

The Old and New »Hermeneutical Jew« in Catholic Theology before and after the Second Vatican Council

The Importance of Jewish Voices

von

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Der alte und der neue »hermeneutische Jude« in der katholischen Theologie vor und nach dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil. Die Bedeutung der jüdischen Stimmen

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Zusammenfassung

Ist es für eine katholische Theologie des Judentums nach dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil möglich, »echte« Juden zu Wort kommen zu lassen, oder ist dieser Dialog dazu bestimmt, sich mit einem theologisch vorkonstruierten hermeneutischen Juden zu befassen? D'Costa argumentiert, dass der »hermeneutische Jude« des Konzils aus christlichen, theologischen Ausdrücken besteht und die Voraussetzung dafür ist, dass die wirklichen Stimmen der rabbinischen Juden zu hören sind. In dem Beitrag werden drei Fragen untersucht, die sich in der nachkonziliaren Zeit stellen. Erfordert das konziliare hermeneutische Judentum eine echte Auseinandersetzung mit dem lebendigen rabbinischen Judentum? Wird das hermeneutische Judentum des Katholizismus trotz dieses positiven Schritts immer im Sinne eines »Mangels« in Bezug auf Jesus Christus gesehen? Taucht eine neue jüdische Figur auf, der jüdische Katholik? Kann diese innerkirchliche Realität ein Problem für den Dialog zwischen Katholiken und Juden darstellen?

Schlüsselbegriffe

Vatikanum II, Juden, hermeneutischer Jude, jüdische Katholiken, Jesus Christus

The Old and New »Hermeneutical Jew« in Catholic Theology before and after the Second Vatican Council. The Importance of Jewish Voices

Abstract

Is it possible for a Catholic theology of Judaism after the Second Vatican Council to hear »real« Jews speak, or is this dialogue destined to engage with a theologically pre-constructed hermeneutical Jew? This paper argues that the Council's »hermeneutical Jew« is made up of Christian theological bones and is the presupposition that requires the real voices of Rabbinic Jews to be heard. The paper explores three issues that arise in the post-conciliar period. First, that the conciliar hermeneutical Jew demands real engagement with living Rabbinic Judaism – and this process is in its infancy with new and challenging questions for Catholic theology. Second, that even though there is this positive step, the hermeneutical Jew of Catholicism is always seen in terms of a »lack« regarding Jesus Christ and this relates to exploring what this means in terms of Rabbinical Judaism. This will cause friction. One cannot get away from this. Third, that a new Jewish figure appears, the Jewish Catholic, and this intra-ecclesial reality may be a problem for dialogue between Catholics and Jews.

Keywords

Vatican II, Jews, hermeneutical Jew, Jewish Catholics, Jesus Christ

Sumario

¿Es posible que una teología católica del judaísmo posterior al Concilio Vaticano II permita que los judíos ›reales‹ expresen su opinión, o este diálogo está destinado a tratar con un judío hermenéutico preconstruido teológicamente? Este artículo sostiene que el ›judío hermenéutico‹ del Concilio está hecho de osamentas teológicas cristianas y es la condición previa para que se escuchen las voces reales de los judíos rabínicos. El artículo examina tres cuestiones que surgen en el período postconciliar. En primer lugar, que el judaísmo hermenéutico conciliar requiere un compromiso genuino con el judaísmo rabínico vivo. En segundo lugar, que a pesar de este paso positivo, el judaísmo hermenéutico del catolicismo siempre se ve en términos de una ›carencia‹ en relación con Jesucristo, y esto se relaciona con la exploración de lo que esto significa en relación con el judaísmo rabínico. En tercer lugar, que está surgiendo una nueva figura judía, el judío católico, y que esta realidad dentro de la Iglesia puede plantear un problema para el diálogo entre católicos y judíos.

Parabras clave

Vaticano II, judíos, judío hermenéutico, judíos católicos, Jesucristo

Introduction:

Is it possible for a Catholic theology of Judaism after the Second Vatican Council to hear ›real‹ Jews speak, or is this enterprise destined to engage with a theologically pre-constructed Jew?¹ Jeremy Cohen calls this pre-construct, when speaking of pre-Conciliar thought, the ›hermeneutical Jew‹.² While the Council's hermeneutical Jew, developed since 1964-65 (in *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*) is the inverse of Cohen's medieval construct, it is, nevertheless, a hermeneutical Jew. I shall call the Council's construction the ›new‹ hermeneutical Jew in contrast to Cohen's ›old‹ hermeneutical Jew. I shall argue that this new hermeneutical Jew (which is made up of Christian theological bones) is the presupposition that requires the real voices of Rabbinic Jews to be heard. It is a presupposition that is fraught as much as it is necessary. That it is both encapsulates the complicated dynamics of Catholic dialogue with Jews. I will explore some of the problems inherent in the new hermeneutical Jew. I point to fresh difficulties as this new construct emerges in post-conciliar Catholic theology.

Some terminology first. I use ›biblical Jew‹ to denote biblical Israel within the Old Testament/Hebrew bible. I use ›Rabbinic Jew‹ to denote post-biblical Israel and one in which the oral Torah traditions interpret the written Torah. Rabbinic Judaism should be plural for there is internal controversy about the definition of who is a Jew and what Judaism is. I write as a Roman Catholic and will address the question within that limitation. This is not intended unecumenically. I use ›Catholic‹ to denote my voice. I use ›Hebrew Catholic‹ to denote Catholics who are Jews, both ethnically and with varying levels of religious Jewishness. I use ›Israel‹ to denote three items: the current nation state founded in 1948; Rabbinic Jews; Gentile and Jewish Catholics. In each instance the qualifier will indicate the denotation. Finally,

¹ This was the question set to me by Professor Klaus von Storch; and also prompted by reading the provocative book by MARIANNE MOYAERT, *Christian Imaginations of the Religious Other: A History of Religionization*, Hoboken, NJ, 2024. I'm grateful for my conversation with Moyaert about her book and my paper; and to various people at the conference, and a graduate group of students who discussed the paper a few weeks after the conference, and the two anonymous readers.

² JEREMY COHEN, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*, Berkeley-Los Angeles, CA 1999, 2.

Cohen's definition of the old hermeneutic Jew regarding the period from late antiquity until the High Middle Ages is helpful to cite:

»The Christian idea of Jewish identity crystallized around the theological purpose the Jew served in Christendom; Christians perceived the Jews to be who they were supposed to be, not who they actually were, and related to them accordingly. [...] As such, the Jews' nature, their personality, and their historical mission derived directly from essential dictates of Christian doctrine and hermeneutics.«³

The old hermeneutical Jew:

Cohen's hermeneutical Jew was constructed from the following elements: Jews were guilty for the death of Christ, and since Christ was divine, also for the death of God (deicide); they thereby deserved the punishment for this crime; they wished it upon themselves in the blood curse, »let his blood be upon us and our children« (Mt 27.25); the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and the dispersion of the Jewish people was part of this punishment; and the wandering Jew had a purpose within God's plan – to give witness to the truth of Christianity. This tradition generated further elements, which often included non-biblical components such as the tradition of the blood libel – Jews who killed Christian children and used their blood for various rituals.⁴

For much of Catholic history from the fourth century on, the old hermeneutical Jew operated within Catholic theology, liturgy, and in the popular imagination. One might add that this hermeneutical Jew was responsible for generating the patterns that led to racial and religious anti-Semitism – that would feed and mix with the poisonous neo-paganism of Nazi anti-Semitism. For this dark history, the Church has only just begun to repent. Part of that repentance would be to critically examine its more recent theological construction of ›Jews‹ and ›Judaism‹.

