



Towards a Renewed Theology of Christianity's Bond with Judaism

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Good morning. It is a personal delight to be back in Buenos Aires. Perhaps, as an honorary citizen of Montevideo, I should feel some trepidation, particularly if a football match looms on the horizon. But despite my links to the other side I have always felt very welcome in this city and I am very pleased that you are hosting ICCJ's 2014 conference.

The title of my lecture in the program is somewhat generic. I have decided to focus it a bit more by giving considerable time to a discussion of Christianity's renewed bond with Judaism and the Jewish people. I say *renewed bond* because, as recent biblical scholarship has clearly established in the last several decades, it is clear that such a bond definitely existed during the church's earliest centuries until the *Adversus Judaeos Theology* largely captured Christianity's soul. I shall return to the implications of the recent scholarship on Christian origins and its roots in Second Temple Judaism in a moment. But let me begin with a few introductory observations.

Fifty years ago Vatican II's groundbreaking document *Nostra Aetate*, together with its documents on ecumenical relations and religious liberty, provided the impetus for a substantial renovation of relationships among the various Christian churches and, more broadly, perceptions of non-Christian religious traditions, Judaism in particular within the churches. While *Nostra Aetate* was a document addressed primarily to the global Catholic community, its influence clearly extended beyond the parameters of Catholicism.

While *Nostra Aetate* grew out of the historic encounter between French Jewish historian Jules Isaac who lost much of his family in the Shoah and St. Pope John XXIII it effectively wiped clean the classical view in the Catholic Church and beyond of non-Christian religions which had been dominated by highly negative stereotypes of these faith communities and spiritual traditions. The first three chapters of *Nostra Aetate* have generated a substantially new template with regard to non-Christian religions, one which was far more positive in its outlook that had been the case for centuries. And chapter four of the document did the same for Christian images of Jews and Judaism. While it neither solved some basic questions such as missionizing people from other faith communities nor reflected in any significant way on possible theological links with these religions, Islam in particular, it did acknowledge some truth in these religious communities and affirmed the importance of dialogue with their religious leaders. This represented a marked contrast with the longstanding outlook within the churches, often seen in their basic educational materials, which spoke of these religious communities in negative, sometimes even contemptuous language and basically regarded them as "enemies" of the church. A new day was indeed dawning. Even a rather conservative Catholic episcopal leader such as Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia, in an address to Jewish representatives in that city, emphasized the transformative effect of *Nostra Aetate*: "So I really believe we are living a new and unique moment in Catholic-Jewish relations. And Catholics will never be able to go back to the kind of systemic prejudice that marked the past."^[1]

There is no doubt that *Nostra Aetate* generated a wholesale reversal in Catholic attitudes towards Judaism and the Jewish People when compared with centuries past. We should never underestimate its powerful, very positive redefinition of Catholicism's relationship with the Jewish People that has occurred. And while the situation is more complex in the many separate denominations that make up global Protestantism similar changes have occurred in many of the Protestant communions. These changes in global Christianity have also generated some reversal of classical Jewish views of the churches as inherently antisemitic and guilty of idolatrous faith statements and practice. The document *Dabru Emet* developed by four leading Jewish scholars associated with the three major branches of Judaism and signed by hundreds of rabbis is but one example of change on the Jewish side. [2] Not all pre-Vatican II viewpoints on Judaism have completely disappeared, especially from liturgical celebration. Even Pope Francis, despite his long positive involvement with the Jewish community here in Argentina, has lapsed into classical stereotypes about the Pharisees and Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus on a few occasions. So as we celebrate the genuine and deep-seated accomplishments of the past fifty years there is still work for us in the dialogue in combatting what remains of the classical stereotyping of Jews and Judaism.

Despite the long, positive path that Jews and Christians have walked together in the last half century and the switch in the basic template for Christian-Jewish relations has the movement of reconciliation launched by *Nostra Aetate* lived up to its full promise? The answer is "not quite." Chapter four of *Nostra Aetate*, as well as many of the companion documents from other churches, built their arguments for a new vision of the Church's relationship with the Jewish People on three foundational premises: (1) Jews were not collectively responsible for the murder of Jesus; (2) as a result, Jews cannot be portrayed as exiled from the original covenant with God; and (3) Jesus drew positively from the Jewish tradition of his time in his preaching.

