

The Jewishness of the Apostles and Its Implications for the Apostolic Church

JEAN-MIGUEL GARRIGUES, O.P.
Institut Supérieur d'Études Thomistes
Toulouse, France

Jewish Mediation as Structural Dimension of the Church

IN RECENT decades Catholic thought has become increasingly aware of the implications of the Jewishness of Jesus for the Christian faith. Though less attention has been given to the Jewish character of the Apostolic Church and its significance, much in the New Testament suggests that the Jewish connection is as important to ecclesiology as it is to Christology. The olive tree mentioned by Paul in Romans (11:17–24) is likely the people of Israel as it is united to the Messiah in the New Covenant. It is a nation whose “roots are holy” (11:16), from the Patriarchs to Jesus; its “first fruits” are also holy (11:16) in the person of the “saints of Jerusalem” (Acts 9:13; Rom 15:26), that is, the Jewish believers in Jesus. Since both the roots and the first fruits are Jewish, Paul implies that the mediation of the Jews on behalf of the Gentiles is structurally connected to the mediation of Jesus. According to Paul, if a Gentile is incorporated by baptism as a member of Christ, he is at the same time grafted onto the cultivated olive tree “among its natural branches, so that he can benefit, together with these, from the root and the sap of the olive tree” (Rom 11:17), that is, from the fulfillment in Jesus of the promise which Israel possesses. And so we must ask: Is this mediation of the Jews who believe in Christ an enduring structural dimension of the Church,

The reflections I propose in this essay have emerged in the course of my participation in a Catholic–Messianic Jewish dialogue group which has met annually since 2000, rotating between Jerusalem and Rome. My friendship and theological exchange with the Messianic Jewish theologian Mark Kinzer has played an important role in the development of these insights.

or is it simply an historical circumstance related to the origins of the Christian Church?

The first community of the Church was made up of Jews, and the Gentiles who converted were associated with them. This was true both in the land of Israel and in the Diaspora, where, according to Acts, Paul always visited the synagogues first and addressed himself to his fellow Jews, some of whom were persuaded (cf. Rom 11:14). If those Jews had failed to believe in Jesus, there would have been no Church at all; this is a point on which all Christians agree. But was this founding role a mere chance occurrence of history, or is it really an enduring structural component in Christ's mediation with regard to his entire Body? It seems difficult to construe the emphatic words of Paul concerning Jews and Gentiles in the Church as a mere metaphor, intended only to describe the concrete historical situation at the beginning of the apostolic mission. We need to reread Paul's words in connection with the question we have raised.

Paul bases himself on what Christ said to him on the road to Damascus, when Paul first received his mission as an apostle: "so that the nations to whom I am sending you . . . may obtain, by faith in me (Jesus), the forgiveness of their sins, and a portion in the inheritance of those who have been sanctified" (Acts 26:17–18). Paul continually repeats the same idea in his own words: "The Gentiles are admitted to the same inheritance [the one intended for the Jewish people and which Jews who believe in Christ have actually received], they (the Gentiles) are members of the same Body" (Eph 3:6). The Gentiles, who formerly were only "strangers and sojourners" (Eph 2:19), separated from Christ (without a Messiah), excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of the promise" (Eph 2:12), have now become in Christ "fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19). Indeed, "the Father has qualified (them) to share in the inheritance of the saints" (Col 1:12). For the Body of Christ that is the Church, the Jewish believers in Christ are the heirs of the promises made by God to Israel. And thus, by the fact of their election they have a role in communicating God's blessing in Christ to the Gentiles who convert. In the Church, they constitute a living witness to the way in which "Christ became a minister to the circumcised, in order to show God's truthfulness" (Rom 15:8); thanks to this faithfulness of the Lord towards them (the people of Israel), "the nations glorify God for his mercy" (Rom 15:9). And thus, in Paul's view the double vocation of Jews and Gentiles remains at the very center of the unique Body of Christ. The duality between Jews and Gentiles is not erased in the unity of the Church: Christ wants to "create *both* of them in himself as one New Man" (Eph 2:15) and to "reconcile *both* of them in

one Body" (Eph 2:16); and, above all, "through him we *both* have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph 2:18).

It appears that Paul considers this association of Jewish believers in Christ with Christ's mediation to be a structuring dimension of the Church. Indeed, he does say that in virtue of baptism "*you are all* sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, . . . neither male nor female . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26–28). However, this holds true only with regard to the baptismal gift of grace by faith, which brings salvation: "for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek: all have the same Lord, who bestows the riches (of his grace) upon all who call upon him" (Rom 10:12; cf. Rom 3:22–24). By the same token, there is no longer "either male or female" with regard to the baptismal priesthood. However there still remains a distinction between the vocations, missions, and ministries of men and women, a distinction that the Catholic Church steadfastly guards. Similarly, the distinction between the vocations and missions of Jew and Gentile continues to exist in the Church.

