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RES OPPORTUNAE NOSTRAE AETATIS

STUDIES ON THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL OFFERED TO MATHIJS LAMBERIGTS

EDITED BY

DRIES BOSSCHAERT – JOHAN LEEMANS

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THE RECEPTION OF *NOSTRA AETATE* 4 IN JEWISH-CATHOLIC RELATIONS

I. The Unrevoked Covenant: A New Teaching Figure (*Lehrgestalt*) of the Catholic Church

It has been the hope of a generation of post-Vatican II theologians that *Nostra aetate* (1965) would be or become a definitive and unambiguous turning point in the teachings of the Church *vis-à-vis* the Jewish people. It introduced indeed a shift from "supersessionism" to mutual understanding, from a desire to convert the Jews through mission to genuine dialogue, from the teaching of contempt to the recognition of the intrinsic value of Judaism[1]. This turn in Jewish-Christian dialogue was later synthesized prominently by Pope John Paul II in his famous formula used in a speech to the Jewish community of West Germany at Mainz, on November 17, 1980, referring to "…the people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked"[2]. This formula ("the never revoked Covenant") was included in the Catechism of the Catholic Church of 1983 (no. 123). It became in this way a theological consensus, a new "teaching figure" (*Lehrgestalt*) embedded in the teachings of the Church and was the climax of a very positive dynamism in the concrete Jewish-Christian dialogue of the post-Vatican II era. In this chapter, I will argue, however, how in the course of the last decennia this consensus risks to be questioned and even "revoked" again, due to the constant complexities, ambiguities, and language games that are at play in the developing

1. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed February 17, 2019). Further referred as *NA*.

2. John Paul II, *Begegnung von Papst Johannes Paulus II: Mit Vertretern der Jüdischen Gemeinde* (https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/de/speeches/1980/november/documents/hf_jp_ii_spe_19801117_ebrei-magonza.html) (accessed February 13, 2019): "Die erste Dimension dieses Dialogs, nämlich die Begegnung zwischen *dem Gottesvolk des von Gott nie gekündigten Alten Bundes* und dem des Neuen Bundes, ist zugleich ein Dialog innerhalb unserer Kirche, gleichsam zwischen dem ersten und zweiten Teil ihrer Bibel" (our italics).

discourse since Vatican II in this theological area. My conclusion will be that, until today, the Catholic Church does not have a clear and consistent theology of Judaism at its disposal that can at the same time confess the unique and universal meaning of Christ as well as the intrinsic value of Judaism as an "unrevoked Covenant". On the contrary, even though the Catholic Church officially stated in 2015 that it "neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews", in Jewish (and Catholic) circles today, concerns are once again being raised *vis-à-vis* such missionary tendencies of the Church – in theory, if not in practice. How this became possible is the topic of my analysis in this contribution.

II. *Nostra aetate*: Beyond Substitution Theology?

There is a general acceptance today that *Nostra aetate* (1965) inaugurated a new period in the history of Jewish-Christian relations[3]. It marks the end of Christian supersessionism, a theological approach that saw the Church as a substitute for the people of the Old Covenant, leaving them behind without meaning, without reason for existing and without any hope for salvation. Nevertheless, a close reading of *Nostra aetate* immediately reveals that the text continues to refer implicitly to this much-maligned "theology of substitution". The text speaks about the salvation of the Church as "mysteriously *foreshadowed* by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage", about a Jerusalem that "*did not recognize* the time of her visitation" and about the Church as "the *new* people of God". God holds the Jews most dear, but, the text adds, "*for the sake of their Fathers*" (our italics)[4]. In this way, the supersessionist categories of "shadow" and "reality", of "old" and "new", of "blind belief" and "authentic belief", of "extrinsic value" and "intrinsic value" are not overcome completely. On the contrary, the ambivalence and even the contradiction between "recognition of the other" and (Christian) "superiority over the other" are still present in the conciliar text.

Of course, historically, *Nostra aetate* was a big step forward. It was the first, integral, positive statement of the Catholic Church *vis-à-vis*

3. D. Pollefeyt, *Jews and Christians: Rivals or Partners for the Kingdom of God: In Search of an Alternative for the Theology of Substitution* (LTPM, 21), Leuven, Peeters, 1997.

