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'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Theological Reflection

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Abstract

In 2015 the Commission for Religions Relations with the Jews published a document called *'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic–Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra Aetate'* (no. 4). In this article I will focus in particular on some of the theological questions that are addressed in sections 3 through 6—questions that have increasingly moved into the foreground in the dialogue in recent decades. In particular, I will explore the relation between the old and new covenant, how the uniqueness and universality of salvation in Christ are related to the recognition that God's covenant with Israel has never been revoked, and the question of the mission to the Jews. In presenting the document and grappling with it, (1) I will glance back briefly and outline the theological *status quaestionis*, I will then (2) analyze what new developments *The Gifts* formulates. Finally, moving beyond the document, (3) I will engage it in discussion.

Keywords

Catholic–Jewish relations, covenant, mission to the Jews, *Nostra Aetate*, The Gifts, Trinity

The Commission for Religions Relations with the Jews recently published a document called *'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic–Jewish Relations on the Occasion of*

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the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra Aetate' (no. 4).¹ This document follows the same path that the Church has travelled since Vatican II and opens up new theological perspectives that have also been made possible by 50 years of intense Jewish–Catholic dialogue. It is a particularly interesting read, especially for theologians who are actively involved in this dialogue and whose research is devoted to formulating a non-supersessionist theology of Judaism.

The Gifts consists of seven sections. It begins with a historical glance backwards at 50 years of dialogue, mentioning both the most important milestones (e.g. *Nostra Aetate* and the establishment of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, IJCIC, in 1970) and a few very significant papal symbolic actions (such as John Paul II's visit to the synagogue in Rome and Auschwitz-Birkenau, the lectures by Benedict XVI on the relation between the Old and New Testaments, and more recently, Pope Francis's visit to Israel). As is usually the case with official documents, the emphasis here also lies on the growing amicability between the two religions and not on the obstacles that they encounter along the way.² The document closes with mentioning some of the most important goals of the dialogue with Judaism: reinforcing mutual knowledge, joint aid for justice, reconciliation and peace, and combatting all forms of racial discrimination and anti-Semitism.

The second section discusses the special theological status of Jewish–Christian dialogue. There is an unbreakable family connection between the Church and Israel: the Jews are our elder siblings. Because of this bond, dialogue between Jews and Christians is not a dialogue between 'two intrinsically separate and different religions. It is not the case that two fundamentally diverse religions confront one another after having developed independently of one another or without mutual influence' (15). This also explains, for that matter, why the Commission falls under the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity rather than the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. After all, 'the separation between Synagogue and Church may be viewed as the first and most far-reaching breach among the chosen people' (3). This is less an interreligious dialogue than it is an ecumenical one.

The international press paid the most attention to section 6, which was concerned with the mission to the Jews. That is quite understandable, seeing that, after Vatican II and the years of dialogue that followed, the question whether Jews have to convert to Christ was an unclear issue that became the subject of heated debate.³ *The Gifts* attempts to clarify the issue and states that there is no institutionally organized mission to the Jews. If *Nostra Aetate* was the first official church document to express itself in such an appreciative fashion on Judaism in relation to the Church, then *The Gifts* will be remembered as the first official church document that clearly states that Jews do not need to convert to

1 The document can be consulted on the Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html.

2 Alon Goshen-Gottstein, 'Reflections on a Reflection: A Response to the Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable,' 2.

3 For a recent theological discussion on mission to the Jews, see *Theological Studies* 73 (2012), with contributions by Gavin D'Costa, Edward Kessler, and John Pawlikowski.

Christianity. The fact that this is now stated explicitly is quite a relief for many Jews as well as for many Catholics involved in dialogue. We can still ask, however, if this document, which clearly states that it has no *magisterial authority*, can actually bring the discussion to a close. Moreover, there are still a number of points in the document that require further clarification.

In this article I will focus in particular on some of the theological questions that are addressed in sections 3 through 6—questions that have increasingly moved into the foreground in the dialogue in recent decades. In particular, I will explore the relation between the old and new covenants, how the uniqueness and universality of salvation in Christ are related to the recognition that God's covenant with Israel has never been revoked, and the question of the mission to the Jews. In presenting the document and grappling with it, I will glance back briefly and outline the theological *status quaestionis*, I will then analyze what new developments *The Gifts* formulates. Finally, moving beyond the document, I will engage it in discussion.

God remains Faithful to the Covenant, and Christ is the Saviour Sent by God

Fifty years ago, *Nostra Aetate* §4 brought about a genuine transformation in the relation between Church and Synagogue. Since the Middle Ages, the Church had conceived of its relation to Israel according to a supersessionist theological paradigm: the Church assumes the place of Judaism forever and the role of Israel in God's salvific plan is definitely over. Moreover, because of the Jewish No to Jesus (and the role of the Jews in Christ's death), God has turned away from the Jews: Israel is no longer God's beloved people, and the Church is the new people of God.⁴ Supersessionist theology usually entails exclusivism with respect to salvation (Israel's No excludes it from salvation) and primarily emphasizes the discontinuity between the Church and Israel (saved/lost, loved/rejected, enlightened by/blind to the truth, etc.). For centuries, Christians were unable or not prepared 'to perceive in the [Jewish] other the indwelling of the Spirit.'⁵

History teaches us that theology is far from innocent and has real consequences for how people—in this case, Christians and Jews—relate to each other. Replacement or supersessionist thinking has for centuries theologially legitimated feelings and attitudes of distrust, libel, and rejection, and for the sake of power in European Christianity, theological convictions were often translated into sociopolitical practices of marginalization, exclusion, and expulsion. Jules Isaac calls this the 'teaching of contempt' in his book of that title.⁶ With

4 Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt, 'Israel and the Church: Fulfillment Beyond Supersessionism?' in Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt, eds, *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, 40 (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), 159–83.

5 Elizabeth Groppe, 'The Tri-Unity and the Fractures of Human History,' in Philip Cunningham et al., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Cambridge and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 164–82, 177.

6 Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, 1964).

