Not Just Any Child, but That Special Child.

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We have heard the detailed historically oriented presentation of the path of the Catholic Church from the Fourth Lateran Council up to the declaration of *Nostra aetate*. We have been informed of the biblical concept of the pilgrimage of the nations. I would now like to add some dogmatic annotations on how the path continued, and how the Catholic Church sees its relationship with Israel, its relationship to Judaism today. Due to the lack of time I shall sketch all this in short strokes, but shall try to give special attention to four essential points:

1. How did the path go on after Vatican II?

2. What problems do we see in this path?

3. Here I will refer to an excellent text of the teaching after Vatican II.

4. Finally, we will apply our observations to a present day issue in the Church.

1. How Has The Path Gone On After Vatican II?

Nostra Aetate has been praised a lot, but it has also been criticized a lot. In the perspective of 2015, especially the text on Judaism seems all too reluctant, cautious and relativizing, since it puts Judaism into a phenomenology of religions which describe a kind of family relationship in the teachings on God. This relationship extends from the furthest religions of Hinduism and Buddhism to the more closely related monotheistic Muslims and up to Judaism with the common spiritual heritage. Neither the religions themselves nor the positioning of Judaism have certainly been described appropriately. Nevertheless, all observers, especially at the time of the Council and in the immediately following time, have acknowledged the outstanding significance of *Nostra aetate* as a genuine turning point and as a real progress in the teaching of the Church.

It is a document that, as Pope Benedict XVI said in one of his last speeches as Pope, "grew quite unexpectedly" next to the larger texts and against enormous resistance of the Council[1]. However critically one may see this, one must recall how great the resistance was and how explicit the reactions were, especially those of the Jewish observers. In an exhibition of Vatican II that is being shown here at Campo Santo Teutonico at this time (November 2015), one can see a copy of the telegram that Nahum Goldmann, then president of the Jewish World Congress, had sent to Cardinal Augustin Bea. In this telegram Nahum Goldmann spoke of a "significant moral victory of the overwhelming majority of the Council Fathers."[2]

It was especially Johannes Oesterreicher, one of the most important collaborators on the staff of Cardinal Bea, repeatedly stressed that the declaration on Judaism was not watered down into a decree on non-Christian religions. Rather, so his argumentation, the discussion on the relation of the Church t with Judaism was given a more comprehensive character, so that the new spirit of encounter could spread beyond Judaism onto all non-Christians. The declaration thus underlines the singularity of Israel that exists for the sake of universality—practically as an unplanned side effect of the heavy resistance against a declaration on Judaism. Israel's singularity exists for the sake of its universality. "In this manner," so Oesterreicher, "the Jew-declaration" has taken on a dimension that goes far beyond the originally measured out significance. It proved its fertility by becoming the core around which the old and new insights and statements could accumulate".[3] The statements on Judaism now constitute, as Oesterreicher says in a somewhat poetic manner, "the sun of the entire document."[4] or, in the words of Cardinal Bea: "From the seed—the short statement on the right attitude of Christians toward the Jewish people—has grown a tree in which many birds are nesting."[5]

Fifty years later we can state that both theological research as well as the teaching of the Church have recognized the significance of this text. So *Nostra aetate* has been taken up and continued in various ways. What we know today about the insights of the Catholic Church into the relationship with the Jews cannot be found directly in the text of *Nostra aetate*, but without this declaration the further developments would not have been possible.

The examples I will discuss in the following are: The Catechism of the Catholic Church of 1992, the document of the Pontifical Bible Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" (1993) and the text of that same commission, "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible" (2001). What is remarkable in these texts is the progress concerning the view on the Old Testament and Judaism after Jesus. While in the theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Judaism in the time of Jesus was still spoken of as "Late Judaism," as though after that nothing else came to pass, we find in these documents the Rabbinic exegesis as such and the interpretation of the scriptures of the Middle Ages and Modern Times acknowledged for the first time.

We must also mention, besides some other statements, the speeches of the Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI on the occasion of their visits to the synagogues of Rome and Cologne, as well as in their visits to the former concentration camp of Auschwitz. This constant theological in-depth work was accompanied by concrete references and help, so, for example, by the guidelines and references for the Implementation of the Council's Declaration of *Nostra aetate* No. 4,[6] and the document of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" of 1985.