4. All quotes from *NA* 4.

Judaism, after centuries of fostering contempt. On this last point, the text is very clear: "Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures". On the contrary, the sacred synod "wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect". The short text of *Nostra aetate* 4 was the outcome of a very long, complex process, a consensus text acquired with many difficulties, as the authoritative historical research of Lamberigts and Declerck has shown convincingly[5]. The Church itself took this text very seriously as a new starting point "after Auschwitz" and created on October 22, 1974, a *Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews* with the purpose of implementing the conciliar declaration *Nostra aetate*[6].

III. No Parallel Ways of Salvation

After ten years, the commission published an important and well-known text with *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985)[7]. This text deals with the interpretation of Vatican II in regards to Judaism, and reveals especially how the conciliar document *cannot* be interpreted. More specifically, the text rejects the solution of the so-called two different paths to salvation: a Jewish path without Christ and a Christian path with Christ. In line with the Vatican declaration *Dignitatis humanae*, the *Notes* say:

> Jesus affirms that "there shall be one flock and one shepherd". Church and Judaism cannot then be seen as two parallel ways of salvation, and the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all, "while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council" (*DH* 7)[8].

Vatican II opted for inclusivism as the theological paradigm to deal with other religions. It accepts that religions can "reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people". Of course, this "Truth" refers to

5. M. Lamberigts – L. Declerck, *Vatican II on the Jews: A Historical Survey*, in M. Moyaert – D. Pollefeyt (eds.), *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA, Peeters; Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2010, 13-56.

6. See: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_pro_20051996_chrstuni_pro_en.html (accessed February 18, 2019). Further referred as *Notes*.

7. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820306_jews-judaism_en.html (accessed February 17, 2019).

8. *Notes*, no. 7.

Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14,6)[9]. He is the full revelation of divine truth. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (Mt 11,27), as *Dominus Iesus* 5 reminds us[10]. It is (relatively) easy to argue that in other religions, the Logos of Christ is (hiddenly) at work, but this inclusivistic solution is more difficult to apply to Judaism since it *explicitly* rejects the divinity of Christ. In other religions, one can argue, Christ can save people without their explicit knowledge, but in the case of Judaism, Jews would then be saved by Christ *against* their own will and their own explicit beliefs. That is why – for some – Judaism is such a stumbling block in the theology of non-Christian religions because its continuing existence risks to endanger the foundations of Christian faith since – as Christians believe – the mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ is unique, universal and all-inclusive (thus also including Jews). At the time of *Notes*, in 1985, the statement of John Paul II on the "never revoked covenant" (1980) was already made, recognizing the intrinsic and remaining validity of the Old Covenant.

IV. From Substitution to Fulfillment and Back

In 1999, Cardinal Ratzinger – later, Pope Benedict XVI – wrote a book to deal with the subject: *Many Religions – One Covenant*[11]. He is well aware of the central theological question related to *Nostra aetate* 4. He puts it openly and positively on the table: "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?". Ratzinger's answer to these questions is – in the line of *Nostra aetate* – of course: "No!" Positively, his answer to the question of the theology of Jewish-Christian relations today reads like this: "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"[12]. This concept of

9. *NA* 2.

10. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html, no. 5 (accessed February 17, 2019).

11. J. Ratzinger, *Many Religions – One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World*, San Francisco, CA, Ignatius Press, 1999.

12. *Ibid*., pp. 18-19 (our italics).

fulfillment best summarizes Ratzinger's and the Church's official position *vis-à-vis* Judaism today.

A deeper analysis of the concept of fulfillment as used by Benedict XVI shows that this approach is not without ambivalence in light of the quest to recognize the "never revoked Jewish covenant". On the one hand, Cardinal Ratzinger stresses that all nations become brothers and receivers of the promises given to the Chosen People and "not one iota of it [the Old Testament] is being lost". On the contrary, the new perspective in Jesus does not imply "the abolishment of the special mission of Israel". On the other hand, the emphasis on the newness of Jesus implies that the Sinai covenant "within God's providential rule … is a stage that has its own allotted period of time"[13]. The Sinai covenant thus seems to have only a conditional and as such temporary significance. How is this compatible with the idea of the "never revoked covenant"? In my analysis, the problem with the concept of fulfillment is that it logically cannot prevent the reduction of thinking to a theology of substitution and replacement – moreover, that thought ultimately implies substitution theology.

