

# ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH FULFILLMENT BEYOND SUPERSESSIONISM?

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## INTRODUCTION

In the history of the Jewish-Christian relationships, Christians have often wondered whether or not the Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. Can Israel, after the coming of Christ, the Son of God, still be considered 'the people of God'? A negative answer to this question is usually described as 'substitution theology', 'replacement theology', or as 'supersessionist theology' (from the Latin *supersedere*: 'to be superior to'). Christians assumed that, by their belief in Jesus as Messiah, the election of the Jewish people had been definitively and exclusively transferred to them.<sup>1</sup> For once and for all, the Church has taken the place that used to belong to Judaism. The implication of this theology is that there is no longer a place for Israel in God's salvific plan. Israel's role in the history of revelation and salvation has ended forever. The Jewish 'no' to Jesus as Messiah meant the end of God's commitment to Israel. The new chosen people, the true, spiritual Israel, the new covenant now takes the central place. Keeping with this theology, the Christian exegesis, liturgy, and catechesis have represented the relation between the first and second testament in

<sup>1</sup> Didier Pollefeyt, "In Search of an Alternative for the Theology of Substitution," *Jews and Christians: Rivals or Partners for the Kingdom of God? In Search of An Alternative for the Christian Theology of Substitution*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt, (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 1-9.

terms of old and new, temporary and definitive, shadow and reality. The underlying idea of these supersessionist expressions is that Israel has lost its privileged status as God's chosen people at the moment she rejected God's invitation in Christ. Because of this, Israel has lost its right of existence; it is now a cursed nation or, at best, anachronistic.

At the bottom of this substitution theology lies an exclusivist, Christocentric understanding of salvation. The exclusivist theology is based on the belief that there is only one covenant, one gospel, and one redeemer, namely Jesus Christ. The access to salvation is exclusively linked to the conviction that Christ is the Savior on God's behalf. The thesis that the Jews had made a bond with God already, that would make Christ superfluous for their salvation, is rejected. Even stronger, Jews who do not recognize Christ as Messiah are lost. Exclusivism is not only Christocentric but also ecclesiocentric by nature. Indeed, belonging to the one, true, Catholic Church is understood as the criterion to achieve the state of grace. 'No salvation outside the Church'. The Church that has been founded by Christ substituted Israel as God's salvific instrument. Hence the Church needs to proclaim the gospel to the Jews as well.

This substitution theology played a prominent role in Christian thinking rather quite early. It is no surprise therefore that for centuries this theology formed an undisputed element of Christian teaching both in the Western and in the Eastern churches. To the Church, it was a source of annoyance that the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah and that they did not recognize that their role in God's salvific plan had definitely been played out. For almost two thousand years the Church has given expression to this annoyance through anti-Jewish statements and deeds. Even if Nazism should not be understood as an inevitable and direct outcome of Christendom — as accepted by the Jewish document *Dabru Emet*

(2002)<sup>2</sup> it is nevertheless obvious that without the long history of Christian anti-Jewish outlooks and the anti-Jewish acts of violence that followed, the Nazi ideology would never have been able to take root and it would certainly not have been imitated so fanatically in the heart of European civilization.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, it is no exaggeration to assert that the *Shoah*, insofar it forms the climax of a longstanding tradition of anti-Jewish discrimination against the Jewish people, contains one the most important inducements for the “revolutionary change”<sup>4</sup> in the Church’s attitude vis-à-vis Israel.<sup>5</sup> Particularly the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) brought about a turning point in

<sup>2</sup> *Dabru Emet* can be found (with commentaries by Jewish and Christians scholars) in Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel, and Michael Signer (eds.), *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Zie ook Joseph Ratzinger, “The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 29 December, 2000. “We know that every act of giving birth is difficult. Certainly, from the very beginning, relations between the infant Church and Israel were often marked by conflict. The Church was considered by her own mother to be a degenerate daughter, while Christians considered their mother to be blind and obstinate. Down through the history of Christianity, already-strained relations deteriorated further, even giving birth in many cases to anti-Jewish attitudes, which throughout history have led to deplorable acts of violence. Even if the most recent, loathsome experience of the *Shoah* was perpetrated in the name of an anti-Christian ideology, which tried to strike the Christian faith at its Abrahamic roots in the people of Israel, it cannot be denied that a certain insufficient resistance to this atrocity on the part of Christians can be explained by an inherited anti-Judaism present in the hearts of not a few Christians.”

<sup>4</sup> David M. Gordis, “John Paul II on the Jews,” *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Byron L. Sherwin & Harold Kasimow (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999) 125-138, 125.

<sup>5</sup> Massimo Guiliani, “The Shoah as a Shadow upon and a Stimulus to Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*, ed. P.A. Cunningham, N.J. Hoffmann & J. Sievers (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007) 54-72.

