Christianizing Judaism? On the Problem of Christian Seder Meals

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The meaning of the term 'Judeo-Christian' partly depends upon the context in which it is used. I write this contribution as a Roman Catholic theologian after the Second Vatican Council (held from 1962 to 1965 and henceforth in this contribution referred to as 'Vatican II'). My considerations revolve around the theological significance of the Judeo-Christian tradition with a specific focus on its importance for the dialogue between 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' in a post- Shoah era.[1] I shall commence by pointing out how the term 'Judeo-Christian' symbolizes a dramatic change in the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people.[2] From a Catholic perspective, the hyphen between Judaism and Christianity expresses a retrieval of the Jewish roots of Christian tradition, which were denied for close to two thousand years, even to the point of their erasure. After Vatican II and the promulgation of Nostra Aetate (the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions), Catholic theologians began to realize that one cannot understand Christianity without Judaism.[3]

In the aftermath of the Council, Catholics grew accustomed to speaking about the Judeo-Christian tradition, thereby at once recognizing the continuity between both traditions. Scholarly research began to reveal the complex history of the parting of the ways between the two traditions. At a grassroots level, several initiatives were taken to stimulate the dialogue between Jews and Catholics, and to establish friendly relations between both communities. The changed attitude of the Church vis-à-vis the Synagogue also found its expression in the liturgical realm. In the years after Vatican II, some Catholics have started to adopt certain ritual practices, which Jesus (and his followers) presumably observed. The celebration of some form of the Jewish Passover Seder in particular is becoming more popular.[4] The primary goal of such celebration is to imitate as closely as possible Jesus and his disciples during the Last Supper, as well as learn to appreciate the Jewish origins of the Eucharist. This ritual cross-over can be seen as a concrete expression of Judeo-Christianity. I will argue that this specific form of cross-riting brings to the surface some problems related to the notion of the *Judeo-Christian tradition*, which are not sufficiently thought through by theologians who locate themselves after the Shoah and after Vatican II. That is to say, emphasis on the Judeo-Christian tradition is meant to express *Christian* appreciation for the bond between the two traditions. Yet its usage may also indicate the difficulty in recognizing Judaism as a self-sufficient and independent religion. To put it more strongly: its usage may even indicate a form of latent anti-Judaism.[5]

I shall structure my argument as follows in three parts. In the first part of this contribution, I dwell upon a theological (anti-Jewish) tradition that emphasized the discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity. Second, I articulate the shift that the Second Vatican Council (and *Nostra Aetate*) brought to Catholic theologies of Judaism and how the notion of *the Jewish-Christian tradition* in this theological context was, and continues to, be an expression of appreciation for the Jewish roots of Christian tradition. Third, I will then turn to the contemporary practice of Catholics who re-enact Jesus' Last supper by celebrating Jewish Seder meals. However sincerely intended, I will argue that this liturgical expression of 'Judeo-Christianity' is problematic from a historical point of view (did Jesus actually celebrate Seder?), from a religious-ethical point of view (is it appropriate for Catholics to appropriate the rituals of Jewish tradition?), and from a reconciliatory perspective

(will Christian Seders contribute to reconciliation between Christian and Jewish communities?).

1 Christian Theologies of Discontinuity and the Forgetfulness of Jesus' Jewishness

For the greatest part of its history, Christianity did not succeed in positively accepting its Jewish origins, and only until recently the dominant Christian theological discourse was one of highlighting the *discontinuity* between both traditions. The cross of Jesus, his salvific suffering, death and resurrection definitively cancelled out Israel's hopes. The Church developed her own self-understanding as people of God and heir to God's promises by denying Israel a lasting place in God's plan of salvation. This resulted in so-called replacement or supersessionist theologies.[6] That is to say, the Church is the New People of God, which has replaced Israel, the Old People of God. This replacement entails an abrogation of the first covenant between God and Israel.[7] There exist various kinds of supersessionism.[8]

According to one version, Israel's replacement by the Church is a divine punishment. Because they missed the time of their visitation by God and refused to embrace the gracious gift of salvation offered them in Christ, God has turned away from Israel and has revoked his promises to them. Israel is no longer his beloved people. According to some theologies, the Jewish people is even cursed by God. The Church, on the other hand, has accepted Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and has welcomed his message about the Kingdom to come and is therefore called the New People of God. We find this sort of punitive supersessionism common among the early Church Fathers.[9] In its most objectionable form it contains the charge of deicide,[10] the accusation that the Jewish people is collectively responsible for the death of Jesus, the Son of God. As a result of this collective responsibility, Jews henceforward bear the mark of Cain, which, for many Christians throughout history, became an excuse to mistreat Jews. If Abel's blood cursed Cain, then Christ's blood has cursed the Jewish people.[11] When asked about the continuing reason for the existence of Israel after the Jewish No to Jesus, the answer is twofold. The continuing existence of Israel is first of all meant as proof to Christians that Jews deserve to be subjugated. What is more, they are testimony to the Christians through their own scriptures that Jesus has come to fulfill the messianic prophecies.