Historically, to ensure a balanced record, some Catholics actually listened to Jewish voices/texts and did engage with them. The old hermeneutic Jew did not always stifle real Jew's voices, even if that was the dominant tendency. For example, we know that Aquinas was familiar with the writing of Moses Maimonides, Rabbi Moses, as Aquinas called him. David Burrell has convincingly argued that Aquinas was willing to engage and learn from these Jewish texts.⁵ Aquinas, a key perpetuator of the old hermeneutical Jew, was not entirely guided by that trope and modern scholars are recovering new readings of his work.⁶

The new hermeneutical Jew:

³ Ibid.

⁴ See NORMAN COHN, *Europe's Inner Demons. The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Europe*, London 1975, 1-8; and MIRI RUBIN, *Gentile Tales. The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*, Philadelphia, PA, 2004.

⁵ DAVID B. BURRELL C.S.C., *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*, Reprint edition, Notre Dame, IN 1992.

⁶ Aquinas has been key for recent Catholic attempts to rethink relations to the Jews. See for example: MATTHEW A. TAPIE, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, Eugene 2014; BRUCE D. MARSHALL, *Christ and Israel: An Unsolved Problem in Catholic Theology*, in: GARY A. ANDERSON / JOEL S. KAMINSKY (eds.), *The Call of Abraham: Essays on the Election of Israel in Honor of Jon D. Levenson*, Notre Dame Press 2013, 330-350; and HOLLY TAYLOR COOLMAN, *Law in Translation: Reflecting with Aquinas on the Promulgation of the New Law*, in: MATTHEW TAPIE / ALAN BRILL / MATTHEW LEVERING (eds.), *The Challenge of Catholic-Jewish Theological Dialogue (Judaism and Catholic Theology)*, Washington, D.C. 2025.

More than fifty years after Vatican II we are in a situation where the Catholic Church, at least in terms of the magisterium and its main teaching organs, has questioned the negative hermeneutical Jew. It has begun to replace it with a positive hermeneutical Jew. This has given rise to what has been called the Catholic Church's ›Israel theology‹, or ›theology of the Jewish people‹. Since this is a movement in its infancy, often linked with small numbers of theologians⁷ and a few grass root movements, the picture I will paint is necessarily impressionistic and still in the making.

The document of the Second Vatican Council that became *Nostra Aetate*, 1965, began as a text with a single concern: the charge of deicide against the Jewish people should be clearly rejected by the Catholic Church. One should recall it was a Jewish voice that prompted Pope John XXIII to start this textual process – in the person of Jules Isaac.⁸ Isaac argued that Christian forms of anti-Semitism would be defanged once the deicide charge was dropped. No central doctrine had to be changed. This happened against the backdrop of mainly post-war Protestant exegesis of St Paul's Letter to the Romans, recovering a new view of the Jewish people.⁹ One might note that the old trope of the Jew was questioned in Catholicism, tragically, through the death and suffering of real Jews (the Shoah), a real Jewish voice (Isaac) and real Protestant voices – along with some prophetic Catholic voices, not a few of them Jewish Catholic.¹⁰

The new hermeneutical Jew arose through the Council's teaching that the Jewish people should not in their entirety, in Jesus' time, nor subsequently as a people, be viewed as guilty for the death of Jesus. Once this was established, the flesh and bones of the old hermeneutical Jew began to weaken. If the Jewish people were not guilty for the death of Christ, then the people were not cursed, then the punishments for their guilt were not appropriate, i.e. the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the people. If that was the case, when these layers are peeled away, the promises made to the Jewish people by God were still operative. Jews always knew this. They were not replaced by the ›New Israel‹, the Church. These insights needed time to unravel after the Council. The implications are still unfolding and unsurprisingly, deeply contested.

One reason why this was not so clear at the time was that *Nostra Aetate* was focused on the deicide charge and the biblical materials surrounding it. Another reason was that real Jews were obscured in the documents, for two complex and differing reasons. First, the biblical Jew was the central focus, not the post-biblical Jew. Second, because real Jews were part of the state of Israel and the Holy See was trying hard to stay out of the Middle East conflict. It would have been impossible for *Nostra Aetate* to be published had it been viewed as in any way referring to the Jewish people – in their new state, Israel. If the Catholic church was perceived as siding with Israel in the Israel/Palestine dispute, Middle eastern bishops were concerned about the safety of their communities. Arab governments in the region had warned

⁷ One of the best overviews of unresolved areas related to his new theology is found in EM. POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Grace and Vocation without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise De Iudaeis*, trans. by NICHOLAS J. HEALEY, in: *Communio*, 45 (2018) 163-184. As an example of trail blazing, I would cite *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, ed. by MARIANNE MOYAERT / DIDIER POLLEFEYT (Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs; 40), Leuven 2010.

⁸ See JULES ISAAC, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, New York 1961; and NORMAN C. TOBIAS, *Jewish Conscience of the Church: Jules Isaac and the Second Vatican Council*, Cham ZG 2017.

⁹ John Connelly has rightly shown this Protestant retrieval was a major influence upon the drafters of the Council's statements on the Jewish people. See his: JOHN CONNELLY, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965*, Cambridge, MA, 2012.

¹⁰ Other key Catholic influences at the Council, both Jewish, were Fr Johannes Oesterreicher (key drafter of *Nostra Aetate*) and Fr. Gregory Baum (also involved in the drafting committee). Jacques Maritain another influential thinker, was married to Raïssa, who came from a devout observant Hassidic family.

the Vatican that the security of Christian communities could not be guaranteed if the church made positive remarks about the Jews and the Jewish people.¹¹

Finally, there were other elements in *Nostra Aetate* that contained the seeds to propel the emerging new hermeneutical Jew. First, the condemnation of anti-Semitism was unambiguous. *Nostra Aetate* ends the section on the Jews: »in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons [not siding with the state of Israel; G.D.] but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.«¹² Some critics were alarmed that the Catholic Church had not taken any responsibility for antisemitism or confessed its sins. However, one should note that »anyone« in the text would include any Catholic. To try and specify particular Catholics or the entire Church would have been inappropriate given the aim of the document and the unresolved status of these questions. These issues were partially engaged with after the council.¹³ Hence, in theory, the new hermeneutical Jew, ethnic, racial and religious, was protected against anti-Semitism.

