



# Pope Benedict XVI on Jews and Judaism: Retreat or Reaffirmation

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Pope Benedict XVI entered the papacy with some track record with respect to Catholic-Jewish relations. This is especially true in terms of the theological understanding of Christianity's relationship with Judaism. I shall return to the theological aspects of his perspective later on in this presentation. But let me begin my analysis of his tenure as Pope with a review of his statements as head of the Catholic Church.

Benedict XVI has made a number of brief addresses in the context of the Christian-Jewish relationship in the early part of his papacy. The first was in connection with a June 9, 2005, visit to the Vatican by representatives of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC). This is the global body established by the major organizations within the world Jewish community for official dialogue with the Vatican and the World Council of Churches. The second statement was delivered by the Pope during his visit to the synagogue in Cologne as part of his participation in World Youth Day 2005. The third was a letter to Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Holy See's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews, on October 26, 2005, the day prior to the Vatican's official commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, the conciliar text on the Church's relationship with non-Christian religious communities whose chapter four placed the Catholic-Jewish relationship on a totally new footing. In all these statements Pope Benedict expresses his firm determination to follow the footsteps of Pope John Paul II whose papacy is credited with providing chapter four of *Nostra Aetate* a solid footing in Catholicism. *"It is my intention to continue on this path"* — these words italicized in the official text released by the Vatican from the June 2005 meeting with the international Jewish leadership constitute the most important statement in these initial addresses.<sup>1</sup>

In these initial statements as a whole, but especially in the more substantive Cologne declaration, Pope Benedict clearly rejects antisemitism in any form. On this point he has been firm and consistent throughout his papacy. While he has refrained from applying the adjective "sinful" to antisemitism, something that John Paul II did on several occasions, there is little doubt that Benedict XVI shares with his predecessor a fundamental intolerance for antisemitism in any guise. He was quite forceful in this regard in his address in Cologne: "Today, sadly we are witnessing the

rise of new signs of antisemitism and various forms of a general hostility towards foreigners. How can we fail to see in this a reason for concern and vigilance? The Catholic Church is committed — and I reaffirm this again today — to tolerance, respect, friendship and peace between all people, cultures and religion.” He repeated this condemnation of antisemitism in an address to Jewish leaders on his visit to France where he insisted that antisemitism “can never be theologically justified.” <sup>2</sup>

If Pope Benedict might have gone further on this point of antisemitism, it would have been to cite the Fundamental Agreement between Israel and the Holy See establishing formal diplomatic relations on June 15, 1994. The preface to this document contains a statement of joint commitment by both parties to work cooperatively in combating global antisemitism. <sup>3</sup> He might have also alluded to the final communiqué from the July 2004 meeting of the official Vatican-Jewish international dialogue in Buenos Aires where the two delegations agreed to stand up against antisemitism, including certain forms of anti-Zionism. <sup>4</sup> Nonetheless I feel I stand on firm ground in predicting that Benedict XVI's papacy will continue to exhibit unflinching opposition to antisemitism.

Pope Benedict's remarks regarding the Holocaust, particularly in his Cologne address and his statement at the Birkenau extermination camp in late May 2006 where I was present during his visit to Poland, remain somewhat more questionable. In both speeches he certainly acknowledged its brutal horrors. This Pope is no Holocaust denier! At Cologne he made his own the words of his predecessor John Paul II in January 2005 on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz camp of which Birkenau is considered an integral part: “I bow my head before all those who experienced this manifestation of the *mysterium iniquitatis*.” The terrible events of the period, the Pope continued, “must never cease to rouse conscience, to resolve conflicts, to inspire the building of peace.” <sup>5</sup> There is little doubt that Pope Benedict regards the Holocaust as one of the darkest moments in European history. In remarks at a general audience on November 30, 2005, he termed the Holocaust of the Jews as “an infamous project of death.” <sup>6</sup>

It is with regard to the parentage of the Holocaust that Pope Benedict's remarks have raised some eyebrows. Both at Cologne and Birkenau he presented it as primarily, even exclusively, a neo-pagan phenomenon which had no roots in Christianity but instead constituted a fundamental challenge to all religious belief, including Christianity. No reputable scholar on the Holocaust would deny its neo-pagan roots nor its fundamental opposition to all religious perspectives. But equally reputable scholars, and I count myself in this category, would also insist on surfacing the Holocaust's links with classical antisemitism. The Holocaust succeeded in a culture that supposedly was deeply impacted by Christian values for centuries. Much of the Nazi anti-Jewish legislation replicated laws against Jews existing in Christian dominated societies since medieval times. I have always opposed drawing a simplistic straight line between classical Christian antisemitism and the Holocaust. It was not merely the final and most gruesome manifestation of that antisemitism. Clearly it was influenced by modern philosophy and modern racial biology. But we cannot obfuscate the fact that traditional Christianity provided an indispensable seedbed for the widespread support, or at least acquiescence, on the part of large numbers of baptized Christians during the Nazi attack on the Jews and other marginalized groups. Christian antisemitism definitely had a major role in under girding Nazism in its extermination of the Jews and perhaps also in the Nazi treatment of other victim groups such as the disabled, the Roma and Sinti (i.e. Gypsies) and gay people.

