

Covenant, Universal Mission, and Fulfillment

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"The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable" (G&C), a document issued by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ) in 2015, describes the impact of *Nostra aetate* (No. 4) fifty years after its promulgation at the Second Vatican Council. As the Preface acknowledges, G&C not only looks back at what has been accomplished over the past several decades, but also provides a stimulus for the future by offering a "starting point for further theological thought with a view to enriching and intensifying the theological dimension of Jewish–Catholic dialogue."¹

In the decades since the Council, the dialogue between Catholics and Jews has developed considerably and bonds of friendship have formed between those engaged in such dialogue. This most recent Vatican document affirms the positive conclusions that have resulted from it. However, there is considerable unresolved tension in G&C's description of the theological relationship between Judaism and Christianity, between the Old Covenant and the New, between the Old Testament and the New. On one hand, the document confirms *Nostra aetate*'s affirmation of the common spiritual patrimony of Jews and Christians (§29, §44) and its rejection of all forms of anti-Semitism (§47). Drawing upon the developments of subsequent years, G&C also declares the irrevocability (§27, §36) and continuing vitality of God's covenant with the Jewish people, which had been first clearly and explicitly affirmed by Saint Pope John Paul II.² It also rejects supersessionism or Christian replacement theology (§17, §30, §32), which holds that God's covenant with the Jewish people has been superseded by God's "new" covenant with Christians, who have replaced Jews as the recipients of God's

¹ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html.

Numerical references in parentheses throughout this essay are references to specific articles of this Commission document.

² Pope John Paul II, "Address to the Jewish Community in Mainz, Germany," November 17, 1980, in *Pope John Paul II on Jews and Judaism, 1979-1986*, with Introduction and Commentary by Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds. (Washington, DC.: US Catholic Conference, 1987), 35.

promises. On the other hand, G&C states that the new covenant brings earlier covenants to fulfillment (§27), that the Church represents the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel (§23), and that the only path to salvation is through Christ (§35). These competing statements raise serious questions: Is it possible to affirm a theology of fulfillment that is not also supersessionist to some degree? If God's covenant with the Jews has not been revoked, but continues today, what is Judaism's contemporary mission? To what extent does the CRRJ document articulate an understanding of Judaism's mission that is consonant with Jewish self-understanding?³

In this essay I wish to argue several points: 1) G&C gives preference to a single-covenant understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship and a concomitant theology of fulfillment, both of which strongly reflect traditional Catholic teaching as it has been most recently articulated by Pope Benedict XVI, who authorized the preparation of G&C, but which was written after Pope Francis was elected; 2) a theology of fulfillment tends in the direction of supersessionism; and 3) G&C nevertheless contains resources for avoiding supersessionism and creating a more positive estimation of post-biblical Judaism.

One Covenant and the Mission of Universality Fulfilled in Jesus the Christ

“‘The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable’” identifies the ultimate goal of God's election of the Jews as God's chosen people to be the gathering together of all of humanity and leading them to God (§22). This goal is an intrinsic part of God's plan of salvation.⁴ According to G&C, there are not two paths to salvation; rather, a single path begins with the people Israel and reaches its culmination with and in Jesus (§34; also see §25).

Pope Benedict articulated this understanding of a single covenant and a single path to salvation in his writings both prior to and after his election as pope. As a university professor in the 1950s and 1960s, Joseph Ratzinger had lectured on the philosophy and the history of religion. In that context, he declared that the history of religions reveals a dynamic development from primitive religion to mythical religion, which was then transcended in one of two ways—either in the form of mysticism or in what he called the monotheistic revolution, which at-

³ “On the practical level in particular, Christians must therefore strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism; they must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in light of their own religious experience.”

Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra aetate”* (n. 4), Preamble.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19741201_nostra-aetate_en.html

⁴ “God entrusted Israel with a unique mission, and He does not bring his mysterious plan of salvation for all peoples (cf. 1 Tim 2:4) to fulfilment without drawing into it his ‘first-born son’ (Ex 4:22). From this it is self-evident that Paul in the Letter to the Romans definitively negates the question he himself has posed, whether God has repudiated his own people. Just as decisively he asserts: ‘For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.’ (Rom 11:29)” (“The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable,” §36).