Another type of supersessionist theology emphasizes instead how God's divine plans for the salvation of humanity once had an important part for Israel to play, but that this role has now expired, because God decided that physical, "Carnal" Israel (1 Cor 10:18) was to be replaced by the spiritual Church. Kendall Soulen rightly points out that

according to this view God's covenant with Israel was carnal, since it was transmitted by carnal means (natural descent from the patriarchs) and since it focused on carnal goods (posterity, prosperity, and land). In contrast the Church is spiritual, since its membership is conferred by faith and not by natural descent, and since it focuses on spiritual goods such as salvation form sin and eternal life. According to this second version of supersessionism, God elected Israel as a kind of 'dry run' on His way to the Church, like a sculptor who first molds a design in clay before committing it to marble. Once the spiritual Church appears, carnal Israel becomes obsolete. Like the clay model, it can be set aside and even destroyed since the reality that it once prefigured is now present.[12]

The implication of this theology is that there is no longer any place for Israel in God's plan of salvation. Israel's role in the history of revelation and redemption has been written out of the world's script forever.

At the heart of many replacement theologies, and the quotation from Soulen above already alludes to this, is an antithesis between the carnal and the spiritual. Carnal Israel with its Mosaic covenant

of the Law became associated with the flesh (earthly desires), but also with the particular, and the transient. The Church, with Christ as its founder, came to be associated with the spiritual, the universal and the eternal. As Christians divinized Jesus and began to see the Jewish people as enemies of the Church, they also came to spiritualize Jesus' Jewishness (de-judaization of Jesus), removing him from any dependence on the legalism and ritualism of Judaism. Jesus was the Christ *in spite of* the fact that he was Jewish, rather than because of it. Thus the history of Christianity implied emancipation from Judaism: The Church distanced herself from the Mosaic Law, abandoned Jewish practices (such as circumcision) and posited a clear distinction between the elevated spiritual Church of belief and the mundane, carnal Israel of ritual observance.[13]

This emancipation manifested itself in various ways. I shall note here how that emancipation affected Christian views of the Passover, given that I shall develop later on in this contribution.[14] Early on in the Christian tradition Christ came to be compared to the Passover lamb that was slaughtered as a sign of the liberation from slavery, a comparison also expressed in the statement by John the Baptist at the beginning of John's gospel: "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29; cf. Isa. 53:7). This comparison was later picked up and further developed by several Church Fathers. We can refer to Melito of Sardis (2nd Century) who claims that Jesus is the true Paschal sheep:

Once, the slaying of the sheep was precious, but it is worthless now because of the life of the Lord; the death of the sheep was precious, but it is worthless now because of the salvation of the Lord; the blood of the sheep was precious, but it is worthless now because of the Spirit of the Lord; a speechless lamb was precious, but it is worthless now because of the spotless Son; the temple below was precious, but it is worthless now because of the Christ above … [15]

Justin Martyr too develops this theme in his dialogue with Trypho, where he tries to convince the Jew Trypho of the fact that Jesus fulfills the Hebrew prophecies.[16] He connects Jesus' sacrificial death with Isaiah's prophecy about the suffering servant: "The Passover, indeed was Christ, who was later sacrificed, as Isaiah foretold, when he said, *He was led as a sheep to the slaughter* (Isa. 53: 7)…Now, just *as the blood of the Passover saved those who were in Egypt, so also the blood of Christ* shall rescue from death all those who have believed in him" (111. 3). The Passover theme also reappears in the writings of Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria (295–373), who wrote his Festal Letters to caution the Christians of Alexandria against the Passover festivities. For Athanasius the Jewish Passover was but a shadow of the real Passover as established by Christ's sacrificial offering for all humanity. If the Jewish Passover brings redemption to a particular ethnic group, Christ's sacrificial death promises salvation for all. Athanasius accuses the Jewish people for not having understood the true spiritual meaning of Passover, for they are still attached to animal sacrifice, their particular people, and antiquated covenant:

Now, however, that the devil, that tyrant against the whole world, is slain, we do not approach a temporal feast, my beloved, but an eternal and heavenly. Not in shadows do we shew it forth, but we come to it in truth. For they being filled with the flesh of a dumb lamb, accomplished the feast, and having anointed their door-posts with the blood, implored aid against the destroyer. But now we, eating of the Word of the Father, and having the lintels of our hearts sealed with the blood of the New Testament, acknowledge the grace given us from the Saviour, who said, 'Behold, I have given unto you to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.' For no more does death reign; but instead of death henceforth is life, since our Lord said, 'I am the life;' so that everything is filled with joy and gladness; as it is written, 'The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.'[17]