This "slippery slope" is clear in Ratzinger's *Many Religions – One Covenant*, where at several places the language of fulfillment theology shifts silently into that of substitution theology. He writes: "God, according to the Prophet, will *replace* the broken Sinai covenant with a New Covenant that cannot be broken. … The *conditional* covenant … is *replaced* by the unconditional covenant in which God binds himself irrevocably"[14]. Nowhere does Ratzinger explicitly distinguish "fulfillment" from "replacement". On the contrary, "fulfillment" implies "replacement".

> Thus the Sinai covenant is indeed *superseded*. But once what was provisional in it has been *swept away*, we see what is truly definitive in it. So the expectation of the New Covenant, which becomes clearer and clearer as the history of Israel unfolds, does not conflict with the Sinai covenant; rather, it *fulfills* the dynamic expectation found in that very covenant[15].

This position creates many theological questions. What role and significance is here remaining for the first covenant in God's salvific plan? Are the Jewish people saved through Christ or in and through their own "never revoked covenant"? And more concretely, do the Jews have to convert to Christ to enter into God's final Kingdom? Is the mission to

13. *Ibid*., p. 68.
14. *Ibid*., pp. 63-64.
15. *Ibid*., pp. 70-71.

the Jews not then an unavoidable consequence of this position? Ratzinger accepts that this theology ends up in a paradoxical conclusion. "Separation" and "reconciliation" between Jews and Christians are intertwined in a "virtually insolvable paradox"[16].

V. Two Catholic Theologies of Judaism?

A critical example of this ambiguous situation is the outcome of the controversy around the Intercessory Prayers of the Good Friday Service in the Catholic Church, commonly referred to as the Good Friday Prayer[17]. Here we see the real consequences of this paradoxical situation. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI formally rehabilitated the old Tridentine rite through a *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* on the use of the Roman liturgy before the reform of 1970[18]. This *motu proprio* concerns the rite that was introduced in the liturgy by Pope Pius V as standard in 1570. In 1970, as a consequence of the liturgical renewal in line with Vatican II, the Tridentine rite was replaced by a new liturgical missal. The old missal, however, has never been abolished and was/is still used by a small number of conservative Catholics, even after the Second Vatican Council.

As a consequence of this papal decision, the Tridentine rite was considered again officially as an extraordinary form of the Latin rite, whereas the 1970 Roman missal remained the ordinary form. In particular, it was feared that the revaluation of the old missal would lead to a reintroduction of the traditional (and violent) Good Friday Prayer: "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"[19]. The expression "perfidious Jews" was already removed from the old missal in 1962. In the new post-Vatican II missal, the prayer was replaced by a completely new one. This new prayer respects the alterity of the Jewish people as such: "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

16. *Ibid*., p. 40.

17. D. Pollefeyt – M. Moyaert, *Israel and the Church: Fulfillment beyond Supersessionism?*, in M. Moyaert – D. Pollefeyt (eds.), *Never Revoked*: "*Nostra Aetate*" *as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (LTPM, 40), Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA, Peeters; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge, Eerdmans, 2010, 159-183.

18. https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20070707_summorum-pontificum.html (accessed February 19, 2019).

19. *Roman Missal*, 1920, typical edition, pp. 221-222.

his name and in faithfulness to his covenant" (1970)[20]. Instead of replacing the old Good Friday Prayer of 1962 from the old rehabilitated missal with the Good Friday Prayer of 1970, Pope Benedict XVI decided to write a completely new prayer to be used in the old liturgy: "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"[21]. Here, we see the shift from the "never revoked covenant" logic (as in the prayer of 1970) to again a supersessionist logic in the prayer of 2008 (now included in the official rehabilitated missal). It shows that the Catholic Church continues to wrestle with the tension between fulfillment and replacement. The call to conversion in the 2008 prayer implicitly means that the election of the Jews as the Chosen People, as well as their own particular mission, no longer holds significance after the coming of Christ. Fulfillment and replacement remain closely tied. We can conclude that today the Catholic Church maintains two different theologies of Jewish-Christian relations, within the very heart of its life: one in the ordinary form of the liturgy, and one in the extraordinary form of the liturgy, each with different theological presuppositions.