tained classic form in ancient Israel.⁵ Writing forty years later as cardinal, he refined his characterization of the two most recent stages of human religious development. Instead of contrasting mysticism and monotheism, he now preferred to speak of “a mysticism of identity” in contrast to “a personal understanding of God.”⁶ The path to a personal and true understanding of God, he declared, begins with Abraham. It develops in the subsequent history of Israel, and is further refined in the experience of the Exile, the formulation of wisdom literature, and the transition of Judaism into the Greek world. According to Ratzinger, the creation of the Septuagint allowed the Old Testament to move beyond Israel, “reaching out to all the peoples of the earth. That was indeed the effect this book had, and its translation did indeed in many respects further accentuate the universalistic trait in Israel’s religion—not least, in its picture of God, since the name of God, JHWH, no longer appeared as such but was replaced by the word *Kyrios*, ‘Lord’.”⁷ The faith of Israel, translated into Greek thought forms, was successful in attracting many of the enlightened minds of the ancient world.

The question for Ratzinger, however, was whether Israel could succeed in bringing authentic knowledge of God to the entire world. And this is where Christianity comes into the picture. According to Ratzinger, the network of God-fearers who were attracted to Israel’s faith became “the precondition for the Christian mission: Christianity was that form of Judaism, with a universal dimension, in which what the Old Testament had hitherto been yet unable to give was now fully granted.”⁸ Christianity made full universalism possible by making blood relationship with the patriarch, the particularist legal and moral structures of Judaism, and the Jewish cult no longer requisite for membership in God’s people. Ratzinger concluded:

Thus the spiritual development that could be perceived in Israel’s path had attained its goal, the uninterrupted universality that was now a practical possibility. Reason and mystery had met together, the very fact that the whole had been brought together in one person [i.e., Jesus] had opened the door for everyone: through the one God, all could become brothers and sisters.⁹

Ratzinger elaborated on this idea in a more focused way in *Many Religions—One Covenant*. There he stated that the “faith of Israel was directed to universality. Since it is devoted to the one God of all men, it also bore within itself the

⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2004), 28-29. This portion of the book was originally written in 1963 for inclusion in a Festschrift on the occasion of Karl Rahner’s sixtieth birthday.

⁶ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 45. See also his *Many Religions—One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1999), 95-100.

⁷ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 153.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 156. See 155 for Ratzinger’s description of how Christianity brought about the breakthrough to full universalism. The chapter in which these comments are found was written in 1998.

promise to become the faith of all nations.”¹⁰ That promise, however, was brought to fulfillment with and in Jesus, whose mission was “to unite Jews and pagans into a single People of God in which the universalist promises of the Scriptures are fulfilled that speak again and again of the nations worshipping the God of Israel.”¹¹

Cardinal Ratzinger continued this line of thought as pope: Israel was given a universal mission by God; Jesus and the church bring that mission to fulfillment.¹² In his Jesus book, Pope Benedict states that the release of Gentile converts from observance of the Torah’s prescriptions concerning food, purity, and circumcision makes possible “the universalization of the People of God, as a result of which Israel can now embrace all the peoples of the world; the God of Israel has truly been brought to the nations, in accordance with the promises, and has now shown that he is the God of them all, the one God.”¹³ If Israel has a universal mission beyond serving as the “precondition” of Christianity’s universalization of the

¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Many Religions*, 38. Similarly: “First of all we must remember that the fundamentally ‘new’ covenant—the covenant with Abraham—has a universality orientation and looks toward the many sons who will be given to Abraham” (68). See also his essay in *L’Osservatore Romano* (December 29, 2000), “The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas”: “The task of the Chosen People is, therefore, to make a gift of their God—the one true God—to every other people; in reality, as Christians we are the inheritors of their faith in the one God.” (https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/ratzinger.htm).

¹¹ Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant*, 26. See also 18-19, 28. Again: “For, through the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, the God of Israel has become the God of the nations of the world. Through him the promise has indeed been fulfilled that the nations shall pray to the God of Israel as the one God, that the ‘mountain of the Lord’ will be lifted up above the other mountains” (103-04).

