

Response to My Respondents

GAVIN D’COSTA
University of Bristol
Bristol, UK

Introduction

I AM MOST GRATEFUL to Fr. Richard Schenk and Professors Gabriel Reynolds and Eduardo Echeverria for their comments on my book *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* and for their wider reflections. I have learnt much and will continue to learn from their writings. In this article I will briefly summarize the main arguments of my book (part 1) before responding, in turn, to the critical questions they raise (part 2). Summarizing the whole will help when dealing with the parts to which they have responded. Readers can of course skip part 1.

Brief Summary of *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims*

My book seeks to return to the Council documents to find out what they teach in terms of doctrines regarding other religions in general (ch. 2), and in particular the Jewish people (ch. 3) and Muslims (ch. 4). To achieve this, I address two basic questions first (ch. 1): I inspect the hermeneutical debate surrounding the reception of the Council and I clarify what counts as doctrine—including what grades of authority are attached, if any, to such “doctrines.” I do not concern myself with pastoral orientation and practical guidance, only with doctrine, however important the former. Echeverria carefully outlines my discussion of the hermeneutical debates with clarity and grounds them in their wider context. He also outlines the three basic trajectories of reception that loosely map onto admittedly porous labels: “liberal,” “traditionalist,” and “reforming conservative.”

The first ("liberals") are primarily historically oriented, and Fr. Schenk kindly points out that, while I have put many questions to this group, I also learn deeply from them. More importantly, he rightly questions whether this is the best way of labeling them (as "historicists"), as they have implicit theological presuppositions that drive their position. They are not *simply* historically oriented. Some among their number emphasize discontinuity, novelty, and deep changes within Catholic sensibilities. I am in agreement with some of their findings, and much of their historical research is invaluable. However, others assert doctrinal discontinuity, and this is an important claim that I find problematic. This is Fr. Schenk's point about their theological presuppositions. I try to show that some of their key claims about discontinuity can be challenged on historical grounds. Briefly, for example, there are the teachings of Florence, in the *Bull of Union with the Copts* (1442), that at face value seems to condemn "Jews," along with heretics and schismatics and pagans, to the fires of hell. "It [the Church] firmly believes, professes and preaches that all those who are outside the catholic church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics and schismatics, cannot share in eternal life and will go into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless they are joined to the catholic church before the end of their lives."¹ I argue that, with historical sensitivity, we can see that those to whom Florence refers as "Jews" do not correspond to those to whom Vatican II refers as "Jews": The latter are invincibly ignorant; the former are not. Thus the former, at Florence, were (probably wrongly) assumed to be guilty of knowing and rejecting the truth of the Gospel, thus explaining their terrifying and sad final destination. This point negates neither Florence's authority nor its proper object of doctrinal teaching—that salvation comes through Christ and his Church and is not available to those who knowingly reject this truth in their minds and hearts. Thus, regarding the "Jews," each Council envisages them quite differently, but without real contradiction or

¹ Council of Florence, *Bull of Union with the Copts*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward). The Latin reads: "Firmiter credit, profitetur et predicat nullos extra ecclesiam catholicam existentes, non solum paganos, sed nec iudeos aut hereticos atque scismaticos eterne vite fieri posse participes, sed in ignem eternum ituros, qui paratus est dyabolo et angelis eius (Matt 25:41), nisi ante finem vite eidem fuerint aggregati, tantum que valere ecclesiastici corporis unitatem." The Arabic is to be found in Eugenio Cecconi, *Studi storici sul concilio di Firenze* (Florence, IT: S. Antnino, 1869), last fasc. 61.

doctrinal discontinuity: they can be construed entirely negatively at Florence; they can be construed very positively at Vatican II. My argument against historicists in this instance is that it is not a discontinuity of doctrine, but a difference related to a contingent judgment: whether all Jews are culpable of willfully rejecting the truth of Christ when they continue to remain Jews. I name this approach “historicist” because it is my belief that their claims can be defeated on historicist grounds.

The other major claim regarding doctrinal reversal is related to this same statement at Florence: “no salvation outside the church” (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Some scholars argue that this is overturned at Vatican II. Here we have a longer and more complex magisterial tradition to deal with both before and after Florence. I argue that this teaching, “no salvation outside the church,” is upheld at Vatican II, not denied. However, its context is made even clearer. The basic truth it conserves is the claim that only through the agency of Christ and his Church is salvation attained. In earlier statements, such as at Florence, those who were taught to be “outside” are named: Jews, heretics and schismatics. Historical studies might show that these named are not properly named because they were “outside” without culpability and invincible ignorance may apply. Florence was not concerned with this latter issue. At Vatican II, there was a recognition that there are many who are invincibly ignorant to whom this teaching, “no salvation outside the church,” cannot be applied—without qualification. This notion of invincible ignorance was always present in theology, but it became developed and applied to those from other religions particularly during the discovery of the “New World,” and it first appears in a magisterial teaching in Pope Pius IX’s 1854 encyclical *Singulari Quadam*. After stating there is no salvation outside the Church, Pius adds: “But, on the other hand, it is necessary to hold for certain that they who labour in ignorance of the true religion, if this ignorance is invincible, are not stained by any guilt in this matter in the eyes of God.”² He adds how difficult, if not impossible, it is to make this contingent judgment regarding particular souls. After this, there is no conciliar or magisterial statement of “outside the church there is no salvation” without this careful qualification. This is clarifying the doctrine that has remained true and immutable since it was first taught.