Nostra Aetate, the Church broke with the ‘teaching of contempt’ and turned down a different path.⁷

In the years prior to *Nostra Aetate*, as well as in the years of dialogue that followed, there was a growing understanding that God remained true to his promises to Israel ‘to whom belongs adoptions as sons, and the glory and the testament, and the giving and following of the law, and the promises. Theirs are the fathers, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is over all things ...’ (Rom. 9:5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. A line of thought that emphasized the lack of faith and the blindness of the Jews shifted to one that stressed God’s loving initiative to conclude a covenant with Israel. The covenant is a gift from God.⁸ Although still somewhat implicitly, *Nostra Aetate* thus points to the possibility that God continues his covenant with Israel after Christ as well. This implicit acknowledgement was made explicit by Pope John Paul II during his visit to Mainz in 1980, and later documents, particularly *The Gifts*, build on it.⁹ If replacement thinking primarily emphasized the discontinuity between the Church and Israel, which often resulted in ecclesiological triumphalism, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews played in a different key since *Nostra Aetate*, paying more attention to the continuity between the Church and Israel and how they both anticipate the eschaton, even though their expectations of that are so different (Jews await the ‘Days of the Messiah’ and Christians the ‘Second Coming’). Ecclesiological triumphalism gave way to increasing modesty that not only emphasized the ‘already but not yet’ of the Kingdom of God but also recognized that the followers of Christ still have much to learn. The image of blind Israel over against the proud, enlightened Church is no longer valid and needs to be replaced by an image in which there is at least an eye for the ‘not yet’ of both their expectations.

The recognition of the continuing value of the Jewish covenant after the coming of Christ initiated an important process of theological reflection in which the relationship between the first and second covenants is central. The question is how God’s covenant with Israel *that was never revoked* is related to the Christian claim of the uniqueness and universality of salvation in Christ and what this means for the mission to the Jews.¹⁰ Following this, how can we express theologically the view that both the Church and Israel, despite or, better, because of their differences, are partners? In the years after Vatican II and especially during the past three decades of intense dialogue, the

7 For a recent discussion of the importance of *Nostra Aetate* 4, see Philip Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom: The Journey to Right Relationship between Catholics and Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 146–53.

8 Erich Zenger, ‘The Foundations of a Christian Theology of Judaism,’ in Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hofmann, SDB, and Joseph Sievers, *The Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 92–112, 100

9 A reinterpretation of Rom 9–11 played an important role in the re-evaluation of Israel. *The Gifts* looks more closely at this question and quotes the letter to the Romans in its title, ‘The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable’ (Rom. 11:29).

10 Cardinal Walter Kasper, ‘The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish–Christian Dialogue,’ Lecture at the *Centre for the Study of Jewish–Christian Relations*, Great Britain, 6 December 2004, §5.

Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews attempted to formulate a consistent theological answer to these questions. To give the position of the Commission a proper framework I will briefly indicate the status quaestionis of the theological discussion.

One-Covenant and Two-Covenant Theologies: The Current State of Discussion

The theology of Jewish–Christian relations distinguishes between one-covenant and two-covenant theologies.¹¹ Both approaches attempt to create clarity regarding the place of Israel in God’s plan of salvation and attempt to reflect on the relation between the Church and Israel without falling into supersessionism. The distinction between both theological approaches is less focused on the *number of covenants* than on the *nature* of the relation that exists between them, a relation that primarily emphasizes their mutual *independence* or a relation of mutual *coherence*. More particularly, the distinction between both approaches seems to be determined by the answer to the following question: Does the first (old) covenant between God and Israel effect salvation on its own, i.e., without *Christ*? Or is Christ involved in one way or another with the first covenant?

According to *two-covenant theology*, Synagogue and Church stand in a salvific relationship with God via two different and distinct covenants (Sinai/Jesus). This approach links up best with Jewish self-understanding. Jews are part of the covenant between God and Israel by *birth*, a covenant that in itself effects salvation. Jesus Christ does not play a soteriological role in this covenant. To assert anything else is, from the Jewish perspective, a *Christianizing* of Judaism that is difficult to swallow. Or, as Alon Goshen-Gottstein states, the Christological claim that ‘Judaism’s own salvific power (whatever that may mean) is dependent on Jesus, even if Jews do not know it,’ is a difficult one for Jews to accept. Recognizing the unique independence of the covenant with Israel is crucial for their self-understanding, and Jews can find it difficult to understand why Christ *needs* to be part of a covenant that was concluded before his coming and continues to remain valid afterwards.¹² In any case, there is no mission to the Jews in a two-covenant theology either, for *their covenant* suffices for them to reach salvation. Frans Rosenzweig already stated it long ago: ‘What Christianity and his Church mean in the world—on that we agree: “no one comes to the Father save through him” (John 14:6). No one comes to the Father, but it is different when one no longer needs to come to the Father because he is already with him. And this is the case with the people of Israel.’¹³ The Church and Israel each have their role to play in God’s plan of salvation, but those roles are different and distinct from each other.

11 John Pawlikowski, ‘Ein Bund oder Zwei Bunde,’ *Theologische Quartalschrift* 176 (1996): 325–40.

12 I am aware that terms like ‘Jewish self-understanding’ or ‘Jewish perspective’ are very essentialistic and could lead to the wrong impression that there something like Judaism as such exists. Nonetheless, I think that there is some unanimity among Jews on this point.

13 Luc Anckaert et al., eds, *The Legacy of Franz Rosenzweig: Collected Essays*, Louvain Philosophical Studies 18 (Leuven: Leuven Universitaire Pers, 2004), 178.

In *one-covenant theology*, the emphasis lies more on continuity and the connection between Israel and the Church. Both covenants are part of one advancing covenant tradition that began at Sinai and was continued in Christ. Their mutual coherence is emphasized more, as is their interdependence. One-covenant theology usually presupposes a theology of fulfilment: ‘The unique Christ event is the climax of God’s salvific action in history and God’s revelation has achieved its fullness in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ fulfils that what God has initiated with Israel.’¹⁴ One-covenant theology can be either missionary or non-missionary.¹⁵

Already in 1985, with *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Catholic Church*, it became clear that the Commission chose the path of one-covenant theologies (I.7). The idea that there are two distinct, separate, and parallel covenants, one for the Jews and one for non-Jews, is clearly rejected. In the first instance, this choice can be explained on the basis of an anti-Marcionist attitude. Marcion of Sinope (85–160) emphasized one-sidedly the opposition between the Old and New Testaments to the extent that he rejected the Old Testament (and specific passages in the New).¹⁶ For Marcion, the Old Testament God was a vengeful God who only brought redemption for the Jews, whereas the New Testament God was a God of love who brought redemption for all in Christ. Marcionism had already been condemned in the early church (144) but still found its way into Christian stereotypical thinking in which the vengeful Old Testament deity is contrasted with the gracious God of the New. In its documents—to nip all Marcionistic and anti-Jewish antagonism in the bud—the Commission emphasizes the unbreakable bond between Judaism and Christianity: both the Old and the New Testament witness to faith in the one God, who is also the author of both testaments; the Church and Synagogue belong to one and the same covenant tradition that began on Sinai and was continued in Christ. Discontinuity becomes continuity, replacement becomes fulfilment. The path of a two-covenant theology has thus been closed off.