While this was welcome, it hardly solved the problem. Defining anti-Semitism is fraught and there is no formal detailed or accepted definition of the term within Catholic theology or, for that matter, in international politics.¹⁴ Nevertheless, this condemnation of anti-Semitism is an achievement of the Council, that clearly may have traction with real Jews and Jewish communities. During the Israel-Gaza conflict it is interesting to note Jewish criticisms of the pope's apparent failings in this respect. The criticisms presuppose the (alleged) implications of anti-Semitism embraced by the Church.¹⁵ The point here is that a theological construct was required for the engagement with real Jews that subsequently helps the construct develop – and the dialogue. This is a relational process. The Church thus began a process of discovering what it might mean to denounce anti-Semitism in all its forms, without knowing all its forms. That process is still in via.

Second, another element of the new hermeneutical Jew was the deployment of Saint Paul and the recovery of Romans 9-11. If the old hermeneutical Jew was constructed in biblical verses condemning the Jews, the new was similarly constructed in biblical verses affirming their covenant's validity. The two Pauline verses cited in *Lumen Gentium* 16 became a mantra in post-conciliar documents, especially 11:29. *Lumen Gentium* said:

»In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. (Rom. 9:4-5) On

¹¹ See the background in my GAVIN D'COSTA, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims*, Oxford 2014, 113-160.

¹² NA, 4, Vatican website: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_ge.html (accessed: 06.06.2024).

¹³ AVERY DULLES / LEON KLENICKI / EDWARD IDRIS CASSIDY (eds.), *The Holocaust, Never to Be Forgotten: Reflections on the Holy See's Document »We Remember«*, Mahwah, NJ 2001 – which also includes the document text. The Jewish responses in this booklet outline various Jewish questions.

¹⁴ A good overview of the problematics of the definition and its complex history can be found in KENNETH L. MARCUS, *The Definition of Antisemitism*, Oxford 2015. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, »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 Fiftieth Anniversary of »Nostra Aetate«, (No.4), 2015, 47, <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en.html> (accessed: 06.06.2024), is unequivocal about denouncing even the »slightest perceptible forms« of anti-Semitism, but it does not define what it is.

¹⁵ See CHIEF RABBIS GOLDMAN, Lau and Di Segni, all found at: <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/israel-hamas#ges:searchword%3DGaza%26searchphrase%3Dall%26page%3D1> (accessed: 06.12.2024).

account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues. (Rom. 11:28-29).«¹⁶

If God does not repent of the gifts and calls, then the Jews are in an authentic covenant with the living God. This is the major backbone of the new hermeneutical Jew: they are no longer cursed and forsaken, but God's chosen, elect, and beloved. The old trope is inverted using a new set of biblical verses. The new trope must have grounding in revelation. At the Council it was argued that the deployment of revelation (›let his blood be upon us‹) to persecute Jews was a misuse and misunderstanding of revelation.¹⁷ Clearly, the Council could not question scripture – only its earlier misuse or misunderstanding.

Three popes have reiterated this teaching that God does not repent of the gifts or the calls He makes to his people. The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews has elaborated upon this theme. It took until 1980 before the never revoked covenant that was true of biblical Jews – to be applied to Rabbinic Jews – by Pope John Paul II in Mainz, Germany.¹⁸ The new hermeneutical Jew started its engagement with real Rabbinic Jews at this point, for up until then, this view of the Council's teachings had been disputed.¹⁹ The task, generated by the new hermeneutical Jew, was to find out the shape of this covenant and its many fruits in Rabbinical Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism, while deriving from biblical Judaism was as different to biblical Judaism as was the Church – and both were in continuity – and discontinuity.²⁰ The conversation has only just begun.

The new hermeneutical Jew provides a theological bridge that demands a crossing from Catholics. Listening to Jewish voices and how they understand themselves has a theological mandate: it is a listening to how God may be moving and transforming His covenant people. This is a complex act of discernment. It is a unilateral move by Catholics as befits its theological construction; it was and must be generated from scripture and the magisterium. Whether real Jews desire this dialogue or how they understand it and justify it from their own point of view is part of the complex history since Vatican II. It is a history that generates different forms of hermeneutical Christians, not without considerable problems that rarely surface due to Christianity's dominant social and political power. The establishment of the state of Israel upset this long disequilibrium.²¹

The third element of the new hermeneutical Jew also arose from biblical texts to demonstrate that Jesus operated as a Jew with Jews and for Jews.²² This trajectory had two prongs. First, drawing with broad brush strokes, this had the distinct advantage since the Council of

¹⁶ https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed: 30.01.2025).

¹⁷ This is discussed by one of the drafters of *Nostra Aetate*, JOHN M. OESTERREICHER, *The New Encounter: Between Christians and Jews*, New York 1986.

¹⁸ ›The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable‹ (Rom 11:29), 39; see my narration of this history in GAVIN D'COSTA, *Catholic Doctrines on the Jewish People after Vatican II*, Oxford 2019.

¹⁹ RUTH LANGER, *The Impact of Nostra Aetate on Jews*, in: JOHN MERKLE (Hg.), *The Catholic Church and Interfaith Relations: Nostra Aetate and Beyond* – lent to the author; RUTH LANGER, ›Gifts and Calling‹: The Fruits of Coming to Know Living Jews, in: *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 12/1 (2017) 1-10, doi:10.6017/scjr.v12i1.9797.

²⁰ This is made clear in ›The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable‹ (Rom 11:29), 31.

²¹ See KARMA BEN JOHANAN, *Jacob's Younger Brother: Christian-Jewish Relations after Vatican II*, Cambridge, MA 2021, for an overview and the different hermeneutical Christians generated. She shows that when Jewish groups have social power and security, the tropes about Christians can mimic earlier anti-Jewish Christian tropes and indeed learnt from them; and see the two influential positive statements: JEWISH SCHOLARS, *Dabru Emet Text* – ICJS, 2021 <https://icjs.org/dabru-emet-text/> (accessed: 06.12.2024) Orthodox Rabbinic Statement on Christianity. To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership Between Jews and Christians (Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations, 2015) <https://www.cjcuc.com/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity/> (accessed: 30.01.2025).

²² Biblical scholarship contests many of these claims, but that is not my concern at this juncture.

lessening the positive/negative dichotomies of grace/law, new/old, Christian/Jewish. It placed Jesus and the apostles and St Paul in a firmly Jewish setting, rather than their breaking free and creating a new religion. Second, and sometimes in tension with reproachment with the Jewish people, it has also resituated early Christianity as a Jewish messianic sect that perilously and necessarily undertook the ingrafting of the gentiles. This new body was made up of the ›church of the circumcision‹ and the ›church of the gentiles‹, a community of Jews and gentiles following the Jewish messiah. Recall, *Nostra Aetate* had begun its paragraph on the Jewish people with a line that indicated the Church's own identity was at stake with this new attention to the Jewish people: ›As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.‹ This inevitable inward gaze, not necessarily narcissism, means that the relationship with the Jewish people is *sui generis*. One cannot read from the Jewish-Christian paradigm to Christian-Muslim relations without considerable care and deft analogical sensitivities.²³

The first prong helped in conversation with the Jews. The second prong created an internal conversation within the Church – and does not presently help in conversation with Jews. Hebrew Catholics, attending to the second prong, asked whether their Jewishness had to be suppressed and hidden, as was the main tradition prior to the Council. This Jewish ecclesia began to emerge slowly after the Council, although it had been inchoately present prior to the Council. After the Council, there was a recovery of not only the ancient Jewish ecclesia, the church of the circumcision, but an emerging sense that the nature of the Church itself requires a church of gentiles *and* a church of the circumcision. While the latter is primarily an intra-Catholic issue, it is not so clear cut. The church of the circumcision is both an embarrassment in valorising apostate Jews in the eyes of many Rabbinical Jews; and a special blessing in the eyes of gentile Catholics, returning a predominantly gentile Christianity to its biblical Jewish roots.