These three new perspectives on the Jewish-Christian relationship have certainly provided a good building block for the development of a new theological understanding between the two faith communities. But, if we ask whether the profound theological implications of *Nostra Aetate* that the Canadian theologian Gregory Baum, an official expert at Vatican II who had some hand in the earliest formulation of what became *Nostra Aetate*, highlighted in a speech to the 1986 Catholic Theological Society's Annual Meeting in Chicago where he argued that *Nostra Aetate* represented the most radical change in the ordinary magisterium of the church to emerge from Vatican II [3] have been integrated into Christian systematic theology, the response has regrettably to be "not very much." Hence in this presentation I would like to focus on what has happened in Christian theology with this new vision of the Church's relationship with the Jewish People.

Over the years a small cadre of individual Christian scholars, and a few institutional Church leaders such as Cardinal Walter Kasper and the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, have tried to reformulate basic Christian self-understanding in the key areas of Christology and ecclesiology. There have also been some attempts by theologians such as Johannes Metz and Jürgen Moltmann to reflect on the impact of the Shoah on Christian theology. The effort took on some steam in the first decade or so after Vatican II, but it has waned somewhat in more recent years. Scholars involved in this effort include the late Monika Hellwig [4] and Paul van Buren who produced a trilogy outlining a fundamentally new theological vision of the Church's relationship with the Jewish People in which the term "Israel" was defined as including both Jews and Christians. [5] Others such as Mary Boys, [6] Kendall Soulen, [7] and myself [8] have contributed to this ongoing theological discussion. Each has added valuable perspectives, but no one as yet has produced an interpretation that has caught the attention of a significant segment of the Christian theological community. I will turn to my own contribution to this process later on in this presentation. So, with regard to theology, a new understanding of the Christian-Jewish relationship is still in its infancy. The only major change (and this is not to be underestimated) is the perspectival reversal from a classical theology of Jewish covenantal exclusion after the Christ Event to a theology of continued Jewish covenantal inclusion.

A few institutional and group attempts to grapple with Baum's central theological challenge have occurred since Vatican II. The Rhineland Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany produced a major statement in 1980 that unfortunately was rejected by other synods of the Evangelical Church in Germany.^[9] The Leuenberg Church Fellowship of the Reformation Churches in Europe released a comprehensive study of the church and Israel in 2001.^[10] And the ICCJ completed a five year theological consultation in 2011 around the mega question "how might we Christians in our time reaffirm our faith claim that Jesus Christ is the savior of all humanity even as we affirm Israel's covenantal life with God?" with the publication of a volume titled *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships*.^[11] This volume contains some fourteen essays by Christian scholars around the mega question with responses by Jewish scholars. The project received explicit support from Cardinal Walter Kasper who then headed the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jews. Cardinal Kasper participated in the first session of this consultation and wrote a substantial reflection for its published volume. The ICCJ is now in the midst of a second ongoing theological consultation which met again this past June at the University of Heidelberg and is focused on the theme of land.

In the United States two parallel documents appeared at the beginning of this new century. One came from the ecumenical Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations. Titled *Christianity's Sacred Obligation*, it affirmed ten basic theses about the Christian-Jewish relationship, including Judaism's continuity as a living faith, the recognition that the continued covenantal inclusion of the Jewish people impacts Christian notions of salvation, and a rejection of any targeted efforts at converting Jews to Christianity.^[12]

The second statement came in the form of a study document produced for the ongoing official Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Some of the same scholars involved in *Christianity's Sacred Obligation* were also responsible for this statement known as *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*. It was released together with a parallel Jewish text on the same questions. But the Jewish text was quickly judged as inadequate by the Jewish leadership and removed from the dialogue table.^[13]

Reflections on Covenant and Mission affirmed the ongoing validity of the Jewish covenant and also rejected conversionist efforts directed toward the Jewish community. But very quickly the statement brought about a storm of controversy led by the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., himself a distinguished theologian who carried great weight in terms of theology among American bishops as well as in Vatican circles.^[14] Dulles fundamentally questioned whether Vatican II had clearly affirmed Jewish covenantal continuity after the coming of Christ, arguing in part that we had to return to the seemingly negative judgments in this regard found in the letter to the Hebrews which *Nostra Aetate* never raised. In 2005, in an address, given at an official commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* he further pursued this questioning of Judaism's continued covenantal involvement greatly angering many of the longtime Jewish leaders in the dialogue such as Rabbi Irving Greenberg who were present at the commemoration. It is interesting to note that Cardinal Walter Kasper and Cardinal William Keeler (who chaired the U.S. Bishops Committee on Catholic-Jewish Relations) absented themselves from Dulles' presentation even though they were part of the overall commemoration. Some years later Cardinal Kasper remarked that in his view the remarks of Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to the synagogue in Rome with their stress on Judaism as a living faith from which Christianity could draw important spiritual insights, including from postbiblical Jewish texts, represented an ultimate rejection of Dulles' perspective.^[15]