History has shown that theologies are not innocent, but impact the way Christians relate to their fellow human beings, in this case their Jewish neighbors. One need only take the Christian Holy Week as an example. The week commemorates of Christ's sacrificial death on Good Friday, followed by his descent into hell on Holy Saturday, culminating in his glorious resurrection on

Easter Sunday. While Holy Week became the pivot of the Church's liturgical year, for Jews it was all too often an unholy week of terror. It was the time when, from the Middle Ages onwards, Christians not only celebrated the death and resurrection of Christ, but also recalled the 'deadly role' the Jews played in Christ's death. On Good Friday many priests incited their parishioners with hatred against the Jews for their deicide. This charge was sometimes also staged with processions and passion plays,[18] supplemented with libels against the Jews.[19] Spontaneous and semi-organized pogroms often resulted from this.[20] As a consequence, Frank Senn explains "[the] Passover of the Jews has been celebrated many times during nights of terror. It has not only been a festival of liberation but a festival of fear."[21] I need not go over this history in these pages. Allow me simply to remark that, as a result of this terrible chapter in Christian-Jewish encounters, it should be no surprise that symbolic practices connecting Passover and Easter can evoke strong emotional responses from Jewish communities. Some of these historical events have become deeply rooted in their collective memories. This will be something to return to later in this contribution, especially when considering Catholic attempts at reconciliation with Jews.

2 The Judeo-Christian Tradition and Its Theological Significance

The Declaration *Nostra Aetate* issued by the Second Vatican Council on October 28, 1965, on 'the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions' marks a revolutionary "milestone"[22] in the history of Christian- (and specifically, Catholic-) Jewish relations. Of special importance is the fourth and longest paragraph which deals with the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Jews. This paragraph represents a turning-point and can even be considered a breakthrough moment; the document breaks with a centuries-old history of anti-Jewish violence resting upon supersessionist theological convictions that the Jewish people was accursed because of 'its' rejection of Christ.[23] Now the Council aimed at a fundamental rethinking of the image of the Jews that had prevailed until then in the Church and that had been disseminated through preaching, catechesis, the liturgy, art and popular culture.

First, the bond between Judaism and Christianity is now emphasized. The Church in *Nostra Aetate* also recognizes that "her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets." Next, the text confirms that God first concluded a covenant with Israel, the people who received the revelation of the Old Testament. Further on we read of "the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles", referring once again to the bond between Judaism and Christianity. The document next turns its attention to the fact that Jesus, Mary, the first apostles and many of the first disciples sprang from the Jewish people, to whom "the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises" belong. The fact that many Jews did not accept Jesus does not take away the fact that the Jews are still dear to God and that God "does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues." It is very important that *Nostra Aetate* explicitly states with regard to the death of Christ that "what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today". This is a rejection of the accusation of 'deicide' that had so often been levelled against the Jewish people throughout history leading to violence against the Jews. The document condemns every form of persecution arising from anti-Semitism.

With the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, the Church tried to move beyond two thousand years of anti-Jewish sentiments and actions, and now officially stated that the way forward was through Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Scholarly research that could help in coming to a better theological understanding of the relations between Israel and the Church (exegesis, historical studies, archaeology, etc.) also received a boost. The story that began to emerge and continues to emerge to this day is much more complex than the theological narrative of discontinuity (between the flesh and the spirit; the Law and Christ; Synagogue and Church) that 'we' have been constructing for centuries; the story that emerges is not a pleasant one; yes, it is marked by prejudices, stereotyping, exclusion and violence. But research also shows that the Jewish roots of Christianity

(however hard we tried in the past) cannot be erased. We have learned that Jesus, his family and friends were observant Jews who were faithful to the Law, that Paul cannot be understood apart from his Jewish heritage, and that the first followers of Jews should not be called Christians, but Christ following Jews.[24] The “parting of the ways”[25] was a gradual process with many stages that in fact lasted quite long (until the 4th to the 5th century the boundaries of Jewish and Christian communities were somewhat porous). We have also learned that the antithesis between the vengeful God of the Old Testament and the God of love of the New Testament is theologically indefensible, and that there is much more continuity between Jewish and Christians values, norms, and practices than we ever dared to imagine.

When theologians use the term ‘the Judeo-Christian tradition’, I take them as expressing all of the above, realizing that not only have we rediscovered that God always remains faithful to his promises and that he has more than one blessing to give, but also that by reading Christianity through Jewish eyes, we may discover and rediscover forgotten truths that may help us come to a better understanding of God’s plan of salvation. Thus many Catholics have come to understand themselves as Judeo-Christian, because so much of their own tradition stems from Judaism. The term ‘Judeo-Christian’ announces the dawn of a dialogical age with new life-giving possibilities for the Church and the Jewish people. Pointing to the bond between both traditions through a simple signifier, the hyphen in ‘Judeo-Christian’ represents now a bond that is unique and cannot be broken. That little hyphen carries with it the expectation that the days of theological anti-Judaism are over and that finally Jews and Catholics can try to make sense of one another in new ways.[26] With that comes a new theological challenge: how do you at the same time recognize that God has never taken back his promises to Israel and that their covenant was never revoked, while still maintaining the Christian belief that Jesus fulfills the Hebrew prophecies? The tension between both claims remains unresolved to this day, and probably explains in part why it is sometimes difficult for Catholics to come to terms with Judaism as a living tradition that does not seem to need Christianity.