VI. How Irrevocable Is the Jewish Covenant?

In 2015, 30 years after the *Notes*, at the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra aetate*, the Vatican published *The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable (Rom. 11:29)*[22]. *Gifts* is the most extensive theological statement released by the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. In its *Preface*, the statement is very explicit on the central theological question: "the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant, the relationship between the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ and the affirmation that the covenant of God *with Israel has never been revoked*, and the Church's mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism" (our italics). The document reaffirms the inclusivistic theological paradigm: salvation happens "through an explicit or even implicit faith in Christ" (no. 17). At the same time, it rejects in relation to Judaism a "replacement or supersession theology which sets against one another

20. E. Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 182.

21. *Ibid.*

22. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed March 7, 2019).

two separate entities, a Church of the Gentiles and the rejected Synagogue whose place it takes, … deprived of its foundations" (no. 17).

For this reason, this new Church statement rejects *both* the solution of the two parallel ways of salvation (pro-"inclusivism") *and* "any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews" (no. 40) (pro-"never revoked"). The approach of Ratzinger in his book of 1999 is introduced in the text: "The New Covenant for Christians is therefore neither the annulment nor the replacement, but the *fulfillment* of the promises of the Old Covenant" (no. 32). The concept of fulfillment allows the placement of Jesus in continuity with the Old Covenant. At the same time, however, it is in this process of fulfillment that the Old Testament is – in the words of Ratzinger – "renewed"[23] by Jesus, "transformed"[24], and "brought to its deepest meaning"[25].

Gifts warns against over-interpretations of *Nostra aetate* that happen "not infrequently" and which project into the text that "which it does not, in fact, contain" (no. 39). It then gives "an important example of over-interpretation": "…that the covenant that God made with his people Israel perdures and is never invalidated. Although this statement is true, it cannot be explicitly read into *Nostra aetate*" (no. 39). In this way, it is as if *Gifts* wants to disconnect or at least soften the relation between the conciliar text and the statement made by Saint Pope John Paul II in 1980. At the same time, however, the expression "never revoked covenant" is used twelve times in the document. This is an example of the grey zones and word plays at work in these theological reflections. Is the "never revoked covenant" now a true interpretation key for reading *Nostra aetate* 4? Is it "implicitly" present therein, or is it an over-interpretation? Moreover, when it comes to Israel, *Gifts* constantly equivocates, alternating between recognition and substitution. This is especially clear in no. 25. It starts with the idea that the Scriptures are "open therefore to both ways". But it ends with the idea that God's word is "one single and undivided reality":

> A response to God's word of salvation that accords with one or the other tradition can thus open up access to God, even if it is left up to his counsel of salvation to determine in what way he may intend to save mankind in each instance. That his will for salvation is universally directed is testified by the Scriptures (cf. e.g. Gen 12:1-3; Is 2:2-5; 1 Tim 2:4). *Therefore* there are not two paths to salvation according to the expression "Jews hold to the Torah, Christians hold to Christ". Christian faith proclaims that Christ's

23. *Ibid*., p. 62.
24. *Ibid*., p. 39.
25. *Ibid*., p. 32.

> work of salvation is universal and involves all mankind. God's word is one single and undivided reality which takes concrete form in each respective historical context[26].

It is not clear how the "*Therefore*" functions in this chain of argumentation from "open to both ways" and "God's will to universal salvation", to a rejection of the "two paths" and returning in the end to the "universal salvation through Christ" (thus also for Jews). Even if one would accept that such selection of biblical passages (in the text between brackets) can be used in this argumentation as a "proof", the choice of these particular pericopes is not so convincing. Isa 2,2-5 speaks of God's "ways" and "paths" in plural, and 1 Tim 2,4 only speaks about the desire for "all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth". In no. 31, *Gifts* further relates such biblical issues to the well-known document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2001) on the Jewish and the Christian reading of the Bible: "Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible"[27]. In this way, from the perspective of the New Testament, the Jewish and Christian faiths are two "irreducible" ways by which the people of God can make the Sacred Scripture their own. How the Jewish and Christian realities can be at the same time "irreducible" and "undivided" is not made clear.