To repeat, for Paul this distinction of ecclesial vocations and missions appears to play a structural role. Paul employs an inclusive "we" when referring to salvation, which is common to Jewish and Gentile believers. Thus, when evoking baptismal typology in his letter to the Corinthian church, which consisted mainly of Gentiles, Paul indicates that they too have been included in Israel by Christ: "*Our* fathers were all under the cloud; and all passed through the sea" (1 Cor 10:1). On the other hand, when he explains the forms of mediation involved in the realization of God's plan of salvation, he distinguishes between "we [the Jews]" and "the rest of you [the Gentiles]" (Eph 1:11–13). Later in this same epistle, he says to the converted Gentiles, "Remember that at one time, you, the Gentiles . . ." (Eph 2:11). And this distinction holds true not only for the past, the era preceding their entry into the Church. It continues to exist in the present life of the Christian community: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles" (Rom 11:13).

Today the Catholic Church encounters a new (yet old) development: Messianic Jews who share with us the New Testament faith in Jesus as the accomplishment of God's promises. These contemporary Jewish believers in Jesus are confronting the Church of Christ with the following decisive question: is the mediation exercised by the Jews at the birth of the Church a mere historical accident, or does it have a deeper significance? Does it represent an enduring structural element for the Church? At first glance, this mediating function would seem to have disappeared with the

apostolic or sub-apostolic generation, when the Judeo-Christian community of Jerusalem held the role of the Mother Church.

Modern historical studies provide a resource for responding to this important question.¹ They have shown the great extent to which the sacramental and liturgical rites and the priestly institutions of the sub-apostolic Church—the very “frühkatholischen” elements that would mark her from the second century onwards as the “Catholic Church”—received the structural imprint of Judeo-Christian models which can come only from the original apostolic community. Unfortunately, with the influx of Gentiles into the Church the Judeo-Christians became marginalized and gradually disappeared. In light of the emergence of the Messianic Jewish movement in the twentieth century, we should ask ourselves whether this treasure of Christian community and spiritual life which goes back to the apostles, and which the Catholic Church guards as the apple of her eye, can really yield its full meaning and fruit for the benefit of all Christians without being assumed by the Jews who believe in Jesus as the accomplishment of the messianic promises carried by the people of Israel.

On an even deeper level, we need to ask ourselves whether the multitude of believers coming from the nations can fully express its own baptismal incorporation into the Messiah of Israel, without taking root, through Christ-believing Jews, in the people of Israel, which God preserves as the trustee of the promise for its final fulfillment in view of the glorious Coming of the Messiah (Rom 11:15). “If you want to boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you” (Rom 11:18). The Catholic Church can only respond to these questions with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, whose mission is to “introduce [the Church] into the entire truth” (Jn 16:13), and to glorify Christ in her, through fellowship among a diversity of members.²

The Jewishness of the Apostles

As noted above, the Catholic Church has made a considerable effort in recent decades to account for the Jewishness of Jesus in its Christological

¹ For example, Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964); Louis Bouyer, *Eucharist*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968); Carmine Di Sante, *Jewish Prayer: The Origins of the Christian Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

² Up to this point the text has mainly been taken and translated from my book *Le Saint-Esprit sceau de la Trinité: le Filioque et l'originalité trinitaire de l'Esprit dans sa personne et dans sa mission*, coll. “Cogitatio fidei” no. 276 (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 125–28 and 142–45.

teaching. Nothing comparable has yet been undertaken to integrate the Jewishness of the apostles of Christ, and of the Mother Church of Jerusalem, into Catholic ecclesiology. Greater attention to these factors might well have major consequences for both the theory and the practice of the apostolic ministry in the Church.

All the apostles were Jews. This holds true in the first place for the “twelve apostles” (Mt 10:2). These are most often designated as the collective body of “the Twelve” (Mk 3:14)—an expression employed even for the period when the group included only eleven members (1 Cor 15:5). They are also sometimes called simply “the apostles” (Luke 6:13) *par excellence*. But in addition there is the larger group of “all the apostles,” as St. Paul calls them (1 Cor 15:17), and of which he himself is the “last” (1 Cor 15:7). This group too is entirely made up of Jews. It is composed of those to whom the risen Christ appeared and whom he himself sent to be his witnesses (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; Rom 1:1, 5; Gal 1:16). James, “the Lord’s brother” (Gal 1:19), must be counted among these, because Christ appeared to him personally (1 Cor 15:7). In this larger group of apostles we also find Barnabas (cf. Acts 14:14) who is “a Levite from Cyprus” (Acts 4:36) and Andronicus and Junias, kinsmen of Paul (Rom 16:7). These “apostles,” like the Twelve, received their mission directly from Christ, without having to submit to any ordination “through man” (cf. Gal 1:1), as will later be the case, for example, with Timothy (cf. 1 Tm 4:14; 2 Tm 1:6). This larger group of apostles was undoubtedly quite sizable, since Paul speaks of an appearance of the risen Christ to “five hundred brethren at once” (1 Cor 15:6).