To conclude this section. One might say that the new hermeneutical Jew provided the presupposition and warrant to seriously listen to and engage with Rabbinical Jews. This task is genuinely in progress and cannot be easily reversed given the biblical and magisterial authority in generating the construct. We have hardly begun to see the fruits of this process. It will be a constant moving back and forth from the new hermeneutical Jew to real Rabbinical Judaism. Understanding Jewish voices as they define themselves will be a demanding and difficult task (whose voice; the authority of that voice upon Catholic theology?), as will be the task of the Church's finding a voice to engage Judaism after its own appalling history of persecution and negative theologies.²⁴

One might also note at the very moment of this fragile break through, the new hermeneutical Jew might also generate the possible eclipsing of the Rabbinical Jew. On one reading, St Paul's view in Romans is that ›all Israel‹ will come to faith in Jesus once the ›gentiles have wholly come in‹ (Rom. 11:25). There is a purpose to Israel's partial ›hardening in part‹. While it has been right to draw on Romans for the new Israel theology, one cannot take Paul selectively. Paul's positive affirmation that the Jewish people have God's gifts and callings that are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29) is built on this mystery of Israel's ›hardening‹, and their final coming in (Rom. 11:25-27). To put it in my terminology, and to put it anachronistically: for Paul, the best biblical Jew, the fulfilled Jew, is a Yeshua confessing Jew, what today is a

²³ I have reservations about viewing Islam as if it were similar to Judaism viz. it being a Christian ›other‹, for Judaism is not entirely an/other.

²⁴ Here some deeply sensitive proposals perhaps go too far, as is the case with PAUL J. GRIFFITHS, *Israel: A Christian Grammar*, Minneapolis, MN 2023, who imposes a silence upon Catholics speaking about Jews because of their appalling denigration of the Jewish people... A graceful gesture perhaps, but finally unhelpful.

Hebrew Catholic.²⁵ Is Rabbinic Judaism a temporary identity, always defined by ›lack‹, that must inevitably be dissolved according to its telos, into Hebrew Catholics (at best)?

This is a tension that may not be resolvable. To be free of this tension, strangely risks falling into undermining the very advances the Council has made. Or to put it differently, the positive view of the Jewish covenant that underlies the new Catholic theology of the Jewish people is built on foundations that both questions the final telos of Rabbinical Judaism in its own terms, as well as the Catholic Church's own previous ecclesiology. This is still being worked out. My argument will be that we need not resolve these tensions, nor can we disown them, but rather we can try to safe-guard the two elements that constitute them: a new appreciation and open conversation with Rabbinic Judaism knowing that these are God's chosen and beloved people; and a new appreciation of the Hebrew Catholic dimensions of the church which provide a challenge to Jewish-Catholic dialogues, because of its inherent view of the telos of Rabbinic Judaism. It is a perilous and difficult tension to accept, but more perilous perhaps to deny. I will now look at each three aspects of this tension: the importance of real Jewish voices; the question of the telos of Rabbinical Judaism according to Catholics; and the importance of Hebrew Catholics.

The importance of real Jewish voices:

I will briefly register the recognition and importance of the voice of real Rabbinical Jews since the Council as this is a genuine theological break through. It is based on the recognition that Rabbinical Judaism is part of an irrevocable covenant with God. The important signal comes from the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ) in 1974:

»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 the light of their own religious experience.«²⁶

Looking back at this 1974 statement in 2015, the CRRJ reiterate it:

»The crucial and new concern of this [1974; G.D.] document consists in becoming acquainted with Judaism as it defines itself, giving expression to the high esteem in which Christianity holds Judaism and stressing the great significance for the Catholic Church of dialogue with the Jews.«²⁷

This concern with listening to Jewish voices finds itself embedded in the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) operating since 1970; and the institutional conversation with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel (since 2012). It is also evident in the release of the 2015 document published on the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *The Gifts*, when two Jewish voices, Rabbi David Rosen and Dr Ed Kessler, made comments on the document at the official press conference for the release. It is, as far as I know, the first time that a Vatican document has been released with two Jewish voices invited to comment on it. Rosen rightly mentioned the

²⁵ At this early stage, it is difficult to speak of ›Christian‹ or ›Hebrew Catholic‹. See for example, DANIEL BOYARIN, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia, PA, 2004; *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by ADAM H. BECKER / ANNETTE YOSHIKO REED, Minneapolis, MN, 2007.

²⁶ See: <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crrj/documenti-della-commissione/en3.html>, Preamble.

²⁷ »The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable« (Rom 11:29), 4.

lack of comment on the status of the state of Israel; and Kessler on whether ›fulfilment‹ is always in danger of regressing into replacement or supersessionism; pertinently pointing to this issue of ›lack‹ that is at the heart of the matter.²⁸

One important theological point should be stressed. Catholics need to listen to Jewish voices, not just out of guilt for previously denigrating Jewish voices, although it should not forget this history of disrespect; not just out of courtesy, although it should always be a courteous listening; and not just in a paternalistic manner as if it was the wise old man listening to an infant. It should listen because God has not abandoned his people or the gifts he has given to them. It means that in the practice of Torah, in the reading and enactment of scripture, God is to be found in all his brightness, awe, and majesty.

If I may, I will illustrate the importance of Jewish voices for changing and challenging my own Catholic theology of the Jewish people. When Rabbi David Rosen made his comment in 2015 that the ›Gifts‹ failed to address the land question, it made me turn to biblical and rabbinical traditions about the land and its many expressions in modern Rabbinical Judaism. I could not own the Rabbinical traditions myself, but they made me, a gentile Catholic, return to the biblical promises in the Old Testament. It made me realise that if the gifts and promises made to God's people are irrevocable, this must relate to the land and people, but not necessarily the ›state‹. This eventually generated my own ›Catholic minimalist Zionism‹.²⁹ This is a position which is speculatively reached through deployment of Catholic authoritative sources: the bible and the magisterium (very little tradition!). My thinking has drawn upon and echoes several contemporary Rabbinic Jewish thinkers on this question and has led me into a troubled solidarity with Israel, the nation state, the latter not intrinsically related to the biblical promise but only contingently related. While there are many serious differences within Rabbinical Judaism on this matter, including anti- and non-Zionist voices, these outcomes show the inevitably selectivity of solidarity with some voices as well as the openness required to other voices. I hope this is not to make Jews instrumental to a narcissistic gaze. Rather, I hope it is part of what genuine dialogue and learning might look like. Some Jewish voices have helped me learn something of the ways of God which I had never considered before. As a Catholic theologian I strive to raise this question in Catholic circles.³⁰