¹² Concerning the universality of Israel’s mission: “Now, when we read the Torah together with the entire Old Testament canon, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Wisdom Literature, we realize very clearly a point that is already substantially present in the Torah itself. That is, Israel does not exist simply for itself in order to live according to the ‘eternal’ dispositions of the Law—it exists to be a light to the nations. In the Psalms and the prophetic books we hear more and more clearly the promise that God’s salvation will come to all the nations. We hear more and more clearly that the God of Israel—being, as he is, the only god, the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the God of all people and all men, who holds their fate in his hands—does not wish to abandon the nations to themselves” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker [New York: Image, 2007], 116).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 100 and 101. See also 117. Without endorsing Benedict’s theology of fulfillment, some Jewish scholars have acknowledged Christianity’s role in bringing people into relationship with God. *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*, for example, concludes that “through Christianity hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel.” See Michael Signer, “The Covenant in Recent Theological Statements,” in *Two Faiths, One Covenant? Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, eds. Eugene B. Korn and John T. Pawlikowski (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2005), 118. In the same volume, Eugene Korn affirms that Jews and Christians have “the same goal of making the God of Abraham known in the world, ‘to be a blessing for all the nations of the earth’” (153). See also the Orthodox document, *To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians*, #3: “As did Maimonides and Yehudah Halevi, we acknowledge that Christianity is neither an accident nor an error, but the willed divine outcome and gift to the nations.” <http://cjcuc.com/site/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity/>

People of God, Benedict does not indicate here what it is or what Jews believe it to be.

This understanding of the respective roles of Judaism and Christianity in fulfilling the universal mission of bringing knowledge of God and the possibility of salvation to all people finds echoes throughout G&C. For example, the document asserts that Jesus “fulfils the mission and expectation of Israel in a perfect way” (§14). The Jewish Jesus movement “opens up other horizons and transcends its purely Jewish origins” (§15). While insisting that God’s covenant with the people Israel has not been abrogated, G&C does insist that the “old” covenant has been fulfilled in the new, which reinforces the personal nature of God as revealed in the Old Covenant and establishes it as “openness for all who respond faithfully from all the nations” (§27).¹⁴

In this covenant community it should be evident for Christians that the covenant that God concluded with Israel has never been revoked but remains valid on the basis of God’s unfailing faithfulness to his people, and consequently the New Covenant which Christians believe in can only be understood as the affirmation and fulfilment of the Old. 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 covenant 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. By the same token, 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).¹⁵

¹⁴ See also §30 and §32 of “The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable.” A similar description of the relationship between the old and new covenants can be found in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 2001 document, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures*, II.A.5 (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html#5.%20The%20Unity%20of%20God's%20Plan%20and%20the%20Idea%20of%20Fulfillment).

¹⁵ Rabbi David Rosen, one of two Jewish scholars who participated in the official presentation of the document to the public, commented as follows on G&C’s assertion that the Church and Israel mutually need each other: “Permit me to note that there is hardly a symmetry in these regards. The former expresses an understanding of the intrinsic character of the Church, while the latter warns against a possible misunderstanding and maybe even abuse of the Jewish concept of election and loss of a sense of universal responsibility. Not only is there a profound asymmetry between the two in as much as the Church’s need for Israel is a matter of Christianity’s foundational self-understanding; but the real danger of ethnic insularity is hardly something of which Judaism was unaware before the emergence of Christianity and for which Judaism is specifically in ‘need’ of the Church.” He added: “However the very fact that we can talk about complementarity is itself a powerful demonstration of how far we have come along this remarkable journey of transformation and reconciliation between Catholics and Jews over the last half century” (<http://www.cjfr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analysis/crrj-2015dec10/1365-rosen-2015dec10>).

What is clear neither in G&C nor in the statements of Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI that precede it, is the nature of Israel's mission after Christ. If the divine mission was to bring the possibility of relationship with the one true God to all peoples, and if that mission came to fulfillment in Jesus and with the Church, what is left for Israel to do with regard to the rest of humanity?

Fulfillment without Replacement?

It is clear that “‘The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable’” wishes to affirm, in keeping with traditional Catholic teaching, that Christ and the Church represent the fulfillment of the promises made to the people Israel, while also rejecting the notion that Israel has been replaced as God's chosen. This dual affirmation, however, creates a significant tension that G&C struggles to resolve. Dr. Edward Kessler, one of two Jewish scholars who participated in the official presentation of the document to the public, highlighted the problematic aspect of fulfillment theology in his comments as the document was made public.¹⁶ Other scholars have pointed to the same problematic:

Fulfillment thinking is characterized by an ongoing tension translated into thinking patterns such as promise-fulfillment, unfinished-finished, imperfect-perfect, etc. Admittedly, in these schemes the focus is not on the substitution of Israel by the Church, but on the fulfillment of the first covenant by the second, even though this fulfillment is usually considered in an eschatological way. . . . Because fulfillment thinking does not sufficiently recognize the intrinsic—and as such lasting—value and significance of Judaism, the Catholic Church has difficulty in definitively detaching herself from *substitution thinking*. According to us, *fulfillment thinking* remains kindred to *replacement thinking*.¹⁷