Christ calls the apostles to be witnesses of his resurrection according to the order which he himself established before his death. The most primitive *kerygma* includes Peter and the Twelve as foundational to the testimony concerning the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15: 5). Only those who were called to associate with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry until his death can validly testify that it is the same Jesus who is now risen from the dead (cf. Jn 15:27). This is why the ministry of “all the apostles” is based on the testimony of the Twelve (cf. Acts 13:31), who are the “foundations” (Rev 21:1). Paul himself receives from them the *kerygma* (cf. 1 Cor 15:3) as well as baptism and the Eucharist; before embarking upon his apostolic mission, he goes up to Jerusalem “to see Peter, spending fifteen days with him” (Gal 1:18).

Christ instituted the college of the twelve apostles in order to correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel. They are the leaders of the people of Israel in its new messianic and eschatological era. In Matthew, the formula “The names of the Twelve are . . .” (Mt 10:2) is reminiscent of the language

employed by the Book of Kings in describing the twelve prefects appointed by Solomon at the head of all the people (cf. 1 Kgs 4:7–8). This status of the Twelve is inseparably historical and eschatological, extending over the entire time span of the New Covenant inaugurated by the Resurrection of Christ and including the Last Judgment which will establish the Kingdom of future glory: “In the new world (παλιγγενεσία), when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit you on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28). In Hebrew the verb “to judge” (*shafat*) means both to rule and to exercise judgment. The Greek equivalent (*krino*) is employed here in Matthew to refer both to the time of history during which the Eucharist is celebrated (i.e., “until he comes” [1 Cor 11:26]), and to the eschaton when God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). When he instituted the Eucharist, Jesus said to the Twelve: “It is you who have been continually with me in my trials; and I assign to you the kingdom as my Father has assigned it to me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk 22:28–29).

The book of Daniel prophesied that in the messianic age “the saints would possess the kingdom” (Dn 7:22) and “thrones would be placed” (Dn 7:9) so that the saints could exercise judgment with the Son of Man. We see this fulfilled in the Apocalypse: “I saw thrones and seated upon them were those to whom judgment was entrusted” (Rev 20:4). In the eschatological Jerusalem the Twelve exercise judgment because the city has “twelve foundations, and on them are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev 21:14). The wall of Jerusalem, of which the Twelve are the foundations, is endowed “with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel” (Rev 21:12). The Twelve ensure the messianic structure of the people of Israel up to and into the age to come. This people is visibly represented in the Apocalypse by those who are chosen from “all the tribes of the sons of Israel” (Rev 7:4). The expression is too precise to apply to a “spiritual Israel.” It obliges us to see, in the immediately subsequent vision of a “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev 7:9), the multitude of the Gentiles, who are considered as distinct, even in the age to come, from the twelve tribes of the eschatological Israel.

The Twelve are destined by Christ to judge the twelve tribes of Israel in the world to come. In the meantime, they already have a permanent mission to govern the people of Israel as embodied in its Messianic *kahal* (assembly or church). The faithful from the Gentiles are joined to this *kahal*, with its Jewish roots in the mother community of Jerusalem. On

the Apostolic Sees, from which the Twelve judge the twelve tribes of the Messianic Israel, bishops (most often Gentiles) have succeeded one another throughout the history of the Church. But these bishops represent the twelve apostles in their ministry, because it is always through them that Christ “keeps [his flock] under his constant protection through the apostles, guiding it still through these same pastors who continue his work today.”³ The apostolic ministry of the Church is indeed Jewish in its historical origin, and this is not a purely contingent fact of history, but instead a stable disposition established by divine providence and by the will of Christ in an eschatological perspective.

What may seem at first sight paradoxical is that these Jewish apostles, whose ministry is based on the twelve tribes of Israel, are all sent by Christ to the Gentiles: “All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples from all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And behold, I am with you until the end of the world” (Mt 28:18–20). We find the same universal mission in the final chapter of the Gospel of Mark: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). Only Luke notes that the preaching of the Gospel to all nations requires a “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). This serves as a reminder to the Gentiles that they must not cut themselves off from the Mother Church, the church of the eyewitnesses of Jesus and of Pentecost, which is attached directly to the Jewish people. The opening up of the messianic Jewish *kahal* to the Gentiles is clearly revealed through the interdependence of the three key apostolic figures of the early Church: Peter (inseparable from John and from the College of the Twelve), Paul, and James.