Jewish-Christian relationships. As far as the Church's attitude towards Judaism is concerned, the Council intentions lay mainly in the stimulation of new relations of mutual understanding and respect as well as dialogue and cooperation. One of the Council's purposes was to unite an as large as possible majority in favor of a changing attitude of the Church vis-à-vis the Jews.<sup>6</sup> It was presupposed that an open attitude towards Judaism would become possible only on the basis of a positive theological appreciation of Israel.

Particularly, the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate* has played an unmistakably important role in the changing relationship among the Church and the Jewish people.<sup>7</sup> *Nostra Aetate* recognizes that the relations between the Church and Israel were characterized by ignorance, conflict, and confrontation for almost two thousand years. The document expresses the hope that, in the future, the bonds among Jews and Christians can evolve beyond apologetics towards dialogue and encounter. To that end, *Nostra Aetate* confirms the strong liaison among the Church and the Jewish people and are Christians called to reject the old anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.

With the declaration of the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate*, the Church tries to break away from the exclusivist substitution theology and the "teaching of contempt."<sup>8</sup> The text clearly recognizes the intrinsic and lasting significance of Judaism. "Jews remain faithful to God," even though this recognition is immediately modified: "because of the patriarchs." "The Church," according to *Nostra Aetate*, "cannot forget that she received the

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *La rencontre du christianisme et des religions: De l'affrontement au dialogue* (Paris: Cerf, 2002) 99.

<sup>7</sup> Pollefeyt, "Jews and Christians after Auschwitz: From Substitution to Inter-religious Dialogue," 21.

<sup>8</sup> Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, 1964).

revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles (Rom. 11: 17-24).” Other than the exclusivist substitution thinking, *Nostra Aetate* draws attention to the continuity of Judaism and Christianity. In this way, the document tries to overcome the problem of *supersessionism*.

The significance and meaning of the declaration of the ecclesiastical document *Nostra Aetate* in 1965 cannot be underestimated. Rightly, it is spoken of as a turning point in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. This document holds a massive symbolic importance. It ushers in a new era for the relationship between the Church and Israel. Despite the undeniable symbolic significance of *Nostra Aetate*, a critical reading demonstrates that the text contains still some elements referring to the substitution theology. For instance, the text refers to the salvation of the Church is mysteriously “foreshadowed by the chosen people’s exodus from the land of bondage,” to “Jerusalem [that] did not recognize the time of her visitation,” and to the Church as “the new people of God.” In this perspective, the document *Nostra Aetate* illustrates how, during the Second Vatican Council, the Church still wrestled with the relationship vis-à-vis the Jewish people and particularly with the ancient old substitutive understanding thereof.<sup>9</sup>

In this contribution, we will investigate how the Catholic Church further developed its relationship with Israel after the publication of *Nostra Aetate* and its attempts to overcome substitution theology. To that end, we will focus on the work of cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,

<sup>9</sup> All quotations in the following paragraph are taken from the Second Vatican Council document *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions*, October 28th, 1965, nr. 4.

now pope Benedict XVI. We consider his position as former prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as particularly representative for the Catholic position today and, now that cardinal Ratzinger has become pope, also for the Jewish-Christian relations in the future. Special attention will be paid to the book Ratzinger published about this subject in 1999, *Many Religions — One Covenant Israel, the Church, and the World*.<sup>10</sup> In this work, Ratzinger speaks in positive wordings about the reconciliation among Jews and Christians, and he emphasizes the lasting role of the Jewish people.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Ratzinger defends the value of the Hebrew Bible. In *Many Religions — One Covenant*, this positive theological appreciation is translated into a fulfillment thinking. The Church does not replace Israel in God's salvific plan but rather professes that the partial truths, which God revealed to the Jewish people, are transgressed, fulfilled, and completed in Jesus. The unique Christ event is the climax of God's salvific action in history and God's revelation has achieved its fullness in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ fulfils that what God has initiated with Israel. However, we will prove that the fulfillment thinking which underlies Ratzinger's theology causes the relations among Jews and Christians to debouch into a kind of paradox that was already obvious in *Nostra Aetate*. On the one hand it is stated that the first covenant has never been revoked, on the other hand it is constantly suggested that that the first covenant has merely a preparatory function towards the new covenant God has made through Christ. In *Many Religions — One Covenant*, Ratzinger not only recognizes this paradoxical theological situation, but he also accepts it both as believer and as theologian. In this perspective, Ratzinger speaks of an unsolvable paradox.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Many Religions — One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. "The Jews must remain as the first proprietors of Holy Scripture with respect to us, in order to establish a testimony to the world."