The rejection of two-covenant theologies and all talk of different *paths of salvation* was, in my view, reinforced even more in the later controversy surrounding the pluralist thinkers who view ‘non-Christian religions’ as soteriologically independent paths of salvation. (cf. John Hick, Roger Haight, Paul Knitter). Pluralism seems to suggest a kind of ‘multiple-covenant theology’ that is difficult to reconcile with the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity. Without referring to Jewish–Christian dialogue, the pluralistic route seems to have been closed off for good with the publication of *Dominus Iesus* (2000). All talk of other religions as paths of salvation is rejected as contradicting Church teaching on the universality of salvation in Christ. According to *Dominus Iesus*:

14 Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt, ‘Israel and the Church: Fulfillment Beyond Supersessionism?’ 164.

15 David Bolton, ‘Catholic–Jewish Dialogue: Contesting the Covenants,’ *Journal for Ecumenical Studies* (2010): 39.

16 Archbishop Bruno Forte, ‘Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism,’ in Philip Cunningham, et al., eds, in *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 73–91,88.

However, from what has been stated above about the mediation of Jesus Christ and the ‘unique and special relationship’ which the Church has with the kingdom of God among men—which in substance is the universal kingdom of Christ the Saviour—it is clear that it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God. (*Dominus Iesus* 21)

Although Israel enjoys a special theological status and is not seen as a completely separate religion and although *Dominus Iesus* is not directly applicable to Judaism, Israel’s covenant with God *cannot be viewed as a separate path of salvation*. Christ is the universal Saviour, and there is no salvation outside of Christ.

The Gifts and the Tension between the Validity of the Jewish Covenantal Life and the Universality of Salvation in Christ

The Gifts continues on this path and at the same time makes a number of points more explicit. In line with earlier documents by the Commission, *The Gifts* also endorses the view that there is one covenant history between God and people. That history encompasses various covenants, whereby the old covenant is a constant preparation for the new and the new does not replace but fulfils the old (32). Moreover, in line with *Nostra Aetate*, it is emphasized that the new covenant extends the old covenant to non-Jews (27) and that this widening or universalization was already announced in the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). The promise that God made to Abraham was fulfilled in Christianity. The underlying theology is inclusivistic—the turn to the nations does not mean that the Jews are excluded (exclusivism), but it does mean that the covenant is expanded and thus becomes more inclusive (33).¹⁷ Cardinal Kasper, one of the most important contributors to *The Gifts*, explains this differently in the following sense:

On this pathway fundamental faith constructs of Judaism have been universalised, and Jewish monotheism, the Ten Commandments, and its messianic hope have been exported to the world.¹⁸

In line with the earlier conciliar and post-conciliar documents, *The Gifts* confirms (in witness whereof see the title of the document) that God never revokes the grace he gives (Rom. 11:29) and remains faithful to the covenant, regardless of any shortcomings on Israel’s part (39). Nevertheless, this is the first document by the Commission that

17 Adam Gregerman, ‘All Blessings Are Equal: Post-Nostra Aetate Catholic Interpretations of the Biblical Blessings to the Jews and to the Nations.’ Paper read at the AAR conference, Atlanta, 2015.

18 Walter Cardinal Kasper, ‘The Relationship of the Old and New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish–Christian Dialogue.’ Lecture given at the Centre for the Study of Jewish–Christian Relations, Cambridge, 6 December 2004.

explicitly rejects any form of the supersessionist theology of discontinuity (17). With *Nostra Aetate*, the Church did indeed begin a new chapter that was followed up in later documents, but such an explicit rejection of replacement thinking is nonetheless new. *The Gifts* goes further and also states very explicitly that ‘the Jews are [not] excluded from God’s salvation because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God’ (36). Even more, and stated in a positive way, *The Gifts* says that the Jews share in communion with God by observing the Torah (24). At the same time, *The Gifts* also states that Christ is the universal Saviour (37) and that there are not two paths to salvation, as if the Torah brings salvation for the Jews and Christ salvation for the nations (25). Christ is also ‘the Redeemer of the Jews in addition to the Gentiles’ (37). In other words, Christ is also actively involved in the covenant between God and Israel, which is not independent of him.

Thus, in *The Gifts* we find some theological statements that seem difficult to reconcile and have already been circulating for some time: (1) the covenant with Israel remains valid after the coming of Christ as well and Jews do not need to convert, and (2) Christ is the universal Saviour sent by God and there are not two separate paths to salvation. The question how that unrevoked covenant is related to the claim of the universality of Christ’s salvation is answered by referring to God’s mystery (36, 37):

That the Jews are participants in God’s salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an *unfathomable divine mystery*. It is therefore no accident that Paul’s soteriological reflections in Romans 9–11 on the irrevocable redemption of Israel against the background of the Christ-mystery culminate in a magnificent doxology: ‘Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways.’ (Rom 11:33) Bernard of Clairvaux (De cons. III/1,3) says that for the Jews ‘a determined point in time has been fixed which cannot be anticipated.’ (36) (emphasis mine)

Ultimately, the document states—and here the hand of Cardinal Kasper and that of Cardinal Koch can both be clearly seen¹⁹—the relationship between the Church and Synagogue and how Christ mediates salvation for the Jews is a mystery of faith that we can accept because we live on the basis of the hope that God will finally unite Christians and Jews.

It is striking that a document that has resulted from so many years of theological discussion between the Church and Israel has so little to say about what, according to the Commission, is the heart of the theological discussion. That God’s ways are unsearchable is one thing, but that does not mean that theology has nothing more to say about the tension between the universality of salvation in Christ and the particularity of Israel’s covenant. It seems that a number of theological steps must still be made to formulate a one-covenant theology that avoids triumphalism. In what follows and moving beyond the document, I argue that a Trinitarian perspective offers some important avenues.

