

Association of Hebrew Catholics

New Zealand Branch

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The GACOG
(Gifts and Calling of God) are Irrevocable
(Romans 11: 29)

Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews.

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Introduction

This magnificent paper celebrates fifty years since the promulgation of "[Nostra aetate](#)". It contains the outcome of much reflection on the principles of this ground-breaking change in Judaeo-Christian relations. The whole document is available by clicking on the title. We recommend it strongly to those of our readers able to study such material. Following this introduction, we offer a selection of passages we would like to suggest as especially helpful.

A Difference of Perspective

Our work and general focus are on the promotion of a Hebrew Christian perspective **within the Church**. Our documents, articles and devotions are intended to help our members and readers develop a well-informed understanding of our Hebrew heritage. This, we hope, will assist us, in turn, to develop a robust Faith which we will feel confident in sharing with the world around us.

The document we are here introducing has a particular function as an instrument of affectionate acknowledgement of Judaism in our contemporary world — and how we can build a more appropriate relationship with those we now collectively call, "our elder brothers". Thus it guides the growth of **a more external positive relationship**.

Despite this apparent external focus, the document is certainly a rich gathering of contemporary theological reflections and perceptions for our apostolate within the Church and we are certainly very much affirmed by it.

An Affirmation of Both Judaism and Christianity

It is generally recognised that Catholics, as distinct from Protestants, do not proselytise Jews. Each great stream of Christianity provides its own reasons for their position.

Indeed the apostolate represented by this website acknowledges and affirms the religious choices, decisions, culture, practices and pursuits of Jews in our contemporary society. The reaction we sometimes receive from adopting this position is that we are not following the instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ in terms of making disciples of in all nations — etc. and so on. Since there is a vast volume of writing about this, it suffices for us to state that we strongly endorse the policy of not proselytising Jews!

It is, however, necessary to also state that this does not imply we hold to some theory of parallel religious paths to salvation. Just as St. Paul's Epistles can be grossly misunderstood and misused to prove certain positions, so our materials could be misrepresented and thus demeaned. To quote the document named in our title:

"**35.** Since God never revoked his covenant with His People Israel, there cannot be two different paths or approaches to God's Salvation."

The obvious conclusion to be taken from this is that we acknowledge our differences yet perceive in our diversity a truly interdependent yet divergent single path which mysteriously is walked by Christians and Jews, each according to their God-given role. Now that can be more than a little mind-boggling if we do not seek to understand what is being taught. This position is explained in the full document under the title of our article. It is a truly wonderful piece of instruction and worth the most careful study.

And Now to the Document

The paragraphs and sections below have been lifted from the main document — the numbers indicating where to find them.

Anyone feeling motivated to follow through with further reading will find excellent books shown on our page: "[Some Special Books](#)".

Some Items of Interest

Part 2: The special theological status of Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

Section 15: The soil that nurtured both Jews and Christians is the Judaism of Jesus' time, which not only brought forth Christianity but also, after the destruction of the temple in the year 70, post-biblical rabbinical Judaism which then had to do without the sacrificial cult and, in its further development, had to depend exclusively on prayer and the interpretation of both written and oral divine revelation. Thus Jews and Christians have the same mother and can be seen, as it were, as two siblings who – as is the normal course of events for siblings – have developed in different directions. The Scriptures of ancient Israel constitute an integral part of the Scriptures of both Judaism and Christianity, understood by both as the word of God, revelation, and salvation history. The first Christians were Jews; as a matter of course they gathered as part of the community in the Synagogue, they observed the dietary laws, the Sabbath and the requirement of circumcision, while at the same time confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah sent by God for the salvation of Israel and the entire human race. With Paul the 'Jewish Jesus movement' definitively opens up other horizons and transcends its purely Jewish origins. Gradually his concept came to prevail, that is, that a non-Jew did not have to become first a Jew in order to confess Christ. In the early years of the Church, therefore, there were the so-called Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, one Church originating from Judaism, the other from the Gentiles, who however together constituted the one and only Church of Jesus Christ.

Section 16: The separation of the Church from the Synagogue does not take place abruptly however and, according to some recent insights, may not have been complete until well into the third or fourth centuries. This means that many Jewish Christians of the first period did not perceive any contradiction between living in accordance with some aspects of the Jewish tradition and yet confessing Jesus as the Christ. Only when the number of Gentile Christians represented the majority, and within the Jewish community the polemics regarding the figure of Jesus took on sharper contours, did a definitive separation appear to be no longer avoidable. Over time the siblings Christianity and Judaism increasingly grew apart, becoming hostile and even defaming one another. For Christians, Jews were often represented as damned by God and blind since they were unable to recognise in Jesus the Messiah and bearer of salvation. For Jews, Christians were often seen as heretics who no longer followed the path originally laid down by God but who went their own way. It is not without reason that in the Acts of the Apostles Christianity is called 'the way' (cf. Acts 9: 2; 19: 9, 23; 24: 14, 22) in contrast to the Jewish *Halacha* which determined the interpretation of the law for practical conduct. Over time Judaism and Christianity became increasingly alienated from one another, even becoming involved in ruthless conflicts and accusing one another of abandoning the path prescribed by God.

