet taken root." But then the 1984 document immediately added: "Other passages of the same Council have stressed that the [evangelical?] mission of the church is also to work for the extension of the Kingdom and its values among all men and women" (§11). These few examples show clearly that the Catholic Church's understanding of these matters since the Second Vatican Council is in a state of flux, and this without even considering the *sui generis* status of Judaism in Catholic thought (see below).

more simply *evangelization*,²¹ in the broad sense of living according to the Gospel in all aspects of life and the more specific and colloquial understanding of “evangelization” as “the clear and unambiguous *proclamation* of the Lord Jesus,”²² which is “an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the...Church.”²³ D&P notes that proclamation “occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it; and yet it is only one aspect of evangelization.”²⁴

For the authors of D&P, “dialogue” is a subset of the Church’s “evangelical mission,” one of the many activities that are part of the Christian life. Dialogue “includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions. It is in this...sense that [D&P] uses the term dialogue for one of the integral elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”²⁵

This leads to the question: when G&C speaks of “evangelization” does it intend “Dialogue and Proclamation’s” broad sense of “evangelizing mission,” of which dialogue with Jews is a part, or the colloquial use of “evangelization” as an invitation to enter the Church? Unhappily, G&C confusingly uses some of the terms under discussion in different senses than D&P, especially proclamation/proclaim. Nevertheless, G&C describes the “Christian mission” (D&P’s “evangelizing mission”) as “proclaiming” (D&P’s “witnessing”) to their faith in their “personal lives,” nourished in the liturgy, by making Christ present through “service to others, especially those in need” (§42). In other words, G&C understands “evangelization” in the broad sense. Thus, it cautions that in living out the Gospel, “Christians must put their trust in God, who *will carry out his universal plan of salvation in ways that only he knows*, for they are witnesses to Christ, but they do not themselves have to implement the salvation of humankind” (Ibid.).²⁶ G&C advises Christians to live out their Christian faith (or their evangelical mission) without any thought that they are bringing “salvation” themselves. That is God’s work.²⁷

Also, consistent with a broad understanding of evangelizing mission is G&C’s list of the “goals of dialogue with Judaism.” These include “mutual enrichment whereby the dialogue partners become recipients of gifts” (§44), fostering the experience of Catholic-Jewish dialogue among clergy, teachers, and future generations (§45), “joint engagement throughout the world for justice, peace, conservation of creation, and reconciliation” (§46), opposition to antisemi-

²¹ D&P, §8. Italics in original. However, it should be noted that this text intentionally did not address the special relationship between “Christians and Jews [which] has its own special requirements. These are not dealt with in this document” (note 8).

²² Ibid. Italics added.

²³ Ibid., §9.

²⁴ Ibid., §8.

²⁵ Ibid., §9. In its discussion D&P draws upon Blessed Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), especially §18 and §22, which demonstrate both broader and narrower uses of the term.

²⁶ The added italics are an allusion to the discussion in *Dominus Iesus* §21 and *Ad Gentes* §7 that God bestows salvific grace “in ways known [only] to Himself.”

²⁷ See also note 35 below.

tism (§47), and “support [of] the poor, disadvantaged, and sick” (§48). Absent from this list is any hint to use dialogue “as a disguised invitation to baptism.”²⁸ Without using its terminology, then, G&C reflects D&P’s categorical distinction between “dialogue” and “proclamation,” both of which are discrete activities within the Church’s “evangelical mission.”

Into this discussion of the meanings of “evangelization” must now be brought G&C’s stress on the special religious status of Jewish-Catholic dialogue (§§14-15, 20). “Judaism is not to be considered simply as another religion; the Jews are instead our ‘elder brothers’...” (§14).

Therefore the Jewish-Christian dialogue can only with reservations be termed “inter-religious dialogue” in the true sense of the expression; one could however speak of a kind of “intra-religious” or “intra-familial” dialogue *sui generis*. In his address in the Roman Synagogue on 13 April 1986 Saint Pope John Paul II expressed this situation in these words: “The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion” (§20).

If G&C understands the relationship between Judaism and Christianity to be so close as to be called “intra-religious,” and that therefore “the dialogue with Judaism has a completely different character and is on a different level in comparison with the other world religions” (§20), then evangelization with respect to Jews must inevitably also have a *sui generis* character.