19 Compare this text with ‘The Relationship of the Old and New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish–Christian Dialogue.’ Lecture held at the Centre for the Study of Jewish–Christian Relations, Cambridge, 6 December 2004. See also the lecture by Koch: <http://www.news.va/en/news/cardinal-koch-on-jewish-catholic-dialogue-since-va>, accessed 1 March 2016.

Thinking with and beyond *The Gifts*: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of the Covenant

When reading *The Gifts*, I am struck by the fact that a Trinitarian perspective is almost completely absent while a Trinitarian turn can be detected in the theology of interreligious dialogue. Theologians like Gavin D'Costa, Jacques Dupuis, Mark Heim, Amos Yong, and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen have already been arguing for some time that a Trinitarian approach to religions has the potential to reconcile the particularity of Christ with the universality of God's grace. This Trinitarian turn, however, is not found as much among theologians specifically concerned with Jewish–Christian dialogue. Nevertheless, there are some theologians engaged in this dialogue who view the relation between the Church and Synagogue from a Trinitarian perspective, such as Philip Cunningham, Didier Pollefeyt, and Elizabeth Groppe.²⁰ I agree with the latter when she writes: 'Today's revitalized trinitarian theologies can contribute to the construction of a theology that can affirm both the place of Jesus Christ as universal saviour and the eternal character of God's covenant with the people of Israel.'²¹

In what follows I will clarify why a Trinitarian approach holds promise for the development of a non-supersessionist theology of Judaism. I will pay particular attention to the role of the Logos and the Spirit.

The Logos

Although *The Gifts* does not develop a Trinitarian covenant theology, there is one passage that is potentially very important and could be developed further. This passage speaks about how both Jews and Christians respond to the Word of God (in the Christian tradition known as the eternal Logos). I will cite this passage extensively:

God revealed himself in his Word, so that it may be understood by humanity in actual historical situations. This Word invites all people to respond. If their responses are in accord with the Word of God they stand in right relationship with him. For Jews this Word can be learned through the Torah and the traditions based on it. The Torah is the instruction for a successful life in right relationship with God. Whoever observes the Torah has life in its fullness (cf. Pirqa Avot II, 7). By observing the Torah the Jew receives a share in communion with God. In this

20 As a Catholic theologian involved in Jewish–Christian dialogue, I understand all too well that such a Trinitarian perspective is difficult to relate to Jewish self-understanding. Not only is it difficult for Israel to reconcile the Trinity with monotheism, a Trinitarian theology also implies that God is involved in the covenant with Israel via Christ, something is experienced as a Christianization of Judaism. From the perspective of the Catholic tradition, the God to whom Jews and Christians pray is a Trinitarian God. The Trinity expresses the Christian experience that God's salvation in Christ is effectuated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Speaking of God in non-Trinitarian terms is, theologically, almost inconceivable, just like it is difficult to speak of God's active grace without also recognizing the role of the Logos and Spirit in that grace.

21 Elizabeth Groppe, 'The Tri-Unity of God and the Fractures of Human History,' in *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People*, 164–82, 165.

regard, Pope Francis has stated: 'The Christian confessions find their unity in Christ; Judaism finds its unity in the Torah.'

In this sense, Christians affirm that Jesus Christ can be considered as 'the living Torah of God.' Torah and Christ are the Word of God, his revelation for us human beings as testimony of his boundless love. For Christians, the pre-existence of Christ as the Word and Son of the Father is a fundamental doctrine, and according to rabbinical tradition the Torah and the name of the Messiah exist already before creation (cf. Genesis Rabbah 1,1).

Let me further elaborate on this passage.

According to Catholic tradition, all have been created by God and all intended to a loving communion with each other and with Him.²² To that end, God reveals himself through his Word, i.e., the eternal Logos and second person of the Trinity, to all people and invites them *as friends* (Dei Verbum) to enter into a relationship with him.²³ God reveals himself out of love (that is the mystery of grace) to people and is unconditionally committed to them until the present. The Jews know God's Word via the Torah.²⁴ One could say that the Torah, the law that was revealed to Moses, is the expression of God's desire to come to dwell among people.²⁵ That divine desire is still as strong today and continues to keep the covenant relation between God and Israel alive. By observing the Torah, they give expression to their covenantal relation with God and live a complete life. In their Trinitarian theology Didier Pollefeyt and Phillip Cunningham explain this as follows: 'in their covenanted life [the Jews attempt] ... to enact God's will by grappling with God through the words of the Torah. [Pollefeyt and Cunningham understand] 'Torah' here in the broadest sense, referring both to the Tanakh (the entire Hebrew Bible: the Teaching of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings) and to the rabbinic and post-rabbinic commentary elaboration and debate upon it. This loving tradition of engaging God's Word has dynamically adapted to new situations and challenges over the centuries right up to the present.'²⁶ This not only implies some appreciation for pre-rabbinic

22 Daniel Madigan, 'Saving Dominus Iesus,' in James L. Heft et al., eds, *Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility among Jews, Christians and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 257–77, 271.

23 Marianne Moyaert, 'Dei Verbum, *Nostra Aetate* and Interreligious Dialogue,' in *Louvain Studies* 39 (2015): 43–62.

24 Jewish tradition includes the idea that the Torah is pre-existent. Sometimes, the Torah is even personified, but the idea that the Torah could function as a second divine person is not present in Jewish tradition. Edward Kessler and Hans-Hermann Hendrix, 'God's Presence in Israel and Incarnation: a Christian–Jewish Dialogue,' <http://www.jcrelations.net/God%92s+Presence+in+Israel+and+Incarnation%3A+A+Christian-Jewish+Dialogue.3218.0.html?L=3>, accessed 22 August 2016.

25 See Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 104; Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Christian–Jewish Relations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 204), 178.

26 Philip Cunningham and Didier Pollefeyt, 'The Triune One, the Incarnate Logos, and Israel's Covenantal Life,' in Cunningham and Pollefeyt, eds, *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today*, 191.

Judaism but also for the multifaceted way in which Judaism has developed after the fall of the Temple (inconceivable within the supersessionist view) up until now. Judaism continues to be a living faith, enriched by many centuries of development.