In this contribution, we will demonstrate that this paradoxical situation is not unproblematic. Firstly, Ratzinger does not succeed entirely to put a final end to the replacement thinking either. In our opinion, the reason is that it does not become entirely clear how fulfillment can be thought of without falling back to replacement thinking. Fulfillment thinking is characterized by an ongoing tension translated in 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 the fulfillment of the first covenant by the second, even though this fulfillment is usually considered in an eschatological way. However, the question remains of which the lasting significance of the first covenant can consist if a more complete second covenant exists. Theologically speaking, what is the value of God's first covenant with Israel in light of the choice of God to make a new, unconditional, and more complete covenant through Christ? Put differently, to confirm that the *old covenant* has never been revoked is of little value as long as no theological reason is provided for the existence of Judaism after the coming of Christ.<sup>12</sup> It is precisely this question that cannot be answered sufficiently within the fulfillment thinking. Because the fulfillment thinking does not suffice to recognize the intrinsic — and as such lasting — value and significance of Judaism, the Catholic Church has difficulty to succeed in getting detached definitely from *substitution thinking*. According to us, *fulfillment thinking* remains kindred to *replacement thinking*.

Ratzinger's conclusion that the relation between the Church and Israel is paradoxical has much to do with the clearly inclusivist

<sup>12</sup> Mary C. Boys, "The Covenant in Contemporary Ecclesial Documents," *Two Faiths, One Covenant: Jewish Identity and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, ed. E. B. Korn & J. Pawlikowski (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 81-110, 82.

parameters within which he places the relation between Church and Israel Inclusivism — applied to Jewish-Christian dialogue — tries to balance both rejection and acceptance of Israel's role in God's salvific plan. The Church confirms Israel's intrinsic value but always within the borders of particular Christian *a priori*'s, such as the uniqueness of Jesus, the universal savior on God's behalf. Through Christ all people — including the Jews — will be saved. Between Judaism and Christianity, there exists no such thing as soteriological equality.

Secondly, in this contribution we will illustrate how this theological paradox puts increasingly pressure on the relations between the Church and Israel and the interreligious dialogue. In 2008 this was proven as a consequence of the controversy concerning the new Good Friday prayer established by pope Benedict XVI. At heart, this controversy revolves around the ambiguous, because not clarified theological appreciation of Israel in God's salvific plan and the trouble of Catholic theology to shed light on its relation to *substitution thinking*. It is our thesis that theology does not do any good by accepting the abovementioned paradox as *unsolvable*. We do believe that this paradox implies a hindrance for the progress of Jewish-Christian dialogue. A theology that keeps repeating like a mantra that Israel is *dear to God* and that the *old* covenant has a lasting significance in God's salvific plan,<sup>13</sup> yet at the same time this theology continues to pray for the conversion of the Jewish people to Christ — as is the case in the new Good Friday prayer — such a theology misses authenticity and coherence in the eyes of many. Precisely this lack of authenticity and coherence puts an

<sup>13</sup> Pope John Paul II has confirmed this lasting significance of Israel in his speech to the Jewish community of West Germany in Mainz on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1980. He there spoke of “The people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked.”



increasing pressure on the undertaking of Jewish-Christian dialogue. Nowadays, we hear often speak of stagnation or a crisis in Jewish-Christian dialogue or, more even, of a dialogue over the hill.

‘MANY RELIGIONS — ONE COVENANT. ISRAEL, THE CHURCH, AND THE WORLD’: FULFILMENT OR REPLACEMENT?

In his book *Many Religions — One Covenant*, Ratzinger formulates the central question to Christians about the contemporary theology of Jewish-Christian relationship clear-cut and openly:

Do confession of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of the Living God and faith in the Cross as the redemption of mankind contain an implicit condemnation of the Jews as stubborn and blind, as guilty of the death of the Son of God?<sup>14</sup>

As for the last part of the question, Ratzinger refers to *Nostra Aetate* art. 4, that mentions that “the report of Jesus’ trial cannot substantiate a charge of collective Jewish guilt.” “All sinners were the authors of Christ’s Passion.”<sup>15</sup> In the first part of the question, Ratzinger approaches Jesus as “the promised shoot of Judah,” who has come to reconcile Israel and the nations, in the Kingdom of God. In Jesus, the history of Israel becomes the history of the whole humanity.<sup>16</sup> The inclusive mission of Jesus unites Jews and heathens in one single people who complete Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

The notion *fulfillment* summarizes Ratzinger’s position best. This concept locates Jesus primarily in line with the Jewish tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Ratzinger, *Many Religions — One Covenant*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

He fulfils the universal promise of the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup> Here, Jesus and Israel's Holy Scriptures appear as inextricably bound.<sup>19</sup>

Through him whom the Church believes to be Jesus Christ and Son of God, the God of Israel has become the God of the nations, fulfilling the prophecy that the Servant of God would bring the light of this God to the nations.<sup>20</sup> [Italics ours]