The controversy over *Reflections on Covenant and Mission* was revived several years after the original critique of the document by Cardinal Dulles. In 2009 the doctrinal office of the U.S. Bishop's Conference together with its office on ecumenical and interreligious relations released a joint statement on the document in which it was claimed that the text did not reflect official Catholic teaching in several areas, most especially on the matter of the necessity for Jewish conversion. The document was signed by Cardinal Francis George, OMI, of Chicago, the then President of the Bishops' Conference and the support of Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta who was serving as

the Chair of the Bishop's Committee on Catholic-Jewish Relations.[\[16\]](#)

The original version of the critique brought an extremely negative reaction from all major branches of Judaism as it appeared to link dialogue with a direct effort to convert Jews. This strong, coordinated response from the Jewish dialogue partners led to a quick decision on the part of the leadership of the Bishops' Conference to revise the critique. Cardinal George organized a small group of bishops to undertake the revision over a period of a few months. The revised text issued in October 2009 disconnected dialogue and evangelization but did not address the question of any conversionist efforts directed towards Jews outside the context of dialogue. This had been one of the major points raised in the original Jewish reaction along with the coupling of dialogue and evangelization. The Jewish leadership accepted the revision and did not press the bishops on the issue of evangelization of Jews as such. In so doing they left the bishops off the hook in my judgment, at least for the time being.

This controversy made it clear that the issue of evangelization remains largely unresolved in Catholicism and most Protestant denominations, particularly with the current emphasis of the "new evangelization" within global Catholicism. I find few scholars promoting this new evangelization grappling in any significant way with the interreligious dimensions of the issue. Can we evangelize and promote authentic dialogue as well? The Vatican has developed some statements on this linkage in recent years but in my judgment these statements have not adequately resolved the issue for as my former colleague at Catholic Theological Union and now director of interreligious relations for the Anti-Defamation League, David Sandmel once put it, when all is said and done evangelization is in fact a "soft" form of genocide as, if successful, it would in fact obliterate the religious other. Ultimately this issue of evangelization requires a reconsideration of the meaning of ecclesiology in our day. One simply cannot reconcile the question of evangelization and dialogue very easily as some in the churches seem to think, including some in the Vatican.[\[17\]](#)

One of the most remarkable transformations in scholarship generated as part of the fundamental reconsideration of the early Christian-Jewish relationship, a transformation that impacts significantly on Christian theological identity, is to be found in the area of biblical studies. Beginning in the 1980s there arose a movement often termed the "Parting of the Ways" scholarship. Early participants in this movement included John Gager, Robin Scroggs and the late Anthony Saldarini. Back in 1986 Scroggs, a professor at Catholic Theological Seminary at the time and subsequently at Union Theological Seminary, summarize the essential components of this new vision. As Scroggs saw the situation in the time of Jesus and soon thereafter the following realities shaped the relationship between the church and the synagogue: (1) The movement begun by Jesus and continued after his death in Palestine can best be described as a reform movement within the Jewish community of the time; (2) The Pauline missionary movement as Paul understood it was a Jewish mission that focused on the gentiles as the proper object of God's call to God's people; (3) Prior to the end of the Jewish war with the Romans in 70 C.E., there was no such reality as "Christianity." Followers of Jesus did not have a self-understanding of themselves as a religion over and against Judaism. A distinct Christian identity began to emerge only after the Jewish-Roman war; and (4) The later portions of the Second Testament all show some signs of a movement toward separation, but they also generally retain some contact with their original Jewish matrix.[\[18\]](#)

Anthony Saldarini added to this picture presented by Scroggs. In various essays he underlined the continuing presence of the "followers of the Way" within the wide tent that was the Jewish community of the time. Saldarini especially underscored the ongoing nexus between Christian theology and practice in the Eastern sectors of the Church and Judaism, a reality that is often ignored in Western theological discussions.[\[19\]](#)