Section 17: On the part of many of the Church Fathers the so-called replacement theory or supersessionism steadily gained favour until in the Middle Ages it represented the standard theological foundation of the relationship with Judaism: the promises and commitments of God would no longer apply to Israel because it had not recognised Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, but had been transferred to the Church of Jesus Christ which was now the true 'new Israel', the new chosen people of God.

Section 18: There have often been attempts to identify this replacement theory in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This Epistle, however, is not directed to the Jews but rather to the Christians of Jewish background who have become weary and uncertain. Its purpose is to strengthen their faith and to encourage them to persevere, by pointing to Christ Jesus as the true and ultimate high priest, the mediator of the new covenant. This context is necessary to understand the Epistle's contrast between the first purely earthly covenant and a second better (cf. Hebrews 8: 7) and new covenant (cf. 9: 15, 12: 24). The first covenant is defined as outdated, in decline and doomed to obsolescence (cf. 8: 13), while the second covenant is defined as everlasting (cf. 13: 20). To establish the foundations of this contrast the Epistle refers to the promise of a new covenant in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah 31: 31 — 34 (cf. Hebrews 8: 8 — 12). This demonstrates that the Epistle to the Hebrews has no intention of proving the promises of the Old Covenant to be false, but on the contrary treats them as valid. The reference to the Old Testament promises is intended to help Christians to be sure of their salvation in Christ. At issue in the Epistle to the Hebrews is not the contrast of the Old and New Covenants as we understand them today, nor a contrast between the church and Judaism. Rather, the contrast is between the eternal heavenly priesthood of Christ and the transitory earthly priesthood. The fundamental issue in the Epistle to the Hebrews in the new situation is a Christological interpretation of the New Covenant. For exactly this reason, "[Nostra aetate](#)" (No.4) did not refer to the Epistle to the Hebrews, but rather to Saint Paul's reflections in his letter to the Romans 9 – 11.

Section 20: Nevertheless, from the theological perspective the dialogue with Judaism has a completely different character and is on a different level in comparison with the other world religions. The faith of the Jews testified to in the Bible, found in the Old Testament, is not for Christians another religion but the foundation of their own faith, although clearly the figure of Jesus is the sole key for the Christian interpretation of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The cornerstone of the Christian faith is Jesus (cf. Acts 4: 11; 1 Pt 2: 4 – 8).

Part 3. Revelation in history as 'Word of God' in Judaism and Christianity.

Section 23: The Church is called the new people of God (cf. "[Nostra aetate](#)", No.4) but not in the sense that the people of God of Israel has ceased to exist. The Church "was prepared in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant" ("[Lumen gentium](#)", 2). The Church does not replace the people of God of Israel, since as the community founded on Christ it represents in him the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel. This does not mean that Israel, not having achieved such a fulfilment, can no longer be considered to be the people of God. "Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures" ("[Nostra aetate](#)", No.4).

Section 24: 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. Pirke Avot II, 7). By observing the Torah the Jew receives a share in communion with God. In this regard, Pope Francis has stated: "The Christian confessions find their unity in Christ; Judaism finds its unity in the Torah. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh in the world; for Jews the Word of God is present above all in the Torah. Both faith traditions find their foundation in the One God, the God of the Covenant, who reveals himself through his Word. In seeking a right attitude towards God, Christians turn to Christ as the fount of new life, and Jews to the teaching of the Torah." (Address to members of the International Council of Christians and Jews, 30 June 2015).

Section 25: Judaism and the Christian faith as seen in the New Testament are two ways by which God's people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own. The Scriptures which Christians call the Old Testament is open therefore to both ways. A response to God's word of salvation that accords with one or the other tradition can thus open up access to God, even if it is left up to his counsel of salvation to determine in what way he may intend to save mankind in each instance. That his will for salvation is universally directed is testified by the Scriptures (cf. eg. Genesis 12: 1 — 3; Isaiah 2: 2 — 5; 1 Timothy 2: 4). Therefore there are not two paths to salvation according to the expression "Jews hold to the Torah, Christians hold to Christ". Christian faith proclaims that Christ's work of salvation is universal and involves all mankind. God's word is one single and undivided reality which takes concrete form in each respective historical context.

Section 26: 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).