This concept of *fulfillment* clearly places Jesus in continuity with the old covenant. This focus on the continuity is confirmed by the following quotation from Ratzinger's article *The Heritage of Abraham: the Gift of Christmas*: "the New Testament consciousness of God, which finds its climax in the Johannine definition that 'God is Love' (Jn 4:16) does not contradict the past, but rather serves as a summary of all of salvation history, which initially had Israel as its central figure."<sup>21</sup> For Ratzinger, it follows that, on the one hand, the Church should cherish a great gratitude towards Israel since she owes her faith to her Jewish brothers and sisters, who, "despite the hardships of their own history, have held on to faith in this God right up to the present, and who witness to it in the sight of those peoples who, lacking knowledge of the one God, "dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death" Lu. 1:79)."<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Ratzinger here notices a possible theological appreciation for Jesus by the Jewish communities. Even if it is impossible for Israel to regard Jesus as the Son of God in the way Christians do, it should still be possible for them, according to Ratzinger, "to see Jesus as the Servant of God who has come to carry the divine light to all

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "The Heritage of Abraham — The Gift of Christmas," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 December 2000, 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

nations.”<sup>23</sup> Jesus does not abrogate the *Old Covenant*.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of what is predicted in the *Old Covenant*<sup>25</sup> about the servant of God.

Nevertheless, for Christians this fulfillment means much more than a mere continuation; it signifies a broadening and universalizing of the history of Israel. Ratzinger criticizes the contemporary representations of “Jesus as a Jewish teacher, who did not go beyond what was possible in the Jewish tradition.”<sup>26</sup> In the fulfillment process, the Old Testament is at the same time “renewed”<sup>27</sup> by Jesus, “transformed,”<sup>28</sup> and “brought to its deepest meaning.”<sup>29</sup> Through Jesus, it is God self who fundamentally reinterprets the Law and who shows Christians that only now the Law finds its factual intended significance:

When Jesus offers the cup to the disciples and says, “This is the blood of the covenant,” the words of Sinai are heightened to a staggering realism, and at the same time we begin to see a totally unexpected depth in them. What takes place here is both spiritualization and the greatest possible realism.<sup>30</sup>

It is clear, however, that this use of ‘fulfillment’ in expressions like ‘renewal’, ‘reinterpretation’, ‘transformation’, ‘intensifying’, and ‘deepening’ creates quite some tension in Ratzinger’s analysis — a tension to which we referred already at the beginning of this article and of which traces can be found in *Nostra Aetate* as well. On the one hand, Ratzinger emphasizes that, in the Christological

<sup>23</sup> Ratzinger, *Many Religions — One Covenant*, 104.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

movement in which all nations become partners and receivers of the promise to become the Chosen People, “without one iota [of the Old Testament] being lost”<sup>31</sup> and that this new perspective in Jesus does not mean the “abolishment of the special mission of Israel.”<sup>32</sup> It rather concerns a ‘fulfillment’:

All cultic ordinances of the Old Testament are seen to be taken up into his death and brought to their deepest meaning... The universalizing of the Torah by Jesus... preserves the unity of cult and ethos... The entire cult is bound together in the Cross, indeed, for the first time has become fully real.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, the emphasis on the newness of Jesus implies, at times, that the Sinai covenant “within God’s providential rule... is a stage that has its own allotted period of time.”<sup>34</sup> The Sinai covenant thus seems to have only a conditional and as such temporary significance. Several times throughout the book, Ratzinger’s analysis refers explicitly to the terminology of replacement theology. He argues that the replacement theology is already present in the First Testament. The new covenant which God self founds, is already present in the faith of Israel (Jeremiah 11).

God, according to the Prophet, will *replace* the broken Sinai covenant with a New Covenant that cannot be broken: this is because it will not confront man in the form of a book or a stone tablet but will be inscribed on his heart. The *conditional* covenant, which depended on man’s faithful observance of the Law, is *replaced* by the *unconditional* covenant in which God binds himself irrevocably.<sup>35</sup> [Italics ours]

At this point in his book, Ratzinger nowhere says that the covenant has been replaced by the flesh and blood of the risen

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

Christ. But, by referring in the same study to the theology of the new covenant in the first testament which replaces the broken covenant and — before and after this reference — to the idea of the ‘fulfillment’ in Christ the replacement theology gets a Christological plausibility, especially because in his book Ratzinger never makes an explicit distinction between ‘fulfillment’ and ‘replacement’.

This confusion becomes clear again when Ratzinger writes the following:

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 *fulfils* the dynamic expectation found in that very covenant.<sup>36</sup> [italics ours]

This quote illustrates how, for Ratzinger ‘fulfillment’ of the ‘Old Covenant’ immediately implies ‘replacement’. He even speaks of the Sinai covenant as being swept away. In this perspective, several theological questions ask for an answer. What can be the remaining role and significance of the first covenant in God’s salvific plan? Does God’s covenant with Israel not suffice for the salvation of the Jewish people? To put it sharply, are the Jewish people saved through Christ or in and through “the never revoked covenant” (John Paul II) which God sealed with them on Mount Sinai? Do the Jews have to convert to Christ to enter into God’s final Kingdom?