The eternal Logos, which buoys up Israel's covenant, has thus been revealed in Jesus Christ, a Palestinian Jew from the first century who observed the Torah and was included in Israel's covenant. According to Christians, God became human in Christ, and the incarnation is the climax of revelation and salvation history. The Logos, understood by Christians to be the second person of the Trinity, has become flesh and lived among people. As the only begotten Son of God, Christ is the perfect embodiment of God's Word (DV 4). That is why it is said that whoever sees Christ has seen the Father (John 14:9); God is present in him in a very historical, concrete, and tangible way. Christians attempt to do God's will by following the way of Christ. If 'Jewish covenantal life [is] Torah-shaped,' then 'Christian covenantal life [is] Christ-shaped.'²⁷ But this is not a question of two different paths to salvation (cf. two-covenant theology).

Theologians sometimes distinguish between the *Logos asarkos* and the *Logos ensarkos*: the Eternal Word that pre-exists and the Eternal Word that became flesh in Jesus Christ. According to *Dominus Iesus* a further qualification is in order. Although the salvific activity of the Logos precedes the incarnation, after the coming of Jesus and following the incarnation, we can no longer speak, however, of the salvific activity of the Logos *apart from Christ*, as if there would be two separate economies of salvation. If Christians today claim that God is present and active in Israel's covenant through the Logos, then Christ, the Son of God and incarnation of the Word, is always implied.²⁸ There is one economy of salvation, hence the one-covenant theology.

It is likewise contrary to the Catholic faith to introduce a separation between the salvific action of the Word as such and that of the Word made man. With the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he has assumed for the salvation of all people. The one subject which operates in the two natures, human and divine, is the single person of the Word (*Dominus Iesus*, 10).²⁹

Here, the continuity between the two covenants lies not only in the Jewish roots of Christianity but also, theologically speaking, in the continuing salvific activity of the Logos that cannot be conceived apart from Christ after the incarnation. This Logos theology can help explain how the first covenant continues to be valid and fruitful. It is and remains the way God and Israel are and remain connected. At the same time, theological reflection on the role of the Logos can help clarify how the continuing appreciation for the first covenant can go with the claim that it is Christ who saves: 'Therefore there are not two paths to salvation according to the expression "Jews hold to the Torah, Christians

27 Cunningham and Pollefeyt, 'The Triune One, the Incarnate Logos, and Israel's Covenantal Life,' 192.

28 On this, see Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom*, 213.

29 Quoted in Cunningham and Pollefeyt, 'The Triune One, the Incarnate Logos, and Israel's Covenantal Life,' 198.

hold to Christ". Christian faith proclaims that Christ's work of salvation is universal and involves all mankind' (25).

The Spirit Blows Where He Wills

Though this logos-theology helps to make sense of the interconnection between the two covenants, it may also be read again as an expression of a Christocentric triumphalism, a critique sometimes formulated against *Dominus Iesus*. From this perspective, it needs to be complemented with a pneumatology, which emphasizes the 'not yet' of both Jewish and Christian expectations. Allow me to formulate some theological reflections that may help to advance such a pneumatological theology.

Both Israel and the Church wrestle with the Word as revealed in the Torah or by following the Way of Jesus and thus attempt to remain true to God's covenant and to doing God's will. Both do this in their particular way in expectation of the Age to Come. In expecting the eschaton, Jews and Christians are two pilgrim peoples, neither of which has access to the full meaning of God's Word. One could add here that Israel and the Church, each with its own understanding of covenantal life, are also, in a certain sense, companions in adversity: both live in an imperfect time, both are called to build up the Kingdom of God here and now while knowing that they will always fall short and that it will ultimately be up to God to usher in the end time. This mutual connection is an important correction to the supersessionist and triumphalist theology that one-sidedly emphasized the blindness of the Jewish people over against the Church that walked in the light. How often has Israel not been depicted as blind, with the Church looking down in contempt at Israel because God revealed himself fully in Christ? The eschatological reservation is an important guarantee against triumphalism, which is rooted in the belief that the ultimate truth has not only been given but is also known and understood by a faith community, i.e., the Church. Although *The Gifts* briefly points out that, in the Jewish view, God himself interprets the Torah at the eschaton and, according to Christianity, everything will be recapitulated in Christ at the end time, I think the Commission could have explored this path further (26). More particularly, a pneumatological perspective (supplementing the above-mentioned logocentric perspective) can be fruitful here in giving shape to the continuity and connection between Church and Israel over against antithetical schemas regarding the Age to Come.³⁰ If it was not possible within the supersessionist perspective for Christians 'to perceive in the [Jewish people] the dwelling of the Spirit,' then it is now important to state the spiritual vitality of Judaism after the coming of Christ and in expectation of the Messianic coming. I agree with Elizabeth Groppe who says: 'The world would be spiritually poorer, not richer, were all Jews to stop hallowing

30 Recently John T. Pawlikowski gave a lecture in Leuven, entitled 'The Holy Spirit: A Possible Foundation for a Catholic Theology of Religious Pluralism,' Leuven, May 2015. In his lecture, he also notes that a Logos Christology needs to be complemented with a Spirit Christology and he especially draws upon the work of Michael E. Lodahl, to further develop his pneumatological reflections. See Michael Lodahl, *Shekinah/Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1992). The author of this article only learned about this lecture after having written this contribution on *The Gifts*.

the Sabbath, to cease grappling with the meaning of the Torah, and to abandon their commitment toward *Tikkun olam* (the repairing of the world) in anticipation of the inauguration of the messianic era.³¹

The Spirit moves throughout the whole creation and has a universal effect that involves *all* people, their cultures, and their religions: God is working in mysterious ways in all human hearts, and ‘we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery’ (GS 22). More particularly, the Torah is inspired, and it is the task of the Spirit to accompany the Jewish people on their journeys and wanderings and to Israel be faithful to its covenant with God. The Spirit is not only the “principle of life”—it brings about a change of heart when needed and sustains Israel in its covenantal life to this day. Contrary to supersessionism, Judaism is not an anachronism after Christ’s coming but a living tradition in which the Spirit is active. Here *The Gifts* can refer to the *Notes* (1985), which states: ‘We must remind ourselves how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times’ (6).