Peter and Paul as Jewish Apostles

Peter, the rock upon which Christ founded the Church (Mt 16:18) and the one who loved the Lord Jesus “more than the others” (Jn 21:15), is the pastor of the entire flock (cf. Jn 21:15–17). It is he who is responsible for “strengthening his brethren” (Lk 22:32). Even before the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter took the initiative to complete the College of the Twelve by presiding over the election of Matthias (Acts 1:15). Peter is the one who speaks to the people of Israel on behalf of the Twelve. He does this alone at Pentecost (Acts 2:14), and acts together with John during the first miraculous healing (Acts 3:11–12). He is the one who, with John

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1575 quoting the Preface of the Apostles of the Roman liturgy. The Catechism further states: “The college of bishops . . . makes the college of the Twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ’s return” (no. 1577).

(Acts 4:7–13) and the apostles (Acts 5:27–32), speaks twice on behalf of the apostolic Church before the Sanhedrin. His universal ministry is also evident in the initiative he takes at the home of Cornelius, where, in obedience to the Holy Spirit, he “ordered that [the Gentile believers]” be baptized (Acts 10:48). Later he departs from Jerusalem, leaving James to preside over the church of this city (cf. Acts 12:17). He goes first to Antioch (cf. Gal 2:11), then to Rome (cf. 1 Pt 5:13).

The geographical itinerary of Peter’s apostolic mission between Jerusalem and Rome expresses the eschatological extension of the nation that was desired by the risen Christ. However, this universal ministry, which is ultimately established in Rome, the first world metropolis, is exercised by Peter as “the apostle to the circumcised” (Gal 2:8). His point of departure and of reference is the singularity of the divine election of the Jewish people. His First Epistle is addressed “to the foreigners (or exiles) in the Diaspora: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pt 1:1). From Rome, Peter is writing either to the Jewish believers of the Diaspora who reside in these nations, or more probably to all “Christians” (1 Pt 4:16) who in this world are “strangers and sojourners” (1 Pt 2:11 citing Gen 23:4 and Ps 39:13). In any event, it is clear that he is addressing his recipients as a Diaspora of the people of Israel, thus implicitly referring them to Jerusalem. Passing from Jerusalem to Rome, Peter does not enact a simple geographic transfer of the Church, in the way that historians would later speak of a *translatio imperii* by Charlemagne. Peter accomplishes his apostolic mission received from Christ, a mission which goes from Jerusalem to the nations, not in order to start a “Gentile church” replacing the people of Israel presumed to have been rejected by God, but instead to gather the nations together and, at the right time, to integrate them into Israel.

Paul, who is the “last” to whom the Risen Christ appeared (1 Cor 15:8), describes himself as “the least of the apostles” (1 Cor 15:9). He is not a member of the College of the Twelve, in which Peter has John as his usual companion, both before and after Pentecost. Nevertheless, Paul has received from Christ a mission to the Gentiles, parallel to the mission Peter has received to the Jews, and this puts them in a symmetrical position (Gal 2:7–9). This explains why Tradition has come to honor them together as the two “princes of the apostles.” When Paul describes his mission in the Letter to the Galatians, he employs the same terms found in St. Matthew’s episode of Peter’s confession at Caesarea: “When [God] was pleased to *reveal* his *Son* in me” (Gal 1:15–16) is parallel to the Gospel’s “‘You are the Christ, the *Son* of the living God’ . . . ‘This has been *revealed* to you by my Father who is in heaven’ ” (Mt 16:17). It is even more striking to note the parallel between St. Paul’s expression, “without consulting

flesh and blood" (Gal 1:16), and Jesus' words in the Gospel, "this revelation came to you not from flesh and blood" (Mt 16:17).

Even though for Paul the Twelve are "the apostles [his] predecessors" (Gal 1:17), he does not go to Jerusalem to meet them immediately after his encounter with the risen Christ. However, before embarking on his apostolic mission to the Gentiles (Gal 1:18–21), he does go up to Jerusalem "to visit Cephas and stay with him fifteen days" (Gal 1:18). Paul's recognition of the apostolic authority of Peter, and at the same time his awareness of the symmetry of their missions, stand out simultaneously in the confrontation which later occurs between the two apostles at Antioch. Paul "opposed [Peter] to his face because, the latter stood self-condemned" (Gal 2:11), having concealed the fact that up until then he had been in the habit of "eating with the Gentiles" (Gal 2:12). Paul openly opposes him in this, because Peter's authority is such that "other Jews [i.e., Jewish believers in Christ] followed him and began likewise to dissimulate, to the point that even Barnabas was carried away by their dissimulation" (Gal 2:13). In Paul's eyes, Peter "stood self-condemned" in hiding "for fear of those from the Circumcision" (Gal 2:12) the true conviction of his faith, which he had expressed openly up until then by "living like a Gentile and not like a Jew (ἔθνικῶς καὶ οὐχὶ Ἰουδαϊκῶς)" (Gal 2:14) and by eating together with the Gentile believers.⁴ This dissimulation led his fellow Christ-believing Jews astray, and seemed to "compel the Gentile converts to adopt Jewish practices," contrary to the decisions of the apostolic assembly of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:28–29) and to Peter's own speech on that occasion (cf. Acts 15:7–11).