The singular standing of Jews in Catholic thought brings us back to the statement that the Catholic Church conducts no conversionary outreach to Jews: “The Church is therefore obliged to view evangelization to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views. In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews” (§40). According to the CRRJ, then, the “evangelizing mission” of the Church regarding Jews is to engage in what G&C calls “intra-religious” dialogue with them. Still remaining is the question mentioned above²⁹ about the same paragraph §40:

While there is a principled rejection of an institutional Jewish mission, Christians are nonetheless called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews, although they should do so in a humble and sensitive manner, acknowledging that Jews are bearers of God’s Word, and particularly in view of the great tragedy of the Shoah.

²⁸ Cardinal Francis George, et al., “Statement of Principles for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue” (October 2, 2009),

<http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-todays-dialogue/conversion/583-usccbdialogue09oct2>.

²⁹ See note 19.

Could readers infer the CRRJ feels that Catholics should dialogue with Jews to “bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ” in hopes that their Jewish partners will be moved to embrace Christian faith? Is the adjective “institutional” merely disavowing *organized* missionizing campaigns, but tacitly blessing personal, individual efforts? Are Christians to proceed with special humility and sensitivity because after the Shoah Jews will vehemently resist such overtures?³⁰

Given the history of perennial, sometimes violent, Christian conversionary efforts, doubts and suspicions about ambiguities in ecclesiastical texts are warranted. Such doubts are little assuaged by the circuitous roads along which core theological questions customarily unwind in Catholic documents. Sadly, “Gifts and Calling” does not unequivocally declare that Christians’ “witness to their faith in Jesus Christ” in dialogue with Jews is by definition never “a means of proselytism” or “intended as a disguised invitation to baptism.”³¹

Still, I believe the CRRJ takes this view of Christian witness for granted since it is scattered in the writings of important curial figures over the preceding years. A few examples:

- Cardinal Francis Arinze, president of the PCID, 1985-2002: “Dialogue does not aim at conversion in the sense of a change of religious allegiance, but conversion understood as greater readiness to do God’s will should be one of the aims and fruits of sincere interreligious dialogue.”³²

- Cardinal Walter Kasper: “The aim of dialogue is not for Jews to become Christians... giving up some of the essential elements of their individual traditions. Dialogue sets partners before one another, each with their own identity. This is the only way they can speak to each other and mutually enrich one another. Dialogue has nothing to do with proselytism.”³³

- Cardinal Kurt Koch: “Genuine brotherhood can however only develop and flourish where conciliation is dared in trust, so that the former hostility can be transformed into friendship...[T]he two sides encounter one another with the mutual intention of reaching greater understanding, of engaging more intensively with one another, and collaborating together more effectively to bear witness to the world of today that even after a tragic history of conflict, reconciliation can take place and trust can become possible.”³⁴

- Pope Francis: “This is what Gospel proclamation is: it is saying with my words, with my witness: ‘I have a Father. We are not orphans. We have a Father,’

³⁰ Adam Gregerman raised these questions at a February 2015 consultation on G&C at Saint Joseph’s University.

³¹ George, et al., “Statement of Principles for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue.”

³² *The Church in Dialogue: Walking with Other Believers* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990), 331-332.

³³ “The Theology of the Covenant as Central Issue in the Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” Dec 4, 2001, §I. See also his “Commission,” §III: “This is the very essence of dialogue—neither confusion or absorption, nor relativism or syncretism, but [the] encounter of different perspectives and horizons, and—as I have learned from Jewish thinkers like Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas—recognition of the other in his/her otherness.”

³⁴ “Trust as the Basic Attitude in a Culture of Humanity,” February 26, 2013, §3.

and means sharing this sonship with the Father and with everyone else. [Some might say:] ‘Father, now I understand: it is a question of convincing others, of proselytizing!’ No: it is nothing of the kind. The Gospel is like seed: you scatter it, you scatter it with your words and with your witness. And then it is not you who calculate the statistics of the results; it is God who does. It is he who makes this seed germinate but we must sow it with the certainty that he will water it, that he gives the growth. And we do not gather in the harvest.”³⁵

Importantly, in the last example Pope Francis was not even speaking about Catholic-Jewish dialogue, but about Christian witness to the Gospel at all times. Surely, “convincing others” is even further removed from the commitment to a dialogue in which Jews and Catholics, each with their own identity (Kasper), dare to trust each other (Koch) in trying to do God’s will (Arinze). Indeed, Francis has been so edified by Jewish devotion to their faith in God over the centuries, which historically includes resisting persistent Christian proselytizing efforts, that he feels “the Church and the whole human family can never be sufficiently grateful to them.”³⁶ This developing understanding of Christian witness provides the space within which G&C operates and should be interpreted.