Gifts also admits that not all theological questions that arise between Christianity and Judaism are resolved. As is often the case in this discourse, *Gifts* ultimately chooses an eschatological approach to Jewish-Christian relations. In the words of Cardinal Kasper: "The Church places the when and how entirely in God's hands"[28]. The consequence of this solution is a form of epistemological and ecclesiological modesty: the Church gives up its role to be the sole instrument of salvation. Finally, it is not the Church but rather God who brings salvation to all people and it is He – not us – who knows how this will all play out. In the following central quote from *Gifts*, all contradictions are collected and silenced before the divine mystery:

> From the Christian confession that there can be only one path to salvation, however, it does not in any way follow that the Jews are excluded from

26. *Gifts*, no. 25 (our italics).

27. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html, no. 22 (accessed February 19, 2019).

28. W. KASPER, *Il Cardinale Kasper e la missione verso gli ebrei: Rispondi alle critiche del Venerdi Santo per gli ebrei*, in *Osservatore Romano*, April 10, 2008.

> God's salvation because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. … Saint Paul … asserts: "For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). That the Jews are participants in God's salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery (no. 36).

VII. A Good Covenant and a Better Covenant

In his critical analysis, the Jewish scholar Adam Gregerman also acknowledges the complex and ambiguous character of *Gifts*[29]. He concludes that despite rejecting supersessionism and affirming the continuing value of the Old Covenant, *Gifts* nonetheless argues for the superiority of the New Covenant and the benefits of Jewish conversion into it. In his words:

> The authors of *Gifts* both present the old, Jewish covenant as a *good* covenant (rejecting traditional Christian supersessionism) and nonetheless view Jews' conversion to the *new*, *better* Christian covenant as desirable. It is the comparative status of the two covenants – one good (old and Jewish), one better (new and Christian) – that furnishes a motivation to have Jews hear and hopefully belief in the gospel. This motivation does not contradict or undermine the affirmation that Jews are already in a salvific, legitimate, and "irrevocable" covenant … The authors [of *Gifts*] admit that, even without belief in Jesus, Jews are not "excluded from God's salvation". But while Jews can be saved as Jews (they have a good covenant), there should be an effort to bring them into a better covenant, defined in quite specific terms as "incorporation into [Christ's] Body which is the Church"[30].

The conclusion that Gregerman draws from the statement of 2015 is critical: even if it is the case that Jews are saved by their own Old Covenant, the Catholic Church nonetheless argues for the superiority of the New Covenant, making it "not undesirable" that Jews – indeed, all humanity – submit to it[31]. In this way, the mission of the Jews is again on the table, even if *Gifts* simultaneously rejects that idea, at least "institutionally" (no. 40).

29. A. Gregerman, *The Desirability of Jewish Conversion to Christianity in Contemporary Catholic Thought*, in *Horizons* 45 (2018) 1-38.
30. *Ibid*., p. 2.
31. *Ibid*., p. 4.

VIII. Trying to Revoke the Consensus

A new step in the complex and controversial interpretation history of *Nostra aetate* 4 was made with the publication of an academic article in 2018 in the international Catholic journal, *Communio*, by "Joseph Ratzinger – Benedikt XVI" under the title *Gnade und Berufung ohne Reue: Anmerkungen zum Traktat 'De Iudaeis'*[32]. The text has a *Preface* by Cardinal Koch, who has been the president of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews since 2010, in which he stresses that initially the article was not intended for publication, but that he had encouraged its publication. Later, after critique, Koch would further frame the text: "it is not a magisterial act, but [the] personal theological opinion [of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI], which is why the essay has been published in a theological journal"[33]. The essay is concerned only "with an intra-Christian understanding that will promote Christian-Jewish dialogue" and for sure does not promote the idea "that Christians must or should try to convert Jews"[34].