3 The ambiguity of Catholics celebrating Seder meals

The rediscovery of the Jewishness of Jesus, and more broadly speaking the Jewish origins of Christianity, has also found its way into the liturgical domain. It has led to the realization that many Christian celebrations have roots in the Hebrew scriptures and Jewish symbolic practices. Ritual scholars, historians, and especially exegetes are now all trying to make sense of the complex liturgical history of Judaism and Christianity. They explore how the liturgy of Jewish communities influenced the liturgy of emerging Christian communities, and how it happened that Christian anti-Jewish polemics entered into the language of ritual.[27] This research contributes to a better understanding of the complex process of the parting of the ways, and helps to nuance the antithesis between Carnal Israel and the Spiritual Church.[28] It also forces the Church to confront some of the more dark pages of her history, e.g. anti-Jewish sermons that target Jewish ritual practices and festivities, as well as libels revolving around alleged Jewish anti-Christian symbolic practices.[29]

These scholarly explorations into the Jewish roots of Christianity should be regarded as laying the groundwork for changes in Catholic liturgical traditions, which for centuries were plagued by anti-Jewish symbolism. The Church realizes that to really change Christian-Jewish relations after the Shoah and contribute to reconciliation between both communities, she has to disseminate the rediscovery of the Jewish origins of Christian tradition on a large scale. This extends itself to Catholic rituals in her liturgical tradition.[30] After the Council, several initiatives were taken to that end. The Vatican issued recommendations on how to present the Jews during her liturgies, the prayer for Jews recited on Good Friday[31] was reformulated, and blessings over bread and wine (resembling the ancient Jewish Hebrew Table blessings) were introduced.[32] What we are encountering here is the liturgical expression of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

My focus in this contribution, however, is not on official liturgical initiatives, but rather on what may be called a paraliturgy, i.e. a liturgy outside the normally approved Catholic rites and liturgies. More specifically, I wish to further explore the epiphenomenon of Catholics celebrating a Jewish Seder meal as part of their Holy Week ceremonies. Though this practice is not authorized (nor has it been officially rejected) by the Roman Catholic Church, it is becoming more popular in certain Catholic milieux. Usually such celebration happens on Maundy Thursday, the evening when Jesus gathered with his disciples to have his last supper before he was betrayed by Judas and captured by the Roman authorities. The assumption is that "Christian observance of this ritual meal celebrates not only our tradition of Christ's last supper but our own Jewish heritage which provided the context for Jesus' institution at the last supper.[33] What is more, many Catholics are convinced that this form of cross-riting is one way to expresses appreciation for Judaism as the soil in which Christianity took root.[34] It may even contribute to the reconciliatory process that was started during the Second Vatican Council. As Eugene Fisher explains:

Because the seder, when properly done, communicates so effectively the essential narrative 'framing' of Jewish history and Jewish self-identity as a people, this can have a very positive impact on Catholic understanding of and respect for Judaism. Likewise, as the Council reminded Catholics, Jesus lived and died as a pious Jew of his time. So the seder can give Catholics a very necessary sense of the religious context within which Jesus taught[35]

However well-intended, though, we should ask if Catholics ought to celebrate Seder meals. Is it appropriate for them to replicate this ritual that is so central to Jewish self-understanding?[36] Does this ritual reenactment of the 'hyphen' not take the Judeo-Christian continuity one step too far? We should ask if this cross-riting does justice to the theological uniqueness of both traditions and, connected with that, Catholics should ask if they are not at risk of Christianizing Judaism once again. When that happens, the term *Judeo-Christian* becomes very problematic.[37]

To come to a nuanced evaluation of Christian Seder meals, I begin by asking the following question. Seeing that one of the reasons why Catholics want to celebrate Seder meals is because it would help them to better understand the Jewish roots of Christianity and would bring them closer to the Jewish Jesus, we must ask if this makes sense, *historically speaking*. What does historical evidence say about Jesus' Last Supper being a Seder meal? We must ask if in the first Century, before the destruction of the Temple, the custom existed to gather on the first night of Passover to enjoy a ceremonial meal with a fixed order of symbolic practices (Seder) and the ritual relating of the Exodus narrative (Haggadah).[38]