In his Cologne and Birkenau addresses Pope Benedict seemed to be supporting a fringe interpretation of the Holocaust which presents it solely as an attack on religion in all its forms rather than a phenomenon that drew strongly on a previous antisemitic base in the heart of Christianity. His remarks can leave the impression, intended or not, that the Holocaust was simply the result of secularizing modern forces in Europe at the time of the Nazis not dissimilar from the secularizing forces that affect Europe today in particular and which as Cardinal Ratzinger and now as Pope he

has strongly attacked. Meira Scherer-Emunds, in an article in *U.S. Catholic* magazine described the papal visit to the synagogue in Cologne as a “milestone,” but also as a “missed opportunity,” because of the Pope's failure to deal forthrightly with Christian culpability during the Nazi era.<sup>7</sup>

When we ask why Pope Benedict has been so reluctant to confront Christian responsibility during the Holocaust several answers may emerge. One possibility is that he simply fails to understand the depth of Christian complicity. He certainly is aware that there were some bad apples, if I can put it that way, within the Christian community at this time. But he seems to regard them as few in number and as rather isolated individuals in terms of the overall Christian community. Fr. Patrick Desbois, who chairs the French Episcopal Commission on Catholic-Jewish Relations and whose recent work in uncovering mass graves from the Holocaust period in the Ukraine has been profiled in the *New York Times* and on NBC television in the United States, work he has undertaken with support from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, has reported on a letter received by the late Cardinal Lustiger of Paris who had given his strong personal support to Fr. Desbois' efforts in the Ukraine from Benedict XVI. The Pope's letter was in response to a letter from the Cardinal informing him of Fr. Desbois work. In the letter received by Cardinal Lustiger the Pope expresses shock to learn of the information of Catholic collaboration in terms of these mass graves. It would seem that Benedict XVI has never made himself aware of the full depth of Catholic complicity in the Holocaust.

An even stronger influence may in fact be Pope Benedict's ecclesiological outlook. He has shown a strong tendency to regard the church as primarily an eternal, heavenly reality basically unaffected by human history. Scholars have shown how little the present Pope has referenced Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* in contrast to John Paul II for whom it served as a basic reference. This clearly reveals Benedict's great reluctance to deal directly with the church as a reality in human history.

I hope that in future addresses Pope Benedict might expand his understanding of the roots of the Holocaust to include the role that traditional Christian antisemitism played in its development. His speech at Birkenau does show some development, though not on the Catholic responsibility question, in contrast to Cologne. In Poland he brought out the theological challenges the Holocaust poses for our understanding of God, something not present in his Cologne address.<sup>8</sup> And as Cardinal Ratzinger Pope Benedict has in fact (Exhibit D) some understanding of the link between traditional Christian antisemitism and the ability of the Nazis to carry out their program of Jewish extermination. In a front page article in the December 29, 2000, issue of *L'Osservatore Romano*, he argued that “it cannot be denied that a certain insufficient resistance to this atrocity on the part of Christians can be explained by the inherited anti-Judaism in the hearts of not a few Christians.”

<sup>9</sup> It is a shame that the Pope failed to include this rather weak statement in either his Cologne or Birkenau addresses.

Following upon his own stated commitment to walk in the footsteps of John Paul II on issues of Christian-Jewish relations, he would be well advised to pursue his predecessor's remarks in the March 2000 “liturgy of pardon” at the Vatican<sup>10</sup> and subsequently at the Western Wall in Jerusalem where there was a clear acknowledgement of Christianity's role in fomenting antisemitism and a sincere request for pardon for this sinful failure in future statements in the Holocaust. It would also prove beneficial if he made use of the 1998 Vatican document on the Holocaust, *We Remember*, which, along with the German, French and even Polish episcopal statements of several years ago, took responsibility for the Holocaust in a way Pope Benedict never does in his two addresses. None of these documents, including *We Remember*, were referenced in Cologne or at Birkenau. I must admit to great astonishment at this omission.

In his Cologne address Pope Benedict did urge Catholic and Jewish scholars to take up together the difficult historical issues in the Church's relationship with the Jewish People. This sounds

similar to the so-called historians' project of several years ago launched by Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy which focused on a thorough assessment of the pertinent materials from the Vatican archives released during the pontificate of Paul VI. Unfortunately this effort fell by the wayside when Cardinal Cassidy departed the curia despite the Cardinal urging his successor Cardinal Walter Kasper to continue the effort despite the acrimony surrounding it because of some unfortunate press statements by members of the commission as well as staunch resistance from those within the Vatican promoting the canonization of Pius XII. If Pope Benedict would support reestablishment of a similar, even if not exact, project this would mark an important step forward. It would show some awareness of a link between the actions of the Church and the development of antisemitism that is basically missing from his Cologne and Birkenau addresses. Realistically I have little hope this will occur as the Vatican has in fact adopted a totally "defensive" posture on Pius XII and the Holocaust, highlighting the work only of scholars who support its view, some of whose scholarship has been highly questioned, and ignoring the work of reputable Christian and Jewish scholars who take a more critical stance. We are still awaiting a clear decision on the request made by Rabbi David Rosen to the Pope as Chair of the International Jewish Liaison Committee for Interreligious Consultation (IJCIC) in late October when the IJCIC leadership met with the Pope. Pope Benedict responded to this request by saying he would consider postponement of Pius XII's canonization until scholars are able to access fully the relevant Vatican archives.