The initial scholarship on the first several centuries of the Common Era has been advanced by an increasing number of other scholars, both Christian and Jewish.[\[20\]](#) John Meier, for example,

argues that from a careful examination of New Testament evidence, Jesus must be seen as presenting himself to the Jewish community of his time as an eschatological prophet and miracle worker in the likeness of Elijah. According to Meier Jesus was not interested in creating a separatist sect or a holy remnant along the lines of the Qumran sect. But he did envision the development of a special religious community within Israel. The idea that this community “within Israel would slowly undergo a process of separation from Israel as it pursued a mission to the Gentiles in this present world—the long term result being that his community would become predominantly Gentile itself—finds no place in Jesus’ message or practice.”^[21] And David Frankfurter has insisted that within the various “clusters” of groups that included Jews and Christian Jews there existed a “mutual influence persisting through *late antiquity*. There is evidence for a degree of overlap that, all things considered, threatens every construction of an historically distinct ‘Christianity’ before at least the mid-second century.”^[22] Finally, Paula Fredriksen questions the term “Parting of the Ways.” For her the term is unhelpful because it implies two solid blocks of believers when in fact the various groups were intertwined for several centuries.^[23]

The “Parting of the Ways” scholarship has certainly implanted the notion of Jesus’ fundamental Jewishness in Christian consciousness. But the question remains, what impact does this recognition of Jesus’ Jewishness have for Christian theological reflection, especially in the area of Christology? Thus far the answer has to be “not much.” A few Christian scholars such as Wesley Ariarajah, formerly of the World Council of Churches, speaking at a WCC co-sponsored Christian-Jewish dialogue at Temple Emmanuel in New York some years ago, called the effort to return Jesus to his original Jewish context a ‘futile attempt’ in terms of faith expression in a non-Western context. While Ariarajah did not deny Jesus’ Jewish roots he argued that these roots carry no significance for theological statements in Asian and other non-Western contexts. For him it is far more important to relate Jesus to Buddhist thought.^[24]

In my view the argument offered by Ariarajah is incomplete. I agree that we need to inculturate the teachings of Jesus and how we ultimately present his mission in theological language and that relating our teachings about Christ to other religious traditions ought to be a priority of the church. But I profoundly disagree that we can present the authentic meaning of Jesus’ teachings and how the early theological tradition about his person and ministry arose without situating him in his profoundly Jewish context. The process of reinserting Jesus into his actual Jewish context, including the theological implications of this process, is still in an embryonic state.^[25]

One other implication of the “Parting of the Ways” scholarship has to do with our perspective on Paul and his writings. These writings have had a pervasive influence on much of Christian theology, Christology in particular, especially in the Protestant churches. Recent scholarship has literally turned much of the traditional understanding of Paul, an understanding that has served as a bedrock for Christological interpretation, on its head. Paul is now seen as standing far more within the context of the Judaism of his day than previous Christologies had imagined. To argue, as many have done over the centuries, that Pauline thought represents the ultimate break between the church and the synagogue, including at the level of theology, is increasingly being challenged by the emerging new scholarship on Paul.^[26]

In addition to the scholarly development just described, there has also been important papal reflections on the theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship. On a number of occasions St. Pope John Paul II spoke of an inherent bond between Jews and Christians. The following quote is but one example of his emphasis on this theme:

The Church of Christ discovers her “bond” with Judaism by “searching into her mystery.” (Nostra Aetate, 4). The Jewish religion is not “extrinsic” to us, but in a certain way “intrinsic” to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion.^[27]

And in his acclaimed Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis says much the same:

We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.” (Rom 11:29) The Church, which shares with Jews an important part of the sacred Scriptures, looks upon the people of the covenant and their faith as one of the sacred roots of her Christian identity (cf. Rom 11:16-18). As Christians, we cannot consider Judaism as a foreign religion; nor do we include Jews among those called to turn from idols and to serve the true God. (cf. 1 Thes 1:9).[\[28\]](#)

These theological affirmations by Popes John Paul II and Francis raise for Christians today the question as to whether Judaism, especially its texts and traditions, need to be seen as “in house” resources for the expression of Christian belief. Put another, how much do we need to “re-Judaize” Christianity to bring it into conformity with these papal perspectives? A few theologians such as Johannes Baptist Metz have argued for the necessity of such integration into Christian faith today.[\[29\]](#) And Pope Benedict XVI in his address at the Rome synagogue spoke of the usefulness of certain postbiblical Jewish resources for the articulation of Christian faith. But by and large the issue has been ignored in Christian theological circles.