The center of Benedict's analysis is a "critical consideration" and "final judgement"[35] of the concept of the "never revoked covenant". Benedict stresses that the formula itself did not belong to *Nostra aetate* but was a later development. He agrees that this formula of the covenant as "never revoked" "is, in a certain sense, part of the current teaching figure (*Lehrgestalt*) of the Catholic Church". But he argues further: "The core of what is said here should [be] regarded as correct, but some details need to be clarified and deepened"[36]. Here is the core of his critical analysis of the "never revoked covenant":

> We first raised two linguistic objections. The word "revoke" does not belong to the vocabulary of divine action. As used to describe the story of God's history with mankind, "covenant" in the Bible is not singular, but occurs in stages. Now, beyond these formal objections, we must say critically in terms of content that this formula does not bring to the fore the real drama of the story between God and man. Yes, God's love is indestructible. But the covenant history between God and man also includes human failure,

32. *Communio* 47 (2018) 387-406. We use for this article the English version: *Grace and Vocation without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise 'De Iudaeis'*, in *Communio* 45 (2018) 163-184.

33. https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/koch-2018aug14 (accessed February 19, 2019).

34. *Koch Defends Benedict's Communio Article*, in *The Tablet* 16 August 2018: https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/9582/koch-defends-benedict-s-communio-article (accessed February 24, 2019).

35. *Grace and Vocation* (n. 32), p. 183.

36. *Ibid*.

> the breaking of the covenant and its internal consequences: the destruction of the temple, the scattering of Israel, and the call to repentance, which restores man's capacity for the covenant … It is not the end of his love, but a new level of love[37].

The article ends with the final conclusion of Benedict XVI on this issue:

> The formula of the "never-revoked covenant" may have been helpful in a first phase of the new dialogue between Jews and Christians. But it is not suited in the long run to express in an adequate way the magnitude of reality[38].

In other words, the theologian Ratzinger wants to get rid of the "never revoked" formula, to remove it on the long term from the *Lehrgestalt* of the Catholic Church. Of course, this would also immediately solve the problem of the paradox of Judaism and Christianity as both "irreducible" and "undividable", forsaking the former, and consequently producing a new substitution theology in opposition to *Nostra aetate*.

The arguments with which Ratzinger tries to eliminate in the long term the concept of "never revoked covenant" are twofold. "Revoke" is not a category of God. The love of God is indestructible. From the perspective of God, it makes no sense to speak about a "never revoked covenant" since God never "revokes" covenants. Covenants come to an end, but the love of God never does. From the other side, human beings do break covenants from time to time. This infidelity applies especially to Israel, but according to his statements, it does apparently not apply to the Church. The covenant in Christ is final. At this point and for this reason, Ratzinger enters again in the grey zone between "fulfillment" and "replacement".

> In fact, there is no substitution, but a journey that ultimately becomes one reality, yet with the necessary disappearance of the animal sacrifices, *in whose place* ("substitution") is the Eucharist … The reinterpretation of the Sinai covenant in the new covenant in the blood of Jesus, that is, in his love *overcoming* death, gives the covenant a *new* and *eternally valid* form[39].

In his article in defense of Ratzinger, the German theologian Tück emphasizes that this contribution "does not claim an authoritative magisterial status", but rather "is as strong as the arguments he puts

37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 171 (our italics).