To summarize this discussion of a complex constellation of concepts, let me return to the list of binary questions that opened this section. Future Catholic documents should make explicit what G&C expresses imprecisely. A post-*Nostra aetate* theological trajectory understands “evangelization” as the living out of Christian faith in service to the Reign of God, “mission” to Jews as engaging in mutually enriching religious study with them, “witness” as explaining Christian faith to Jews in order to reciprocally experience covenantal relationship with God, and “dialogue” with Jews as seeking to deepen a relationship of mutuality in service to the world.

3. Promise and Fulfillment

The interconnected words “promise” and “fulfillment” respectively appear in one form or another eighteen and twelve times in G&C, and almost a dozen times promise is related to fulfillment or synonymous expressions (“realized,” “culminating point,” “final”).

We might begin by asking what exactly are “the promises and commitments of God” (§17) of which G&C speaks, “promises which no human infidelity can nullify” (§21)? Citing the New Testament, the document makes it plain that the promises in question were made by God to Israel as part of their covenantal rela-

³⁵ “Address to Participants in the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome” (June 17, 2013), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130617_convegno-diocesano-roma.html. N.B. G&C, §42: “Christians must put their trust in God, who will carry out his universal plan of salvation in ways that only he knows, for they are *witnesses* to Christ, but they do not themselves have to implement the salvation of humankind” (italics added).

³⁶ “A Letter to A Non-Believer,” September 11, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130911_eugenio-scaffari.html

tionship: “In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and promises were given...” (§43). Israel became “the people of God” and the bearers of God’s “messages and promises” after their “liberation from slavery in Egypt (cf. Ex 13:17ff) and the establishment of the covenant at Sinai.” They became the “witnesses of his merciful favor in the midst of the nations and also for the nations” (§21).

Although at various points, G&C alludes to the divine promises to Israel in terms of “salvation” (§27), “the Messiah promised to the Jewish people” (§28), and a future “new and eternal covenant” (§32, cf. §18), it places at “the core of Christian faith” the church’s confession that in Christ “the promise has been fulfilled that all peoples will pray to the God of Israel as the one God (cf. Is 56:1-8)” (§35, cf. §25). G&C explicitly defines the promised “New Covenant” this way: “Christians are therefore also convinced that through the New Covenant the Abrahamic covenant has obtained that universality for all peoples which was originally intended in the call of Abram (cf. Gen 12:1-3). This recourse to the Abrahamic promises is so essentially constitutive of the Christian faith that the Church without Israel would be in danger of losing its locus in the history of salvation” (§33). The centrality of Genesis 12:1-3 for G&C is also evident in §21: God’s “plan of salvation is expressed in an enlightening way at the beginning of biblical history in the call to Abraham (Gen 12ff).” Such phrases as “the beginning of biblical history,” the “locus of the history of salvation,” “the core of Christian faith,” and “essentially constitutive of the Christian faith” underscore the importance to G&C’s authors that Christ and the Church fulfill the promise God declares to Abram in Genesis 12:3: “All the families of the earth will find blessing in you.” The document accords this biblical promise a special pride of place.

Significantly, G&C takes pains to stress that the “Church does not replace the people of God of Israel” (§23). “The New Covenant for Christians is...neither the annulment nor the replacement, but the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Covenant” (§32). This emphasis obviously flows from the Commission’s acknowledgement of the irrevocability of Judaism’s covenantal life with God but also brings us to the text’s understanding of fulfillment.³⁷

It is worth noting that G&C tends to speak of fulfillment in a “realized” manner without much explanation or qualification. It can therefore be read as conceiving of biblical promises only as having *already been* realized. Thus, the “Church...represents in [Christ] the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel,

³⁷ G&C counters perennial Christian thought in its insistence that the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that all the nations would find blessing in him does *not* mean the replacement of Israel. As Jeffrey S. Siker observes: “Christian controversy with Judaism from about 50 to 150 C.E. began with Gentile inclusion and ended with Jewish exclusion. In this shift we see a nearly complete transition of Christianity from its origins as a subgroup within Judaism to its development into a full-blown Gentile religious movement outside Judaism. At the same time, we see a development of Christian controversy with Judaism to the point that Christianity completely rejects Judaism. This rejection marks a final stage in the controversy in that it is merely refined and restated in different ways by subsequent generations of Christians, even to the present time.” [*Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, KY; Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 194.]

which [has] not achieved such a fulfillment..." (§23). "[T]he New Covenant in Christ is the culminating point of the promises of salvation of the Old Covenant.... Jesus lives during the period of the Old Covenant, but in his work of salvation in the New Covenant confirms and perfects the dimensions of the Old" (§27). "In [Christ] the promise has been fulfilled that all peoples will pray to the God of Israel as the one God" (§35). To be sure, the use of the present tense in many of these passages can be construed as referring to an ongoing, incomplete process (as in "the New Covenant is in the process of confirming and perfecting the Old"), and at one point G&C avers Christ's transcending of Israel's mission and expectation "in an eschatological manner" (§14).

