

**Association of Hebrew Catholics**

New Zealand Branch

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# **Role of the Jewish People After the Coming of the Messiah**

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

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## I Introduction

One of the most common statements we hear in discussions about Jews and Christianity goes something like this: "You can't be a Jew and a Christian at the same time —it is impossible!"

We know what people mean when they say that. They are being respectful of both Faiths, and protecting of their own. However we see it quite differently. It would not be an exaggeration for us to state our position something like this:

"The ceremonial Law and sacrifices as offered in the Temple liturgies have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the commands to put them into practice are therefore abrogated. Nevertheless the bulk of what we understand today as Judaism can be lived in all its richness and discipline within the Church when all is seen as transformed in the Light of Jesus Messiah. Its traditions are enhanced by the additional perspective of finding their perfect fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. Fulfilment gives lustre to the spiritual treasury of Jewish liturgy and practice, but does not alter, annul, nor detract from their venerable forms and customs."

This short article merely introduces this beautiful subject about which we love to talk. Our hope is that readers will follow up our bold statement by reading the small number of references we offer at the conclusion. These particular books and articles are treasures in their own right but collectively offer huge insights into the relationship of Judaism and Christianity.

## II A Vital Understanding: "Preparation"

One of the leading authorities in this area of discussion is Dr. Lawrence Feingold and his works are of inestimable value. In his series, "The Mystery of Israel and the Church — Volume One —Figure and Fulfilment" he provides some important points to help us appreciate the emphasis God gave to "preparation" for the Coming of the Messiah, promised in Genesis 3: 16. We draw on portions of his book found in chapters 5 and 10. Incidentally, Dr. Feingold is Director of Theology in the Association of Hebrew Catholics, International.

Dr. Feingold provides a most helpful introduction to a vitally important aspect of Biblical studies and it goes by the name of "typology" — or the study of "types," which he calls: "a Divine Bridge" between the Old and New Testaments. He explains what he means by this:

Biblical typology provides a divine bridge between the Old and New Testaments. I say "divine" because this bridge was prepared by God Himself. Guiding the events and religious ceremonies of the Old Testament so as to make them figures, signs, or symbols of the New. We may ask why God wished to make this bridge between the Testaments, creating a subtle symbolism that most readers would never understand unless they were expressly taught. Why did God create these figures?

God begins His Plan using a sequence of progressively unfolding learning experiences (comprising "a progressive pedagogy"). This proceeds from imperfect, incomplete representations, moving towards the perfect and complete unfolding. The people involved thus grow with the unfolding process, as does their understanding of the meaning of it all.

In this process which takes place over time and space, those involved are introduced to spiritual realities presented with the help of tangible material examples, analogies and stories. These are necessary as our understanding of abstract and spiritual ideas first impact on us through our senses, and what is called, "sense knowledge".

Dr. Feingold emphasises that this demonstrates God's respect for our human nature by revealing great spiritual truths through historical narratives as well as images we experience through our senses.

The following are some of the chief examples of Biblical images and accounts which all contribute to God's "teaching method" — i.e. the progressive unfolding of stories, events, symbols and customs in a way which draws the person reflecting on them towards deeper spiritual perception.

- The Covenant with Abraham.
- The election of the Chosen People.
- The Law of Moses
- The prophecies concerning the Messiah and His Church.
- Customs and ceremonies, especially those belonging to the Temple liturgies.
- The history of the people and their Faith.

- The Fathers of the early Church, following the teaching of Jesus and of St. Paul see the entire framework of the Old Testament — its history and ceremonial laws — as a tangible, visible (in theology, "sensible") figure of future spiritual realities that would be brought by the Church.

These, then, are important aspects of the notion of the Jewish Faith being the forerunner, prefiguring the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His Church. All of this demonstrates how Judaism has been the **preparation** for the Messiah and His Mission. This begs the question:

- Is its role of preparation complete and "over with" in light of the Messiah's coming?
- Are there aspects of the role to which Judaism was appointed, that require further or continued attention?

### III Spiritual Blindness

(We remind readers that we are presenting only a very brief introduction to our subject which is drawn largely from the book cited above, by Dr. Lawrence Feingold. Details are provided at the end to enable readers to obtain the series which we consider indispensable.)

The Judaeo-Christian understanding is full of seemingly endless mysteries. We have a natural tendency to draw back from facing them. When we use the word "mystery" in any religious discussion we should remember that a "mystery in theology is a truth revealed by God which exceeds the full grasp of the human mind. Human reason can never fully understand mysteries through its own power" (L. Feingold).