What stems from this minimalist Catholic Zionism in terms of political action and social doctrine is far from clear. How this positions my Catholic view in terms of Jewish secular and religious anti-Zionists is also unclear. Have these anti-Zionist Jews failed to accept one of the gifts (the land), or have they better understood the nature of ›gift‹, thus calling both Jewish Zionists and my type of Catholic minimalist Zionism into question? And what of secular anti-Zionists who criticise religious Zionisms and openly challenge the very notion of ›gift‹? From a Catholic viewpoint, should the secular Jewish voice be given equal value to the religious anti-Zionist voice? It seems that while all voices are important in this conversation, the type of argumentation by secular voices who do not accept any biblical authority in this question, raise the complex issue that while they are of course Jews, are their objections to be considered seriously when their authority sources (for example, Marx or Derrida) are not necessarily shared by Catholics (or indeed many religious Jews)? Later Rabbinic arguments from texts that do not have a direct authority on Catholics is a more complicated matter. There

²⁸ See ROSEN and KESSLER's pieces: both documents at: <https://www.ccjr.us/news/newsflash/na-statements#ges:searchword%3DEdward%2BKessler%2B%26searchphrase%3Dall%26page%3D1>, (accessed: 06.12.2024).

²⁹ See D'COSTA, Catholic Doctrines on the Jewish People after Vatican II, 64-143.

³⁰ See the different perspectives in: Contemporary Catholic Approaches to the People, Land, and State of Israel, ed. by GAVIN D'COSTA / FAYDRA SHAPIRO, Washington 2021; and the volume: GAVIN D'COSTA / ETIENNE VETO / THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE (eds.), Catholics and Jews on the State of Israel, Washington 2024.

is a good argument that the oral Torah requires a careful listening to and reflection on, as these voices are often explicating the written Torah – which is authoritative for Christians. It is improper to simply dismiss Rabbinical texts and arguments. However, regarding secular Jews, one might argue that Marx was implicitly explicating the biblical texts (as some liberation theologians and some Catholics involved in conversation with Marxists argue).³¹ It may well be the case that an indirect explication by a let us say a Judith Butler, may have a deeper insight into some aspect of the scripture than direct explication by either a Catholic or Jew. I am thinking here of the theme of justice in Butler's work on Zionism.³²

This type of Israel theology is in its infancy and it opens to many fruitful vistas of listening and learning from Rabbinical Jews on all sorts of matters: messianic expectations; Jewish eschatology; the oneness of God; the ways to read and practice the Torah; the importance of blessings and prayer; suffering; the land; anti-Semitism; and so on. It is also difficult to predict in advance how these conversations will enrich and call into question the new hermeneutical Jew. One thing for sure, which did not exist so clearly before the Council: Catholics can listen to Rabbinical Jewish voices with a certain confidence that God's love, intimacy, and calling are deeply embedded within these traditions. Hence, Catholics may be confronted with the voice of God mediated through Rabbinic Judaism – and they should rejoice, while no doubt being deeply unsettled and challenged in many unpredictable ways. They may be deeply critical of what seems contrary to what God's love looks like to the Church, but even then, they have the history of anti-Semitism to remind them of history's vicissitudes and the constant need for self-criticism and vigilance.

The stifling of real Jewish voices? Rabbinical Judaisms as ›lack‹?

Catholicism is ›trapped‹, freely and liberatingly, within its own metaphysical and historical commitments. These are threefold in terms of the present question. I now move from biblical texts to dogmatic teachings derived from biblical texts.³³ First, Catholicism's central claim is that Jesus Christ is both the Jewish messiah and the second person of the trinity. The uniqueness and unicity of Christ is irrevocable.³⁴ Second, that God has willed the salvation of all people through Jesus Christ and his Church.³⁵ Third, and this is now part of the furniture since Vatican II, God is faithful to the irrevocable covenant he has made with the Jewish people as found in Rabbinic Judaism. A subset of the third is that Catholicism has also come to understand that on historical and theological grounds, and in good faith, Rabbinic Jews disagree with the first two commitments – and, one might add, are generally relieved at the third (if they happen to know modern Catholic theology). They may also be rightly puzzled at how the third coexists with the first two. They are not alone in this puzzlement.

³¹ See JOSÉ PORFIRIO MIRANDA, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, trans. by JOHN EAGLESON, London 1977; and NICHOLAS LASH, *A Matter of Hope: A Theologian's Reflections on the Thought of Karl Marx*, London 1981.

³² A possible example would be JUDITH BUTLER, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, New York 2012.

³³ See my GAVIN D'COSTA, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims*, Oxford 2014, 59-112. My reading of these teachings is contested by other Catholics. Compare Sarah Coakley's engaging with biblical teachings not doctrinal truths and Matthew Levering dealing with both: SARAH COAKLEY, *The Broken Body*, Hoboken, NJ, 2024; MATTHEW LEVERING, *Engaging the Doctrine of Israel*, Eugene, OR 2021.

³⁴ *Dominus Iesus* (2000),

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html (accessed: 06.12.024); and ANGELO AMATO, *The Document »Dominus Iesus« and the Other Religions*, Osservatore Romano 2008.

³⁵ D'COSTA, *Vatican II*, 59-112; and *Dominus Iesus*, 4, and »The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable« (Rom 11:29), 43.

A second subset of the third point is, as noted, that Paul's eschatological hope is that the Jewish people will eventually come to embrace Christ. Obviously, for Paul, Rabbinic Judaism is a non-object for he is writing during the time of biblical Judaism, but by the Church's identification of Rabbinic Judaism with biblical Judaism (which has brought about such positive relations), the hope for this Christological endgame has inevitably been projected upon Rabbinic Judaism.

Whether Rabbinic Jews require mission (institutional or personal), witness, or whether this final scenario is entirely brought about by God's intervention and no actions are required by the church and its members, is irrelevant to the main point of my discussion. I am not here concerned with the means (which is not to minimise the impact of this question), but the question of the teleological end. The question is this: is this ›lack‹ in the Rabbinical Jew, akin to the old hermeneutic Jew trope, that also posited a ›lack‹ - this same one, and of course many others? Of course there is a fundamental difference: in the new hermeneutic Jew, this lack sits alongside a new and deep respect and solidarity and a clear acknowledgement that God is actively covenanted with these people. Can these two claims co-exist? If no, then the new Catholic theology of the Jewish people is unlikely to flourish; if yes, then it might flourish, but at the cost of offending the very people it seeks to engage with.

I want to deploy two arguments, one drawing on Catholic dogmatics (and thus aimed especially at Catholic readers); and the other drawing on Jewish sources (and thus aimed at Jewish readers). Both these arguments seek to show that the tension between these two can co-exist and must co-exist if the Catholic position is to be faithful to revelation and its self-understanding and understanding of the Jewish people.