In addition, two observations seem important to me:

a) It is exactly these two texts that show that the problem after Vatican II no longer lies in the teachings of the Catholic Church, but in the lack of reception or rather in a more or less open resistance to the insights and the teachings of *Nostra aetate*. Even at such an anniversary you should not be deluded that among theologians, bishops, and priests anti-Jewish clichés have survived and are still widespread even to the present day.

b) You must not think that *Nostra aetate* has been easy for the Church, as if it had suddenly come to new insights after thorough thinking. This is why again and again, and justly so, it is pointed at the fact that it was only the Shoah which opened the eyes of the Church. I would like to name five persons who are connected with *Nostra aetate* and the development since then in a special way (even though more could be named): Pope John XXIII, Jules Isaac, Cardinal Augustin Bea, Johannes Oesterreicher, and Cardinal Jean Marie Lustiger. John XXIII had personal experiences with the fate of the Jews when from 1935 to 1944 he was the Apostolic Delegate in Turkey. "His

heart had been prepared for a new way of turning towards the Jews", as Cardinal Koch said in a lecture in June 2015. Augustin Bea was qualified through his research. Three of these five persons came from Judaism, Isaac and the converts Oesterreicher and Lustiger. Jules Isaac gave John XXIII a decisive impulse for the declaration on Judaism in an audience in 1960. John Oesterreicher became the most important person on the staff of Cardinal Bea. Jean Marie Lustiger became a great promoter of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. We should not forget that Jules Isaac's wife and his daughter were murdered in the Shoah. Lustiger's mother was also killed in Auschwitz. Whenever we think thankfully of *Nostra aetate* today, we must not forget this magnanimity, which was not to be expected and not deserved, that helped the Church decisively to find its way.[7]

2. What Problems Have Become Visible to Us on This Path?

In just a few words, in a second part I would like to call your attention to a danger that has become evident in the Church after *Nostra aetate*. Not every one was conscious of the genesis of *Nostra aetate*. That is: It was not clear to every one that in the center of the declaration on the non-Christian religions stands the statements on Judaism, and that this part is also in the very center of its contents, and that the way to see other religions evolves from this point. The relationship to Judaism is singular and the dialogue with the Jews cannot be compared to any other discourse with religions. The joy of rediscovering the Jewish roots must not be falsified into the superficial concept of one religious dialogue among others.

How easily this happens can be seen in the term "the three Abrahamite religions," Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The interpretation of the figure of Abraham in the Koran and the consequences the Islam deduces from it are so divergent from the presentation in the Old Testament, which is also binding for Christians, and a correspondence can really be claimed only contra factum. No less problematic is a romanticizing rapprochement to Jewish customs, such as the imitation of Seder ritual in Christian communities. Judaism is for us no foreign religion, no dying out folklore that should be protected, "not an Indian reservation that is preserved so that one can say: That is the way they used to live. ..."

3. An Extraordinary Text of Post-Council Teaching

In the third part of this presentation I would like to introduce the perhaps most remarkable text we can find in the teaching of the Church in the wake of *Nostra aetate*. It is striking that this text, a chapter of the Catechism of the Catholic Church of 1992, is never mentioned when we reflect on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, between Israel and the Church. The reason is simply that this article of the Catechism does not use the usual vocabulary in speaking about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. It uses other vocabulary. It is found in the paragraph on the childhood of Jesus. I quote from this:

"The *Epiphany* is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world. The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (*magi*) from the East (Mt 2:1) [see LH, Antiphons of the Benedictus of the Laudes and of the Magnificat of the 2nd Vesper of Epiphany], together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. In the magi, representatives of the neighboring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. The magi's coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews (Mt 2:2) shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David [see Num 24:17; Rev 22:16], the one who will be king of the nations [see Num 24:17-19]. Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament [see Mt 2:4-6]. The Epiphany shows that "the full number of the nations" now takes its "place in the family of the patriarchs" (Leo the Great, serm. 23), and acquires *Israelitica dignitas* (is made "worthy of the heritage of Israel")

(MR, Easter night 26: prayer after the 3rd reading).

This unusual text goes back to the Dominican priest Jean-Miguel Garrigues, who worked closely with Cardinal Schönborn, the editor of the Commission for the Catechism. Père Garrigues,, who now lives in Toulouse, France, was a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He can properly be considered the father of this text, since it was his idea to say something about the relationship of the heathens to Israel in the text on Epiphany.[8] After the text was presented, there were no serious objections or suggestions for changes—neither in the Cardinals' Commission for the Catechism, nor from Cardinal Ratzinger, nor from Pope John Paul II.