² Pope Pius IX, *Pontificis Maximi Acta: Pars Prima*, vol. 50 (Rome: Bonarum Artium, 1864) 620–31, at 626.

Each claim for doctrinal discontinuity must be tested historically and contextually. In the wider literature, there are many claims, and each must be tested individually with the pertinent historical context carefully examined. My starting point—and here is the chief theological difference between such interpreters and myself—is to assume doctrinal continuity if the doctrine is being taught authoritatively and continually by the magisterium. This is not a historical starting point. It is a theological starting point, but not one that is immune from historical enquiry and critical discussion.

To carry out this task, one has to know what is authoritative and binding and what is not. Hence, I sought to articulate the different grades of doctrinal authority of teachings, for one can easily engage in fruitless defense of positions at Councils that do not have significant doctrinal authority. I do not seek to defend continuity in any absolute sense—only at certain levels of formal authoritative teaching. Thus, when Florence starts its teaching with the phrase “[the Roman Catholic Church] firmly believes, professes, and preaches,” one cannot lightly suggest that Florence is reversed, reversible, or wrong, as that would also entail the claim that the magisterium, in the operation of its highest teaching authority, got it wrong on basic doctrinal teaching. However, to hold that Vatican II got it right and Florence got it wrong entails a fatal inconsistency, for there would be no good reason to accept the magisterium’s teaching at Vatican II if, at a *de fide*, level it got things wrong in the past.

This is far from the “traditionalist” position, which is, after all, a mirror opposite to the liberal approach. The latter is delighted that discontinuity happens and celebrate that the Church is now teaching truth. The traditionalist is dismayed, as they see the current teaching as erroneous precisely because of the denial of previously “proclaimed” truths. Scholars like Russell Hittinger, David Schindler, and Nicholas J. Healy, Jr., have made strenuous efforts to show that both liberals and traditionalist are wrong on the question of “religious freedom.” Likewise, Cardinal Avery Dulles and others have contested John Noonan’s claims that slavery and usury are examples of “doctrinal” discontinuity.³

³ See Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Dignitatis Humanae and the Development of Catholic Doctrine,” in *Catholicism and Religious Freedom: Contemporary Reflections on Vatican II’s Declaration on Religious Liberty*, ed. Kenneth L. Grasso and Robert P. Hunt (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 43–67; David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy, Jr., *Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religion Freedom, A New Translation*,

It is at this stage that Fr. Schenk and Dr. Echeverria pose probing questions to my own position. Fr. Schenk asks whether I depart from Cardinal Ratzinger / Pope Benedict and Cardinal Koch on their hermeneutics of reform when it comes to the question of the Jews. I seem to resist certain changes that they have promoted regarding mission to the Jewish people. Dr. Echeverria and Fr. Schenk ask for clarification of my position regarding the conceptual resources and metaphysics underpinning my alignment with the third group. Should I have employed Newman's notion of "principles" to articulate what is "continuous" and what gives grounds for "development?" Should I make it clear that, while I am sympathetic with a historicist approach to texts, I can successfully eschew relativizing doctrinal truth in terms of my historicizing doctrinal expressions? I will attend to these important questions below after completing the narrative of my book.

I defend the third position, a hermeneutic of continuity and reform, and acknowledge "novel" teachings (meaning the first time the solemn magisterium addresses a particular question). By "novel," I mean that the magisterium had not previously spoken solemnly and positively about Jews and Muslims as it does in §16 of *Lumen Gentium*. In one sense, there is no novel teaching, as everything must be founded in what is given in Scripture, but novelty can be the recovery of Scripture to address a question that was not addressed before or not addressed with this particular scriptural foundation. The use of Romans 9–11 would be an example of the latter, where this section of Scripture, always within the Church's treasury and deposit of faith, is now mobilized afresh to consider the Jewish question. Development is using previous teachings as building blocks to develop fresh implications.