Catholic dogmatic sources. The argument below might be summarised in a question-and-answer form. Question: what is the end of all human persons for their fulfilment? Answer: To know the triune God through faith, hope and charity. The first two Catholic commitments outlined above, entail a ›lack‹ in every religion and way of life that is not Catholic. It also entails a lack subjectively in every Catholic who lacks faith, hope and charity. This is purely a formal point: it is a ›lack‹ of knowing Christ explicitly and the aids to salvation that he brings through the sacraments and the nature of the church, the body of Christ. It does not necessarily entail that the person, or their religion, contains evil, wilful error, or bad faith, nor does it exclude a genuine relationship with God. To repeat, this lack may be also be subjectively present in a Catholic who has erred seriously or lacks charity; and objectively, in the Church's own grasp of the fullness of truth that it has been given. The latter objective lack is fulfilled in the eschaton as is true of Rabbinic Judaism, but it is not a lack in the objective sense here and now in so much as the Church is the body of Christ. *Lumen Gentium* 15 indicates a ›lack‹ (of a different order) even of other Christians who are distinguished between Sister Churches and ecclesial communities. They ›lack‹ the visible sign of unity of Christ's church: the Pope. This is not a Christological lack. This does not mean the Catholic church cannot learn from them, and has not acted wrongly towards them, or that holiness is always more abundant in Catholics. *Lumen Gentium* 16 asserts a ›lack‹ viz. those religions that do not profess Christ. That is true of the religion that is closest to Christianity, Judaism, as the first three lines of *Lumen Gentium* 16 indicate:

»Finally, those who have *not yet* received the Gospel are *related* in various ways to the people of God. (See THOMAS AQUINAS, STh III, q. 8, a. 3, ad. 1; G.D.) In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. (Rom. 9. 4-5) On account of their fathers

this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.« (Romans 11:28-29)³⁶

The opening line reminds us that the constitution frames the relation in terms of an orientation or ›relation‹ (ordinantur) towards the gospel, which has not yet been heard.³⁷ *Lumen Gentium* 16 also ends with the necessity of preaching the gospel to all peoples. It is within this framework that the section on the Jewish people appears. These are the dogmatic parameters within which *Nosta Aetate* operate. The point is made bluntly in *Dominus Iesus* (2000) when it says:

»If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.«³⁸

Admittedly, the next sentence of *Dominus Iesus* shows the reverse side of this claim means it might not be soteriologically safe being a Catholic! It says:

»all the children of the Church should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in thought, word, and deed to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be more severely judged.«³⁹

Is this an unspeakable arrogance found in Catholicism, or is it the logic of a religion making truth claims? I think it is the latter. This is not to deny Catholic arrogance past and present, but not in the making of this claim *per se*.

To show that this is the logic of realist religions, I briefly listen to some Jewish voices to suggest the plausibility of my claim, both about Catholicism – but also about Orthodox Judaism. Both have a similar inbuilt logic for theological realists. Of course, when one religion has social and political power over the other, then this ›lack‹ can also be socially and politically abusive, although this is not a matter of logical or theological necessity. *Dignitatis Humane* at Vatican II helps restore a social and political equality of freedom of practices for different religions within the Catholic social imaginary.⁴⁰ While this is secure perhaps at a theoretical level, the level of practice is a different matter.

Jewish sources: I briefly draw on four Jewish thinkers, three contemporary and one medieval, to argue that the Catholic ›lack‹ claim is inevitable and need not contradict the new positive hermeneutical Jew. Consider David Novak's argument that any religion, and here he is speaking about Christianity, must be at the least, soft supersessionist. It is hard supersessionism that is the problem. Hard supersessionism is equivalent to holding punitive, economic, and structural forms of supersessionism, using Kendall Soulen's terms.⁴¹ Soft supersessionism is Christianity upholding the continuing validity of Israel's covenant while still arguing that Judaism is ›best‹ perfected and properly ›fulfilled‹ in Jesus Christ. Novak is drawing on Alasdair MacIntyre's discussion of how the Thomist tradition superseded the Augustinian. In Novak's words, echoing MacIntyre, »Christianity solves the problems of

³⁶ https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html; my italics added.

³⁷ It establishes the context of invincible ignorance, or in the case of the Jewish people, the hardening of heart that God has willed (whatever that means).

³⁸ *Dominus Iesus*, 22.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See F. Russell Hittinger, The Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, in: MATTHEW L. LAMB / MATTHEW LEVERING (eds.), Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition, Oxford 2008, 359-383; NICHOLAS J. HEALY JNR, *Dignitatis Humanae*, in: MATTHEW L. LAMB / MATTHEW LEVERING (eds.), The Reception of Vatican II, Oxford 2017, 367-392.

⁴¹ R. KENDALL SOULEN, *Der Gott Israels und die christliche Theologie*, Minneapolis, MN 1996.

Judaism better than Judaism can do without Christianity because Christianity provides the savior to whom Judaism has always looked». ⁴² I think this point needs slight revising as the Judaism being described in Novak's quote is properly attributed to biblical Judaism, and in a different way attributable to Rabbinical Judaism – that has a further oral tradition, the destruction of the temple, and a different liturgy and messianism that is often more eschatological. Rabbinical Judaism is not biblical Judaism *per se* any more than Christianity is biblical Judaism *per se*. In effect, the ›better‹ has a more dynamic relational sense rather than a clear teleological line of development. More of this below.

Novak further argues that if this traditional Christian claim is dropped, then there are no reasons for Christians to be Christians, or for Jewish converts like Edith Stein to convert. Novak also notes there is an asymmetry between the religions. Jews do not claim Judaism is better than Christianity; nor that everyone should become Jewish. ⁴³ However, from the standpoint of a Maimonides, it is quite possible to argue that since Christianity is idolatry and polytheism, it is an inferior religion. Maimonides understandably thought this. Christianity, he argued, should nevertheless be permitted and even welcomed as it carries testament to the truth of the Hebrew bible. When the false doctrines in Christianity fall away, as they will at the end times, then Christians will join Jews, shoulder to shoulder, worshipping the true God. ⁴⁴ Novak stops short of recognising supersessionism in Judaism, while charitably recognising an acceptable form of soft supersessionism in Christianity that could not be itself without it.

Jon Levenson joins Maimonides and takes the extra step. Like Novak he acknowledges that orthodox Christianity can do no other than remain soft supersessionist. He, also like Novak, believes Christian fulfilment can be held without denigrating Judaism or negating God's activity within Judaism. However, unlike Novak, Levenson makes a strong case that Judaism is hard supersessionist regarding all forms of idolatry and paganism that exist. When this supersessionism entails violence, there are serious problems with it. When it entails a belief that Judaism is true compared to something that is less true or only has an element of truth in it or is downright false, he argues that this claim is permissible and necessary. Otherwise, no religion would make truth claims at all and relativism would rule. ⁴⁵ Amy Jill Levine, another Jewish author, agrees with Levenson. ⁴⁶ Levine helpfully then explores the different types of dynamics that operate within supersessionism, rather than denying it. ⁴⁷

Conclusion: ›lack‹ is not necessarily evil, dark and disrespectful. It is part of the logic of truth claims that are made when religions meet. It isn't imposing pre-conceived descriptions upon another, regardless of their self-description. It obviously accepts that the self-description does not accept this ›lack‹. In the Catholic case, I want to suggest that the new hermeneutical Jew is open to challenge and questioning, but without it the basis of positive engagement is impossible. The new hermeneutical Jew provides traction whereby self-description can help Catholics understand whether and how ›lack‹ may be understood. It also shows how rich and

⁴² DAVID NOVAK, *Talking with Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian*, Michigan-Cambridge, 2005, 164; see also DAVID NOVAK, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification*, New York 1992, 16f.