Historians should be given the opportunity to sift through remaining archival materials that have come to the fore with the collapse of the German Democratic Republic in particular as well as new documents from Latin American sources. It will take scholars several years to digest these materials. They may or may not alter our perspectives on the papacy of Pius XII regarding the Jewish question. Certainly the Vatican should be encouraged to put forth any documentary evidence it may uncover that supports a more positive assessment of his role. But distinguished scholars, both Catholic and Jewish, should be given the opportunity to examine and critique such new evidence. Only in this way can the Vatican hope to establish credibility on the issue. The fact is that it will prove difficult for historians, especially Catholic ones, to conduct a thorough review of the materials if they are forced to examine them in a context where Pius XII has already been declared a saint. Granted the matter of his canonization does not rest solely on his record regarding the Jewish community. But neither can this question be marginalized in any discussion of his canonization.

Cardinal Edward Cassidy in response to pleas for a hold from leading Jewish and Christian scholars recognized the wisdom of such a delay when he served as President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, as did some other key Vatican officials. Hopefully that "wisdom" will find acceptance as well within the current papacy.

Pope Benedict has already shown some sensitivity on Holocaust matters. For one, he ordered the postponement of the canonization of Fr. Leon Dehon, approved during the previous papacy, in the face of mounting evidence of an antisemitic mindset in his writings which was not treated with full seriousness in the initial probe of his work. A blue ribbon committee, if I may call it that, consisting of several Vatican officials with demonstrated sensitivity on the issue of Catholic-Jewish relations was commissioned by Pope Benedict to investigate these writings with the clear indication that if the evidence proved conclusive the canonization recommendation would be cancelled. It should also be noted that under Pope Benedict the Holy See's office at the United Nations gave strong support to the proposal for an International Holocaust Remembrance Day when that proposal first came before the General Assembly.

A final aspect of the Pope's Cologne address that has raised some questions within the Jewish community had to do with the omission of any mention of the State of Israel which has become so central in contemporary Jewish identity. At a 2005 international conference at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University a leading Jewish figure in the dialogue with Christians Dr. Ruth Langer of

Boston College argued that the Jewish attachment to the land of Israel must become part of the interreligious dialogue with Jews. The distinction currently maintained by the Vatican between religious relations with the Jewish community coordinated through Cardinal Walter Kasper's office and political discussions handled by the Vatican Secretariat of State simply do not correspond with Jewish self-identity on the issue. Langer maintained that contemporary Jewish religious identity involves deep ties with the land of Israel. The Vatican's 1974 Guidelines on Catholic-Jewish relations issued for the tenth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in fact urge, in what has become their most notable statement, that Catholics must come to understand Jews as they define themselves.

Increasingly Jews are finding the Vatican's separation of the religious and political relations with the world Jewish community unacceptable and not in keeping with the spirit of the 1974 guidelines. Dr. Michael Kotzin, the director of the Jewish Community Relations Council in Chicago and a longtime participant in the inter-institutional Catholic-Jewish dialogue in Chicago, has picked up on Dr. Langer's critique. In an essay in progress growing out of his presentation at the same 2005 Gregorian University conference he argues that a "religious" dialogue with Jews that does not include the notion of Jewish attachment to the land through the state of Israel falsifies the understanding of the overwhelming number of Jews today. He adds that Pope Benedict's omission of any reference to Israel in his Cologne address perpetuates this false division.

I suspect this issue of a separation between the religious and the political in discussions with the Jewish academic and communal leadership will continue to arise during Pope Benedict's papacy. I rather doubt that we will see any change in the Vatican's position in this regard, but surprises are always possible. I should add that Pope Benedict did issue a statement congratulating Israel on its sixtieth anniversary of statehood. While he did raise legitimate concerns about the situation of Christians in the region, his statement was generally well accepted by the international Jewish leadership.

The most recent public issue in which Pope Benedict has been directly involved is of course the Good Friday prayer. His newly reformulated prayer for use in those churches that follow the Tridentine Missal has caused considerable controversy, especially in Germany, Italy and Austria. The criticisms have come equally from Catholics and Jews including a number of bishops. While Pope Benedict's prayer eliminates the harsh negative language of the prayer found in the 1962 Missal, it has a far more conversionist bent than the 1970 Missal version of the prayer approved by Pope Paul VI which stresses Jewish covenantal faithfulness, leaving open-ended the issue of conversion. This prayer still falls under the heading found in the 1962 Missal, i.e., "for the conversion of the Jews." There is some talk that the word "conversion" will be stricken from the Tridentine Missal but nothing has happened on that score till now. At the International Liaison Committee meeting in Budapest in mid-November, Cardinal Walter Kasper promised the Jewish delegation that he would try to have that heading removed from the missal. There have also been fears that Pope Benedict will move to have his new prayer become "the prayer," eliminating the 1970 version. A prominent German theologian Franz Mussner has informed us that on the basis of a personal conversation with the Pope regarding the prayer he is convinced Pope Benedict has no such intention. I have discussed the issue of the prayer much more extensively in an article in *Commonweal* and in a contribution in German in a volume released by German Catholic and Jewish critics of the new papal prayer. <sup>11</sup>