Ratzinger acknowledges that his theological analysis ends with a paradoxical conclusion which, according to him, can only find a solution in an eschatological perspective.

It follows, therefore, that the figure of Christ both links and separates Israel and the Church. It is not within our power to overcome this

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

separation, but it keeps both of us to the path that leads to the One who comes. To that extend the relationship between us must not be one of enmity.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, this is the conclusion of Ratzinger's approach, namely that 'separation' and 'reconciliation' among Jews and Christians are intertwined in what he calls a "virtually insolvable paradox."<sup>38</sup> By reconciling himself to this paradox, Ratzinger also provides theological plausibility to the 'confusion' between 'replacement' and fulfillment'.

According to Ratzinger, this situation is livable when it is put in — some will say postponed to<sup>39</sup> — an eschatological perspective. Positive about such an 'eschatological solution' is the acknowledgement that even the Church today does not dispose of the fullness of the truth and that as such, analogous to the Jewish people, the Church lives in the same expectation of the definitive salvation. Such an eschatological perspective stresses the mysterious character of the truth and salvation and thus it confirms that Israel and the Church find themselves in a similar situation. Both the Church and Israel live in the hopeful expectation that God will bring justice. "The Church too awaits the Messiah. She already knows him, yet he has still to reveal his glory."

In light of the long history of exclusivist anti-Judaism, it is important to mention that this 'eschatologizing' clearly recognizes that *not the Church* but *rather God* brings salvation to all people. In other words, the Church renounces its role as being God's singular instrument for salvation. This is confirmed by cardinal Walter Kasper: "The Church simply cannot do this [setting itself up as God's only instrument for salvation]. The Church places the when and how entirely in God's hands. God only can bring the Kingdom

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Manfred Vogel, "The Problem of Dialogue Between Judaism and Christianity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 4 (1967) 684-699, 689, nr. 2.

of God, in which the world will know eschatological peace and the whole of Israel will be saved.”<sup>40</sup>

To Ratzinger, this eschatological delay is ‘good enough’, since it can prevent enmity and violence among Christians and Jews. The special mission of Israel is not lifted by Jesus and the Jewish self-esteem does not compel them to ask Christians to abandon the heart of their Jewish faith.

We also believe that Christians find themselves in a paradoxical situation, forty years after *Nostra Aetate*. A situation that in a certain sense is characteristic of the very text of *Nostra Aetate*, caught in a tension between continuity and discontinuity with the Jewish tradition, between separation and reconciliation, between fulfillment and replacement theology. However, we ask ourselves if it is, theologically speaking, opportune to accept this paradox as unsolvable. After all, we think that the tension between ‘replacement’ and ‘fulfillment’ is quite problematic, even when placed in an eschatological perspective. It is not evident for Christians-in-dialogue to engage in a real encounter with the Jewish other when these Christians are confronted with an irresolvable paradox. In the long run, this situation will not serve the Jewish-Christian relations as such.

Even though we find many Jewish dialogue partners to be satisfied with ‘the eschatological solution’ and that, at first sight, they show little interest to participate in a discussion they consider an internal Christian one, it has recently been proven that this “irresolvable paradox” (Ratzinger) does indeed bear consequences that complicate the relationship between the Church and Israel. We particularly think about the controversy that arose in Jewish-Christian circles following the *motu proprio* (a letter on personal authority of the pope, outside the curia) in which pope Benedict XVI gave

<sup>40</sup> Walter Kasper, “Il Cardinale Kasper e la missione verso gli ebrei. Risponde alle critiche del Venerdì Santo per gli ebrei,” *Osservatore Romano*, 10 April, 2008.

permission for a broader use of the Tridentine rite. It is appropriate to take a closer look at the controversy that emerged as a result of this *motu proprio* and the reviewed Good Friday prayer, precisely because this commotion illustrates that the aforementioned paradox in the position of Ratzinger — a tension characteristic for the Catholic Church's attitude vis-à-vis Israel — becomes a source of many problems. According to us, this controversy is the logical outcome of Ratzinger's particular inclusivistic theological vision typified by a tension that, on the one hand, wants to do justice to the idea of the “never revoked covenant” (Rom 11:29; John Paul II) and, on the other, a strong Christocentrism. As a matter of fact, on the pastoral level Ratzinger, now as pope, does exactly what he has done on the level of his systematic theology; there is continuity in both his book and his prayer.