But let me note that these perspectives pose a challenge for Jewish religious thought as well. I raised this challenge in an essay of *Moment* magazine some years ago.[\[30\]](#) Can Christianity speak of an inherent bond with Judaism if no such understanding is to be found in Jewish theological circles? Bondedness cannot be a one-way street. In a brief response to my essay the prominent Jewish scholar Irving Greenberg acknowledges the validity of my question but goes on to say that few Jews have thought of other religions, including their positive significance. In his mind this remains an unfilled goal in Jewish theology. I suspect that the issue of theological bondedness and a mutually explored understanding of the continuing link between Judaism and Christianity must decide whether they are intertwined within a single covenantal framework that makes their relationship quite different from the relationship either has with other religious communities or whether they exist today as two quite separate religions despite their ties in the past. In other words are the findings of the “Parting of the Ways” scholarship permanently significant for an understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship?

While the ecclesiological question will remain central in the theological discussion of the Christian-Jewish relationship the issue above all is how Christianity has interpreted Jesus and his ministry over the centuries, i.e. the Christological tradition of the churches which stands at the very nerve center of Christian faith expression. I have presented an overview of how some prominent Christian theologians have approached this challenge, most recently in a new book *Restating the Catholic Church's Relationship with the Jewish People: The Challenge of Super-Sessionary Theology*.[\[31\]](#) I will not rehearse that history in this presentation. Rather let me now lay out a possible approach to Christology in light of the church's new perspective on Judaism and the Jewish People.

As a preface to my presentation on this topic, let me say that I believe this is a time when the theological discussion should remain open-ended. I sense in some Christian circles a desire to set up strict parameters for such a discussion. This in my judgment will stifle creative proposals. As I see it this is what Pope Paul VI had in mind with his 1970 version of the Good Friday prayer for the Jews which affirms the continuity of the Jewish People in the covenantal relationship with God without defining how this affirmation affects Christian theological proclamation about Christ. Such gradual definition must emerge from robust theological discussion rather than from an ecclesial fiat.

As with other scholars such as Franz Mussner who authored one of the more comprehensive volumes on Christology within the context of the Christian-Jewish dialogue[\[32\]](#) I believe

Incarnational Christology is the best approach to understanding the Christ Event in a way that leaves legitimate theological space for Judaism. Let me emphasize that I am here speaking from the perspective of Christian theology. Jews may rightly feel that they do not need theological validation for their faith from Christians.

Here we encounter a difficult challenge in any attempt to forge a post-supersessionist theology within the churches. Christian leaders, both Protestant and Catholic, have generally insisted that only a single covenantal perspective on Jewish-Christian relations is valid in order to protect the traditional notion of the universality of Christ. I certainly understand the intent of this outlook even if I feel it is somewhat too narrow in my eyes. If I were a Jew I am rather sure I would not rejoice as having my religious identity defined via a covenant in Christ. Yet, the option of two totally separate covenants is equally unacceptable. It fails to take into account the increasingly emphasized notion of Jesus' fundamental rootage in the Jewish community of his day and the continuing deep-seated links between the two religious communities for several centuries after his death. And it would also ignore the strong insistence starting with St. John Paul II and continued by Pope Benedict XVI and now Pope Francis of Judaism implanted in the very heart of Christianity. So any acceptable model in my view will need equally to affirm connectedness and distinctiveness.

In moving in the direction of Incarnational Christology as the foundation for a contemporary Christian theological perspective on the Church's relationship with the Jewish People I am also rejecting the two other classical options for Christology in Christian history: (1) Jesus as the fulfillment of messianic prophecies, and (2) Jesus who spilled his blood to wash away human guilt and the stain of original sin. Neither of these two Christological options work very well in terms of creating a positive theological framework on the continuing covenantal role for the Jewish People after the Christ Event. But I recognize that these Christological perspectives are deeply entrenched in Christian self-understanding. So it will not be easy to put them aside. This is particularly true for the "messianic" interpretation of Christology which so permeates the Christian liturgy. But *Nostra Aetate* mandated the contemporary church to produce a theology of Jewish-Christian relations devoid of supersessionism. And I fail to see how that solemn responsibility can be met in today's church through either the "messianic" or "blood" Christologies. Only Incarnational Christology provides some pathway towards this end. The liturgical aspects of reaching this goal are daunting but some liturgists such as Liam Tracey, OSM, have begun to take us on this path.[\[33\]](#)