The controversy surrounding this prayer continues, though the decibel tone has been somewhat lowered. Cardinal Walter Kasper in a number of published pieces in German and Italian has tried to cast Pope Benedict's prayer in an entirely eschatological context, having no immediate application in terms of concrete efforts to convert Jews. Kasper has claimed that Pope Benedict encouraged him to publish this article though we have no corroborating evidence of this. The Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Bertone, in a letter of clarification sent to the Chief Rabbis of Israel in response to their inquiry about the prayer, has supported Cardinal Kasper's eschatological



interpretation. The President of the United States Catholic Bishops' Conference Cardinal Francis George has also endorsed such an interpretation. However, Cardinal Bertone's letter was never officially released as a public document and was not placed on the Vatican website. So its status remains somewhat ambiguous. In the meantime the United States Catholic Bishops' conference in August issued a revised version of the statement on the Jews in the catechism which included a set of notes for bishops on the change which appear to counter at least in part the strictly eschatological interpretation offered by Cardinals Kasper and Bertone.

Clearly the issue of the new prayer remains in flux. In September of this year a delegation from the German Committee of Catholics and Jews whose members have been especially vocal in their critique of the prayer went to Rome to meet with Cardinal Kasper and with the Pope. There is some belief that a further statement of clarification regarding the prayer may still be in the offing. Here in Canada a statement from the Centre for Catholic-Jewish Learning at Kings University College in London, Ontario, expressed disappointment and regret over the new papal prayer. And we are beginning to see the emergence of proposals for active attempts at converting Jews from the likes of Cardinal Schonborn of Vienna in an article in the influential Catholic publication *The Tablet*.<sup>12</sup> a conference at the Catholic University of America sponsored by Hebrew Catholics at which the Papal Nuncio gave the keynote address and the establishment of a new women's religious community under the patronage of the Archbishop of St. Louis by people long associated with the promotion of efforts to convert Jews on the ETWN television network and other media outlets. While none of this has been officially endorsed by Pope Benedict or key Vatican officials neither has a word of criticism or even caution come forth regarding such plans.

The final public statements made by Benedict XVI occurred during his visit to the United States this past summer. He briefly addressed the Jewish leadership both in Washington and in a synagogue in New York. While both were positive in tone they were quite brief, the New York one lasting less than five minutes. Neither addressed substantive questions. As a longtime Jewish participant in the dialogue Rabbi A. James Rudin put it, these brief presentations had a symbolic value but lacked any meaningful substance in contrast to Pope John Paul II's visit to the synagogue in Rome which joined powerful symbolism with a substantive text.

Let me now turn to more theological issues in the Christian-Jewish relationship as they have played themselves out in the writings of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. So far as Pope, Benedict XVI has said little in this regard though his Cologne address does encourage continued exploration of the theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship as well as a generic approval of statements made by Pope John Paul II on the relationship.

We need to go back as far as October 1987. In an interview in the Italian Catholic *// Sabato* on October 24th Cardinal Ratzinger, speaking to the interviewer in German as head of CDF, argued that church teaching must always reflect the "theological line" that Judaism finds its fulfillment in Christianity. The aim of dialogue is to arrive at truth rather than to exchange opinions. For Ratzinger in that interview Christianity must see itself as united with the faith of Abraham, but also emphasize the reality of Jesus Christ in which the faith of Abraham finds its fulfillment.<sup>13</sup> This interview caused widespread negative reaction in Jewish circles and led to the postponement of a scheduled session of the official Vatican-Jewish dialogue. Subsequently Ratzinger claimed his German was not accurately translated by the Italian interviewer. He wanted to emphasize that this was the Catholic perspective which he recognized Jews would not likely accept. This interview I judge important because it began a line of thinking on the part of Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict that has remained fairly consistent. Hence Cardinal Ratzinger has always maintained the position that we can only speak of a single covenant linking Jews and Christians. Any talk of dual covenants is tantamount to heresy.

There was a rather brief moment several years ago when it looked as though Ratzinger might be

open to some adjustment in his earlier perspective. There is no question that Cardinal Ratzinger regarded the Christian-Jewish relationship as *sui generis* theologically, something clearly acknowledged in an endnote in the official CDF notification on the writings of the late Fr. Jacques Dupuis, S.J., in particular his volume *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* where it is stated that the relationship between Christianity and Judaism requires “an altogether singular explanation.”