⁴³ Novak's discussion takes place in the context of discussing the Jewish convert to Catholicism, Saint Edith Stein.

⁴⁴ See Novak's rendering of Maimonides in NOVAK, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 57-73.

⁴⁵ JON D. LEVENSON, *Can Catholicism Validate Jewish Biblical Interpretation?*, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 1/1 (2011) 170-185; and JON D. LEVENSON, *How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, *Commentary Magazine*, 1. Dezember 2001 <https://www.commentary.org/articles/jon-levenson-2/how-not-to-conduct-jewish-christian-dialogue/> (accessed: 30.01.2025). Levenson is relentlessly clear that both religions have a supersessionist logic that is intrinsic to any truth claim when it meets an incompatible alternative claim.

⁴⁶ AMY-JILL LEVINE, *Supersessionism: Admit and Address Rather than Debate or Deny*, *Religions*, 13/2 (2022).

⁴⁷ Perrier makes an argument against supersessionism and post-supersessionism in EMMANUEL PERRIER, *The Election of Israel Today: Supersessionism, Post-Supersessionism, and Fulfilment*, *Nova et Vetera*, 7/2 (2009) 485-504.

inexhaustible are the gifts and callings to Rabbinical Judaism. It shows that goodness and holiness in Rabbinical Judaism may be understood and celebrated. It will also help reveal a ›lack‹ within Catholics, for they too must fully receive the gift of Christ and his Church. However, since ›lack‹ echoes the old hermeneutical Jewish trope, one may understand why it sounds so sinister and menacing to many. Catholics should not be complacent about this dark shadow. I have tried to show that this logic may be present in Rabbinic Judaism to indicate that it is part of any realist religious world view.⁴⁸ I have used the term ›lack‹ not as a provocation, but to bring clearly into the dialogue what is at stake for Catholics.

Further ›Jewish‹ voices? The Hebrew Catholic and the church of the circumcision:

There is one last issue that I need to address and have already signalled this is part of the complex heritage of the positive hermeneutical Jew in Catholicism – the emergence of another Jewish voice in the contemporary discussion: the voice of Hebrew Catholics. I have acknowledged the inherent tension between the first two points (1/ faith in Christ and 2/ the Church as the means of salvation) and the third (3/ that the covenant with Israel is irrevocable). Traditionally, the third was impossible since the first two required the abandonment of any Jewish identity were one to become Catholic; or if one remained Jewish, one lived under the curse of being a deicide people (even with some ›positive‹ features). Currently, Hebrew Catholics, who wish to retain their ethnic and religious identity, represent an important voice: at the same time ›Jewish‹ and Catholic; and in one sense, a voice that goes to the heart of Catholic identity. Please note, I do not say Rabbinic Jewish and Catholic, but Jewish and Catholic, for once a Jew becomes a Catholic, they are apostate Rabbinic Jews. In this sense, Hebrew Catholics are apostates.

Hebrew Catholics do not normally claim to be the teleological fulfilment of Rabbinic Judaism, but the teleological fulfilment of biblical Judaism when its messiah has come. They do however, in varying degrees, have a respect for Rabbinic Jewish traditions.⁴⁹ Hebrew Catholics are threatening to many Jews, as from a Rabbinic point of view, they are not only apostates, but painfully deplete the numbers of Jews from the ›Jewish people‹. Hebrew Catholics do not see themselves in this manner. Whose self-description holds the trump card here: how Rabbinic Jews view Hebrew Catholics or how Hebrew Catholics view Hebrew Catholics or how Gentile Catholics (like myself) view Hebrew Catholics? This is a vexed question. Since I am exploring the importance of engaging with real voices, the Hebrew Catholic voice has been stifled and muted, but cannot remain so.⁵⁰

I think that Rabbinic Jews will have little interest in this internal Catholic discussion, but if anything, will understandably have a suspicion that it is a new phase of Catholic mission: ›you can remain Jewish and be Catholic‹ compared to the old ›you cannot be Jewish and Catholic‹.

⁴⁸ As an aside: In the Jewish case, I'd posit that had Maimonides read Chalcedon and Aquinas on incarnation, he may have rethought whether the incarnation was idolatry, *avodah zarah*. Maimonides was too intellectually curious to allow types to suffocate history and voices.

⁴⁹ See EMMA O'DONNELL POLYAKOV, Jewish-Christian Identities in Conflict: The Cases of Fr. Daniel Rufeisen and Fr. Elias Friedman, in: *Religions*, 12/12 (2021) 1101, doi:10.3390/rel12121101. Friedman does not take the Rabbinic tradition seriously and his position is close to traditional supersessionism, in contrast to Rufeisen who acknowledges the importance of the continuing covenant in Rabbinic Judaism while at the same time seeing Hebrew Catholicism as its fulfilment. See also ELIAS FRIEDMAN, *Jewish Identity*, Ypsilanti, MI 1987; NECHAMA TEC, *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen*, Oxford 1990.

⁵⁰ See ANGELA COSTLEY / GAVIN D'COSTA (Hg.), *Hebrew Catholics*, San Francisco 2025.

I tentatively turn to another Jewish voice, Michael Wyschogrod, who at least argues for the logic of the coherence of Hebrew Catholics,⁵¹ while not supporting them or denying their apostasy – but recognising what is at stake. Wyschogrod argued that were a Jew, compelled by their conscience to follow Jesus, in the days of the old hermeneutical Jew, they would have become gentilized. Their Jewish identity was eradicated. However, in the light of the Second Vatican Council, looking at the Council of Jerusalem (*Acts* 15), Wyschogrod rightly asks, through the lens of the new hermeneutical Jew, this apostate Jew, a tough question:

»are you not, from a Christian point of view, obligated to lead a Torah observant life because, as they say, you are a Jew? Are you not obligated to obey the dietary laws, the sabbath, the Jewish festivals, etc.?

It is clear that such a decision could cause problems both for the Church and for Jews. But that cannot be the decisive issue. If you, in your conscience, become convinced that because you are a Jew you are obligated to lead a life in accordance with the Torah, then you must do so, no matter what the consequences.