My current approach to the creation of a non-supersessionist Christology picks up much what I have written earlier on this topic.[\[34\]](#) Working within an Incarnational framework and with an understanding of the gradual development of Christological consciousness in the early church I would continue to maintain that what ultimately came to be recognized with greater clarity for the first time through the ministry and person of Jesus was how profoundly integral humanity is to divine biography. This in turn implies that each human person somehow shares in divinity. Christ is the theological symbol, using symbol in the most profound sense of the term, that the church selected to try to express this reality. As the later strata of the New Testament stress, this humanity existed in the Godhead from the very beginning. Thus in a very real sense we can say with Paul that God did not become man in Jesus, God always had a human dimension. Humanity has been an integral part of the Godhead eternally. The Christ Event was crucial however for the manifestation of this reality to the world. In this regard I could be quite comfortable theologically with the term "transparent," an image floated but never formally adopted by Paul van Buren. The Christ Event in this perspective gave greater transparency to the human-divine linkage.

The above vision, let me make it clear, does not mean to equate God with the totality of humanity. That would represent a fundamental misreading of my approach. A gulf remains in my perspective between God and the human community that is forever impassable. Moreover, despite the intimate link with God revealed through the Christ Event, humankind remains equally conscious of the fact that this God is the ultimate Creator of the life that is shared with men and women as a gift. Nor does it mean that there was not a uniqueness in which humanity and divinity were united in Jesus.

Humanity could never have come to the full awareness of the ultimate link between itself and God without the express revelation occasioned by the Christ Event. While this event will allow us to experience a new closeness with the Creator God, our humanity will never share the same intimacy with the divine that existed in the person of Jesus.

In recent years I have made one major modification to my original vision of a non-supersessionist Christology. I would now introduce the term “kingdom of God” or “reign of God” more centrally into the expression of my Christological vision. I have been persuaded on this point in a particular way as a result of a seminar exchange with Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, the co-editor of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament*.^[35] As a Jewish New Testament scholar, she sees Jesus’ sense of the presence of the kingdom as the most distinctive aspect of his teaching. I find her persuasive on this point. But I would go on to tie this notion very directly with my vision of Jesus as making transparent the full linkage between humanity and divinity. It is the revelation of this linkage that makes possible the proclamation that the kingdom is already in our midst, even if not fully realized. The presence of the kingdom can be perceived both within human consciousness and human history. Here I would underscore the importance of seeing history and human consciousness as profoundly intertwined, a reality I would note that allows for some opening for theological dialogue between the biblical and Asian religious traditions. This is a reality, I admit, that needs further elaboration as I continue the development of my thinking on Christology in light of the suppression of supersessionist thought.

Here we come to a key point in terms of a theology of Christian-Jewish relations. The new transparency with respect to divine presence that I regard as the core of the Christ Event’s revelation should not be taken as a full and complete vision of human salvation by itself. The Protestant scholar Kendall Soulen has made an invaluable contribution to the discussion of this theology when he insists that it must include as absolutely central the Hebrew Scriptures’ vision of the immersion of God in history and in creation, hallmarks of the revelatory core of the Jewish covenantal tradition. Both are critical to an authentic path towards final human redemption. In the period prior to the endtime, however, each community walks a distinctive path dominated by one or the other of these two revelatory visions. Their paths are parallel and sometimes intersect. Ultimately they will coalesce, though how that will occur is known only to God. Even though I am aware that he did not particularly like the term “paths” I believe this is the theological vision left us by Cardinal Walter Kasper in his several writings on the theological relationship between Jews and Christians.^[36]

Before ending this brief overview of the challenges involved in generating a post-supersessionist theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship I need to bring to your attention the important document issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 2001.^[37] The document carries a supportive introduction by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger under whose jurisdiction at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the document ultimately fell. Released with a minimum of fanfare, this statement opens up several new possibilities in terms of expressing the significance of the Christ Event while leaving ongoing theological space for Judaism.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document, despite definite limitations in the way it portrays postbiblical Judaism, makes an important contribution to the development of a new constructive Christological understanding in the context of continued Jewish covenantal inclusion. Two statements in particular are very significant for this discussion. Both occur in the same paragraph of the document.^[38]