The Church also lives by the grace of God’s Spirit. After his earthly life and resurrection, Jesus also sent the Spirit to his disciples to aid them in their weaknesses (Rom 14:18). According to John, the Spirit was sent to remind us of Jesus so that we would continue his worldly mission after his ascension as well. In light of the troubled history of Jewish–Christian relations, this helping hand is indeed necessary. After all, one could claim that it is partly the perversion of the memory of Jesus that has so burdened the relation between Church and Israel. For a long time, we forgot that Jesus was Jewish, that he remained faithful to the law—of which he did not want to change one iota—that Mary and Joseph and his followers were also Jews. For a long time, we forgot that *Christians* have a long way to go as well and that the Church also sees ‘through a glass, darkly’ (1 Cor. 13:12). In addition, the anti-Jewish forgetfulness Christians all too often had, reinforced by replacement theology, has legitimated much violence, and that should not be forgotten either. The task of remembering is an important part of reconciliation between the two communities. One could state that breaking with the past of contempt and the choice for dialogue are fruits of the activity of the Spirit.³² The Spirit is present, moreover, in guiding us in our growth process toward truth. After all, even if it is claimed that God’s revelation in Christ has reached its completion in Christ, this does not mean that we already understand everything. The recognition and stating of the role of the Holy Spirit in this growth process can safeguard the Church from any triumphalist tendencies that are so much a part of the supersessionism that *The Gifts* now explicitly rejects. Instead of the Church’s triumphalism, like that which adversely affected the relations between Jews and Christians in a thorough way, a pneumatological perspective reminds us that Jesus’ followers still have a long way to go in understanding God’s revelation in Christ. This knowledge calls for

31 Elizabeth Groppe, ‘The Tri-Unity of God and the Fractures of Human History,’ 180.

32 See the document: The Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, ‘Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit in the World and in Other Religions,’ http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01091997_p-56_en.html, accessed 22 August 2016.

humility. The Spirit, understood as God's continuing presence in creation, will help in this process of understanding because there is still so much that is unclear. Here I think of the statue, recently blessed by Pope Francis, that depicts the Church and Synagogue as two partners in friendship seeking for truth while reading each other's scriptures.³³ Continuity, from a Christian perspective, is made possible by a Trinitarian approach. If, on the one hand, we take seriously the view that the Jewish covenant is still valid today and that, right up to the present, the Jews want to do God's will by wrestling with the Torah and if, on the other hand, we recognize that Christians are attempting to do the same via the Way of Jesus, whom they see as the incarnation of God's Word, and if we confirm that the Spirit blows where it wills and stimulates and encourages all people, including Jews and Christians in their search for truth, then, as the image suggests, the time has come to read each other's scriptures, with (ancient and recent) commentaries, wrestling together with the question of being a people of God today.³⁴

Mission to the Jews?

The special relation between Jews and Christians raises the question whether the Church does think that Jews have to convert to Jesus, an issue that has aroused a great deal of commotion in the years before, during, and after the Second Vatican Council. This question is known as the question whether the Church endorses a mission to the Jews.³⁵ *The Gifts* attempts to be clear about this, stating that the church must view 'evangelisation to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions' (40). The document continues to claim that there is no institutionalized mission to the Jews, a statement which received a lot of attention in the press. However, 'Christians are nonetheless called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews' (40).

The problem is that, despite its intentions, *The Gifts* is not completely successful in bringing clarity because there seems to be a conceptual confusion regarding different terms, such as mission, proclamation, witness, etc. In the final section of this article I will try to provide conceptual clarity in the hope of getting a clear picture of what *The Gifts* does and does not say. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* promulgated by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991) is an important help here.

An Attempt at Clarification

According to *Dialogue and Proclamation*, mission (also called evangelizing mission) is a complex and multifaceted concept. It involves the mission of the Church to go into and

33 The statue entitled 'Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time' was created by Joshua Koffman. It can be found in Saint Joseph University, Philadelphia, where it was visited and blessed by Pope Francis on 27 September 2015.

34 This resonates both with comparative theology and with scriptural reasoning. See Special issue: Interreligious Reading After Vatican II: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology and Receptive Ecumenism, *Modern Theology* 29 (2013).

35 Gavin D'Costa, 'What Does the Catholic Church Teach about Mission to the Jewish People?' *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 590–613, with responses by, among others, Edward Kessler and John Pawlikowski.

present the Gospel to the whole world. This is expressed in multiple ways: 'presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and finally, proclamation and catechesis.' One can think here of the founding of schools and hospitals, as well as the struggle against poverty and oppression, and making symbolic gestures that express humility, penitence, or forgiveness. Prayer and liturgy are mentioned as important expressions of the ecclesiastical mission, whether it involves personal prayer or a contemplative or public, even multireligious, prayer. They are all expressions of what it means to be Church and the people of God. The Church has its place in the world, where it shares joy, sorrow, hope, and love with people and sees it as one of her tasks to promote 'unity and love among men, indeed among nations.'³⁶ But the evangelizing mission also includes dialogue itself with those of other faiths, and, of course, dialogue is not aimed at the conversion of others. The intention, rather, is to promote friendly relations through mutual understanding and enrichment. Finally, proclamation is also part of the Church's mission. This is a remarkable expression, understood as 'the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church' (D and P 10).

The confusion arises, in my view, because, in the context of Jewish-Christian dialogue what is meant with the expression *mission to the Jews* is actually the *proclamation* of the Gospel aimed at the Jews' conversion and entrance into the Church via baptism. Whenever the question is posed, with some concern, by Jews as to whether the Church endorses a mission to the Jews, the real question is if the Church believes that Jews must convert to Christianity to be saved. In this context, mission is narrowed to proclamation with conversion as its goal.

We know that there was discussion during the writing of *Nostra Aetate* on the question whether the Jews had to convert to Christ. Opinion was divided. Some were concerned that dialogical openness would lose out to the ecclesiological call and task to proclaim the Gospel. One of the drafts (1964) stated, referring to Romans 11:25, that '[i]t is also worth remembering that the union of the Jewish people with the Church is part of the Christian hope. Therefore, following the teaching of the Apostle (cf. Rom 11:25) the Church waits with unshaken faith and deep longing for the entry of that people into the fullness of the people of God established by Christ.'³⁷ There was a great deal of reaction to this passage, not least by Jews. Abraham Joshua Heschel's assertion to the effect that he would sooner return to Auschwitz than convert is well known.³⁸ In a very explicit and painful way, Heschel articulated the deep aversion that can still be found among Jews today. First, the mission to the Jews brings to mind the very evil practices of forced conversions like those during the time of Christendom. In addition, some, if not many

36 Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on 28 October 1965, §1; http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

37 Second Draft 28–29 September 1964 in Cunningham et al., eds, *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*, 195.