In the text itself the strong references to the Old Testament and to the liturgy of Easter Night catch the eye. The core sentence of the entire paragraph is certainly the interpretation: "Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament."

In 1994 Joseph Ratzinger underlined the significance of this statement during a conference in Jerusalem when he said: "The mission of Jesus is to lead together the histories of the peoples into the community of the history of Abraham, the history of Israel."[9] Here, too, it becomes evident that it is not a matter of the dialogue of religions, but of the question of what Christianity is. The Catechism here speaks of what was the task of Jesus and what is the task of the Christians. It is not about a discourse of religions, nor about two peoples that together would be the people of God. Rather, it concerns the fact that the nations have to quasi "chime into" the history of Israel. The "first" or, as Ratzinger says, the "special position of Israel" remains for all times. The entire text, so the Cardinal, is "a lecture on the relationship between world religions, the faith of Israel, and the mission of Jesus"[10]

It is just at this point that you see the theological relevance of the liturgy which never speaks of two peoples but only of the one people, not of connectedness, but of identity: In the Easter Night whose texts are quoted in No. 528, the liturgy speaks of the fact that God led "our fathers, the children of Israel" with dry feet through the Red Sea that night.[11] "To become the People of God" doesn't mean, according to this passage of the Catechism of the Church, that two peoples become one, or that many heathen peoples join the people of Israel. It rather means: entering into the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Christological perspective this even means, to put it bluntly, that the non-Jews can recognize Jesus as the Son of God only if they turn to the Jews.

To Jewish ears this may sound no less paradox than to Christian ears: Christology can only be unfolded if one thinks from the Jewish side. This result is, in a certain sense, not astonishing, if you consider that the most important Christological statement of the Church—the formulation of confessing Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ and Son of God ? was formulated exclusively by faithful Jews in the first centuries, who furthermore asserted in the first decades that by this they did not relinquish Judaism and its monotheism.[12]

4. A Look at a Current Issue in the Church

In the following I would like to refer at least briefly to an issue for which our short text plays a decisive role: The question of the singularity of biblical revelation and the singularity of the people of God, Israel and the Church. This question is virulent today in connection with the so-called pluralism of religions.

The pluralism of religions states, in effect, that humans are not at all able to answer the question of the truth of the religions, that human beings can always see only fragments of the truth, those parts that have spread over all religions and philosophies of life. This concept has also spread out in the

Church and its theology. Concerning the person of Jesus this means that even though the greatness of Jesus is acknowledged, he is still put on equal terms with other founders of religions and teachers of mankind. My thesis, which I can only assert here rather than to present it in a really detailed and substantiated manner, says: Without this view on Judaism as explicated above, Christian belief cannot find an answer to this challenge as regards real content. It is the question of whether we see the Old Testament as source of our belief and Israel in the center of the history of salvation, which decides whether we fall for this modern heresy or whether we maintain our faith.[13] Jean Marie Lustiger, who was archbishop of Paris until 2005, saw the story of the magi in Mt 2. as both promise and warning for the Christians. He writes on this

“Pagans, even when they become Christians, are constantly tempted to refuse the particularity of history and divine election. They are tempted to make Jesus the projection of the ideal man that each culture and civilization creates within itself. That is the most instinctive way of bringing God down to man’s scale - in other words, of falling into idolatry by worshiping oneself. Each pagan civilization that becomes Christian is likely to be enticed into making Jesus its Apollo and projecting on him its own image of man, an image that it finds pleasing.

Christ himself, the figure of Christ in its reality, can assume every face of humanity, but that can happen only because he is first of all the individual who was born in Bethlehem of Judea. A phrase from Saint Matthew can enlighten us: The Magi, who arrive are pagans and they ask: ‘Where is the King of the Jews?’ He has to be searched for, and in the end, after scrutinizing the Scriptures, they find him ‘in Bethlehem in Judea’, and not somewhere else. And it is Jesus they find, not ‘an’ infant, but ‘this’ infant.”[14]

What Jean Marie Lustiger describes here can be observed in many variations in theology. If you forget or deny flatly God’s concrete history with Israel, you will with an inner logic be led to the credo of pluralistic theology of religions, meaning that God can be encountered not definitely in the history of Israel and the Church, but everywhere— on the mountains, in the springs, in ecstasy and private meditation. Then the history of his revelation has no connection just with the Jordan, but in the same manner and in equal validity with the Indus, Nile, or the Amazon. The testimony of God’s communication can then not only be found in the Bible, but equally and in equal validity in the Koran, in the Upanishads an in the holy knowledge of the Indians.