Paul further pursues the parallel between himself and the "apostle to the circumcised" (Gal 2:8) by seeking to go to Rome, where Peter had probably already established himself along with his two longtime disciples Silvanus and Mark (1 Pt 5:12–13). Paul does this despite the fact the he usually "makes it his ambition to limit [his] apostolate to the regions where the name of Christ has not been invoked, in order not to build on the foundations laid by others" (Rom 15:20, cf. 2 Cor 10:15–16). At first glance it might appear that Paul considers this visit to Rome as a mere stopover on a mission to Spain (cf. Rom 15:24, 28; Acts 19:21). But the manner in which Christ reveals to Paul the meaning of his upcoming journey to Rome (Acts 23) helps us understand the reason why both of these apostles must come to the capital of the Roman Empire. In the course of a dream that Paul has while a prisoner in Jerusalem, Jesus says to

⁴ Contrast this with Peter's exclamation when God asks him to share the table of the Gentile Cornelius: "Oh no, Lord! Because I have never eaten anything profane or unclean" (Acts 10:14).

him: "Courage! Just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so must you testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11). There is a striking correlation here ("just as . . . so") between Rome and Jerusalem, as well as between the mission that Christ assigns to Paul "in Rome as in Jerusalem"—a mission requiring that Paul "testify about him." In this context, the expression seems to imply that there will be persecution. This is why the book of Acts, which begins in Jerusalem, ends with the arrival of Paul in Rome.

It is therefore no accident that Peter and Paul, the "princes of the apostles," bore witness to Christ together through the martyrdom they endured under Nero.⁵ In the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons refers to "the very great, very ancient and universally known Church, which the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, founded in Rome."⁶ The Church of Rome, as the Church marked forever in blood by the *charisma* of Peter and Paul, is the Apostolic See not merely because it is the church of the capital of the Roman Empire. It has this status because this same empire, as it already manifests itself under Caligula and Nero, is the first draft of a false pagan universality or an antichristic Babylon, which represents its historical and eschatological struggle among the nations, as Peter in his first epistle (5:13) and the Apocalypse (chapters 17 and 18) indicate. This church, through the Gospel preaching and the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, received the gift of being not only the church whose bishop exercises the ministry of Peter, the universal pastor,⁷ but also the church of Peter and Paul, linking together the two modalities of their respective apostolic missions—the mission to the Jews, who represent the "first fruits" (Rom 11:16) of the Church rooted in Israel, and the mission to the multitude of nations, to whom Christ sent the apostles in order to evangelize them.

James as Jewish Apostle

This presentation of the interaction between the two main apostles would be incomplete without reference to a third apostle, James, "the brother of the Lord" (Gal 1:19; cf. Mk 6:3). Whereas in the first eleven chapters of the Acts of the Apostles the Twelve are omnipresent and Peter takes all pastoral initiatives, in chapter twelve a shift occurs in the narra-

⁵ Before the end of first century, Clement of Rome already attests to this fact in his *Letter to the Corinthians* (5:3–5).

⁶ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, III, 3, 2.

⁷ "For with this church, by reason of her pre-eminence, the universal Church, that is, the faithful everywhere, must necessarily be in accord, since she is that church in which, for the benefit of people everywhere, has always preserved the Tradition which comes from the Apostles." (ibid.).

tive. When Peter returns after being miraculously delivered from his third arrest, he asks that “James and the brethren” be informed of what has occurred (Acts 12:17). The same verse concludes enigmatically: “Then he departed and went to another place.” Although Peter had previously been the book’s main protagonist, he now fades into the background, leaving James as the head of the church of Jerusalem. Paul mentions that on the first trip he made to Jerusalem as a believer in Christ he had already seen James, but insists that he had come “to visit Peter and remain with him fifteen days” (Gal 1:18–19). Relating his second visit to Jerusalem, fourteen years later, Paul says that James extended to him his hand as a sign of communion. This time James is mentioned alongside Peter and John, as an “acknowledged pillar of the Church” (Gal 2:9).

The full importance of James appears at the Council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:7–29). Peter speaks first to recall his initiative, in obedience to the Holy Spirit, of receiving the Gentiles into the Church: “In the early days, God chose me from among you, so that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the Good News and become believers” (Acts 15:7). The silence that follows signifies the adherence of the entire assembly, something that the Occidental text of Acts recounts in this way: “As the elders gave their assent to what Peter had said, the whole assembly fell silent” (Acts 15:12 Syriac). Paul then proceeds to describe, together with Barnabas, their common mission to the Gentiles. James is the last to speak, and his words put an end to the debate: “I myself judge . . .” (Acts 15:19).