forth"[40]. How strong then is Ratzinger's argument? In fact, his stress on the capability of humans of breaking covenants is one-sidedly applied to the covenant with the Jewish people, so to relativize, to weaken and to undermine the power of the first covenant; not mentioning that time and again the Jewish people also re-established that covenant in a living and loyal relationship to God. At the same time, Ratzinger fails to utter a single word about the ruptures created by Christians, the people of the second covenant. He fails especially to mention the suffering that Christianity has wrought upon the Jews. This is no mere detail – not the least due to the fact that the history of anti-Judaism and the memory of the Holocaust were the very reasons for reconceptualising a non-substitutive conception of Jewish-Christian relations in *Nostra aetate*. It is as if the Jewish covenant has become broken and unstable, while only the Christian covenant has remained unshakable and definitive. In light of the moral crisis the Church is going through today, it is strange to see such a theological scheme of "old" (sinful) and "new" (eternally valid) covenant using *historical and ethical* arguments (such as the destruction of the Temple and the scattering of the Jewish people) to underpin supersessionism. Moreover, even from an abstract perspective, is the idea that one cannot apply the formula "never revoked" to God a good reason to take it away from church teaching in the long run? This argument is not logical. If God Himself never breaks a covenant, then there is no problem to speak of a "never revoked covenant". Even more, it makes the idea stronger, not weaker. The argumentation of Ratzinger could serve, not to put aside the concept, but to strengthen it. In the future, an alternative for the formula "never revoked covenant" with Judaism could be "the indestructible covenant" with Judaism since "the love of God is indestructible" (Ratzinger). If the love of God for Israel is not only "never revoked", but also "irrevocable", then the original statement of John Paul II has value not only for a certain time, but it contains a definitive truth.

IX. The Indestructibale Covenant

It remains remarkable that Benedict XVI wrote this article and that Cardinal Koch, as president of the Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews, promoted its publication, since it is an open criticism

40. J.-H. Tück, *Benedikt XVI – eind Wegbereiter des Antisemitismus?*, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 1 August 2018: https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/benedikt-xvi-ein-wegbereiter-des-antisemitismus-ld.1407681 (accessed February 24, 2019).

of his predecessor, Saint John Paul II. The article of nineteen pages is signed with "Joseph Ratzinger – Benedikt XVI" (translated in the English version as "Benedict XVI, Pope Emeritus"). This shows what is at stake for the Pope Emeritus: the formula shows the disruptive potential he sees in the statement of John Paul II, and the article reveals the urgency with which he attempts to cast it aside. And this in full knowledge of the established consensus which was confirmed again by his successor, Pope Francis, who also speaks of the "never revoked covenant" in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of 2013 (*EG* 247). Cardinal Koch argued in defense of the publication of the Ratzinger-text that it is "not a document from the Jewish-Christian dialogue". The text gave rise to massive criticism and indignation – not only from the Jewish side but also from Catholics[41], even on the official website of the German bishop's conference[42].

41. J. Roberts, *Benedict under Fire for Intervention in Dialogue with Jews*, in *The Tablet*, 19 July 2018: https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/9431/benedict-under-fire-for-intervention-in-dialogue-with-jews (accessed February 24, 2019); D. Krochmalnik – T. Söding, *The Controversial Ratzinger Essay*, in *Deutschlandfunk*, 22 August 2018: https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/reactionary-views-or-important-text (accessed February 24, 2019); M. Böhnke, *Der gekündigte Konsens*, in *Herder Korrespondenz* 9 (2018) 50-51: https://www.herder-korrespondenz.de/heftarchiv/72-jahrgang-2018/heft-9-2018/zum-artikel-des-emeritierten-papstes-ueber-das-verhaeltnis-von-juden-und-christen-der-gekuendigte-konsens (accessed February 24, 2019); P. Goldschmidt, *Without Regrets: Commemorating the 9th of Av*, World Jewish Congress, 20 July 2018: http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/without-regrets-commemorating-the-9th-of-av-7-5-2018 (accessed February 24, 2019); W. Homolka, *Wird sind kein unerlöstes Volk!*, in *Die Zeit* no. 30, 19 July 2018, p. 50; M. Le Priol, *Benedict XVI's Article on Jews Stir Debate*, in *La Croix International*, October 11, 2018: https://international.la-croix.com/news/benedict-xvis-article-on-jews-stirs-debate/8603 (accessed February 24, 2019); J. Massonnet, *Benoît XVI* Les dons et l'appel sans repentir: https://www.ajcf.fr/IMG/pdf/j-massonnet-benoitxvi.pdf (accessed February 24, 2019); *The Pope and the Rabbi: Correspondence between Pope Emeritus XVI and Arie Folger, the Chief Rabbi of Vienna*: http://www.jcrelations.net/The_Pope_and_the_Rabbi.6166.0.html?id=720&L=3&searchText=the+pope+and+the+rabbi&searchFilter=%2A (accessed February 24, 2019); C. Rutishauser, *No Way Around Christ*, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 7 July 2018, 2018, p. 43; Deutscher Koordinierungsrat der Gesellschaften für Christlich-Jüdische zusammenarbeit, *Is the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue in Danger?*, 17 July 2018: https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/dkr-2018july17 (accessed February 24, 2019); C. Geyer, *Flawed Writing. Two Popes on Judaism*, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 18 July 2018: https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/geyer-2018 (accessed February 24, 2019).