I also note that reading documents requires a proper hermeneutic in employing Constitutions to interpret Decrees. In the recent anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, too often that document is read apart from *Lumen Gentium* §§14–16, which is the dogmatic backbone upon which the flesh of *Nostra Aetate* is stretched out. This hermeneutic also freely allows repentance and acknowledgment of deep failings

Redaction History, and Interpretation of Dignitatis Humanae (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015); and Russell Hittinger, "The Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*," in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 359–82.

and abuses within Church practices and false notes in non-authoritative doctrinal traditions. Regarding the latter, there have always been many unresolved theological traditions, sometimes in downright contradiction to each other. This is how theology grows and is often the context of magisterial intervention, as is the case with post-conciliar teachings regarding the unicity of Christ and the salvific efficacy of Christ, and the intervention of The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's declaration *Dominus Iesus* (2000) is an example of this.

Dr. Echeverria rightly notes that, while I learn from other approaches, my main inspirations in employing this hermeneutic are John Henry Newman, Yves Congar, and Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI. From this viewpoint, one can embrace historical critical scholarship of the Council and many of their findings that are not driven by problematic ecclesiological theological underpinnings. One can also appreciate the concerns of the "traditionalists" who wish to uphold previous authoritative doctrinal teachings and are concerned that one cannot simply put them aside or relativize them. One problem with the traditionalists is that they, like the liberal group, see discontinuity when there is none, as they do concerning the "Jews" the teaching of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Another problem is their absolutizing one particular teaching at the cost of others in an ahistorical manner. Then-Cardinal Ratzinger put it nicely when he said of this group's stance: "It is an illogical position. The point of departure for this tendency is, in fact, the strictest fidelity to the teaching particularly of Pius IX and Pius X. . . . But why only the popes up to Pius XII and not beyond? Is perhaps obedience to the Holy See divisible according to years or according to the nearness of a teaching to one's own already-established conviction?"⁴ It is with this theological, historical, gradated hermeneutic that I turn to Vatican II.

To view the doctrines on the Jews and Muslims, without detracting from each of their unique particularities, I first ask: what is the Church's attitude to non-Christian religions as a generic category? Only within this general framework can one then situate particular religions. To secure this claim, my close exegesis of the first sentence of *Lumen Gentium* §16 is crucial. The note in this sentence indicates that religions in general, when invincibly ignorant of the Gospel,

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report: An Inclusive Interview on the State of the Church with Vittorio Messori*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 31.

have an orientation (*ordinantur*) towards Christ. This *telos* towards Christ, the Trinity, and the Church frames the paragraph, just as the closing sentence of §16, on the universal necessity of mission, closes the frame. This leads into §17, which is concerned to reiterate the necessity of universal mission so that the Father, Son, and Spirit may be known and so that the invitation to participate in the divine life be universal.

Regarding the latter point, Ralph Martin's important work has drawn proper attention to this dynamic.⁵ Hence, while *Lumen Gentium* §16 allows for the religions to be viewed positively, there are certain earlier theological traditions/assumptions that still bear upon this positive appreciation. These are: those referred to are assumed to be in invincible ignorance of the Gospel; despite any positive statements, the necessity of universal mission toward all religions is required; Christ is the head of all humanity and, thus, of all religions, but only in potentiality, not actuality (for actuality, explicitly confessing Christ is required in this life or at death); the world religions are best viewed as *praeparatio evangelica* to the Gospel; and at worst, they are viewed as in differing ways particularly vulnerable to Satan and sin, as they lack the full truth of Father, Son, and Spirit. The final salvific destination of those in other religions is not known. They cannot be deemed lost, as salvation is possible for all people. They cannot be deemed as saved, for final salvation is the explicit enjoyment of the triune God in beatific bliss. It is vital to hold these careful qualifications together with the remarkable positive attitudes developed in the Council towards Jews and Muslims. This then is the argument of chapter 2 of my book.

The chapter I devote to the Jews (ch. 3) reiterates some of the arguments above and closely inspects what is said particularly of the Jewish people. The conclusions of this chapter show that three doctrinal teachings are advanced. First, not all Jews at the time of Jesus, nor Jews since that time, including contemporary Jews, can be held collectively guilty of killing Jesus Christ. This is now usually taken for granted in most Christian circles today, but this was not the case of many Catholics at the time of the Council. In some ways, this was odd, as the *Tridentine Catechism* (1566) had already acknowledged that the "principal reason" for Christ's death was "sin," which "seems graver in our case than it was in that of the Jews; for the Jews, as the

⁵ Ralph Martin, *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II actually teaches and its implications for the New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

same Apostle says, ‘would never have crucified the Lord of glory if they had known him’ (1 Cor 2:8). We ourselves maintain that we do know him, and yet we lay, as it were, violent hands on him by disowning him in our actions.”⁶ In Vatican II’s *Nostra Aetate*, the Conciliar magisterium clarifies the deposit of faith in the Scripture regarding the culpability for the death of Jesus Christ. The Jewish historian Jules Isaac had presented this as *the* issue that required reform if Christian traditions of anti-Judaism were to be deconstructed.