In *Many Religions—One Covenant*, Cardinal Ratzinger attempted to avoid the conclusion that the theory of Christian fulfillment entails the abrogation of Is-

¹⁶ “Discussion of covenantal theology is witnessing a resurgence in contemporary conversations between Christian and Jewish scholars and I welcome the new document's assertion that ‘the New Covenant for Christians is therefore neither the annulment nor the replacement, but the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Covenant.’ However, please allow me to express a warning: fulfillment easily slides into replacement and substitution theory is alive and well in the pews” (<http://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analysis/crrj-2015dec10/1366-kessler-2015dec10>).

¹⁷ See Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt, “Israel and the Church: Fulfillment beyond Supersessionism?” in *Never Revoked: Nostra aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, eds. Moyaert and Pollefeyt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 165. In the same volume, see also John T. Pawlikowski, “Reflections on Covenant and Mission Forty Years After *Nostra aetate*,” 65.

rael's special mission.¹⁸ There he stated that Israel has a particular mission and that Jews must remain alongside Christians as “a witness to the world.” In response to the question, what does this witness say?, Ratzinger identified two things that are essential to the faith of Israel: first, “the Torah, the commitment to God’s will and the establishment of his rule, his kingdom in this world;” and second, “the hope, the expectation of the Messiah; the expectation, even the certainty, that God himself will step into this history and create justice—for the forms of justice we ourselves set up are very imperfect.”¹⁹ However, insofar as Christianity is presented as having assumed and having fulfilled the universal mission of advocating commitment to the one God and insofar as Christianity proclaims that the Messiah has already come, post-biblical Judaism appears to be stripped of a unique and distinctive mission. Ratzinger’s heavy emphasis on the continuity between Israel and the Church, understood in terms of promise-fulfillment, robs Israel/Judaism of its independent identity.²⁰ Although Ratzinger states that the Sinai covenant has not been abrogated, he does claim that it has been superseded and renewed.²¹ As pope, Benedict gave voice to similar statements.²² In the end, his understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity appears to succumb to a form of supersessionism.²³

G&C attempts to avoid supersessionism while continuing to uphold the Christian conviction that the new covenant in and through Christ represents the fulfillment of the old. The document repeatedly affirms that the old covenant has

¹⁸ “The mission of Jesus consists in bringing together the histories of the nations in the community of the history of Abraham, the history of Israel. . . . The history of Israel should become the history of all. Abraham’s sonship is to be extended to the ‘many.’ This course of events has two aspects to it: the nations can enter into the community of the promises of Israel in entering into the community of the one God, who now becomes and must become the way of all because there is only one God and because his will is therefore truth for all. Conversely, this means that all nations, *without the abolition of the special mission of Israel*, become brothers and receivers of the promises of the Chosen People; they become People of God with Israel through adherence to the will of God and through acceptance of the Davidic kingdom” [emphasis added] (Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant*, 27-28).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104-05.

²⁰ See Hermann Häring, “‘Wer Jesus Christus begegnet, begegnet dem Judentum’: Das Verhältnis Benedikts XVI. zu Israel,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 59 (2007): 43 and 46. See also Steven D. Aguzzi, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Supersessionism and Pope Benedict XVI’s Eschatological Ecclesiology Concerning Israel and the Jewish People,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 49 (2014): 612.

²¹ “Thus the Sinai covenant is indeed superseded. But once what was provisional in it has been swept away, we see what is truly definitive in it. So the expectation of the New Covenant, which becomes clearer and clearer as the history of Israel unfolds, does not conflict with the Sinai covenant; rather, it fulfills the dynamic expectation found in that very covenant” (Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant*, 70-71).

²² Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 100-02, 119, and 126.