3.1 Historical questions

Passover is an eight day feast, which commemorates the liberation of Israel from Egypt (the Exodus).[39] This feast is inaugurated by a Seder meal, which is (usually) celebrated as a home ritual with family and friends. There is ritual food (which is not all to be eaten), songs, wine and prayer. As far as I can tell, most guidelines for Catholics celebrating a Seder (the ritualized meal that follows a fixed order) try to follow traditional Jewish ritual guidelines as written down in a Haggadah.[40] The Exodus from Egypt is recounted as a story about liberation from slavery and this story is ritually reenacted in and through the various symbols. There will be songs and prayers, lighting of candles, blessings, washing of hands and ritual food: the boiled egg, unleavened bread (*matzah),* the shank bone (reminding one of the sacrificed lamb), the salty water (that symbolizes the tears of affliction), the green herbs, *charoset* (a mixture of apple, almonds and, wine that points to the mortar the Israelite slaves used in construction), *maror* – the bitter herbs (as a reminder of the bitterness of slavery), four cups of wine (and an extra cup for Elijah), and the search for the *Afikoman* (the hidden piece of unleavened bread).

Catholics want to observe this Jewish ritual, which they believe was already in place at Jesus' time.[41] They want to share in an experience of Jesus and stay as close as possible to

what he did. All of this, however, hinges upon the assumption that Jesus actually celebrated a Seder meal that closely resembles the one that exists today. Commenting on this phenomenon, Jonathan Klawans acknowledges that “in these times of ecumenism and general good feeling between Catholics and Jews, many people seem to find it reassuring to think that communion and the Passover Seder are historically related.” However, he continues, “history is often more complex and perhaps a little less comforting than we might hope. We must be careful not to let our emotions get the better of us when we are searching for history.”[42] We do not actually know if what Catholics have come to call the ‘Last Supper’ was a Seder meal as it is known today.[43]

According to some scholars, it is possible to identify the Last supper as a Seder meal.[44] They argue that Jesus and his disciples ate together at Passover (see Luke 22) and point to the parallels between Jesus’ Last Supper and a Seder meal: there is a sacrifice that is prepared in advance, there is wine and bread, blessings are said, Jesus teaches, and the evening ends with a closing hymn. These are all elements, which make it plausible to conclude that Jesus’ Last Supper was a Passover meal.[45]

Most scholars, however, seem to argue against identifying the Last Supper and the Passover meal. They first of all point out that the key symbols of the Passover meal – the lamb and bitter herbs – were absent during Jesus’ Last Supper; that the elements present – wine, bread and blessings – are actually part of any Jewish ritual meal (and we know Jesus partook in many of these). More importantly, however, they argue against identifying Jesus’ Last Supper with a Seder meal because the latter, with its fixed order and accompanying Haggadah, only began to develop as a distinctive religious response to the crisis caused by the destruction of the Temple (70 CE).[46] The destruction of the Temple caused the Jewish community to formulate a “liturgical alternative to the old sacrificial rite, addressing simultaneously the difficult question of how to celebrate a festival of redemption in an age of foreign domination and oppression.”[47] In any case, the Passover rituals before and after the destruction of the Temple differ dramatically.

In Jesus’ time, Passover was one of the pilgrimage festivals revolving around the Temple and sacrifice. To celebrate Passover, Jews would have embarked on a journey to Jerusalem where they would sacrifice a lamb. This lamb recalls the lambs that were sacrificed by the Jews on the eve of their flight from Egypt. The blood of these lambs was used to mark the doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over their houses and spare their firstborn. The sacrificial aspect of the Passover meal – something which Christian theologies would later connect with Jesus’ sacrificial death reenacted in the Eucharist – was central to pre-rabbinic Passover celebrations. We know that Jesus, as an observant Jew, participated in these festivities, together with his family (see Luke 2:41-42).

It was this way of celebrating Passover that changed radically after the destruction of the Temple, which was both a political and religious disaster (in Hebrew, a *churban).* The sacrifice of the lambs at the Temple became impossible, and in response to this impossibility Jewish communities began to develop a domestic ritual, which we now know as a Seder meal. The earliest account of this ritual with its fixed order and Haggadah can be found in the Mishnah Pesahim (chapter 10), edited around 200 CE. According to Baruch Bokser, the account of the Seder meal in the Mishnah is part of the “the general early rabbinic reinterpretation of cultic rites and legitimization of extra-Temple means of religious expression.”[48]

Though we do not know the precise type of meal that Jesus’ Last Supper was, we can say that “there is virtually no ground to assume that Jesus would have practised the rituals described in later rabbinic literature.”[49] In brief, the Seder meal was *never part of a shared Judeo-Christian tradition* in the first place. As a consequence, celebrating a Christian Seder meal will, for one, not help to be closer to Jesus during his last evening, nor will it help to better understand the Jewish origins of the Eucharist.

3.2 Is it appropriate for Catholics to celebrate Seder meals?

In light of the above historical evidence, we need to ask if it is appropriate for Catholics to replicate this ritual that is so obviously at the heart of Jewish self-understanding. To my mind, the answer to this question should be no; I would even argue that despite all good intentions Catholics celebrating Seder meals bear testimony to the problem of what Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski calls latent anti-Judaism.[50] Let me elaborate on this.