If the words of James at this Council were so decisive, it may be due in part to the fact that the original challenge which gave rise to the meeting had come from “some people in the entourage of James” (Gal 2:12). In the Book of Acts these are referred to as “some people from the party of the Pharisees” (Acts 15:5). More importantly, James appears here as the one who ensures that the opening to the Gentiles is not acquired at the price of making the Church cease to belong to the people of Israel. James presents the entry of the Gentiles into the apostolic Church as their integration into the people of Israel, raised up once again by the Messiah according to the prophetic promise:

Simon [Peter] has described how, early on, God has taken care to draw from the Gentiles a people dedicated to his name. This is consistent with the words of the prophets, as it is written: “After this I will return and I will raise up the tabernacle of David which has fallen; I will raise up its ruins, and I will set it up so that the rest of men may seek the Lord, all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is invoked, says the Lord, who does these things” (Am 9:11–12) (Acts 15:13–17).

Acts quotes this passage of the Prophet Amos according to the Septuagint, which differs from the Masoretic version. Instead of “that other men may seek the Lord,” the Masoretic text reads “so that they [those of the tabernacle of David] may possess the remnant of Edom.” Recent exegetical research opens up the possibility that the Septuagint version quoted by Acts may be closer to the meaning of the original Hebrew.⁸

Whatever the precise meaning of the text quoted from Amos, it is clear that in this speech James appears as the apostle who ensures that the reception of the Gentiles into the Church comes about according to the fulfillment of the promises to Israel, that is, “according to the Scriptures.” His concerns contrast with the attitude of Peter, who in his speech emphasizes two very different points. First, Peter insists upon the impossibility of perfectly observing the Law: “Why do you tempt God now by trying to impose upon these disciples [the Gentiles] a yoke which neither our fathers nor we ourselves have had the strength to bear?” (Acts 15:10). This is exactly the same reasoning that Paul will use (cf. Gal 3:10; 6:13). Then, at the end of his discourse, Peter advances still another Pauline argument: “Indeed, it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus that we believe in order to be saved, just like them” (Acts 15:11; cf. Gal 2:15–16).

What is most significant in the apostolic interaction displayed in the Council of Jerusalem is that Peter, Paul, and James finally agree on three essential points concerning the reception of the Gentiles into the Church:

1. It is by grace and faith in Jesus the Messiah, and not by the observance of the Law, that both Jews and Gentiles are saved.
2. The conversion of the Gentiles to Christ is the work of the Lord, who broadens the notion of what it means to belong to the people of God, a people which, according to the promises of the prophets, has now reached its Messianic phase. Nevertheless, this broadening is accomplished through the integration of the Gentiles, and it in no way implies a separation of Christ’s disciples from the people of Israel, to whom the Jewish believers in Christ still belong.
3. It does not mean that the distinction between Jew and Gentile is abolished by faith in Christ. The Gentiles remain Gentiles; they do not become Jews, as did proselytes, and so they are not required to observe the Mosaic Law. This implies, in turn, that the Jews who believe in Jesus remain Jews, and are required as such to substantially fulfill the Law.

⁸ Cf. Michael A. Braun, “James’ Use of Amos at the Jerusalem Council: Steps toward a Possible Solution of the Textual and Theological Problems,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 1977): 113–21.

The first point, which will be of capital importance to Paul, is set forth by Peter, and it is not in any way contradicted by James. On the other hand, Peter and Paul symmetrically accept the way in which James shows how he sees the integration of Gentiles into the people of Israel, maintaining the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

Who is this James, who guarantees that the apostolic Church belongs to the people of Israel that is now called to enter into the messianic age? He is certainly an "apostle" (Gal 1:19), in the broader sense of the term, but probably not one of the Twelve. At the same time, he is "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19), that is, a close relative of Jesus according to the flesh. The "brothers of Jesus" appear in the Gospels as an extended family group or clan. At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, they deem that he had lost his mind (cf. Mk 3:21). Then, upon seeing the miracles he accomplished in Galilee, their behavior towards him tends to be more ambiguous:

Now the Jewish feast of tents was near. So his brothers said to him: "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works that you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." Indeed, not even his brothers believed in him. (Jn 7:1–4).

What happened later on? Some became disciples of their relative. Scripture attests that the Risen Lord Jesus appeared personally to James (1 Cor 15:7), and that the brothers of Jesus were present in the Upper Room at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit descended upon the witnesses of the entire life of Jesus: alongside the witnesses of Jesus' public ministry (cf. Acts 1:21–22), the twelve apostles and the holy women, we find the group of "his brothers," witnesses of his hidden life at Nazareth, with Mary, the Lord's mother (Acts 1:14), who serves as the link between the two groups.