The second doctrinal teaching is the Council’s recovering Romans 9–11 and placing it before the Church, quite literally in verbatim form in *Lumen Gentium* §16: they are “the people to whom the testaments and promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (see Rom 9:4–5), a people according to their election most dear because of their ancestors: for God never goes back on his gifts and his calling (see Rom 11, 28–29).”⁷ The Council teaches with St. Paul that God’s ancient people to whom these covenants and promises were made are not rejected by God because of their beloved ancestors, to whom these covenants and promises were given.

I argue that the Council did not attend to the two most debated issues after the Council: whether the Jewish people today remained faithful to this covenant in the objective order; and the status of this covenant today (is it abrogated, superseded or fulfilled?). The implication from the official *relatio* is that the answer to the second question is that the Jewish covenant is “fulfilled,” but supersessionism is not formally addressed. My conclusion has been criticised in some reviews (elsewhere) as turning the clock back to pre-Vatican II days. Fortunately, the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews has published *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)* (hereafter, *Gift*). *Gift* §39 states that:

⁶ *Tridentine Catechism*, part I, art. 4, pt. 2, trans. John A. McHugh, O.P., and Charles J. Callan, O.P. (ca. 1923; available at <http://www.angelfire.com/art/cactusong/TridentineCatechism.htm>).

⁷ The Latin reads: “In primis quidem populus ille cui data fuerunt testamenta et promissa et ex quo Christus ortus est secundum carnem (cf. Rom 9:4–5), populus secundum electionem carissimus propter patres: sine poenitentia enim sunt dona et vocatio Dei (cf. Rom 11:28–29)” (available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_lt.html).

The Conciliar text is not infrequently over-interpreted, and things are read into it [*Nostra Aetate*] which it does not in fact contain. An important example of over-interpretation would be the following: that the covenant that God made with his people Israel perdures and is never invalidated. Although this statement is true, it cannot be explicitly read into “*Nostra aetate*” (no. 4). This statement was instead first made with full clarity by Saint Pope John Paul II when he said during a meeting with Jewish representatives in Mainz on 17 November 1980 that the Old Covenant had never been revoked by God: “The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God . . . and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible” (no. 3). The same conviction is stated also in the *Catechism of the Church* in 1993: “The Old Covenant has never been revoked” (no. 121).⁸

It is one of the wonderful twists of the Council that its greatest gift to the Church is putting St Paul back into the debate, which the post-Conciliar Church now grapples with.

My third and final argument about the Jews is that mission to the Jewish people was implicitly assumed, not explicitly taught (for a host of contingent non-theological reasons—see below). The universal necessity of mission was taught, while respecting the Jewish religion and also holding to the vital importance of religious freedom and the excluding of all coercion in religious matters. Since this was a sort of “negative conclusion,” precisely because there is no explicit teaching about mission to the Jews, this teaching does not, in principle, have a doctrinal status other than in the general injunction during the Council regarding the universal mission of the Church. Fr. Schenk fairly questions me on this point. For these three doctrinal teachings, I indicate speculatively the level of authority attributable to each. None are *de fide*. The only *de fide* teaching examined in my entire study is the teaching “no salvation outside the church.”

Regarding the Muslims (ch. 4), I isolate two doctrinal teachings. First, the God that Muslims worship is the true God that Christians

⁸ Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nos-tra-aetate_en.html.

worship. I note that argumentation for this teaching is complex and certainly not resolved and that it keeps in tension the Christian claim regarding Jesus that means that God *is* Trinity. The Trinity is, of course, unacceptable to Muslims, for many have classically viewed this as tritheism. The second teaching is that the attributes upon which this predication “same God” is actually made are related to God as “creator,” “judge,” and giver of the “moral law.” These predicates can be attributed to the God of Islam, even if it is also implicitly thought that Islam has not always applied and understood this moral law correctly. One can see this “implicit thought” clearly in the drafting of the document when polygamy provided a clear example of misinterpreting the law of God and *Nostra Aetate* was changed accordingly. The steps taken toward Islam are halting and delicately poised. This tentativeness and precariousness properly reflect the state of debate and levels of possible consensus in the Catholic Church at that time (and at present). My reading of Dr. Reynold’s commentary is that he does not find fault in my interpretation of the Council, and I am grateful to him for adding to the material background I discuss and to the vistas and perspectives that open up in the light of my reading.

The basic purpose of my book was to isolate clearly what the Council actually taught in the light of the protracted debate after the Council about its teachings on the religions. If this important foundation is clarified, it should help post-conciliar theology and practice. Of course, post-conciliar theology and practice are not bound by the topics and concerns of the Council, although a clear historiography of this post-conciliar process, guided by a proper theology, is still required in scholarly literature. My book was a first step toward such a task.