However, most other Vatican documents on relations with Jews are notable for framing the discussion of "fulfillment" explicitly in the terms of a futurist or unrealized eschatology. There is an "already," but also a "not yet." The CRRJ's 1974 "Guidelines" states that Christians "believe that those [biblical] promises were fulfilled with the first coming of Christ. But it is none the less true that we still await their perfect fulfillment in his glorious return at the end of time."³⁸ Likewise, CRRJ's 1985 Vatican "Notes" distinguishes between what is "already accomplished" and its future "fulfillment": "Salvation and liberation are already accomplished in Christ and gradually realized by the sacraments in the Church. This makes way for the fulfillment of God's design, which awaits its final consummation with the return of Jesus as Messiah..."³⁹

The 2001 PBC study, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, offers these very apposite remarks:

The notion of fulfillment is an extremely complex one....Christian faith recognizes the fulfillment, in Christ, of the Scriptures and the hopes of Israel, but it does not understand this fulfillment as a literal one. Such a conception would be reductionist....What has already been accomplished in Christ must yet be accomplished in us and in the world. The definitive fulfillment will be at the end with the resurrection of the dead, a new heaven and a new earth. Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulus to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like them, we too live in expectation.⁴⁰

This "non-literal" understanding of fulfillment as a work in progress, or as a reality that Christ has "irreversibly inaugurated,"⁴¹ is, oddly, scarcely evident in G&C despite the ample precedents in earlier Vatican texts. The document's use of the language of fulfillment raised concerns for one of the document's Jewish consultants: "[P]lease allow me to express a warning: fulfillment easily slides into

³⁸ II, Liturgy.

³⁹ §9, cf. §11.

⁴⁰ §21.

⁴¹ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1988), §11.

replacement [theology]. As a Jewish partner in the dialogue, I welcome further reflection on what fulfillment means in terms of relations with Judaism....”⁴²

A futurist eschatology would have greatly assisted the Commission in its twin goals of asserting the continuity of the Church with biblical promises to Israel while at the same time repeatedly and correctly denying that Israel was replaced or rendered obsolete by the coming of Christianity.⁴³ It would also have given added theological heft to the social justice goals described in G&C in §§46-49 with the inspiring idea that Jews and Christians both have the “responsibility to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah.”⁴⁴

4. Christ

It may seem odd to conclude this analysis of key terms in G&C with such a fundamental word as “Christ,” but how the figure of the messiah is conceived in an eschatological context is directly pertinent to the prior section. Christians usually equate “Christ” or “Jesus Christ” with “Messiah” as if the terms were simply identical. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, for instance, merely relates “Christ” to the Hebrew word *mashiah* and states that “Jesus fulfilled the messianic hopes of Israel.”⁴⁵ G&C does likewise by referring “to the promised Christ (Messiah)” (§14), to “Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah sent by God” (§15), and to “Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Son of God” (§36). In the last case, though, it is difficult to tell if “Christ” is meant to be synonymous with both “Messiah” and “Son of God”; and therein lies the problem.

While “Messiah” and “Christ” are related etymologically, they have quite different meanings for Jews and Christians. In a study of biblical, late Second Temple, and rabbinic texts, Joseph Fitzmyer offers a succinct description of the differences in Jewish and Christian messianic conceptions as they emerged over time up to the present:

[O]ne must stress that the expectation of a Jewish Messiah was not of one form.... The dominant expectation, however, was one that awaited a human kingly figure who was (and is) to bring deliverance, at once political, economic, and spiritual, to the Jewish people and through them peace,

⁴² Edward Kessler, “Reflections from a European Jewish Theologian” (December 10, 2015), <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analysis/crrj-2015dec10/1366-kessler-2015dec10>

⁴³ At the same time, it should be cautioned that an unsophisticated appeal to a futurist eschatology by either Christians or Jews could simply extend into the End of Days the long-lived, binary “winner/loser” model of their interrelations. Some Christians are content to speak of a “Jewish turn to Christ,” while some Jews predict that Christians will ultimately come to recognize their errors. It seems to me that post-*Nostra aetate* theologians should strive to do better than that. For a “non-zero-sum” futurist approach that envisions both traditions coming to appreciate eschatologically the rightness of their respective messianic understandings, see Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom*, 199-201.