THE CONTROVERSY CONCERNING THE GOOD FRIDAY PRAYER:  
A NEW OBSTACLE IN THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

The Tridentine rite is the liturgy introduced by pope Paul V as standard liturgy for the Catholic Mass in 1570. Up until the Second Vatican Council this rite remained the norm, be it in the 1962 version of the Roman Missal. This Tridentine rite, sometimes referred to as the *old Ordo Missae*, has been replaced by the *new Ordo Missae* by pope Paul VI in 1970 according to the liturgical renewal that followed the Second Vatican Council and that counts as standard for the entire Catholic Church ever since. The *old Ordo Missae*, however, has never been abolished officially. A small minority of rather traditionalistic and conservative Catholics stuck to the old Tridentine rite even after the Council. The old Tridentine rite has been formally rehabilitated through the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* dated July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007. After this papal initiative, the



Tridentine rite is considered an *extraordinary* form of the Latin rite, whereas the 1970 Roman Missal (the *new Ordo Missae*) remains the *ordinary* form or expression.

Even though, at first sight, this decision involves a mere *internal Christian matter*, this papal initiative ignites particular concern and irritation among Jews.<sup>41</sup> Many Catholics as well raise questions over the desirability and appropriateness of this *motu proprio*.<sup>42</sup> Especially Catholics who are engaged in Jewish-Christian dialogue do experience this *motu proprio* as a step back vis-à-vis the openness breathed by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>43</sup> It was particularly feared for that the revaluation of this *old Ordo Missae* would lead to a reintroduction of the classic Good Friday prayer, including the 1948 missal in which is prayed for the unreliable — [the original text uses the word] *perfidious* — Jews:

Let us pray also for the perfidious Jews: that Almighty God may remove the veil from their hearts; so that they too may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord. Almighty and eternal God, who dost not exclude from thy mercy even Jewish faithlessness: hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people; that acknowledging the light of thy Truth, which is Christ, they may be delivered from their darkness. Through the same Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

In light of the long history of ecclesiastic anti-Judaism, the Jewish shivery attitude towards the *old Ordo Missae* and this Good Friday prayer is perfectly understandable. For centuries, Good Friday has

<sup>41</sup> David Rosen, “American Jewish Committee Seeks Clarification on Latin Mass;” [www.sidic.org](http://www.sidic.org).

<sup>42</sup> John Pawlikowski, “Praying for the Jews,” *Commonweal*, March 14, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Hans-Peter Heinz & Henry Brandt, “A New Burden on Christian-Jewish Relations: Statement of the Discussion Group ‘Jews and Christians’ of the Central Committee of German Catholics on the Good Friday Prayer ‘For the Jews’ in the Extraordinary Rite Version of 2008.”

been the most dangerous day of the year for Jews.<sup>44</sup> On this day Christians commemorate the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Not seldom, this liturgical memorial led to spontaneous or even orchestrated outbursts of anger against the Jewish population, who were thought to be collectively guilty for the death of Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Official Catholic sources reacted with the following, threefold message against Jewish and Catholic anxiety.<sup>46</sup> Firstly, the observation was made that Benedict XVI's *motu proprio* concerned the 1962 version in which the problematic concept 'perfidis Judaeis' was already expunged. Secondly, it was emphasized that, despite the pope's *motu proprio*, the Roman missal of 1970 remains the qualifying missal for the ordinary rite. Hence, there is no question about some sort of general return to the Tridentine rite. Finally, on January 28<sup>th</sup> 2008, the pope made known that he intended to write a new prayer in which he would take into account the sensitivities on the Jewish side. The reviewed version of the Good Friday prayer is a reformulation of the 1962 missal's Good Friday prayer.

Despite the insistence of various Jewish and even Catholic groups, the pope does not pursue the question to let the 1970 Good Friday prayer that breathed the positive dialogical spirit of Vatican II *enter into* the Roman missal of 1962.<sup>47</sup> The reviewed Good Friday prayer, as presented by pope Benedict XVI, does not succeed in taking away the nuisances of both Jews and Catholics.<sup>48</sup> The new

<sup>44</sup> Judith Banki, "Praying for the Jews. Two Views on the New Good Friday Prayer," *Commonweal*, March 14, 2008, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. The teaching of the deicide.

<sup>46</sup> Vatican Secretariat of State, "The new Prayer for the Jews for the 1962 edition of the Roman Missal — Communiqué," April 4, 2008; [www.sidic.org](http://www.sidic.org).

<sup>47</sup> See among others the letter of John Pawlikowski, president of the 'International Council of Christians and Jews', to cardinal Walter Kasper, Pontifical Commission for the Relations with the Jews'; [www.sidic.org](http://www.sidic.org).

<sup>48</sup> Abraham Foxman, "Anti-Defamation League statement about the Papal Motu Proprio on the 1962 Missal"; [www.sidic.org](http://www.sidic.org).