At the end of the nineties and in early 2000 Cardinal Ratzinger did offer some succinct perspectives that appeared to make him somewhat more open in terms of the theological issues in the Christian-Jewish relationship that was evident in his controversial remarks made in 1987. These perspectives came in two articles, one book, and in the laudatory introduction he wrote for the 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission's two hundred plus page monograph on *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*.<sup>14</sup> The articles were “The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas,” which was published in the December 29, 2000 edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* and a Spring 1998 essay in *Communio* entitled “Interreligious Dialogue and Jewish-Christian Relations.” The latter piece was eventually incorporated into a full length book (though in a somewhat different translation) *Many Religions One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World*.<sup>15</sup>

In the two major articles Ratzinger seemed to propose an understanding of the Christian-Jewish relationship as one in which the two faith communities move along distinctive, but not separated, paths towards a eschatological culmination. Hence there is only one covenant, not two, but pre-eschatologically there exist two different paths. Ratzinger clearly affirms that the Jewish community advances to final salvation through continuing obedience to its revealed covenantal tradition. In the end Christ will confirm that Jewish covenant. Thus Christ remains central to ultimate Jewish salvation, though it is not fully clear whether Ratzinger believes Jews must explicitly acknowledge Christ to attain full salvation. What does seem to be present in these two essays is an acknowledgement that there is no need for Christians to proselytize Jews in the pre-eschatological era. Here Ratzinger seems to be close to Cardinal Kasper's explicit assertion that the church has no need to proselytize Jews since they are already part of the one covenantal relationship with God, though, unlike Kasper, he does not make his position as clear-cut. This viewpoint on the two distinctive paths may also account for Pope Benedict's claimed willingness to endorse the eschatological interpretation of his new Good Friday prayer put forth by Cardinal Kasper though, as previously indicated, we have no evidence for such an endorsement beyond Cardinal Kasper's personal claim.

The 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, despite some significant limitations in the way it portrays postbiblical Judaism, makes an important contribution to the development of a new constructive theological understanding of the Christian-Jewish relationship. Picking up on *Nostra Aetate*'s central assertion that Jews remain in the ongoing covenant after the Christ Event, the document includes two statements that are particularly relevant for any discussion of such a theological understanding.

In the first of these assertions, which Cardinal Ratzinger explicitly supported in his Introduction to the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, one finds the statement that Jewish messianic hopes are not in vain. In other words, there exists an authentic, parallel interpretation of the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures on the part of the Jews which stands side-by-side with the interpretation of such texts within the New Testament. Though this is rather oblique language and likely will not inspire overwhelming cheers from the Jewish side, it seems to move in a direction similar to the distinctive paths notion advocated by Cardinal Kasper when he wrote “if they (i.e., the Jews) follow their own conscience and believe in God's promises as they understand them in their religious tradition they are in line with God's plan.”<sup>16</sup> But since Kasper has also insisted that we must retain a universal significance for Christ in any interreligious dialogue, including with Jews, he would

seem to be close to Ratzinger's idea of eschatological confirmation of the Jewish path to salvation through Christ. At a conference at Cambridge University in December 2004, in response to a question I put to him, Kasper strongly insisted that there exists only one salvific path in the end, not two parallel ones. But Jews on that singular path advance in ways that are distinctive from the ways of Christians. Obviously much ambiguity remains in the perspectives both of Ratzinger/Benedict and Kasper.

Neither as Cardinal Ratzinger nor as Benedict XVI has there been on his part any further development of these theological "kernals," if I may call them that, put forth a decade or so ago. Some years ago I had some hope that in fact this might occur directly or through some endorsement of further reflections on this point by Cardinal Kasper. But in fact there has been no real advancement in the thinking of either one and at this point I would be rather surprised to see such from either of them. Cardinal Kasper once spoke of developing a new statement on Catholic-Jewish relations for the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in October 2005. But that idea was dropped, most likely because of Kasper's assessment that any such attempt would not survive current politics at the Vatican. And Pope Benedict, to the best of my knowledge, has never come back to his reflections in the late nineties in any statement he has issued during his papacy.

The second affirmative statement within the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, a statement not explicitly mentioned in Cardinal Ratzinger's Introduction, is the claim that when the Jewish Messiah comes he will have the same traits already recognized by Christians in Christ. While this assertion is also quite oblique, perhaps deliberately so, I have argued that it may provide some additional opening for Jewish distinctiveness within a single covenantal outlook. For the document seems to leave open the question whether Jews must name those messianic traits also revealed in and through Jesus in explicitly Christological language. Can Jews authentically express such messianic traits in theological language and symbols more in keeping with their tradition? The PBC document does not clearly say they can; but neither does it seem automatically to rule out a distinctive set of terms. And it appears to put the two messianic revelations on more or less equal footing. One has to assume that Cardinal Ratzinger had at least some openness to such an idea since he did not object to the inclusion of this language in the document which ultimately depended on his approval as head of CDF for promulgation.

To complete the theological picture I should make reference to the book on Christology written during papacy but in his capacity as a theologian rather than Pope with the title *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*.<sup>17</sup> In chapter four of this volume he enters into a dialogue with a book by the Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner in which Neusner has created a mythical dialogue between himself and Jesus. Benedict highly praises Neusner's perspective on the fundamental differences between Judaism and Christianity while showing respect and appreciation for Neusner himself and the Jewish nation as a whole.<sup>18</sup> When Benedict's book was first released, this dialogue received considerable attention in the religious and secular press, including the *New York Times*.