The dissociation from the Jewish roots not only leads to a leveling of what is the specifically Christian, but also to a disbanding of revelation into a wellness-religion that no longer looks for what is true, good and evil, but what is plausible, pleasant and acceptable. It makes “Jesus” into its Apollo,” as Jean Marie Lustiger accurately saw it.

The Catechism and with it the entire authentic tradition point into another direction. Of course it is no longer adequate to only assert formally the singularity of biblical revelation. In the face of the many possible paths of religions and cultures, Christians and Jews must be able to show wherein this singularity exists.

This I would like to indicate in four keywords

1. Israel, to whose historical path and its reflection we owe the differentiation of God and world. It has, as we say, “taken the spell” from the world and made possible the modern world.

2. The biblical Israel came to understand more and more that the entire responsibility for the world has been laid into the hands of man. That he has to tend to the garden into which he was placed (see Gen. 2:15). That he cannot put off the responsibility onto any gods, on no God and on no fate.

3. This process of criticizing religion, which requires the differentiation between Creator and the created, means in consequence that there is an equal dignity for all men and that no one may act

as God and master over the others.

4. The insight into the nature of man as created being taught Israel that the most sensible way of living in the world is a voluntary communal way, the way of a people—the people of God.

These are perhaps the essentials with which Jews and Christians can operate in the world. They are elements of the proprium of biblical revelation which cannot only be stated in a formal way, but must be shown in their contents and be proven real. All this has only been addressed in a short manner. You can still see what the Christians had lost and what is still to be rediscovered. *Nostra aetate* is one of the basic texts, a great exclamation mark that keeps the Church in the authentic faith of the beginning. The fact that we can see it this way today stands at the end of a long path, whose steps we have described with Lateran IV and the declaration of *Nostra aetate* of Vatican II. This is not really the final point of finding an understanding, but only a beginning.

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[1] See Benedikt XVI., Address of his Holiness meeting with the parish priests and the clergy of Rome, February 14, 2013; in: AAS 105 (2013), 292.

[2] Cit. from: Renewal in Christ. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in Documents, Photos and Texts. Accompanying booklet for the exposition in the Church Santa Maria della Pietà, Vatican. Regensburg, 2015, 40.can.

[3] Johannes Oesterreicher, *Introduction with comments on the declaration on the Relations of the Church to non-Christian Religions (Kommentierende Einleitung zur Erklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zu den nichtchristlichen Religionen)*, in: H. Vorgrimler et al. (Hg.): *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Dokumente und Kommentare* (Freiburg: Herder, 1967), 455

[4] J. Oesterreicher, *Introduction with comments (Kommentierende Einleitung)*, 456.

[5] As Cardinal Bea said on Nov.11, 1964 in applying the parable of the mustard seed on the development of the declaration of *Nostrae aetate*. Cit. in J. Oesterreicher, *Introduction with comments, 457. Also cited in:* Augustin Bea, The Church and the Jewish People (*Die Kirche und das jüdische Volk*), Freiburg, Herder, 1966, 158.

[6] Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews: Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra aetate* (as printed among others in the Freiburger Rundbrief 26 (1974) 3-5.

[7] J. M. Lustiger, *Choosing God – Chosen by God. Conversations with Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press,1991, p. 84.

[8] This in any case is how P. Garrigues wrote in a mail to the author on July 14, 2015 : « Le n°528 sur l'Épiphanie m'a semblé un lieu significatif pour exprimer la référence des païens à Israël dans le peuple de Dieu et j'ai repris la rédaction épiscopale dans ce sens. »

[9] In English printed as: J. Ratzinger, Israel, the Church and the World, in: *Catholic International* 5 (1994), 309-314. German in: JRGS 8/2, 1081–1098; 1085.

[10] J. Ratzinger, Israel, the Church and the World, see no. 9

[11] See R. Spaemann, Gott ist kein Bigamist (God is No Bigamist) in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 91, 20th April, 2009, p. 29.

[12] See M. Hengel, *The son of god. The origin of Christology and the history of Jewish-Hellenistic religion*, London, SCM, 1976, p.1-2.

[13] J. M. Lustiger, *The promise*, Eerdmans, 2007, Michigan, p.163.

[14] J.M. Lustiger, *Choosing God - Chosen by God*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1991, p. 64.

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