Anti-Judaic discourse is complex; it is not merely a surface problem that can be easily removed through some uncomplicated and straightforward measures. Supersessionist theology was for centuries an undisputed element of Christian doctrine in both the Western and Eastern churches. For two thousand years, Christianity cultivated an anti-Jewish polemic, traces of which can already be found in the gospels. That polemic was pursued by various Church Fathers and imprinted itself upon the collective memory of Christian 'civilization' through liturgy, prayer, sermons, but also through art, sculptures, illuminated manuscripts, popular culture, theater, and music.[51] Far from it being merely a surface issue, anti-Jewish discourse has seeped deeply to the core of Christian culture. History teaches us that these theologies were translated into concrete political actions, e.g. the marginalization, exclusion, expulsion and even killing of Jews. They are part of the collective memory of Christian identity; as a result, anti-Jewish biases often go unnoticed because they are so pervasive. Vatican II therefore undoubtedly initiated an important change in Catholic-Jewish relations that was affirmed in many post-conciliar initiatives. However, it will probably take more than a couple of decades of dialogue to really move beyond anti-Jewish patterns of thought, which have penetrated the pores of Christian thinking. In what follows, I will argue that Christian Seders are an expression of such latent anti-Judaism. This shows itself in a twofold manner: (1) in the very assumption that the ritual celebrated in Jewish communities today resembles the ritual celebrated by Jesus and his disciples; (2) in the way Catholics in celebrating the Seder meal treat this Jewish ritual as a resource to enhance Christian self-understanding without much concern for its meaning for contemporary Jewish communities.

(1) For most of Christian history, the Church seemed to believe that Judaism, because it 'failed' to recognize Jesus as the prophesied Messiah, lost its reason for existence. Moreover, the general assumption was that Judaism, after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans and the expulsion from Jerusalem, had come to an end. It still existed, but no longer developed.[52] These theological assumptions made it difficult, if not impossible, for the Church to recognize Judaism as a vibrant tradition, with its own symbolic practices and textual hermeneutics. Judaism *after the coming of Christ* (and the destruction of the Temple) was viewed as an anachronism. There was no provision within Christianity to reckon with further developments within living Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism brought about the replacement of: Temple by Synagogue, sacrificial ceremonies by study, prayer and home rituals, and the *Kohen* (priest) by the Rabbi. On the contrary, for Christianity Judaism had become a relic, something that belonged to the past, its meaning frozen in time. I see traces of this line of reasoning in the practice of Christian Seders.

The ritual guidelines on which most Catholic communities (and the same goes for Protestant communities) seem to rely are rather traditional.[53] This Christian tendency to stay close to the orthodox Jewish ritual guidelines is inspired by a longing to be authentic, to preserve the integrity of the Jewish ritual and thus to *affectively* reenact what they understand Jesus did at the eve before his death, and what Christians think Jews have continued to do throughout their history. Apart from this reasoning being historically incorrect, we are confronted here with a more problematic assumption, namely that *today's Jewish tradition is more or less the same as that to which Jesus adhered*. The assumption that we can basically project a ritual celebrated in the 21st century by (more traditional) Jewish communities into 1st century Palestinian Judaism amounts to saying *once more* that Judaism is an almost ahistoric tradition frozen in time. There is no acknowledgment of how Jewish self-understanding developed after the fall of the Temple, of rabbinic Judaism, the centrality of the Mishnah and Talmud, of the different geographical contexts

in which Judaism took root, the differences between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Judaism, the build-up of dramatic events it was confronted with, e.g. the pogroms, the expulsion from Spain, the Shoah, and the State of Israel, the different strands in modern Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, etc.). All of that can simply be put between brackets, because the Judaism of today is the same as the Judaism of yesterday (so the thinking goes), and that is why Catholics can just take a ritual of contemporary Judaism and project it back into Jesus' time.

(2) Catholics celebrating Seder meals engage in a practice known as *cultural appropriation*. Cultural appropriation points to the phenomenon of one cultural group adopting artefacts, symbols, rituals, etc. from another cultural group with the additional qualification of a power imbalance between both groups. Because of this power imbalance, both groups do not have equal access to each other's cultural resources. Those in power can decide what to take or not and, what is more, they also control the meaning ascribed to the adopted artefact, symbol, ritual, etc. Often the culture being taken from finds itself in a situation of marginalization or oppression. Due to this power imbalance, we do not speak about a mere cultural exchange as would be the case between cultural groups that relate in a more or less symmetrical way, but rather about wrongful cultural appropriation, which can cause harm or offense. Cultural appropriation is especially problematic when it involves the adoption of a symbolic practice that is central to the identity of the culture to which it belongs. Its problematic character is often hidden under the guise of being a homage or a token of deep respect.