²³ “However sophisticated and nuanced Cardinal Ratzinger’s reading of the covenants is, in the end it seems thoroughly supersessionist” (Mary C. Boys, “The Covenant in Contemporary Ecclesial Documents,” in *Two Faiths, One Covenant? Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, eds. Eugene B. Korn and John T. Pawlikowski [New York: Sheed & Ward, 2005], 105).

not been revoked. But, as Mary Boys has observed: “To assert that the ‘old covenant’ has not been revoked carries little import if there is no theological reason for the existence of Judaism after the coming of Jesus Christ. The major question is thus: Beyond recognizing Judaism’s ‘permanent spiritual fecundity,’ can Catholics say anything significant about Judaism’s mission in relationship to Christianity?”²⁴

Resources beyond Supersessionism

“The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable”²⁵ contains resources for constructing an understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship that steers clear of supersessionism, whether explicit or implicit. We find those resources especially in sections of the document that describe that relationship in familial terms and that emphasize the uniqueness of each tradition.

In Vatican documents and papal statements from *Nostra aetate* to the present, familial language has been used to describe the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. How the “family relationship” is described has important theological implications. For Christians to speak of Jews as their “elder brothers,” as Saint Pope John Paul II did on many occasions,²⁵ suggests that Christianity and Judaism share a common origin, but have developed in different ways, without one supplanting the other. For Christians to speak of Jews as their “fathers in faith,” as Pope Benedict was wont to do, on the other hand, seems to assign Judaism the exclusive role of providing the originating foundation of Christianity. Such language suggests, at least implicitly, that Christians have the primary, if not exclusive task of carrying on the legacy of the “fathers.” Both familial ways of speaking about the Jewish-Christian relationship are mentioned in G&C (§14). Sibling language, however, receives more explicit and developed treatment (see §15 and 16).

Sibling language enables G&C to affirm both the intrinsic connection and the unique difference between Jews and Christians. In article 15 we read:

The soil that nurtured both Jews and Christians is the Judaism of Jesus’ time, which not only brought forth Christianity but also, after the destruction of the

²⁴ Ibid., 82.

²⁵ John Paul II most famously used this language during his historic visit to the Synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1986. See “To Representatives of the Jewish Community of Rome at the Great Synagogue,” April 13, 1986, in *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 74. “Brother language” can also be found in the statements of Pope Benedict XVI. See, for example, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, §43 (http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html); Address to the French Jewish Community (September 12, 2008), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_pariji-juive.html; Address to Dr. Riccardo Di Segni, Chief Rabbi of Rome (January 16, 2006), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060116_rabbino-roma.html.

temple in the year 70, post-biblical rabbinical Judaism which then had to do without the sacrificial cult and, in its further development, had to depend exclusively on prayer and the interpretation of both written and oral divine revelation. Thus Jews and Christians have the same mother and can be seen, as it were, as two siblings who—as is the normal course of events for siblings—have developed in different directions.²⁶

The idea of a close sibling relationship—a kind of unity in diversity—is further elaborated when G&C describes the dialogue between Judaism and Christianity as “intrafamilial” rather than “interreligious” (§20).

Another resource for developing an understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship that appreciates the integrity, distinctiveness, and ongoing validity of Judaism is G&C’s treatment of revelation. In §24 we read that God revealed Godself in the Word, which invites all people to respond. That Word can be learned through the Torah and it can be learned in and through Jesus the Christ. Quoting Pope Francis’ address to members of the International Council of Christians and Jews (June 30, 2015), G&C continues:

Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh in the world; 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. In seeking a right attitude towards God, Christians turn to Christ as the fount of new life, and Jews to the teaching of the Torah.

This theme continues in §25, where G&C states that Judaism and the Christian faith as seen in the New Testament are “two ways by which God’s people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own.” Subsequent articles highlight Judaism’s and Christianity’s differences, without sundering their close connection. G&C states that the covenant, which means a relationship with God, “takes effect in different ways for Jews and Christians” (§27). Reflecting on Paul’s image of the root of Israel as the olive tree onto which the wild branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (Rom 11:16-21), the document states:

With this image Paul gives expression to the duality of the unity and divergence of Israel and the Church. On the one hand the image is to be taken seriously in the sense that the grafted wild branches have not their origin as branches in the plant onto which they are grafted and their new situation represents a new reality and a new dimension of God’s work of salvation, so that the Christian Church cannot merely be understood as a branch or a fruit of Israel (cf. Mt 8:10-13). On the other hand, the image is also to be taken seriously in the sense that the Church draws nourishment and strength from the root of Israel, and that the grafted branches would wither or even die if

²⁶ Sibling language is also found in article 16.

they were cut off from the root of Israel (cf. “Ecclesia in Medio Oriente”, 21). (§34)