42. M. Hickson, *German Bishop's Website Sharply Criticizes Pope Benedict for New Essay on the Jews*, in *Life Site*, 14 augustus 2018: https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/german-bishops-website-sharply-criticizes-pope-benedict-for-new-essay-on-th (accessed February 24, 2019).

Perhaps one can relativize this article as a text which has indeed no magisterial authority. But my conclusion is that it speaks to something else entirely, something more important. The text did not fall from heaven but is consistent with a certain line of interpretation of *Nostra aetate*. In fact, with this text, Benedict XVI implicitly wants to give a theological underpinning to his alternative version of the Good Friday Prayer. All this reveals that 55 years after *Nostra aetate*, Catholic theology on Judaism is still not coherent, and is even ambiguous. In this way it is left wide open and vulnerable for interpretations that do not overcome supersessionism and ultimately cannot take seriously the intrinsic value of the "never revoked covenant", instead leaving the mission to the Jews as the only remaining logical option, despite its institutional rejection.

X. Jesus as the Living Torah of God

How to proceed from here? For the future of Catholic theology, *Nostra aetate* remains a fact. It marks a turning point, as well as an invitation and an obligation to seek out new ways of attending to the theological paradox of the indestructible Jewish covenant and the universal meaning of Christ. Simply undermining the meaning of the Jewish covenant, even to save the universality of Christ, is clearly against the spirit of Vatican II and has no future "in the long run". In my view, there is in *Gifts* a central passage that holds the promise of progress:

> Christians affirm that Jesus Christ can be considered as "the living Torah of God". Torah and Christ are the Word of God, his revelation for us human beings as testimony of his boundless love. For Christians, the pre-existence of Christ as the Word and Son of the Father is a fundamental doctrine, and according to rabbinical tradition the Torah and the name of the Messiah exist already before creation (cf. Genesis Rabbah 1,1). Further, according to Jewish understanding, God himself interprets the Torah in the Eschaton, while in Christian understanding everything is recapitulated in Christ in the end (cf. Eph 1:10; Col 1:20). … Torah and Christ are the locus of the presence of God in the world as this presence is experienced in the respective worship communities (no. 26).

In this Logos-centred approach, a deep and intimate connection is experienced and recognized "from the beginning" between Torah and Christ, both as participating in and as expressions of the eternal Logos[43].

43. See also our contribution: P.A. Cunningham – D. Pollefeyt, *The Triune One, the Incarnate Logos and Israel's Covenantal Life*, in P. Cunningham – J. Sievers – M.C. Boys – H.H. Henrix – J. Svartvik (eds.), *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People*

Jews have received from God the unique possibility to encounter the Logos through the Torah. This possibility is not given (in the same way) to the Christians. Christians have received the unique possibility to encounter the Logos through Christ, incarnating the Logos in a unique and irrevocable way. This experience is difficult to understand and experience (in the same way) from the Jewish perspective. It is God Himself who will bring together the final eschatological interpretations of Jews and Christians. From this hope, it is impossible that what has started as a deep and intimate bond *in* God will not be reconciled *by* God when all interpretations and all things come together. In the meantime, what remains for Christians is to recognise and express the lasting, indestructible dignity of Judaism. In *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis writes that the Church has a "special regard" for the Jewish people, "because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for 'the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11:29)" (*EG* 247). He says that "Dialogue and friendship with the children of Israel are part of the life of Jesus' disciples" (*EG* 248).

KU Leuven
Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
St.-Michielsstraat 4/3101
BE-3000 Leuven
Belgium
didier.pollefeyt@kuleuven.be

Didier POLLEFEYT

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