When Catholics celebrate a Seder meal and claim that this is also a manner of expressing their deep reverence for Judaism, they overlook the historical power imbalance between Catholics and Jews and the violence that sprang from it. For centuries Jews suffered under the colonial power of a "violent European dominated Christianity."[54] Christians were in control; they were the majority religion supported and enhanced by the political system. Jews were at best tolerated. Often, however, they were socially excluded, persecuted, and sometimes killed. Generally speaking, Jewish tradition was incorporated into a Christian hegemonic framework: Christianity as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies, the Church as the replacement of Israel, the wandering Jew as visible sign of God's punishment contrasted with God's eternal love for the followers of Christ. Through this binary structure, Judaism was always the negative counter-part of Christianity. In this process Jewish self-understanding was distorted, Jews were harmed in their right to self-definition: "[they] were depicted either as witnesses of opponents of a victorious Christianity but always as representatives of disputed principles, never as subjects of their own self-defined historical narratives."[55] Jews became Christ-killers, host-desecrators, a cursed people, etc. And it was these negative anti-Jewish depictions that were ritually staged during Holy Week. Too often the Jewish people have had to celebrate their Passover in fear of what Christians might do to them.

In light of this reality, Catholics celebrating a Seder meal are guilty of cultural appropriation (not of cultural exchange, and certainly not of rediscovering the Jewish roots of Christianity). It is a form of trespassing: they take and redefine a ritual practice that belongs to the heart of the religious life of Jewish tradition, which they have oppressed for centuries. Once again Christians are in control: a Jewish ritual is used to enhance Christian tradition without much concern for what that ritual means for Jewish communities today. Since Jews are typically not present during such Christians Seders, once again Christians are writing Jews out of their own story. In the following, I want to press this issue further by highlighting the parts from the Haggadah that Catholics, in their desire to be 'authentic', decide not to tell when they celebrate a Seder meal.

3.3 The Story not Told and How it Affects Reconciliation

The affective dimension of Catholics celebrating Seder meals is obvious: the ritual and dramatic reenactment of the Last Supper (as a Seder meal) would put them in closer touch with Jesus and his disciples during their last night together. They desire to retrace the origins of the Christian movement, and through imitation to affectively remember what once happened.[56] This practice of

cross-riting is also meant to exhale a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation. If Catholics, during the process of the parting of the ways, redefined Jewish ritual practices in a supersessionist framework (discontinuity), then by celebrating the Seder they give liturgical expression to the renewed bond between both traditions (continuity).

To me it seems, however, that Catholics who partake in this form of cross-riting as an effort to redress the violent history of Christian-Jewish relations, try to *go back to a time when 'we' were all Jews*. Would it be too far-fetched to suggest that Catholic Seders symbolize a desire to return to innocence, before the parting of the ways and before anti-Jewish violence? It is an expression of a Judeo-Christian bond, before rivalry, polemics and the imbalance of power. Celebrating a Seder meal, Catholics can *pretend (make believe and play act) to share with Jesus (the Jew) and his disciples the Jewish experience of oppression and liberation*. In doing so, Catholics seem to be saying *your experience was Jesus' experience and his experience is our experience,* and that is why we can, and will, celebrate this Seder meal.

This return to innocence, however, is not all that innocent. The speaker's benefit of this ritual act enables Catholics to look away from the fact that *they did not share* the Jewish experience(s) of oppression, but were rather complicit in Jewish suffering throughout most of Church history. Catholics are able to look away from and confront their complicity in Jewish suffering, because they actually control the way a Catholic Seder meal is celebrated and how it is enacted, because there are no Jews present at this ritual. Even though they try to stay as faithful to the traditional Jewish ritual, in effect Catholics do decide how they tell the Passover story, what they include and exclude. This becomes obvious when we turn to the way Jewish communities celebrate Seder meals today and ask what part Catholics decide not to celebrate.

In Jewish tradition, the Seder meal is not just a commemoration of a past event, the emphasis is rather on the present. Even if the Seder meal with all its symbolic practices enables a ritual reiteration and reenactment, its meaning cannot be reduced to that of remembrance; it is an active retelling, for it is said "In every generation each individual is bound to regard himself as if he had gone forth from Egypt personally." Jews are called upon to make Passover personal and contemporary. They have to live through the events of the Exodus as a contemporary event. The Passover night was a night of fear and terror, before it brought liberation and redemption. These events did not happen in some far away past, they continue to happen now. Jews celebrating the Seder meal are involved in a process of "personal identification in the here and now". Carole Balin explains that "[e]ach participant is adjured to breathe new life into the Haggadah, and Jews have done so by imbuing its pages with the ideas and concerns of their age. Thus each printed Haggadah serves as a barometer of sorts – registering fluctuations and gauging the mood of a particular Jewish community in its unique time and place in history."[57] That is why it happens that new symbols and practices are added to recontextualize and reactualize Passover, and these new symbols and practices reflect the concerns of contemporary Jewish communities.