This emphasis upon the distinctiveness of each tradition is consonant with a theory of “double covenant,” which sees Jews and Christians “bonded despite their somewhat distinctive appropriation of the original covenant tradition.” This theory highlights “the distinctiveness of the two communities and their traditions particularly in terms of their experiences after the final separation of the church and synagogue.”²⁷ Intimations of the unity in diversity of Judaism and Christianity, rooted in their distinctive responses to revelation, can also be found in some of Pope Benedict’s statements.²⁸

The elements in G&C that block a relapse into supersessionism, however, stand in tension with its articulation of the idea of a single covenant that reached fulfillment in Christ. In order to show how it is possible to acknowledge the present and continuing vitality of God’s covenant with the Jews, while simultaneously affirming the “fulfilling” work of Christ, G&C needs to clearly articulate what it means by “fulfillment.” A detailed description of “fulfillment,” however, is absent in G&C. Instead, it asserts that the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel is found in Christ and the Church, while rejecting the idea that Jews after the time of Christ are no longer God’s people.

²⁷ John T. Pawlikowski, “Reflections on Covenant and Mission Forty Years after *Nostra aetate*,” in *Never Revoked*, 76. Although he favors the double-covenant approach, Pawlikowski admits that “neither the single nor double covenantal perspective adequately addresses all the important issues, at least from the Christian side” (79). See also Walter Cardinal Kasper, “The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” a paper delivered at the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge, England (December 6, 2004), available at

<http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kasper/652-kasper04dec6-1>

²⁸ “For example, see his Address to the Delegation of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (March 12, 2009), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090312_rabbinate-israel.html.

In his Address to the Chief Rabbi of Rome (January 16, 2006), he stated: “In Christ we participate in the same heritage of the Fathers as you, to serve Almighty God ‘with one accord’ (Zep 3: 9), grafted onto the one holy trunk (cf. Is 6: 13; Rom 11: 16) of the People of God.” (http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060116_rabbino-roma.html).

During his visit to the Synagogue of Rome on January 17, 2010, he acknowledged the differences between Jews and Christians, who nonetheless are united in responding to God’s call. See his Address During His Visit to the Synagogue of Rome, §8 and 9

(http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100117_sinagoga.html).

See also the Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, §40: “Moreover, the New Testament itself claims to be consistent with the Old and proclaims that in the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Christ the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people have found their perfect fulfilment. It must be observed, however, that the concept of the fulfilment of the Scriptures is a complex one, since it has three dimensions: a basic aspect of *continuity* with the Old Testament revelation, an aspect of *discontinuity* and an aspect of *fulfilment and transcendence*.” See also §43.

The Church is called the new people of God (cf. "Nostra aetate", No.4) but not in the sense that the people of God of Israel has ceased to exist. . . . The Church does not replace the people of God of Israel, since as the community founded on Christ it represents in him the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel. This does not mean that Israel, not having achieved such a fulfilment, can no longer be considered to be the people of God. (§23)

Drawing upon the theological reflection and intrafamilial dialogue of the last several decades, G&C also affirms the salvific character of Jews' relationship with God while also declaring that Christ is the one savior of all. Because of God's universal salvific will, there are "not two paths to salvation according to the expression 'Jews hold to the Torah, Christians hold to Christ'. Christian faith proclaims that Christ's work of salvation is universal and involves all mankind. God's word is one single and undivided reality which takes concrete form in each respective historical context" (§25).²⁹ From the assertion that there is only one path to salvation, "it does not in any way follow that the 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" (§36). However, G&C is forced to admit that how it is possible that Jews participate in God's salvation without confessing Christ explicitly "is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery."

Philip Cunningham points to a "Trinitarian Logos Christology" as providing a way to untangle this mystery. To be in covenant with God means to be in a permanent relationship with God; to be in relationship with God means being a part of God's plan of salvation for the world. Because God's covenant with the Jews has not been abrogated, Jews continue to share in God's plan of salvation, which is brought to its culmination in the eschaton, the Age to Come. Cunningham argues that, from a Christian perspective, Jewish covenantal life with God necessarily involves an implicit connection with Christ as the divine Logos because God is a tri-unity of Father, Son, and Spirit. Without wanting to turn Jews into "anonymous Christians," he argues that a Trinitarian Logos Christology affirms "Jewish covenantal life *without* it having to be predicated on experiencing 'Christ,' i.e., as experiencing the Logos incarnated. Nonetheless, again from a Christian perspective, the incarnated *Logos* cannot be absent from Israel's ongoing walking in God's way."³⁰ This point is reiterated and developed in a subsequent essay that Cunningham authored together with Didier Pollefeyt.³¹ In response to the query why Jews do not enter into covenant with God explicitly

²⁹ Similarly, §35: "The theory that there may be two different paths to salvation, the Jewish path without Christ and the path with the Christ, whom Christians believe is Jesus of Nazareth, would in fact endanger the foundations of Christian faith. Confessing the universal and therefore also exclusive mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to the core of Christian faith."