As the "brother of the Lord," James is related to Jesus according to the flesh. This genealogical connection between James and Israel's Messiah, a connection reinforced by the Spirit of Pentecost, is a precious link binding the apostolic Church to the Jewish people, to whom Jesus came as the Messiah "[son of God] become from the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3). By his very being James is a living reminder of the Jewishness of Jesus, as well as a living link with "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Cor 10:18), a nation which is still called to enter into the Messianic fulfillment of the promises (see Rom 9:4–5). This fleshly and genealogical sacramentality, proper to the Jewish people, accounts for the fact that the church of Jerusalem had as its first hierarchical leaders several "brothers of the Lord." According to Hegesippus, the choice of Simeon—

another “brother of Jesus”—to succeed James, was decided by a council of the apostles and relatives of the Savior.

James connects the apostolic Church to the people of Israel not only through his flesh but also through his deep spiritual continuity with the tradition of Jewish wisdom. James is surrounded (Gal 2:12) by “members of the party of the Pharisees who had become believers” (Acts 15:5). These are the same people who ask Peter for an explanation, upon his return from the home of Cornelius: “Why have you joined the uncircumcised, and why did you eat with them?” (Acts 11:3). Later these men will enjoin the brothers who have come from the Gentiles “to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:1, 5). On his last journey to Jerusalem, Paul went “to see James, with whom the elders were assembled” (Acts 21:18). It is now James alone, assisted by the presbyters, who governs the church of Jerusalem. Those who are assembled on this occasion say to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have embraced the faith and they are all zealous partisans of the law!” (Acts 21:20). Hegesippus reports that James was revered as Jacob the Just by the Jews of Jerusalem, believers and non-believers in Christ alike, until he was put to death upon the order of the high priest in 62. It is even possible that our James is identical to a Jacob of that same period, echoes of whose wisdom are found in the *Talmud*.

Of course, the Epistle of James is also attributed to him. In this letter, the apostle addresses himself to the “twelve tribes in the Diaspora” (James 1:1), that is, to the Jewish Christ-believers scattered throughout the pagan nations. The letter reflects the best of the spirituality of the Pharisees, insisting on the importance of good works, without which faith is dead. It seems implicitly to engage in a discussion with the Letter of Paul to the Galatians, commenting on the same biblical texts concerning Abraham, and the relation between faith and works. This letter of James could well be inserted between the letters of Paul to the Galatians and to the Romans, since in the second of these Paul expresses his ideas with greater nuance. The apparent opposition between James and Paul is more terminological than real. We need to remember that when Paul speaks of “works,” he is spontaneously thinking of “dead works,” those accomplished without love, and which therefore serve no purpose. And when he speaks of faith, he has in mind “living faith” or “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). By contrast, when James speaks of faith, he spontaneously thinks of “dead faith,” which is that of the demons; and when he speaks of works, he always has in mind “living works,” which proceed from the grace of God through charity.

The final meeting in Jerusalem between Paul and James enables us to grasp the essence of their apostolic interaction, as we have sought to describe it. As Paul declared before a Jewish audience, he never denied his Jewish-

ness, nor did he forgo any of the Mosaic observances, as long as these did not interfere with his mission to the Gentiles. One demonstration of this is the Nazirite vow which he made (or perhaps completed) at Cenchreae (Acts 18:18). James knows that Paul “has also behaved as an observer of the law” (Acts 21:24). To cut short the reproaches of those who accuse him of “teaching the Jews who live among the Gentiles to forsake Moses” (Acts 21:21), James advises Paul to accomplish his vow of purification publicly, in the Temple, alongside four Jewish believers in Christ who are also under a vow (cf. Acts 21:23–24). And Paul does as he is told by James.

To understand this docility of Paul towards James, we need to recall the motive behind Paul’s last visit to Jerusalem: the collection for “the saints” which he took up among the Gentiles whom he had converted to the Lord. The faithful in Jerusalem are “saints” in a very special sense of the term: they have put their all property in common, and share everything according to individual needs (cf. Acts 2:43–45). This was a way of showing their abandonment to Providence and, in fact, very soon, they fell “into poverty” (Rom 15:26) and needed to be rescued (cf. Acts 11:29–30). During his earlier visit with Peter, John, and James in Jerusalem, Paul had been asked to “remember the poor” of Jerusalem (Gal 2:10). And, he informs the Galatians, “that is precisely what I have been eager to do.”