⁴⁴ CRRJ, “Notes” (1985), §11.

⁴⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), §436.

prosperity, and righteousness to all humanity....In all of this Jewish belief the expectation was (and is) still focused on the future: a Messiah still to come.

How different that Jewish Messiah is from the Christian Messiah, who has already come...[and has] been identified with Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified as a criminal and rebel....His mission differed too, because it was no longer deliverance in a political or economic sense, but solely in a spiritual sense; and because it was aimed at all human beings, it no longer was considered as coming through a chosen people....In these respects, the Christian Messiah differs radically from the awaited Jewish Messiah....⁴⁶

This difference is recognized in some ecclesiastical texts on relations with Jews, which speak about Jesus' messiahship as both in continuity and discontinuity with Israel's expectations. The Pontifical Biblical Commission provides the fullest discussion:

In reality, in the mystery of Christ crucified and risen, fulfillment is brought about in a manner unforeseen. It includes transcendence. Jesus is not confined to playing an already fixed role—that of Messiah—but he confers, on the notions of Messiah and salvation, a fullness which could not have been imagined in advance; he fills them with a new reality; one can even speak in this connection of a “new creation.”...The messiahship of Jesus has a meaning that is new and original.⁴⁷

An echo of this point is evident in G&C §14: “From the perspective of the Christian faith, [Jesus] fulfills the mission and expectation of Israel in a perfect way. At the same time, however, he overcomes and transcends them in an eschatological manner.”

I suggest that greater clarity could be brought to all the terms discussed in this essay if “Messiah” was used only with regard to Jewish expectations about this figure, and “Christ” was used only for the reconfiguration of late Second Temple Jewish messianic thought by a Church convinced that the Crucified One had been raised.

Jewish messianic ideas, which the PBC recognizes are “not in vain,” have been born out of Israel's experience of walking with God and will ultimately be fully realized “at the end with...a new heaven and a new earth.”⁴⁸ The Church's “Christ,” like the Jewish “Messiah,” also has strong eschatological resonances, but with an explicitly proleptic cadence: “Turn to God so that...he may send the *christos* already appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the times of universal restoration” (Acts 3:19-21), i.e. at the eschaton. The eschatological “one who is to come” (Luke 7:20), whom Christians believe “has already

⁴⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The One Who Is to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 182-183.

⁴⁷ PBC, “Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures,” §21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

shown his face in Jesus of Nazareth,”⁴⁹ brings the life of peace and justice of the Age to Come into the world today in a nascent manner, but “the fulfillment of God’s design...awaits its final consummation.”⁵⁰ “Christ” thus articulates the Church’s defining and continuing experience of God’s *Logos* (Word) incarnated in the life, death, and exalted continuing life of Jesus.

This proposed differentiation between “Messiah” and “Christ” both respects Jewish self-understanding and also better illuminates the distinctive Christian experience. “Christ,” much more than “Messiah,” also conveys the Chalcedonian Neo-Platonic formulation of the “hypostatic union”—everything attributable to the *Logos* happens today in union with the glorified Jesus, the one “who has been introduced into the ‘world to come.’”⁵¹

Importantly, as G&C notes (§24), the Word’s activities are not thereby confined to the Church’s experience of the *Logos* incarnate in Christ: “for Jews the Word of God is present above all in the Torah....Both faith traditions find their foundation in the One God, the God of the Covenant, who reveals himself through his Word.”⁵²

5. Conclusion: Some Considerations for the Future

Beyond the various terminological and theological suggestions made in the course of this essay, I would like to conclude by recalling the CRRJ’s axiom from 1974 that Christians need to learn how “Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.”⁵³ Phrased negatively, this exhortation could be expressed as a commandment to Catholic theologians: “When speaking of Judaism, thou shalt not theologize without respect for Jewish self-understanding.”⁵⁴ How does “Gifts and Calling” fare in this regard?

The fact that the CRRJ shared drafts of the document with Jewish specialists is praiseworthy and perhaps historic. But could input at an earlier stage of composition have made the document even richer, even if only by revealing some blind spots?