Responding to Some Critical Issues

Doctrinal Continuity and Discontinuity

Fr. Schenk rightly wants a more differentiated and complex account of this theme in two particular respects. He wishes that I had employed Newman’s conceptuality more rigorously. He thinks I sometimes play down the genuine elements of doctrinal development that took place at the Council. On Newman, I think he is right. I plead guilty due to shortage of space in the book. However, I am not entirely sure that, “where Newman settled for a vague description of the relationship between unchanging but less clearly thematized principles and the

expressed doctrines needing to be developed in order to keep such principles constant and vital, D'Costa appeals to the handbook schematic of graded propositions." I appealed to the handbook schematic of graded propositions only to run alongside the theme of developing doctrines so as to more precisely catalogue what cannot be reversed in the process, as it is unchanging because of a very high degree of authority, and what might be reversed, changed, and seen as accidental to the real doctrinal object of teaching, because such elements have little or no authority attributed to it. It is precisely this sifting that allows me to argue that the "Jews" as such are not the object of doctrinal teachings in earlier Council teachings such as Florence.

The "Jews" of Florence are not the "Jews" of today, and in that sense, when Florence teaches no salvation outside the Church and relates this to "Jews," the object of the *de fide* teaching is not that the "Jews" are damned, but that the particular class of people who know and reject the truth of the Gospel—the "Jews" of Florence—are damned. Whether this actually applies to the Jews at the time of Florence in terms of the dogmatic truth of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is actually a contingent question. It would depend on whether the actual Jews at the time were genuinely in receipt of the Gospel and freely rejected its truth while knowing it in their minds and heart to be the truth. That this group, the "Jews," are named in Florence does, of course, pertain to the terrible persecutions undergone by the Jewish people at the hands of Catholics. But doctrinally, the "Jews" are not the proper object of the teaching of Florence. This insight allows the changes that happen in Vatican II to be seen without doctrinal discontinuity or contradiction being claimed against the Council. For, by being able to isolate what is *de fide* (there is no salvation outside Christ and his Church) from what is accidental to the expression of that *de fide* teaching (that those outside are identified as Jews, heretics and schismatics), we can argue for both continuity and development at the doctrinal level and discontinuity at the non-doctrinal level.

Is Vatican II's formulation of "no salvation outside the church" in *Lumen Gentium* a "development" of doctrine or simply a clarification of it? Here I think we can find help in Newman, who suggests that we cannot always tell immediately and that most often we can best make such a judgment in retrospect. The basic principle is retained, clearly, but with this new addition (culpability or invincible ignorance), and there is a step forward at Vatican II (which has a precedence in papal magisterial teaching) in showing that this teaching cannot be used to

damn the invincibly ignorant. This achievement, a kind of building block, is then used in *Lumen Gentium* §16. So, at Vatican II those who had previously been seen as destined for damnation at Florence are now re-conceptualized in §16 as related (*ordinantur*) to the people of God and potentially included in his salvific plan. We may be better placed to judge whether there is development or clarification through an examination of post-conciliar teachings.

In one respect, Fr. Schenk is perhaps right about my book. I may inadvertently play down doctrinal development, but that is because I am not entirely sure that we can isolate genuine and clearly established doctrinal developments in an area where the Council does not draw explicit attention to its teaching authority. To avoid problems like this, I had made the plea for the labeling of teachings in terms of the grades of authority attributed to doctrinal teachings. This is not an idealizing of and wishing to return to earlier neo-scholastic days, although I would be happy enough for such precision to return to theology. It is simply a concern to clarify the level of authority behind conciliar and magisterial teachings, knowing that this would simplify the theologians' and the faithful's task in terms of reception, obedience, questioning, and practice. Regarding other religions in general, and Jews and Muslims in particular, I think the Council provides a tentative step forward, opening paths that might be productive and creative. It can do so only through doctrine, not by good will alone. At the end of my book, I isolate the teachings on other religions and on the Jews and Muslims and classify them precisely to help free the debate from misconceptions about what is "authoritatively" taught and unchanging. My finding is that the only *de fide* teaching in everything that I examine is the "no salvation outside the Church" teaching. That such a teaching has developed alongside a series of other doctrinal teachings requires this careful sifting and grading of teachings.

Mission to the Jewish People

Fr. Schenk suggests that my argument that mission to the Jewish people is implicit in Vatican II is contrary to the unfolding of the Council as interpreted by Cardinal Koch in his writings and as interpreted in *Gift*.⁹ We must recall that the preface to *Gift* is clear that it has no magisterial status and is a discussion document: "The text is not a magiste-

⁹ See also Gavin D'Costa, 'What does the Catholic Church Teach about Mission to the Jewish People?', *Theological Studies* 73.3 (2012): 590–614.

rial document or doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church, but is a reflection prepared by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews on current theological questions that have developed since the Second Vatican Council. It is intended to be a starting point for further theological thought with a view to enriching and intensifying the theological dimension of Jewish-Catholic dialogue.” Nevertheless, it is a document produced with the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, so it has two important dicasteries coming together to try to plot out the state of the debate in Catholic teachings.