Today there exist numerous Haggadoth which guide Jews in the process of re-presenting and reliving the dual experience of slavery and redemption. This testifies to the fact that Jewish ritual traditions continue to develop to this day in an ongoing process of recontextualization. As Debra Nusbaum-Cohen explains "[t]he central Exodus story is re-told, with specific symbolic foods, but around that there is plenty of room – which we Jews have long filled – for a multiplicity of interpretations."[58] In contemporary Judaism, both the Shoah and the establishment of the State of Israel especially have been given a prominent place in shaping the Haggadah. There exist numerous Haggadoth relating the exodus narrative in connection to the Shoah. Sometimes the oppression during the Shoah is connected to the redemption experienced in the erection of the state Israel, as a safe haven for Jews. As Carole Balin explains: "Given its central and characteristic theme of servitude-redemption – a movement from degradation to glory – the Haggadah has proved to be an ideal setting for proclaiming such a linkage. The traditional Haggadah retells the tragedy of Egyptian bondage *and* the *connected* divine deliverance of the

People Israel; modern Haggadahs use it also to retell, in sequence, the tragedy of the Holocaust (modern-day servitude) *and* the Jews' connected triumph, again in the Land, this time by the founding there of the State Israel (modern-day redemption)."[59]

This story, however, is not being told, reflected upon, nor celebrated in Catholic Seders, which prefer to go back to an 'innocent shared past' (which was never really shared in the first place). Catholics prefer a ritual enactment of the Judeo-Christian tradition which does not oblige them to confront the part they have played in two thousand years of anti-Judaism and in the Shoah.[60] They prefer an innocent past in which they can share Jesus' Jewish experience of Passover. This, however will not bring reconciliation. The latter asks for confrontation with the past, recognition of the hegemonic tendencies of Christianity and the acceptance to no longer write Jews out from their story. Rewriting that Jewish story, then, is certainly not the solution.

Conclusion

I began this contribution by partly coming to the rescue of the notion of a Judeo-Christian tradition. Recognizing the Jewish background of the Christian tradition, theologians have started to reread Jesus' life, the history of the early Christian communities, the gospels and the Pauline letters through Jewish eyes.[61] This has not only lead to a fuller and more nuanced understanding of Christianity, but also to the formulation of a theological alternative for anti-Jewish supersessionist theologies that had been dominant throughout most of Christian history.[62] Despite all the critical considerations I have listed in my contribution, I would still want to emphasize all the good this notion has brought to Christian-Jewish relations. In light of two thousand years of Christian anti-Judaism and the tragedy of Nazi anti-Semitism, the commitment of the Catholic Church, since Vatican II, to dialogue and reconciliation, should not be discarded. The recognition of the Jewish roots of Christianity is unmistakably an expression of appreciation. The one-sided story of discontinuity, which practically erased the Jewish origins of Christian tradition is being corrected; the continuity between both traditions symbolized in the notion Judeo-Christianity is now being affirmed.

Nevertheless, the notion of a Judeo-Christian tradition has its limits, which the practice of Christian Seder meals makes amply clear. First of all, the notion of 'Judeo-Christian' seems to be appreciative of Judaism to the extent that Christianity *originated from Judaism*. Judaism is recognized as the soil in which Christianity took root, but less as a living tradition that continued to develop. From a Christian perspective, the focus on the Jewish roots of Christian tradition is both understandable and important. But the notion of a Judeo-Christian tradition runs the risk of *only appreciating Judaism* in so far as it contributes to the Christian storyline. It may even lead to out-narrating the Jews from that storyline. Catholic Seders are an extreme example thereof.

Second, the notion of a Judeo-Christian tradition seems to express a rather harmonious bond between both traditions that covers up the historical reality of anti-Jewish violence. It avoids the difficult question of asking how Christians were involved in causing Jewish suffering. It is an embrace that is made too easily, and for that reason it is suspicious. Here too, Catholic Seders are examples, since they create the 'illusion' of a shared Jewish experience (Jesus' Last Supper as a Seder meal celebrating Passover), which distorts the reality that for centuries Jews celebrated Passover in fear. To skip over this history and to return to an innocent time (Jesus celebrating a Seder meal), is offensive and will not contribute to reconciliation.

Third, I would argue that when it comes to celebrating Seder meals, Catholics should uphold the principle of theology after the Shoah: namely, that such overtures should be dialogical and happen in the presence of the Jewish other. In view of centuries of power imbalances and Christian anti-Jewish violence, it would only be right that Catholics accept the fact that the Passover Seder is a dynamic Jewish ritual still celebrated by Jews today. If Catholics are to partake in this ritual, it should be as guests entering into the ritual realm of the Jewish other. Though (minor) adjustments

may be made because of the presence of guests, usually the liturgical standards of the home (Jewish) tradition will be followed. The aim of this form of cross-riting will then not be to recreate Jesus' Last Supper, but rather a deep learning from Judaism as it exists nowadays and continues to develop in response to contemporary challenges.

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