In Christianity we have the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ which constantly challenge us.

In the history and culture of Israel (taking the word in the Biblical rather than the political sense) there are, likewise, mysteries which also challenge the thinking person: for example —

- Why was Israel chosen from all the nations of the world?

Only God can answer that.

To go further — quoting Lawrence Feingold:

"Certainly one of the greatest mysteries about Israel is the fact that God allowed a certain spiritual blindness to come upon a part of Israel so that it would not recognise the Messiah who came from her bosom. As we shall see, St. Paul speaks of this very profoundly. Nevertheless, he too finds it tremendously mysterious, as mysterious as it is tragic. God in His inscrutable plans allowed a great part of Israel to remain blinded in that regard for two thousand years. Does this mean that they are no longer chosen or have been repudiated?"

There is a simplistic approach we could take to answer this question. Dr. Feingold comments:

"The human mind naturally seeks to avoid mysteries. The easy way out of this dilemma would be to say that the Chosen People who have become blinded are no longer chosen. The human mind would eliminate this aspect of the mystery of Israel simply by rejecting the continuing election."

## IV Simplistic Judgments Can Be Misleading

If we dwell on the spiritual blindness of Israel — (ignoring our own for now — but that's another story) — we may well come up with a range of intriguing questions:

- What is the "status" of the Jewish people today in Salvation History?
- Are they still the chosen people or has their lack of belief in Jesus as Messiah annulled that?
- Is the Old Covenant still in force for the Jewish people?
- Do they continue to play a role in Salvation History after the coming of the Messiah?

Lawrence Feingold skillfully engages with what is behind these questions. He says:

"As with most theological questions, the truth lies between two extremes. It is like the summit of a mountain between two opposite slopes. One error would be to say that the Jewish people has been completely rejected by God because of its failure to recognise the Messiah and thus no longer has any special role in salvation history.

An opposing error would be to hold a theory of parallel covenants, thinking that after the coming of Jesus there are two parallel and equal covenants for approaching and pleasing God: Christianity for the Gentiles, and Judaism for Jews. Thus there would be no reason for Jews to embrace Christ and enter the Church."

Dr. Feingold then goes on, after some preliminary conclusions, to answer the above questions and give a very clear and concise "position statement" (Section 'V' C).

## V The "Status" of the Jewish People Today.

Following the model of Dr. Lawrence Feingold's presentation, we will address this in three steps. (Using his text; any emphasis is ours).

### A. Preliminary Conclusions

1. **God's plan for the salvation of the human race, from all eternity, centred on the Incarnation and Passion of God the Son, the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity.** The Jewish people was chosen precisely for the inestimable privilege of being the people to whom the Messiah — the Word Incarnate — would come into the world, into human history and society; He would be born of a Jewish mother and raised under the Law of Moses. As St. Paul says in Galatians 4: 4: "When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."
2. **The coming of the Messiah was the blessing promised to Abraham in his descendants:** "In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22: 18). The Jewish people was called in Abraham and progressively formed through numerous wondrous interventions of God to be the people in whom God would become man, so as to redeem mankind.
3. **The role of the Jewish people was manifold.**
  - First, as we have said, they were **to prepare for the coming of the Messiah**, so that His coming would be long awaited, ardently desired, and constantly prayed for. (Review our Part II on the concept of "preparation".)
  - They were called also **to be a witness to God's entire plan** of salvation, announcing the coming of the Messiah, and giving solemn witness to the signs of His coming.
  - They were called **to live out in their own history** the glorious figures of Christ's work of salvation, as we saw with regard to Biblical typology. (See Part II of this article re "typology".)
  - Finally they were called **to receive the Law of Moses**. As we have seen, the Law of Moses has three aspects: the moral law, the ceremonial law, and judicial precepts which assign penalties and give particular application of the general precepts of the Law contained in the Ten Commandments.

Dr. Feingold explains briefly the three categories of what is referred to as "the Law".