38 'Ecumenism: What Catholics Think about Jews,' *Time*, 11 September 1964.

Jews see conversion as giving a posthumous victory to Hitler.³⁹ In the end, *Nostra Aetate* removed every reference to conversion to the Jews. We find instead the inclusive eschatological vision found in the minor prophet Zephaniah, 3.9, which speaks of a distant future that is completely dependent on God. This vision expresses a partnership, a traveling together, as well as the fact that God determines the day on which the Kingdom of God will dawn.⁴⁰

This prophetic passage, however, did not bring any real clarity, and after the Council, a certain ambiguity remained about how the Church thought precisely about the mission to the Jews. Both the *Notes* and *Guidelines* seem to imply that the Gospel has to be proclaimed to the Jews as well and that they need to convert. The discussion flared up later with opposing voices and ambivalent statements. I think here in particular of the controversy that arose when *Reflections on Covenant and Mission* (2002) was published, as well as the whole uproar in connection with the Good Friday prayer in 2008.⁴¹

In light of this history, the importance of *The Gifts* consists in the fact that it speaks clearly (40): there is no institutional mission to the Jews. That means, according to the Commission, that it is not necessary for Jews to convert to Christ and enter the Church via baptism. If we look at the arguments the Commission gives for this position, then we read the following. The Commission's starting-point is the recognition that the mission to the Jews (read: proclamation) is a very sensitive issue for Israel because it affects its very existence itself. 'The Church is *therefore* obliged to view evangelization to Jews, *who believe in the one God*, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views' (emphasis mine). There seem to be two arguments in play here.

The first argument seems to be that Jews already believe in the one God, which is complemented later in the same paragraph by the idea that they are also 'bearers of God's Word.' The second argument is primarily historical and emotional in nature and is connected to the continued existence of the Jews after the Shoah. Already soon after the Shoah, many Catholic theologians involved in dialogue with the Jews sensed that every Christian attempt at conversion in this context was unsuitable because it was too painful. Friendship and dialogue also mean the avoidance of new injuries—that seems to be the argument. It is good that *The Gifts* translates this into a clear position.⁴²

39 Zie Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmation and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 84.

40 Walter Kasper, 'Il Cardinale Kasper e la missione verso gli ebrei: Risponde alle critiche del Venerdì Santo per gli ebrei', *Osservatore Romano*, 10 April 2008.

41 For a discussion of the Good Friday prayer see Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollyfeyt, 'Israel and the Church: Fulfillment Beyond Supersessionism?' in Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollyfeyt, eds, *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 159–83. For a discussion of the document *Reflections on Covenant and Mission* see John T. Pawlikowski, 'Reflections on Covenant and Mission: Forty Years after *Nostra Aetate*,' in *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 57–92.

42 See also, for example, Gregory Baum, 'Rethinking the Church's Mission after Auschwitz,' in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1977), 113.

This sensitivity is repeated once more at the end of this paragraph when it is said that Christians do need to bear *witness* to their faith in a sensitive and humble way that takes into account ‘particularly’ the tragedy of the Shoah as well as with the fact that the Jews are bearers of God’s Word. Here the Commission employs a different term: the term mission is abandoned in favor of witness. The problem is that it is not entirely clear what ‘witness’ is intended to mean precisely, and that fact can, certainly for non-Catholics and Jews in particular, give rise to confusion. The interpretation that can be heard a great deal is that, while there is no institutional mission (large-scale), there is nothing to prevent individual attempts at conversion; on the contrary, they are an expression of Christian commitment and Christian vocation. Alon Goshen Gottstein understands this to mean:

No institutional mission does not mean no mission. Christians are nonetheless called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews. It is not that they *may* offer witness or that they may *share* with Jews in an open and transparent way what is most important to each faith community. Rather, they are *called to bear witness* to Jesus Christ. As the text reads, personal initiative fills in where there is no clear institutional initiative.⁴³

Although I understand the confusion, I disagree with this interpretation. With its call to witness, I would argue, the Commission is not calling individual Catholics to a mission (read: proclamation) to the Jews. Rather, this witness is part of interreligious dialogue and is a mutual process (those engaged in dialogue mutually witness to their faith). Furthermore, *Nostra Aetate* calls Christians not only to witness to their faith but also to ‘acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral good found among non-Christians, as well as their social and cultural values’ (NA 2). I will explain this in more detail.

Unlike proclamation, witness or testimony is not intended to convert the other but rather to articulate what motivates us, Christians (and the same applies of those of other faiths) at the deepest level of our being, what we experience as the sustaining power of our lives, and what we ultimately believe with all our being. There is no dialogue without witness, which can never be coercive and is always characterized by a certain fragility.⁴⁴ In interreligious dialogue (understood as a context of dispute and difference) adherents of different religions witness to their faith commitment. It is a context of mutual witnessing. From this perspective, the explanation given by Cardinal Kasper elsewhere on the importance of witness in dialogue is important—an explanation that could easily have been quoted in this document to avoid confusion. In a lecture called ‘The Jewish–Christian Dialogue: Foundations, Progress, Difficulties and Perspectives,’ Kasper says:

As we said previously, dialogue is not mere objective information; dialogue involves the whole person. In dialogue I want to communicate something that is important for me and for my life; ultimately in dialogue I want to communicate somewhat from me, what gives meaning to my

43 Alon Goshen-Gottstein, ‘Reflections on a Reflection: A Response to The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable,’ 34.

44 Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2010).

life, what supports me, what inspires, encourages and also consoles me. Because it is important for me and makes me happy, I want to share it with others so that they too may be blessed. Dialogue, in this deeper sense, implies witness of my deepest faith, a witness which proposes but by no means imposes one's own faith; on the contrary, it implies respect for every other conviction and every other faith.

So in dialogue Jews give witness of their faith, witness of what supported them in the dark periods of their history and their life, and Christians give account of the hope they have in Jesus Christ. In doing so, both are far away from any kind of proselytism, but both can learn from each other and enrich each other. We both want to share our deepest concerns to an often disoriented world that needs such witness and searches for it.⁴⁵

In light of this passage, the Commission does not seem to want to replace institutional mission with personal initiatives, it simply wants to highlight the importance of mutual witnessing as part of the dialogical process.