4. The relationship between the Old and New Testament and the Old and New Covenant

Section 27: The covenant that God has offered Israel is irrevocable. "God is not man, that he should lie" (Numbers 23: 19; cf. 2 Timothy 2: 13). The permanent elective fidelity of God expressed in earlier covenants is never repudiated (cf. Romans 9: 4; 11: 1 — 2). The New Covenant does not revoke the earlier covenants, but it brings them to fulfilment. Through the Christ event Christians have understood that all that had gone before was to be interpreted anew. For Christians the New Covenant has acquired a quality of its own, even though the orientation for both consists in a unique relationship with God (cf. for example, the covenant formula in Leviticus 26:12, "I will be your God and you will be my people"). For Christians, the New Covenant in Christ is the culminating point of the promises of salvation of the Old Covenant, and is to that extent never independent of it. The New Covenant is grounded in and based on the Old, because it is ultimately the God of Israel who concludes the Old Covenant with his people Israel and enables the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Jesus lives during the period of the Old Covenant, but in his work of salvation in the New Covenant confirms and perfects the dimensions of the Old. The term covenant, therefore, means a relationship with God that takes effect in different ways for Jews and Christians. The New Covenant can never replace the Old but presupposes it and gives it a new dimension of meaning, by reinforcing the personal nature of God as revealed in the Old Covenant and establishing it as openness for all who respond faithfully from all the nations (cf. Zechariah 8: 20 — 23; Psalm 87).

Section 28: Unity and difference between Judaism and Christianity come to the fore in the first instance with the testimonies of divine revelation. With the existence of the Old Testament as an integral part of the one Christian Bible, there is a deeply rooted sense of intrinsic kinship between Judaism and Christianity. The roots of Christianity lie in the Old Testament, and Christianity constantly draws nourishment from these roots. However, Christianity is grounded in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who is recognised as the Messiah promised to the Jewish people, and as the only begotten Son of God who has communicated himself through the Holy Spirit following his death on the cross and his resurrection. With the existence of the New Testament, the question naturally arose quite soon of how the two testaments are related to one another, whether for example the New Testament writings have not superseded the older writings and nullified them. This position was represented by Marcion, who in the second century held that the New Testament had made the Old Testament book of promises obsolete, destined to fade away in the glow of the new, just as one no longer needs the light of the moon as soon as the sun has risen. This stark antithesis between the Hebrew and the Christian Bible never became an official doctrine of the Christian Church. By excluding Marcion from the Christian community in 144, the Church rejected his concept of a purely "Christian" Bible purged of all Old Testament elements, bore witness to its faith in the one and only God who is the author of both testaments, and thus held fast to the unity of both testaments, the "concordia testamentorum".

Section 29: This is of course only one side of the relationship between the two testaments. The common patrimony of the Old Testament not only formed the fundamental basis of a spiritual kinship between Jews and Christians but also brought with it a basic tension in the relationship of the two faith communities. This is demonstrated by the fact that Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New, in the conviction expressed by Augustine in the indelible formula: "In the Old Testament the New is concealed and in the New the Old is revealed" (Quaestiones in Heptateuchum 2, 73). Pope Gregory the Great also spoke in the same sense when he defined the Old Testament as "the prophecy of the New" and the latter as the "best exposition of the Old" (Homiliae in Ezechielem I, VI, 15; cf. "Dei verbum", 16).

Part 5. The universality of salvation in Jesus Christ and God's unrevoked covenant with Israel

Section 35: Since God has never revoked his covenant with his people Israel, there cannot be different paths or approaches to God's salvation. The theory that there may be two different paths to salvation, the Jewish path without Christ and the path with the Christ, whom Christians believe is Jesus of Nazareth, would in fact endanger the foundations of Christian faith. Confessing the universal and therefore also exclusive mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to the core of Christian faith. So too does the confession of the one God, the God of Israel, who through his revelation in Jesus Christ has become totally manifest as the God of all peoples, insofar as in him the promise has been fulfilled that all peoples will pray to the God of Israel as the one God (cf. Is 56:1-8).

Section 36: From the Christian confession that there can be only one path to salvation, however, it does not in any way follow that the Jews are excluded from God's salvation because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. Such a claim would find no support in the soteriological understanding of Saint Paul, who in the Letter to the Romans not only gives expression to his conviction that there can be no breach in the history of salvation, but that salvation comes from the Jews (cf. also John 4: 22). God entrusted Israel with a unique mission, and He does not bring his mysterious plan of salvation for all peoples (cf. 1 Timothy 2: 4) to fulfilment without drawing into it his "first-born son" (Exodus 4: 22). From this it is self-evident that Paul in the Letter to the Romans definitively negates the question he himself has posed, whether God has repudiated his own people. Just as decisively he asserts: "For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11: 29). 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" (Romans 11: 33). Bernard of Clairvaux (De cons. III/I,3) says that for the Jews "a determined point in time has been fixed which cannot be anticipated".

Our Conclusion

We hope these selections from the principal document encourage readers to investigate further: both the full text in question, as well as the books we so highly recommend.

We wish you well in your reflections.

Shalom!

Some Special Books

In the course of our on-going activities, we will highlight a wide range of important literature impacting upon our apostolate. At this point we draw attention to some outstanding books, with links to sources where further information can be obtained.

1. **Many Religions — One Covenant**, by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Ignatius Press. 1999.
2. **The Crucified Rabbi**, by Taylor R. Marshall. St. John's Press, Texas. 2009.
3. **Salvation Is From the Jews**, by Roy Shoeman. Ignatius Press, San Francisco. 2003.
4. **Second Exodus**, by Martin K. Barrack. Magnificat Institute Press, Houston, U.S.A. 1999.
5. **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
Volume	IV	The Messiah of Israel (In preparation)