One must certainly say that in comparison to the historic Christian-Jewish debates in the Middle Ages, this encounter represents a positive breakthrough. But to be frank, this dialogue has not encountered much enthusiasm within the community of scholars working within the Christian-Jewish dialogue. This particular volume by Neusner is written very much for a popular rather than a scholarly audience. It does not adequately reflect even the important work that Neusner has done on the Pharisees over the years. In the end, the judgment of most theologians involved with the dialogue is that we have a series of stereotypical presentations of the Christian-Jewish relationship on both sides of the issue. Neither Benedict nor Neusner integrates into these respective volumes any of the groundbreaking scholarship on the so-called "parting of the ways" in the first several centuries of the Common Era. Both leave us despite positive tones in their presentations with a picture of the Christian-Jewish relationship which imply predates new scholarship.



In considering Pope Benedict's theological outlook relative to the Jewish relationship we also have to factor into the mix the controversial declaration *Dominus Iesus* released by the CDF in 2000 which most commentators see as directly from the hand of the then Cardinal Ratzinger. *Dominus Iesus* raised serious concerns within the Jewish community, though not as severe as within sectors of the non-Catholic Christian community. Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy along with then Archbishop Kasper and Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald did everything possible to calm the waters. Cassidy and Kasper along with Cardinal William Keeler insisted immediately that the document did not pertain to the Jews. That viewpoint seemed to have prevailed even though it would have been much easier to argue that if *Dominus Iesus* had itself explicitly excluded Jews from its framework. The entire ethos of the document is such that it places Catholicism above every other religious tradition, Christian or non-Christian. And since for *Dominus Iesus* the bottom line is the sacramental tradition any religious community lacking such is inherently inferior to the Catholic Church. So the logic of the document clearly relegates Judaism to a fundamentally inferior position. But it is interesting to note here that at the Assisi II gathering which was structured in the main on the model provided in *Dominus Iesus* the Jewish participants were accorded a status that went well beyond that accorded to the representatives of the non-sacramental Christian bodies.

Overall, as Pope, Benedict XVI has exhibited an ambiguous theological approach to Jews. On some occasions, he has shown a positive attitude towards the Jewish religious tradition and emphasized Christianity's deep connections with it. There is evidence that he would sympathize with the recent Synod of Bishops declaration about the beauty and richness of the Jewish Scriptures and how the Jewish exegetical traditions enhance biblical understanding within the church. Likewise with the declaration's assertion, following MT 5:17 and ROM 9:4, that Jesus did not come to abolish the law and that the adoption, the covenants and the promises still belong to the Jewish People. <sup>19</sup>

But we also have instances where he appears to endorse a position close to supersessionism. In an address given in St. Peter's Square on March 15, 2006, as part of the usual Wednesday general audience Pope Benedict presented some views which are problematical from the standpoint of where Christian-Jewish relations have come since *Nostra Aetate* as well as from current understandings in biblical scholarship. Launching a new cycle of catechesis on the theme of the relationship between Christ and the Church, the Pope spoke of the arrival of the definitive eschatological time in Jesus, "the time for rebuilding God's people, the people of the twelve tribes, which is now converted into a universal people, the Church." The twelve tribes, the Pope added, are "reunited in a new covenant, the full and perfect accomplishment of the old."

And at the opening of the recent Synod where Rabbi Cohen from Israel was invited to deliver an address (certainly a positive development for which Pope Benedict must be given due credit) the Pope selected a personal friend Cardinal Albert Vanhoye, former rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and former secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to offer the initial Catholic presentation. Cardinal Vanhoye who has devoted his scholarly career to the study of the Letter to the Hebrews had also been invited by Benedict XVI to conduct this year's papal retreat. In his remarks the Cardinal argued that while Jews remain in a covenantal relationship with God the Sinai covenant has in fact been abrogated, a view that certainly emerges from sections of Hebrews and which Cardinal Avery Dulles has recently brought to the forefront once again. Since the papal retreat given by Cardinal Vanhoye focused on the text of Hebrews there is strong reason to suspect the Pope heard a similar viewpoint during the retreat. We have no concrete indication that Benedict objected to this interpretation by the Cardinal in any way. Some connected with the 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission document which Cardinal Vanhoye used as a point of reference for his Synod address have argued that the Cardinal misinterpreted the PBC document.

Finally, in a widely publicized letter to an Italian senator for inclusion in a book by the senator on interreligious dialogue the Pope basically returns to the perspective of *Dominus Iesus* that

Catholicism possesses the full truth so that it ultimately has nothing to learn theologically from interreligious dialogue. Such dialogue may enhance justice and positively impact culture but it offers no possibility of exposing new truth from the Catholic perspective. So all the talk about “learning from Judaism” mentioned above appears to take on a very superficial dimension.

A key opportunity presents itself in connection with the Pauline Jubilee Year proclaimed by the Pope. Paul has often been misrepresented as the foe of Jewish tradition. While this misrepresentation has had a greater impact on Protestant theology than on Catholic theology it certainly played a role in creating a negative image of Jews and Judaism within Catholicism as well.