Some Reflections

Although I, like so many others involved in Jewish–Christian dialogue, welcome the clear positions the Commission has taken, I do have some objections. First, I fear that *The Gifts* will not convince everyone, simply because there is no clarity with regard to the doctrinal authority of this document. The document clearly states that it has no magisterial authority, and this will be enough for some to minimize its importance.⁴⁶

45 Cardinal Walter Kasper, 'The Jewish–Christian Dialogue: Foundations, Progress, Difficulties and Perspectives,' lecture given in Jerusalem, 19–23 November 2001; http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20011123_kasper-jews-christians_en.html, accessed 1 March 2016.

46 There has been some discussion about the criteria to assess the magisterial and doctrinal authority of ecclesial documents. Gavin D'Costa addresses this question in the first chapter of his book *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) where he refers to the so-called theological notes to indicate the level of authority that may be attributed to various doctrines. In his blog, canon lawyer Edward Peters, while not entering into a discussion with D'Costa, argues that, even when a document like the *Gifts* explicitly states that it has not been written with magisterial intentions, he argues that this document (whatever the intentions of the commission may have been) clearly and without doubt contributes to magisterial teaching. I quote him here at length; 'Now, if *cardinals and bishops*, appointed by *popes* to direct *pontifical* commissions, issuing statements on some important *points of faith* entrusted to those commissions and *publishing* them through the *Holy See*, are **not** engaged in a magisterial act contributing to the "ordinary magisterium" of the Church, who exactly would be? To be sure, the PCRJ document is not "infallible" (as if only *infallible* assertions were part of the magisterium), nor is it directly papal in character (as if only *popes* could contribute to the magisterium), nor is every assertion therein "magisterial" (as if, say, *historical summaries* were objects of magisterium). But the PCRJ document definitely, and in many places beautifully and insightfully, contributes to the Church's ordinary teaching regarding, among other things, *the relevance of revelation, the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant, the relationship between the universality of salvation*

The fact that it does not appeal very much to conciliar documents like *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes* does not help. Second, it is a shame that the theological argumentation of this paragraph is somewhat summary in nature. The only argument given in *these* paragraphs (40–42) is that the Jews are bearers of God’s Word and that they believe in the one God. One can ask if this is not the case for Muslims as well and what this could mean for the mission to Muslims, who also believe in the one God (*Nostra Aetate* §3). A more generous reading points out that the paragraphs preceding those on the mission to the Jews are actually presupposed and that the mission to the Jews is thus also rejected because of (1) the special theological status of Judaism, (2) the continuity between Judaism and Christianity, and (3) the faithfulness of God to the covenant. While these theological arguments do reinforce the ‘no’ to mission, I still miss a more positive narrative. Right now, these paragraphs seem to be concerned primarily with *what the church is abandoning*, namely, the conversion of the Jews, but there is no positive counter. That brings me to my third point. The movement made in the document is no proclamation, yes witness (in dialogue). I think—and this idea is linked to what I said earlier about the eschatological reservation that affects both Jews and Christians—that there is still an additional step to be made in which one can think about a common ‘Jewish and Christian mission’ in this world. Why not emphasize that both Israel and Church are called to sanctify God’s name and heal the world (*Tikkun olam*) and to work on the Kingdom of God now until the fullness of the redemption comes on a day known only to God? Why not emphasize that Jews and Christians should support each other and need each other to reach that completion (cf. Heb. 11:40)? Why not emphasize that the Church and Israel, *like brothers*, are called to stand *shoulder to shoulder* to do the will of their Father? Thus, the (1) no to conversion of the Jews and the (2) witness in dialogue can be supplemented by (3) a common mission of Jews and Christians, as partners in the expectation of the hereafter. Though the document hints in this direction, this could have been more explicit. I even wonder if the Commission (perhaps in its next publication) will not allow itself to be inspired by the recent document issued by Orthodox Jews, who not only recognize that Christianity is part of God’s plan of salvation and is thus willed by God but also see possibilities for a common mission:

As did Maimonides and Yehudah Halevi, we acknowledge that Christianity is neither an accident nor an error, but the willed divine outcome and gift to the nations. In separating Judaism and Christianity, G-d willed a separation between partners with significant theological differences, not a separation between enemies.... Now that the Catholic Church has acknowledged the eternal Covenant between G-d and Israel, we ... ‘are no longer enemies, but unequivocal partners in articulating the essential moral values for the survival and welfare of humanity.’ Neither of us can achieve G-d’s mission in this world alone. Both Jews and Christians have a common covenantal mission to perfect the world under the

in Jesus Christ and the affirmation that the covenant of God with Israel has never been revoked, and the Church’s mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism.’ Edward Peeters, ‘A Non-Magisterial Magisterial Statement?’, 15 December 2015 <https://canonlawblog.wordpress.com/2015/12/15/a-non-magisterial-magisterial-statement/>. It is not my aim to engage in this discussion directly; I do think this is an issue that needs clarification.

sovereignty of the Almighty, so that all humanity will call on His name and abominations will be removed from the earth.⁴⁷

Fairness demands that it be said that this document does speak in the concluding paragraph about the importance of a common struggle against injustice and poverty, but it does not seem to have dawned on the Commission to view that struggle as an expression of ‘missionary’ work inspired by their prophetic call.

Concluding Reflections

The Gifts is an important document that has long been awaited in Jewish–Catholic circles. It is the result of decades of dialogue and will—I am certain of this—also lead to further dialogue and theological debate. If one looks back, as this document does, to the path that has already been travelled, we can only expect that very large steps will be taken on the road to reconciliation and mutual understanding. The fact that there has been a kind of ‘official’ response from Jews (cf. Dabru Emet and the recent document *To do the will ...*) and that further reflection is occurring in Jewish circles on the theological significance of Christianity, is significant. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go, and the knotty questions and difficult issues that are treated in this document require more theological reflection. As I stated at the beginning of this article, that is exciting, for the relation to Israel also affects the self-understanding of the Church.

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47 Orthodox Rabbinic Statement on Christianity, *To Do the Will of our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians*, 3 December 2015; <http://cjcuc.com/site/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity/>.