On the subject of mission, *Gift* §40 (quoted by Fr. Schenk) says:

The Church is therefore obliged to view evangelisation to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views. In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews. While there is a principled rejection of an institutional Jewish mission, Christians are nonetheless called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews, although they should do so in a humble and sensitive manner, acknowledging that Jews are bearers of God’s Word, and particularly in view of the great tragedy of the Shoah.

The first line is true, even if it raises the issue of whether Muslims, (of whom *Lumen Gentium* §16 acknowledges that they “along with us adore the one and merciful God”) also thus require a different manner of evangelization. Fr. Schenk also registers the same challenge regarding mission to Islam. I agree with him generically that the manner of mission must be related to the truths within a particular religion, and this careful attention to apologetics and sensitive dialogue has characterised the best aspects of Catholic missionary history. There is no general mission strategy, only particular strategies in the light of specific religions at precise times and locations in history.

However, in my view, the second line of the quotation from *Gift* §40 raises some problems. It does not clearly follow from the first. It seems to be contrary to Vatican II, and the principled arguments are never presented explicitly in the document. I think it runs in tension with the Council because *Lumen Gentium* §§14–16 indicates that, other than separated Christians who confess Christ and are Trinitarian, the Church’s mission is towards *all* those who do not know

Christ. *Lumen Gentium* §16 acknowledges different types within this group who do not know Christ: those who know God (Jews and Muslims); those who believe in a transcendent; and those who are not “religious” but follow the voice of God in their conscience. But while these groups are different and some have “revelation” (certainly the Jews in the Old Testament, and by derivation, Muslims through the Qur’an’s dependence on the Old and New Testaments), does *Gift* overturn *Lumen Gentium* §§14–16 and *Ad Gentes*? This is most unlikely. While the Jews are admittedly not “gentiles” (*gentes*), they do not confess and believe in Jesus Christ and the Trinity. In the context of *Lumen Gentium*, they are thus the “object” of mission, for God wishes all men and women to come to him through Christ. The problem is further compounded, as *Gift* argues that it is only Christ’s actions that brings salvation and that this is a non-negotiable truth. *Gift* openly acknowledges the conundrum: “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” (§36). This tension, or “unfathomable divine mystery,” seems to be resolved on one side of the horns of the dilemma (no institutional mission, while mission is the greatest gift the church can offer—indeed, is the very rationale of the Church). If explicitly confessing Christ is the normal means of salvation, not carrying out mission to the Jewish people is profoundly un-Pauline. Paul did not stop his activities towards the Jews. It is also possibly deeply uncharitable, for mission, properly understood, is nothing other than sharing the best gift that has been freely given to us and is no one’s property: Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the claim is in tension with not only some of the Conciliar teachings. I think there is an internal tension to *Gift* at this point. One might ask to what other religion is there a “specific institutional mission” in contrast to the disavowal made here? Historically, the Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Sion, the Sisters of Zion, were devoted to the conversion of the Jewish people and sanctioned by the Church (in the late nineteenth century). Even if they now carry out a practice that seems to be an inversion of their founders’ aims, in this historical respect, there has been “specific institutional” missionary activity toward the Jewish people from within the Church. Ironically, there are no religious orders that were founded to convert Buddhists and Hindus and there is no specific institutional mission towards Buddhists and Hindus today. Hence, there is a genuine ambiguity in this second line: to what other religions are there institutional

missions? And what is the theological rationale for disallowing institutional mission? *Gift* cannot and should not be expected to answer every theological question it raises, for its purpose was precisely to set in motion a discussion on the agenda it set forth.

The third line of the key quotation from *Gift* §40 does not resolve the problem, but rather deepens it. Personal, sensitive, and thoughtful witness is enjoined, and two paragraphs later, witness is rightly seen as a form of mission: “Christian mission and witness, in personal life and in proclamation, belong together” (§42). *Gift* thus seems to propound a position that holds that there should be no institutional mission by the Catholic Church to the Jewish people and only that individual personal mission is legitimate. However, this is a most curious distinction in Catholic theology and reverses the normal ordering: the Church is understood to be the person of Christ first and foremost, and only secondarily do the individual people who constitute the unity of the Body of Christ, who partake in the ministry of Christ, carry out its actions. Its institutional character is integrated into its personal sacramental character. But all is not lost, as my own (possibly eccentric) reading of *Gift* is that it points, inadvertently or not, to a more profound resolution of this issue that is only just beginning to become clear as the Church wrestles with its own Jewish roots and identity. There is textual evidence for this alternative reading.