Were there to be a number of Torah observant Jews (possibly even a Jewish Cardinal) in the Roman Catholic Church, who lead lives in accordance with the demands of the Torah without incurring the Church's displeasure, a profound clarification of the Church's attitude to the Hebrew bible and its Jewish roots will have taken place.«⁵²

Wyschogrod's insightful point is that the promises and callings made to biblical Israel continue in the church of the circumcision, whereas gentile followers have different demands made upon them – even while both live under the grace of Christ. If Catholics preserve the church of the circumcision, they honour God's promises to his people, Israel, by preserving the Jewish ecclesia alongside the church of the gentiles – in the one body of Christ. This is demanded of the Church. But the Jewish ecclesia, Hebrew Catholics, also provides a space for Rabbinical Judaism. This is because Hebrew Catholics represent biblical Judaism's fulfilment; and Rabbinical Judaism contests that it, through the oral tradition, is the fulfilment and continuity of biblical Judaism. They are genuinely different traditions and the meaning of ›lack‹ and ›fulfilment‹ can now be addressed freshly in conversation with Rabbinic Judaism. Does it, in its own terms, seek fulfilment and sense a lack? Do these have any clear relation to the ›fulfilment‹ that Christians believe Christ represents? Rabbinical Jews remain different and other, and envisaging their following Jesus Christ demands fresh thinking, as they are no longer biblical Jews *per se*.

David Novak complexifies the problematic as he argues against Wyschogrod that sincerity and following conscience cannot legitimate this Jewish choice to follow Christ. It is a non-choice. The only response from a Jew should be to try and bring back the Jewish Christian to the Jewish fold. However, Novak's choice of words betrays the important distinction I am making between biblical Hebrew Catholics and Rabbinic Jews. Novak ends his piece with this challenge: »Wyschogrod is suggesting the totally unhistoric possibility of Jewish Christians returning to become in effect another Jewish sect and Jews regarding them similarly.«⁵³ Leave aside that this was not Wyschogrod's argument at all. Leave aside this is not an unhistoric possibility as it was the reality of the early church. Wyschogrod's focus was purely the point that ironically Novak insists on: Jews must practice the Torah; while Novak is imagining this insistence to be part of his critique. Novak ends: »But I pray – and with great frequency – that God will enable all of his people Israel to fully return to the ways of the

⁵¹ MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD, Letter to a Friend, in: *Modern Theology*, 11/2 (1995) 165-171. He calls them ›Jewish Christians‹.

⁵² WYSCHOGROD, Letter, 171; he is speaking of Cardinal Lustiger (see JEAN-MARIE LUSTIGER, *The Promise*, trans. by REBECCA HOWELL BALINSKI et al, Grand Rapids, MI 2007).

⁵³ DAVID NOVAK, Response to Michael Wyschogrod, in: *Modern Theology*, 11/2 (1995) 119-218, 217.

Torah.«⁵⁴ This is why Wyschogrod poses the question to his friend: even if you become Catholic, if you are a Jew, you cannot abandon Torah practice.

This leaves us with at least two unanswered questions. How does the Catholic Church envisage Hebrew Catholics, the church of the circumcision? I think that one of the clearest and most challenging articulations of this is to be found in Antoine Levy's, *Jewish Church*.⁵⁵ There are clues to this articulation emerging as the Catholic church is slowly attending to this question. The other question is what is the relationship of Rabbinic Judaism to the church of the circumcision and the church of the gentile, one church of Christ? That obviously is something that requires answering by Rabbinic Jews - and that process has also begun.⁵⁶ It is important to note that in *The Gifts*, 2015, the Catholic church articulated this new dialogue so to speak. *The Gifts* ends the section on evangelization by saying:

»43. It is and remains a qualitative definition of the Church of the New Covenant that it consists of Jews and Gentiles, even if the quantitative proportions of Jewish and Gentile Christians may initially give a different impression. Just as after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ there were not two unrelated covenants, so too the people of the covenant of Israel are not disconnected from ›the people of God drawn from the Gentiles‹. Rather, the enduring role of the covenant people of Israel in God's plan of salvation is *to relate dynamically* to the ›people of God of Jews and Gentiles, united in Christ‹, he whom the Church confesses as the universal mediator of creation and salvation. In the context of God's universal will of salvation, all people who have not yet received the gospel are *aligned* with the people of God of the New Covenant. ›In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom 9:4-5). On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for he does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues (cf. Rom. 11:28-29)‹ (*Lumen gentium* 16) [my italics; G.D.].«⁵⁷

The narrative I have offered in this paper makes most sense of this otherwise eccentric passage. Why should the qualitative definition of the Church be discussed in the section called: ›The Church's mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism? It is to show what Wyschogrod himself saw ten years before *The Gifts* – that the Church must take its own Jewish nature seriously. If it did, there would take place ›a profound clarification of the Church's attitude to the Hebrew bible and its Jewish roots‹. It is a profound clarification in need of multiple further clarifications, but the clarification has started.

In *The Gifts* passage just cited, note the term to ›relate dynamically‹ is different from ›aligned‹ found in *Lumen Gentium* 16 which is cited in the document *The Gifts*. The Vatican's own English website has the translation ›related‹ not ›aligned‹ for the Latin ›ordinantur‹, so it is not clear from where the English translation of *Lumen Gentium* 16 derives in *The Gifts*, 43. But the change of terminology to ›relate dynamically‹ is surely the beginning of a recognition that Rabbinic Judaism's telos is not quite as clear as biblical Judaism's telos - which is in Catholic eyes, clearly, Jesus Christ. There is something more dynamic in the process, precisely because Rabbinic Judaism isn't biblical Judaism *per se* but has its own dynamic way of receiving its gifts and calls. Of course, the Church is committed to say that the end of all human longing and desire is Jesus Christ, but that is a metaphysical claim that has to be worked out through real engagements with real communities.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ ANTOINE LEVY, *Jüdische Kirche. Ein katholischer Ansatz zum messianischen Judentum*, Lanham, MD 2021.

⁵⁶ See the two major statements noted above.

⁵⁷ »The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable« (Rom 11:29), 43.

Conclusions:

I have argued that the new hermeneutical Jew does not lock Catholic theology into its hermeneutical construction, but rather opens Catholics to engage with real contemporary Rabbinical Judaisms in an open, critical, respectful, and possibly reverential manner. The old hermeneutical Jew was less interested in the reality of Jews, as it had narrated the Jews without remainder. Catholics today know Rabbinical Judaisms are in a valid covenant with the true and living God, the Father, that they themselves worship. That is the narrative, but it is genuinely open-ended: how this is so, and how can we discern it, is the task of theology – in active engagement with Rabbinical Judaisms.

I have also argued that the new hermeneutical Jew comes with the risk of eclipsing real Jews for it necessarily operates within a theology of ›lack‹: those who do not know Jesus Christ, always lack, and knowing him would be the fulfilment of their telos. This does not preclude those who lack being in rich and diverse positive relations with God. It also operates within a theology that affirms Hebrew Catholics as part of the Church's identity. The importance of the church of the circumcision is in tension with the importance of the new engagement with the Jews, for it seems to valorise apostate Jews and represents a threat to the integrity of the population of the Jewish people. From a Hebrew Catholic viewpoint, it does not do the latter and clearly, as Jews, they do not accept they are apostate.

Hence, while welcoming the new hermeneutical Jew as opening up a fresh chapter of dialogue and engagement with Rabbinical Judaisms, it has fraught aspects and difficult challenges to address. But I have argued, the Catholic church can do no other.