Good Friday prayer does lack the positive language and insights of the post-conciliar liturgy.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the comparison between the 1970 Good Friday prayer current up until now, and the new Good Friday prayer (2008) makes clear that the Benedict XVI prayer is a step back compared to the prayer by pope Paul VI and the symbolic actions and sayings of John Paul II.<sup>50</sup> In this way, we get two authorized Good Friday prayers in the Catholic Church today which, as will become clear later in this article, breathe a different theological spirit:

The revised Good Friday Prayer (2008)	The Good Friday Prayer (1970)
<p>“Let us pray also for the Jews. That our Lord and God may enlighten their hearts, that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ as the savior of all men.</p> <p>Almighty, ever living God, who wills that all men would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, graciously grant that all Israel may be saved when the fullness of the nations enter into Your Church.</p> <p>Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.”</p>	<p>“Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant.</p> <p>Almighty and eternal God, long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and his posterity. Listen to your Church as we pray that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption.</p> <p>We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”</p>

<sup>49</sup> Francis Rocca, “Pope Tweaks Prayer to Address Jewish Concerns,” *Christian Century*, March 11, 2008, 18-19, 19.

<sup>50</sup> Heinz & Brandt, “A New Burden on Christian-Jewish Relations.”

Even though this new Good Friday prayer cannot be compared to the 1948 version, it does not succeed to take away the Jewish — and Christian — displeasure entirely. There are several reasons for this.

The 1970 missal not only renounces any negative attitude towards Israel but integrated the theological-liturgical insights of the Second Vatican Council as well. This version of the Good Friday prayer speaks of the Jewish people in clearly positive wordings and it does recognize the soteriological priority of the Jewish people in God's salvific plan. God has turned Himself to Israel first. Israel is the chosen people that "God elevates in love for God's name." The new Good Friday prayer of 2008 passes over this post-conciliar insight. Israel's never-ending love of God is not mentioned any longer.

In the Good Friday prayer of the 1970 missal, the Church renounces its claim to pray for the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. According to this version of the Good Friday prayer, Israel finds itself already on the way to salvation. Here, the Church does not speak about the acknowledgement of Christ as a condition to achieve salvation. Apparently, the Church relies on the fact that the faith in the union between Israel and God will bring the Jews towards salvation;<sup>51</sup> moreover, the 1970 prayer for the Jews mirrors the prayer of the Church for itself. In this way, the Church also indicates that it has not yet arrived at complete salvation itself. With this, the Church recognizes that *not She* but *God only* determines the how and when of salvation. For both Israel and the Church, the completion of salvation is placed in an explicit eschatological perspective.

Other than the 1970 missal, the new Good Friday prayer (2008) does appeal to the conversion of the Jews to Christ, Saviour on

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

God's behalf, for all people. Even though the word 'conversion' is not mentioned in the text, it is implied in the petition for 'enlightenment' for the Jews. Moreover, this prayer for the 'enlightenment' of Israel gives the impression that the Jewish people find themselves still in 'darkness' today. Here, Judaism takes particularly offence at this appeal for conversion. First of all, through this call for conversion the place of Israel in God's salvific plan is placed in a privative scheme — the Jewish people lack the truth that has been revealed in Christ. Moreover, this call to enlightenment recalls reminiscences to the older Good Friday prayer of 1948, in which is said about the Jews that they are blinded and that they lack the light of the Christian truth.<sup>52</sup> Probably Benedict XVI will not share this critical analysis. After all, the new Good Friday prayer says nothing new but only speaks openly about what the Church has always considered self-evident. With this prayer, Benedict XVI confirms that Christ fulfils what God has begun in Israel. The Jewish people will come to the fullness of the truth only when it turns to Christ. Actually, this means that Jews need to convert to Christ and hence become Christians. Jews are considered "potential Christians."<sup>53</sup> In this way, we run into the abovementioned tension between fulfillment and replacement. The call to conversion implicitly means that the election of the Jews as the Chosen People and the particular mission of Israel have actually lost their significance after the coming of Christ. Fulfillment and replacement are closely tied. Christ not only fulfils what God has started with Israel; the Church also replaces the Jewish people who, as such, have no lasting meaning and role in God's salvific plan. There is no longer question of the words of

<sup>52</sup> See above.

<sup>53</sup> See Byron L. Sherwin, "John Paul II's Catholic Theology of Judaism," *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. B. L. Sherwin & H. Kasimow, 141.

John-Paul II about the lasting meaning of the covenant (the never revoked covenant,) which has never been revoked and which will never be revoked.

According to Walter Kasper, the call to conversion of the Jewish people should be put into an eschatological perspective.<sup>54</sup> Pope Benedict XVI has supported this perspective.<sup>55</sup> Fact is, however, that in the new Good Friday prayer this eschatological perspective cannot be found explicitly. This arouses the suggestion that the Church, in its missionary activities, directs itself to the Jewish people as well. This suggestion is reinforced by the use of the Latin verb conjugations and tenses: the prayer uses the present participle (*participium praesens*.) whereas the “neo-Vulgate” translation<sup>56</sup> makes use of a future conjunctive (*conjunctivus futuri*.)<sup>57</sup> This can create the impression that the Jews should recognize Jesus as Savior of all people already now. And even the eschatological perspective remains problematic, because it places Israel in a privative scheme that is difficult to reconcile with the concept of the “never revoked covenant” of John Paul II.