The first is the affirmation that Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. While I wish this had been worded more positively and directly it does in my view undercut the rather simplistic Christology based on Jesus’ supposed fulfillment of Jewish messianic prophecies that so dominates Catholic liturgical expression. This statement appears to rule in the continuing validity of messianic prophecies as distinctly understood within Judaism, thus ruling out the traditional claim

by the church that Christ fulfilled all of them and thus is the expected Jewish messiah whom the Jewish People have refused to accept. Such a claim has been at the core of supersessionist theology within Christianity. Jewish messianic texts as found in the Hebrew Scriptures represent an authentic insight into final eschatological fulfillment. They are an integral part of genuine religious hope. Here we have the seeds of a recognition by Christian biblical scholarship of a distinctive path to the endtime for the Jews, something that, as I have already mentioned, has been proposed by Cardinal Walter Kasper when he wrote that “if they (i.e., the Jews) follow their own conscience and believe in God’s promises as they have understood them in their religious tradition they are in line with God’s plan.”^[39] Cardinal Ratzinger uplifted this affirmation for commendation in his Introduction to the document.

The second statement from Part II A, #5, of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document is somewhat more oblique but has the potential for being developed into an important theological statement. The Pontifical Biblical Commission, let me note here, does not have theological formulation as part of its mandate. That task falls upon the Pontifical Theological Commission which has never formally addressed the theological implications of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s statement. As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* that might well be an important task for the Theological Commission to undertake.

This key text in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document reads as follows: “Like them (i.e., the Jews) we too live in expectation. The difference is that for us the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us.” While this statement certainly claims messianic fulfillment in and through Jesus it seems to imply that this messianic fulfillment is not yet complete. Might we say that the Jewish eschatological vision adds something critical to complete messianic understanding? A critical “trait” visible in and through Jesus might in fact be the enhanced transparency in our understanding of divine-human linkage that stands at the heart of Incarnation Christology. This statement also opens up in my judgment the possibility that not all authentic messianic traits have been made visible in and through Jesus but in fact have been better exposed within Jewish messianic perspectives. Finally, the statement seems to legitimate a discussion whether the “traits” seen by Christians in and through Jesus might be expressed in and through a different set of theological symbols. I realize that I am stretching the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document here, but isn’t that what theologians are supposed to do?

Let me conclude my presentation with a few additional observations having offered a thumbnail sketch of where the theological discussion on the Christian-Jewish relationship needs to move. First of all, let me underscore that I believe Christian theologians must make an essential decision at the outset as to which of the Christological traditions within Christianity is the most appropriate for building a construction approach to the covenantal continuity of the Jewish People. I have made clear my decided preference for Incarnational Christology. But I recognize that this is not an easy choice as the two other major Christological perspectives have played a central role in defining Christianity over the centuries and impacting its liturgical expression. Christology stands at the very nerve center of Christian identity so we must go slow and with appropriate caution in any major adjustment in our Christological outlook.

In my remarks today I have spoken from within and to the Christian community. But I believe there is also a task for Jewish religious scholars as well. Does Christianity have any theological implications for Jewish self-expression? When Christian leaders such as the last three popes speak of the church’s bondedness with Judaism does that at all resonate with Jewish theological self-understanding? And if not, would Jewish scholars suggest that Christians drop such language as “bondedness” since it cannot be a one-way street. And when a Jewish scholars such as Daniel Boyarin speaks of Christology as a job description already existing in Second Temple Judaism and thus applied rather than invented for Jesus is this merely a totally fringe Jewish perspective or one that may gain ascendancy in Jewish religious circles?^[40]

Finally, the discussion about the theological relationship between Jews and Christians must move beyond institutional theological circles to embrace the growing number of people who have important spiritual links to both religious communities without ties to their formal institutional structures. The dialogue will also have increasingly to incorporate the Christian-Jewish theological discussion into the wider interreligious conversation, Islam in particular. I have argued and will repeat that argument here today, that the Christian-Jewish dialogue has important theological consequences for the church's discussion with all other religious traditions.

There are those both in Jewish and Christian circles who may be apprehensive about the theological challenges I have placed before you this morning. They may appear to undermine necessary boundaries among religious tradition, between Christianity and Judaism in particular. But for me fear is the enemy both of conviction and commitment. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission has underscored Christians and Jews equally live in eschatological hope. Let that be the prevailing context as we face the theological challenges in our relationships.

With sincere gratitude to the ICCJ for the opportunity to share these views with you.

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This is a preview of the full edition of papers from the conference that will be published in 2015.

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