³⁰ Philip A. Cunningham, "No Religion Is an Island": Catholic and Jewish Theologies of Each Other," *Modern Judaism* 29 (2009): 31.

³¹ Philip A. Cunningham and Didier Pollefeyt, "The Triune One, the Incarnate Logos, and Israel's Covenantal Life," in *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today*, eds. Phillip A. Cunningham et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 183-201.

through the Logos incarnated in Jesus Christ for the salvation of all, they reply that it must be part of the divine plan for the Jewish and Christian communities to live in covenant with God according to “two organically connected modalities,” whose relationship will ultimately reach fulfillment at the eschaton.³²

In a different context, some earlier theologians had attempted to explain how it might be possible for those without explicit faith in Christ to be saved. Domingo de Soto (1494-1560), reflecting upon the discovery of the “new world” whose indigenous inhabitants had never heard the gospel, argued that faith in Christ was implied by faith in God. Juan de Lugo (1583-1660) went further by applying this line of reasoning not only to those who had never heard the gospel preached, but also to people who knew about Christ, but either did not believe in him or had a faith that was not orthodox. In his treatise *On the Virtue of Divine Faith*, he wrote that pagans, Muslims, and others are obliged by the first preaching of the Christian gospel to inquire further into its truth. But he conceded that such personal inquiry might not uncover sufficient reasons for them to conclude that they ought to embrace the Christian faith. In short, “De Lugo dared to suggest that some who sincerely sought the truth might not recognize it in the Christian religion, and might still be saved by the faith in God which they found in their own religion.”³³ De Lugo’s ideas can be applied to Judaism: the Jewish “no” to Jesus does not mean that God’s covenant with the Jews has been abrogated or that Jews have been excluded from salvation.

Of course, speaking of Jewish covenantal life as an expression of an implicit relationship with the Logos (and the Spirit) is a Christian way of understanding the relationship Jews have with God; it is not how Jews themselves understand Jewish covenantal life.³⁴ Although an earlier document of the CRRJ said that Catholics “must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience,”³⁵ that requirement does not demand that Catholics abandon their own self-understanding or their perspective on God’s activity in the world. As Rabbi Abraham Heschel could say from a Jewish perspective, “All those who worship their gods do not know it, but they are really worshipping [the God of Israel].”³⁶

Conclusion

G&C reiterates the positive statements of *Nostra aetate* concerning Jewish-Catholic relations and provides an impetus for deepened theological reflection

³² *Ibid.*, 200.

³³ Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* (New York: Paulist, 1992), 97 and 98.

³⁴ Adam Gregerman, “A Jewish Response to Elizabeth Gropp, Philip A. Cunningham and Didier Pollefeyt and Gregor Maria Hoff,” in *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today*, 224-25.

³⁵ Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra aetate* No. 4,” preamble. Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19741201_nostra-aetate_en.html.

³⁶ Harold Kasimow and Byron Sherwin, eds., *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 14.

upon that relationship. Its clear rejection of supersessionism and its equally clear affirmation of the ongoing validity of God's covenant with the Jews, however, stand in tension with its affirmation of covenantal fulfillment in Christ. Because G&C describes biblical Judaism's mission as bringing knowledge of the one true God to the nations, a mission said to be fulfilled with the coming of Christ, the document leaves the contemporary mission of post-biblical Judaism an open question. Nonetheless, the document contains elements that can prevent sliding back into a weakened form of supersessionism and identifies issues upon which further theological reflection is needed if the legacy of *Nostra aetate* is to be fruitfully advanced. One such issue is whether the theory of a single covenant lived in two modalities or the theory of a double covenant, in which Jews and Christians are closely bonded to one another, or some alternative model for understanding the relationship of Judaism and Christianity is best able to lay firmer ground for the conviction that Jewish covenantal life continues to have a distinct purpose in the plan of salvation. Similarly, deeper exploration of Trinitarian Logos Christology may help to explain how it is possible that Jews participate in God's salvation without confessing Christ explicitly.