Striking is also that in the new Good Friday prayer the conversion takes a strong ecclesiological inspiration: the Jews will enter

<sup>54</sup> Walter Kasper, “Il Cardinale Kasper e la missione verso gli ebrei. Risponde alle critiche del Venerdì Santo per gli ebrei.”

<sup>55</sup> “As Cardinal Kasper has clearly explained, the new Oremus et pro Iudaeis is not intended to promote proselytism towards the Jews and opens up an eschatological perspective. Christians however cannot but bear witness to their faith in full and total respect for the freedom of others, and this leads them also to pray that all will come to recognize Christ.” See “Letter of Card. Tarcisio Bertone in Response to Concerns on the revised Good Friday prayer”, May 15, 2008; [www.sidic.org](http://www.sidic.org).

<sup>56</sup> The Neo-Vulgate, also known as the ‘Vulgata Paulus’, came into being under pope Paul VI (1963-1978) and was promulgated under pope Johannes Paul II in 1979.

<sup>57</sup> Katholieke Raad voor Israël, “Het Goede Vrijdag gebed voor de Joden in de Tridentijnse ritus 2008,” [www.kri-web.nl](http://www.kri-web.nl).

into the Church. In the letter to the Romans 11, to which this missal alludes, there is no reference made to an 'entrance' into the Church, but rather of an entrance into the *mystery*. As a consequence, the new Good Friday prayer arouses (nasty) reminiscences of the ecclesiocentric exclusivism that has determined the soteriological position of the Church for so long. No salvation outside the Church. Once again, we detect that the fulfillment concept slides down to the old replacement concept: the Jews need to be enlightened. Christ brings salvation — also for the Jewish people — and the Church replaces Israel. Hence, the abovementioned annoyance of Jews and Christians about the new Good Friday prayer is quite understandable:

Like his predecessor, Benedict XVI has reached out to the Jewish community in friendship on several occasions. This newly issued prayer for the conversion of the Jews may be intended to restate the fundamental message of the church regarding the universal salvific uniqueness of Christ. But for many Jews the very word "conversion" will recall campaigns, not prayerful hopes: the Crusades, the forced disputations and sermons, the expulsions, the Inquisition, the ghettos.<sup>58</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Pope Benedict XVI's concern for the success of the Jewish-Christian dialogue is intellectually sharp and challenging. However, the controversy around the renewed Good Friday prayer makes clear that the tension between *replacement* and *fulfillment*, the intrinsic value of Judaism and Christ as universal savior, forms a hindrance to the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The *confusing theory* of the

<sup>58</sup> Banki, "Praying for the Jews: Two Views on the New Good Friday Prayer," 12.

theological interpretation brings about serious consequences for the *practice* of Judeo-Christian conversations. The question of the role and significance of the Jewish people in God's salvific plan is not a mere theoretical problem but it contains a clear pastoral aspect as well.<sup>59</sup> The way in which this question is answered or remains unanswered will also determine how Christians relate to the Jewish people.<sup>60</sup> *Lex orandi, lex credendi*.

We cannot escape the impression that Benedict XVI is confined to the limitations of classic theological thinking patterns; patterns in which the relationship between the Church and Israel took shape since the Second Vatican Council. We ask ourselves the question if it is not about time for Catholic theology to thoroughly reconsider the relation between the Church and Israel. This implies, however, the willingness to become detached from certain theological presuppositions. Right now, Christian theology too often departs from dogmatic *a priori's* that limit any possible outcome of the Jewish-Christian dialogue right from the start. The result is a Christian theology of Judaism too loosely formulated from an interreligious dialogue — that is, a theology which lets itself be fed by the encounter with the other. When we turn to the Jewish people in dialogue, it is of vital importance that Christians (and Jews as well) create space for an imaginative theology which dares to

<sup>59</sup> The bond between the theologies of the religions on the one hand and the practice of interreligious dialogue on the other can be determined already from the very beginning of this theological discipline—this is around the Second Vatican Council. In this perspective, the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, set the trend by developing some major theological initiatives for the promotion of relations between the Church and the other religions.

<sup>60</sup> Andreas Eckerstorfer, *Kirche in der postmodernen Welt: Der Beitrag George Lindbecks zu einer neuen Verhältnisbestimmung* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2001) 135.



follow new roads past the beaten paths. Only then will it be possible to give shape in a theologically responsible way to a thesis in Ratzinger's earlier work that the "Old Testament is... open to both ways" (Ratzinger).<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1998) 53-54. "I have come to the realization that Judaism (which strictly speaking, began with the end of the formation of the Canon, that is, in the first century after Christ) and the Christian faith described in the New Testament are two ways of appropriating Israel's Scriptures, two ways that in the end are determined by the position one assumes with regard to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. The Scripture we today call Old Testament is in and of itself open to both ways."