For centuries a master narrative rooted in the book of Acts has tended to dominate the understanding of Paul's outlook on Judaism and its Torah in terms of Christian belief. This master narrative begins with Stephen's decisive break with Judaism in chapter seven of Acts. So-called Jewish Christians then begin to disappear from this master narrative until chapter eleven when they are totally removed from the story following Peter's revelatory vision through which he is convinced to abandon his previous adherence to continued Jewish observance. From that point onwards the master narrative focuses exclusively on gentiles as the new people of God and moves the geographic center of Christianity to Rome in place of Jerusalem. Thus in the account of Christian origins that has tended to dominate in the church's vision Judaism is superceded and even annulled with Paul being viewed as the primary messenger for this teaching. The master narrative from Acts has impacted Catholic liturgical life in particular as it dominates during the Easter season.

This classical perspective on Paul and Judaism was significantly reinforced in the mid-nineteenth century in the writings of F.C. Baur. In his classical work *Paul the Apostle* (1845) Baur argued for the existence of only two factions in the early church. One was the Jewish Christians whose leader was Peter and the other Gentile Christians who looked to Paul for spiritual leadership. The Jewish Christians, in Baur's perspective, stood mired in a narrow legalism that blinded them to the universalistic elements in Jesus' teachings championed by Paul.

Recent biblical scholarship, with much effort, has worked to break out of the limitations imposed by the master narrative based solely upon Acts as revived by Baur and his disciples. This effort is part of a much broader reinterpretation of the early years of the Christian-Jewish relationship known as “The Parting of the Ways” discussion.<sup>20</sup> A growing consensus within this new scholarship insists that there is no evidence that Jesus intended to establish a totally new religious institution apart from Judaism in his own lifetime and that we cannot really speak of a definitive break between Judaism and Christianity until at least the mid-second century and even later in some sectors of Eastern Christianity. Scholars involved in this new research paint a far more complex and nuanced picture of the first century Jewish-Christian relationship than argued by Baur. In reality many different groups existed within an acceptance of the way proclaimed by Jesus. Even so-called “Christ worship,” some of these scholars would maintain, did not automatically sever the bond with Judaism for those who engaged in such worship. A striking comment on the new approach to Paul and Judaism in recent biblical studies came from the late Fr. Raymond Brown in a popular lecture shortly before his death. Brown said that he now become convinced that if Paul had fathered a son he would have had him circumcised to underscore his continued personal attachment to Torah.

What is beginning to emerge in important sectors of Pauline scholarship is the picture of a Paul still very much a Jew, still quite appreciative of Jewish Torah with seemingly no objection to its continued practice by Jewish Christians so long as their basic orientation is founded in Christ and his teachings, and still struggling towards the end of his ministry to balance his understanding of the newness implied in the Christ Event with the continuity of the Jewish covenant, something quite apparent in the famous chapters 9-11 of Romans cited by Vatican II in chapter four of *Nostra*

*Aetate* where we find the conciliar declaration of the new understanding of the church's relationship with the Jewish people.

It is also possible, though far less certain, that some of the Pauline writings, particularly his Christological hymns, may have roots in Paul's personal contact with the Jewish mysticism of the time, though Paul would have added his distinctive interpretations. A few of the biblical scholars involved in the new Pauline research even go so far as to maintain that Paul regarded Torah observance so highly that he feared that if Gentiles tried to practice it they would only corrupt its authentic spirit. Such a view admittedly pushes the envelope of scholarly evidence a bit far, but it is presently under discussion in some scholarly circles. I discuss this new scholarship in a recent article in *Celebration* magazine.<sup>21</sup>

Pope Benedict would certainly have the opportunity to bring this new scholarship to the attention of the global Catholic community during this Jubilee year and thus make a major contribution to the further development to the new vision of the Catholic-Jewish relationship begun at Vatican II. Do I have any hope that this might occur? Frankly, not very much. A recent collection of Pope Benedict's writings on Paul released by the U.S. Bishops' publishing office in collaboration with the Vatican offers no evidence that the Pope has any awareness of this new biblical scholarship.

In summary, my view of Pope Benedict XVI regarding Jews and Judaism sees him as a leader with a deep-seated opposition to antisemitism and a generally favorable outlook on Israel though with some legitimate concerns about its specific policies towards Palestinians and towards the Christian community. He is also profoundly sensitive to the horrors of the Holocaust but lacks an adequate grasp of the depth of Christian complicity in its execution, including Catholic institutional complicity. On the theological level, while pledging his continued support of the teachings of Vatican II and of his predecessor John Paul II, Pope Benedict has not contributed anything constructive to the continued development of a new theological understanding of the church's relationship with the Jewish People. The theological "kernals" he put forth in this regard in his latter years as Cardinal Ratzinger have not appeared in any of his papal writings. His new Good Friday prayer in fact moves the theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship some steps backwards. At this point I am not very optimistic that we shall see much development in such a theology. Perhaps the best we can hope for is no further backward steps. The central problem for Pope Benedict as it was for Cardinal Ratzinger in such documents as *Dominus Iesus* resides in his fundamental vision of the church. His ecclesiological perspective is one that sees the Catholic church as a totally completed institution incapable of any major redefinition and without any need in the end to learn anything new theologically from a dialogue with other Christians, Jews or any other religious group. He simply shows no awareness that, as Gregory Baum who may have penned the very first version of what became chapter four of *Nostra Aetate* said in an address at the 1986 meeting of the Catholic Theological Society in Chicago, this document represented the most radical change in the ordinary magisterium of the church to come out of the Council.<sup>22</sup>