- The **moral law of the Old Testament was never abrogated**, and could never be so. On the contrary, Christ came to fulfil it perfectly in His Person, and to give us the grace and teaching we need to fulfil it in imitation of Him.
- **The ceremonial law was abrogated, however, for it was a figure that pointed to Christ's sacrifice on Calvary:** the sacrifices of animals and other offerings point to the perfect sacrifice of the Messiah, which is their fulfilment. Thus the ceremonial law, according to God's eternal plan, was to pass into **a new ceremonial law centering on the seven sacraments** of the Church — **divine channels of grace flowing from the perfect sacrifice of the Messiah.**
- The **judicial precepts** of the Old Testament remain as a model, but are adapted to the needs of different historical circumstances. Christ does not promulgate new judicial precepts. This is left **to the Church** in her **canon law**, and to **the nations** in their **civil codes**.

## **B Current Role of the Jewish People**

Dr. Feingold now moves to considering the **current role** of the Jewish People.

"On the basis of these points, how can we understand **the current role of the Jewish people** in salvation history?"

He cites four principal foundational facts.

1. First of all, God's choice or **election of a particular people in which He would become man** *can never be revoked*. Still today, the Jewish people have the inestimable honour and privilege of being the people in which God chose to become man. He was born of a quintessentially Jewish mother, circumcised on the eighth day, raised in pious Jewish fashion, and brought to the Temple three times a year when He came of age. He participated weekly in the synagogue, taught and worked miracles in the streets and marketplaces of Israel. This honour is still theirs, even if they do not yet recognise Him, as Joseph's brothers did not at first recognise Joseph in Egypt.
2. Secondly, the Jewish people were chosen **to be a witness to Jesus'** coming through their sacred books, their Law, their traditions, their liturgy, and their history. This is no less true today than it was before His coming.

3. Third, all the **Apostles and first disciples of Jesus**, together with Mary, the most perfect disciple of all times, were chosen from the Jewish people. The Church of Pentecost was entirely from Judaism.
4. Fourth, **God is faithful to His promises**, even if men are unfaithful to Him. The Jewish people are still singularly beloved on account of the Patriarchs and on account of the covenant of love that He entered into with them. Jesus was born into a people that prayed for His coming for generation after generation.

## **C Conclusion to the Argument: A Position Statement**

**Thus we can say that the special role of the Jewish people did not come to an end with the coming of the Messiah, as some theologians maintain, because of two crucial facts mentioned above: *God's fidelity, and the fact that the Jewish people continue to be a privileged witness to Christ's coming.* This is true even in their unbelief in Jesus, and it will be even more true if they come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, as we believe shall happen before His Second Coming, whenever that shall come to pass.**

These questions are dealt with authoritatively in two crucial sources:

- A brief text of Vatican II, *Nostra aetate* 4, and
- St. Paul's letter to the **Romans, chapters 9 — 11**.

Dr. Feingold's book cited above contains an excellent treatment of Romans 9 — 11. We also link to our more general treatment of these three chapters entitled, "**The Gifts and Call of God**".

In December 2015, the "Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews" published a significant document we strongly recommend to readers:

- "**The Gifts and Calling of God Are Irrevocable**"

Our link is first to our selection of readings from this paper. From there we link to the full document.

## VI Afterword

There will be students of theology and Biblical studies who, having read Lawrence Feingold's magnificent presentation (even this abbreviated version for the non-specialist), who will be grateful for his perceptive thinking and sound theological foundation. Some of us may well feel we need to even "**unlearn**" some of the very slanted treatments given before the 1960's. Be that as it may, we can confidently review all that has gone before, and look now for opportunities to rebuild our vision of the Church in the world. We are now better equipped to help recover a hidden part of our spiritual psyche by helping re-establish an Israelite community in the Church — and even a wider stream accommodating **all** (of Jewish or Gentile origin) who wish to rally to this great challenge of our times and be active members.

We hope you will join us in this wonderful work of the Holy Spirit as it gathers momentum in our time.

**Shalom!**

## Further Reading

### Books:

- **"Many Religions — One Covenant" by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger**  
(Ignatius Press, San Francisco. 1999)
- **The Mystery of Israel and the Church by Lawrence Feingold.**  
(Miriam Press, St. Louis. U.S.A. 2008)

**Volume I**     Figure and Fulfilment  
**Volume II**    Things New and Old  
**Volume III**   The Messianic Kingdom of Israel  
(Available at the [AHC website bookshop](#))

- **"Special Books"**, listed on our website.

### Documents (Website links. Printable)

- **Nostra Aetate 4 — Vatican II**
- **The Gifts and Call of God** (Romans 9 — 11).

### Articles (Website links. Printable)

- **The Torah Made Flesh**
- **Lord of the Sabbath**
- **Fulfilment For All In Jesus Messiah**