More profoundly, this collection indicates that the Gentile churches are connected to the Mother Church of Jerusalem and, through her, to the people of Israel. When he defends himself before the governor Felix and the high priest Ananias, who has come to accuse him, Paul expresses this idea in terms that are borrowed from the vocabulary of Jewish ritual: “I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. As I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple” (Acts 24:17–18). The same priestly vocabulary is found in the letters of Paul when he explains the reason for the collection: “I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. . . . [The Gentiles] owe this to them: for if they have participated in their spiritual blessings, they must in turn serve them with their worldly goods” (Rom 15:25–27). In Paul’s eyes this is not only a debt of charity on the part of Gentile believers towards the church of Jerusalem; it is also for the Gentiles a religious duty. “Because the rendering of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, it is also a rich source of abundant thanksgiving to God. This service proves to them who you really are, so that they may glorify God for your obedience in the profession of the gospel of Christ and for the generosity of your communion with them and everyone” (2 Cor 9:12–13). Through the offering which he brings to James and to the Mother Church of Jerusalem, Paul intends to signify the spiritual connection of the Gentiles to the people of Israel,

from whom (in the person of Christ) and by whom (in the persons of the apostles) their salvation has come.

The carnal and genealogical ties that linked James to Christ were not transmitted beyond the first Jewish bishops of the church of Jerusalem. On the other hand, the apostolic succession continued to be transmitted sacramentally through the bishops (for the most part Gentiles) upon the seats of the apostles, to whom Jesus had promised: "Behold, I am with you all the days, unto the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). However, the apostles are and remain forever Jews, called by Christ to "judge the twelve tribes of Israel." Furthermore, the fundamental genealogical succession, which belongs to the Jewish people, continues to thrive on the basis of a divine election which is "irrevocable" (Rom 11:29), in the same way that the sacramental transmission of apostolic succession is based on a gift of God which is irrevocable. Any future encounter (in whatever form), reuniting these two distinctive types of succession in the Church must necessarily reflect the interaction among the apostles that we have attempted to point out in the pages of the New Testament. The universal primacy represented by Peter (in a Church confronted more and more by "the gates of hell [which, however,] will not prevail against her" [Mt 16:18]) can exercise its *charisma* in an entirely fruitful manner only if it is supported by the *charismata* of the two other apostolic pillars: that of Paul, for the universality of the mission, but also that of James, which guarantees the roots of the Church in the Jewish people. Indeed, when Peter inaugurated the mission to the Gentiles, a mission Paul would later develop, he did so from his Jewish roots as "apostle to the circumcised" (Gal 2:8), roots for which James and the Mother Church of Jerusalem continue to serve as the guarantee. The *charisma* of James, acting through the Jews who believe in Christ while maintaining their Jewish identity, is a physical and spiritual reminder that the Church originally came from Jerusalem and from Israel through Jewish apostles. It also reminds the Church that she is and always will be based on the apostles and is eschatologically pointed by them towards the earthly Jerusalem, where Jesus "will come in the same way as he went" (Acts 1:11).

Conclusion

Paul stands for the pilgrim Church sojourning in this world with her universal mission to all nations. To Peter was entrusted the ministry of receiving (cf. Jn 20:17) these "other sheep [i.e., Gentiles] that are not of this fold" (Jn 10:16) into the catholic fullness of the "one flock" (Jn 10:16), whose unique shepherd is Christ. It is Peter in his role as "apostle to the circumcised" (Gal 2:8) who gathers this one flock inasmuch as it

constitutes the messianic fullness of Israel in its “remnant” (Rom 11:5), which has now truly become “the light for the nations” (Is 42:6; 49:6; Acts 13:47). In doing this, he illustrates that these two missions (to Israel on the one hand, and to the nations on the other) are not identical, even if they lead all men to the same salvation through Christ. In the case of the Gentiles, reception of the Good News implies renunciation of idolatry and entry into the Covenant. In the case of the Jews, on the other hand, the Good News represents God’s fulfillment in his Son of his promises to Israel. This is why the ministry of Peter, which brings about the messianic and eschatological renewal to which the Jews are called, is inseparable from the continuity and stability of the election of Israel embodied by James, as well as from the universal mission to the nations of Paul.

The Jewish identity of the Twelve is central to their apostolic role as those who “judge the twelve tribes of Israel.” The Jewish identity of Peter, as head of the Twelve, is integral to his particular role as “apostle to the circumcised.” The Jewish identity of James, kinsman of Jesus, is especially noteworthy, as he stands guard over the relationship of the messianic *kahal* to the Jewish people as a whole and to the Jewish tradition. The Jewish identity of Paul is crucial to his apostolic mission as he represents Israel’s vocation to be a “light to the nations.” These reflections on the theological significance of the Jewishness of the apostles are supported by Paul’s teaching, considered at the beginning of this essay, that suggests a structurally significant ecclesiological role of Jewish believers in Christ.

While quite striking in their potential implications, all of these fruits of exegesis would remain highly theoretical if it were not for the re-emergence of an explicitly Jewish corporate expression of faith in Christ in our own day. It is now conceivable that the Jewish structural dimension of the Church could once again find explicit visible expression. How and when this will occur is uncertain, but faith in the God who chose Israel, raised Jesus from the dead, and poured out the Spirit at Pentecost leads us to expect the unexpected and to imagine the unimaginable. As Paul states after reflecting on similar themes, “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! . . . For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:33, 36). N.V