One way to understand this apparently mixed message about “mission” might be to recognize that there is an inchoate and visionary insight that *the gentile church* cannot partake in mission to the Jews, as this does signal the erasure of Jewish identity—and has done historically. The Catholic Church has a long history of requiring the relinquishing of Jewish identity and practices from either Jewish converts or even those, such as the Copts who practiced circumcision, to establish a proper claim upon the title “Catholic Christian.” (The discussion of Florence cited above is actually directed toward the Copts, whom the Roman Church was trying to reign in). *Gift* recognizes that, in the original Church, there were two communities that co-existed, the church of the gentiles and the church of the circumcised:

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. (§15)

The document returns to this point in an interesting manner, because if this was so then, the question must arise of whether it could not be so again in the light of the recovery of the importance of the Jewish identity of Christianity. And it is only out of that Jewish identity, possibly only through the *ecclesia ex circumcisione*, that an authentic mission to Jews can happen that does not spell their extinction. I will cite *Gift* §43 in its entirety, as it could make sense in the terms I have construed (and I would argue that, otherwise it is difficult to make sense of it):

It is and remains a qualitative definition of the Church of the New Covenant that it consists of Jews and Gentiles, even if the quantitative proportions of Jewish and Gentile Christians may initially give a different impression. Just as after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ there were not two unrelated covenants, so too the people of the covenant of Israel are not disconnected from ‘the people of God drawn from the Gentiles.’ Rather, the enduring role of the covenant people of Israel in God’s plan of salvation is to relate dynamically to the “people of God of Jews and Gentiles, united in Christ,” he whom the Church confesses as the universal mediator of creation and salvation. In the context of God’s universal will of salvation, all people who have not yet received the gospel are aligned with the people of God of the New Covenant. “In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom 9:4–5). On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for he does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues (cf. Rom 11:28–29)” (*Lumen Gentium*, 16).

The singular “People of God” from the Council has been pluralized to indicate two very distinct forms of being *ecclesia*, perhaps one of them in which the practices and religious culture of Judaism, as was the case with Christ and his disciples, might once more flourish within the Catholic Church. Only such a Jewish *ecclesia ex circumcissione*, such as exists in an inchoate manner in groups such as the Hebrew Catholics, could sensitively carry out an “institutional mission” that is not “bad news” for the Jewish people. Only through such a mission, through the credibility of the new people of God who remain Jewish and Catholic religiously, could Jews realize that the invitation to follow Christ does not mean erasing their religious culture and identity and cutting themselves off from their people and history. Only through such a mission could the Church be confident that it has actually grasped the difficult nettle of its own savage destruction of Jewish culture within its teleologically proper home, its messianic yearnings. In my view, this is the somewhat hidden logic of *Gift*. Whether this hidden logic can break through when Jewish Christians and Hebrew Catholics are such a sensitive issue in Jewish-Catholic dialogue remains to be seen.

There is also another way of explaining the logic of *Gift*’s prohibition of institutional mission. It is seen in the closing line of the paragraph quoted above (§43): it is about the monumental tragedy of the Shoah. This dark event must form a deep shadow in all contemporary Christian-Jewish relations. Susan Heschel tells of her father’s (Rabbi Abraham Heschel) famous statement that was reported worldwide during the Council: “Some bishops insisted that the ultimate conversion of Jews be included in the final version of the document. My father’s objection was unequivocal: the phrase had to be eliminated. If faced with the alternative of conversion or death, he said, he would rather go to Auschwitz. I was terrified when I heard him say this. My father met with Pope Paul VI to make his objection clear, and he said many times that he was told after their meeting that the pope took his pen and crossed out the sentence.”¹⁰ Heschel’s objection indicated unambiguously that any Christian intention at mission toward Jews reminded Jews of an invitation to extinction. That is the historical record for Jews, for Christians had systematically required converted

¹⁰ Doris Donnelly, “Lovingly Observant: An Interview with Susannah Heschel,” *America*, June 18, 2007 (available at http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=10016).

Jews to renounce all Jewish practices and signs of their previous faith. They were required to become “gentiles.” Heschel’s quote dramatically conveys this point. Possibly the only way to avoid this problem, this curse, one might say, is to envisage a special Hebrew Catholic witness to the Jewish people, showing that Jews who follow Jesus are not called to revoke their own spiritual heritage—especially if God does not revoke his promises. The radical door opened by *Gift* calls into question this age old practice of requiring the gentilization of Jews. If the Jewish “covenant” is valid and not revoked (what part or all of it still remains to be clarified?), then Hebrew Catholics may well be viewed analogously to Anglicans who have been granted *ordinaire* status. They need not and should not renounce their spiritual patrimony when entering into full Catholic communion, although anything that conflicted with Catholic faith would not be compatible. The level of conflict, if any, would have to be decided and determined in close communal exchange. To draw this analogy with the Anglicans is simply to suggest that *Lumen Gentium* §§14–15 would have to be rewritten if the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* were to become a thriving reality. I am not clear whether Fr. Schenk would find these suggestions acceptable, but I believe they address his deeper concerns.