For instance, G&C stresses that “through the New Covenant the Abrahamic covenant has obtained that universality for all peoples which was originally in-

⁴⁹ Cardinal Walter Kasper, “The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavour of the Catholic Church,” address delivered at Boston College (November 6, 2002), III. Note also the mirroring phrasing in PBC, “Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures,” §21 that the eschatological Coming One “will have *the traits* of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us.” Italics added. See also CRRJ, “Notes” II, 10: “in underlining the eschatological dimension of Christianity we shall reach a greater awareness that the people of God of the Old and the New Testament are tending towards a like end in the future: the coming or return of the Messiah—even if they start from two different points of view. It is more clearly understood that the person of the Messiah is not only a point of division for the people of God but also a point of convergence.”

⁵⁰ CRRJ, “Notes” (1985), II, 9.

⁵¹ Pontifical Biblical Commission, “Instruction on the Bible and Christology,” (January 6, 1984), §1.2.6.2.

⁵² See also Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom*, 181-219.

⁵³ CRRJ, “Guidelines” (1974), Preamble.

⁵⁴ Cunningham, “God Holds the Jews Most Dear,” 52.

tended in the call of Abram (cf. Gen 12:1-3).” It goes on to say that “Jews could with regard to the Abrahamic covenant arrive at the insight that Israel without the Church would be in danger of remaining too particularist and of failing to grasp the universality of its experience of God” (§33).

This raises a host of questions: Does such an assertion reflect Jewish self-understanding? If the Church is the realization of God’s promise that all the nations would worship the God of Israel, does that suggest that the enduring covenantal mission of Jews today has no ongoing universalistic significance as far as Christians are concerned? Should Catholics understand that Judaism today is guilty of “remaining too particularist and of failing to grasp the universality of its experience of God” (§33) if Jews do not accept the Church as achieving Israel’s universal mission? Must Jews view being a light to the nations as having the highest priority the way Christians do?

Moreover, in its consideration of biblical promises to the People Israel, G&C focuses on one promise, the “blessing to the nations,” neglecting the fact that Genesis 12:1-3 also includes the promise to Abram of a land—a promise covenantally sealed in Genesis 15:7, 18 and 17:7-8.⁵⁵ Although G&C is aware of Jewish religious attachment to the Land of Israel and even quotes an earlier CRRJ study in urging Catholics to try to understand this connection (§5), it devotes no attention to the biblical land promise itself. This indicates a difficult but necessary task for the future: the development of a Catholic theology of the Land of Israel that relates biblical land promises to the world of the twenty-first century (a challenge, incidentally, for Jews as well).⁵⁶

The point is that by theologizing about Judaism without the active contribution of Jews, G&C runs the risk of presenting only unexamined Christian understandings of Jewish covenantal experiences that may subtly impart supersessionist ideas. Even if the “document is a Catholic text, formulated from a Catholic perspective,” its authors also wanted to take “into account the positions of our [Jewish] dialogue partners.”⁵⁷ This did not happen with regard to two key elements of Jewish covenantal self-understanding: Israel’s mission and the Land of Israel.

Which leads to the final question: must not the “personal encounters and face-to-face dialogues” (§8) between Catholics and Jews influence the theologies expressed in ecclesiastical documents? A statement from the PCID’s 1984 “Dialogue and Mission” (§21) is pertinent here:

[I]n interpersonal dialogue one experiences one’s own limitations as well as the possibility of overcoming them. A person discovers that he does not possess the truth in a perfect and total way but can walk together with others towards that goal. Mutual affirmation, reciprocal correction, and fraternal exchange lead the partners in dialogue to an ever greater maturity which in turn

⁵⁵ My thanks to Adam Gregerman for this insight.

⁵⁶ See Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom*, 220-233.

⁵⁷ Norbert J. Hofmann, Press conference remarks.

generates interpersonal communion. Religious experiences and outlooks can themselves be purified and enriched in this process of encounter.

If, therefore, “Gifts and Calling” is successful in “enriching and intensifying the theological dimension of Jewish–Catholic dialogue” (Preface), perhaps in the not-too-distant future we will see joint Catholic-Jewish theological studies published with ecclesiastical approbation, as already occurs ecumenically, e.g., the Lutheran World Federation’s and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity’s 1994 “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.” That would concretely manifest that the dialogue has indeed led to greater interpersonal communion and a deepening purification and enrichment of the respective theologies of its participants. In other words, we will have appreciably “come to terms” with each other as partners in covenant.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ My thanks to members of the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, who offered helpful observations on the penultimate draft of this essay at their October 9, 2016 meeting in Philadelphia.