There is no question that Pope Benedict has a personal affection for Jews and Judaism and that he hopes for a positive relationship with the global Jewish community in the social sphere, especially those Jewish groups that share his same perspectives on key issues such as abortion and women's liturgical and ministerial roles. But while it would give me great pleasure to be wrong on this score, I do not believe we shall see any major developments at the theological level. He basically shows no awareness that the vision of the Christian-Jewish relationship launched at Vatican II represents a fundamental challenge to central aspects of the classical Catholic theological identity.

## NOTES

1. Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, "First Major Meeting with World Jewish Leaders," *Origins*, 35:6

- (June 23, 2005): 88-89; Pope Benedict XVI, "Visit to Cologne Synagogue," *Origins*, 35:12 (September 1, 2005): 205-207. Pope Benedict XVI's October 26, 2005, Message to Cardinal Kasper is available on the website of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College, <http://twww.bc.edu/research/cjl>
2. Pope Benedict XVI, "Visit to the Cologne Synagogue," 206 and "French Visit. Meeting with Jewish Leaders," *Origins*, 38:16 (September 25, 2008): 248.
  3. The text of the Fundamental Agreement with commentaries by David Rosen, Lisa Palmieri-Billig, myself and others can be found in Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenick (eds.), *A Challenge Long Delayed: The Diplomatic Exchange Between the Holy See and the State of Israel* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1994).
  4. . International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, "Joint Commitment by Catholics and Jews to Justice," *Origins*, 34:13 (September 9, 2004): 307-28.
  5. Pope Benedict XVI, "Visit to the Cologne Synagogue," 206.
  6. The text can be found on the website of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College. Cf. note #1.
  7. Meinrad Scherer-Edmunds, "Never Again! The Pope's Visit to the Cologne Synagogue was both a milestone and a missed opportunity," *U.S. Catholic*, 70:11 (November 2005): 50.
  8. "The Pope's Visit to Auschwitz," *Origins*, 36:4 (June 8, 2006): 49-52.
  9. As quoted in Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, *Rediscovering Vatican II: Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue-Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate* (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 249.
  10. The text of *We Remember* is available on the website of the International Council of Christians & Jews, [www.jcrelations.net](http://www.jcrelations.net) For a thorough discussion of the document including reflections by Cardinal; Edward Idris Cassidy, cf. Judith H. Banki and John Pawlikowski (eds.), *Ethics in the Shadow of the Holocaust. Christian and Jewish Perspectives* (Franklin, WI and Chicago: Sheed & Ward) 1-231. My own reflections on the document are included herein.
  11. Cf. John T. Pawlikowski, "Wir müssen die Stagnation im katholisch jüdischen Verhältnis überwinden," in Walter Homolka and Erich Zenger (eds.), "...damnit sie Jesus Christus erkennen," *Die neue Karfreitagsfurbitte für die Juden* (Freiburg/ Basel Nienna: Herder, 2008). Also cf. John T. Pawlikowski and Judith H. Banki, "Praying for the Jews," *Commonweal*, CXXXV:5 (March 14, 2008): 10-12.
  12. Cardinal Christoph Schonbom, "Judaism's Way to Salvation," *The Tablet*, March 29, 2008:1-3.
  13. Cf. Ari L. Goldman, "Cardinal's Remarks on Jews Questioned," *New York Times*. November 18, 1987, 10; "Dialogue with Jews must reflect Catholic theology, says official," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 30, 1987.
  14. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Vatican City: Libreria Edifice Vaticana, 2002). For a discussion of the document, cf. the special issue of *The Bible Today*, May/June 2003.
  15. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Interreligious Dialogue and Jewish-Christian Relations," *Communio* 25:1 (1998): 29-41; *Many Religions-One Covenant*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000; "The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas," *L'Osservatore Romano*, December 29, 2001: 1.
  16. Cardinal Walter Kasper, "Christians, Jews and the thorny question of Mission," *Origins*, 32:28 (December 18, 2002): 464.
  17. Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York/London: Doubleday, 2007).
  18. Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesu.* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000).
  19. For the text of the Synod's final communiqué, cf. *Origins*, 38:22 (September 1, 2005): 341-349.
  20. Two recent collections of articles from the "Parting of the Ways" discussion are Matt Jackson-McCabe (ed.), *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and*

*Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) and Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

21. John T. Pawlikowski, "The Year of Paul, Founder of Christianity or Faithful Jew," *Celebration*, 37:9 (September 8, 2008): 3-5.

22. Gregory Baum, "The Social Context of American Catholic Theology." *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 41 (1986), 87.

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