One other point concerning mission is the Dr. Reynolds’ article draws attention to the fact that the “interest of Muslims in converting Christians has reached a fever pitch in the modern period (in part as a response to Christian missions among Muslims).” Would this asymmetry between Islam and Judaism mean that the Catholic Church would be open in its missionary attention to Islam (for Muslims are open about their own Qur’anic *da’wa*, the call to non-Muslims to convert to Islam)? This is a profound challenge raised by Reynolds. It is one that requires an answer, especially as Muslims do not see “mission” as an imperializing force of destruction, as Jews, perhaps quite rightly, have done. In principle, although differently in practice and expression, both Muslims and Jews have resisted the Trinity as incompatible with pure monotheism. Hence, at the level of apologetics, this incompatibility requires addressing. Given the complex power relations that obtain between these three religions, the Council’s call to mission, respecting religions and their freedoms and the freedom from all coercion, is a most timely reminder. Mission must resist the lure and trappings of making Christianity an “attractive option” (because of wealth, power, status, and so on) and attend to the sheer beauty and truth of the Gospel as being its prime attraction.

And this question of religious freedom and lack of coercion of any sort regarding religious adherence raises a difficult question for both Muslims and Jews. The Vatican has been consistent since the time of St. Pope John Paul II in raising the question of religious freedoms for Christians in Muslim countries, without ever calling into question Islam's freedom to practice *da'wa*. The Vatican has also made diplomatic representation about Israel's refusal to accept Jews who are Christians the "right to return" even when they have kept their Jewish religious identity.¹¹ These matters are important for the future of genuine dialogue between Jews, Muslims, and Catholics.

Theology of Religions and a Fuller Historiography

Fr. Schenk remarks that there is a need for a more historically expansive account of the theology of religions before a better systematic account of other religions is forthcoming, I am in full agreement, and Louis Capéran and Jacques Dupuis have begun this task.¹² What is required (and has hardly begun) is a careful sifting of historical genealogies of both theologians and the magisterium in interaction as they relate to questions of mission, general theology of religions, and specific engagement with particular religions such as Judaism and Islam. As such a historiography develops, systematic theology will be better placed both to develop its own discipline and to stimulate further historical researches. My own book is the smallest contribution to this very large task.

Propositions, Truth, and Revelation

Dr. Echeverria shows that he and I are in basic agreement regarding the hermeneutics of the Council and regarding the critique I provided of differing positions. He is very appreciative of my attempt to build a bridge between the position that affirms eternal truths that the Church teaches and one that acknowledges that all expressions of truth are to be contextualized and historicized. I am grateful for his sensitive appreciation. He isolates two issues that require clarification in my position.

¹¹ See the most interesting story of Oswald Rufeisen, a Catholic Jewish monk, who challenged the government on this matter because he had never renounced his Jewish religious identity and culture and was in fact a Zionist; see Nechma Tec, *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), esp. 210–22.

¹² See" Louis Capéran, *Le Salut des Infidèles: essai historique* (Paris: Louis Beauchesne, 1912); Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1977).

First, should I deliver a metaphysical account of language to buttress my historicized account of doctrinal essentialism? Second, do I downplay revelation as proposition—is he correct when he says, “D’Costa needs to explicitly integrate into his hermeneutics a theology of propositional revelation”?

On the first, my reticence to do so was primarily because I assume, like him, that language is referential, and thus capable of speaking truthfully. In the history of Christian theology, different forms of philosophy have provided the resources for the prolegomena to theology. Platonism, types of Aristotelianism, certain forms of phenomenology, and more recently, analytical philosophy have all provide philosophical resources to explicate the basic conviction that language is open, referential, and realist.¹³ How reference can be verified in this life is another question. Pope John Paul II’s masterly encyclical *Faith and Reason* (1998) shows the crisis produced by philosophies of functionalism and pragmatism. They fundamentally closed down the metaphysical and, thus, eventually eroded theology’s proper confidence that is based both on philosophy and on revelation. Hence, I accept Dr. Echeverria’s concern that my defense of realism should be given a metaphysical explication. For this, I would turn, if time had been available, to Thomas Aquinas, who is the master of such a synthesis, as *Faith and Reason* §44 makes clear: “In him, the Church’s Magisterium has seen and recognized the passion for truth; and, precisely because it stays consistently within the horizon of universal, objective and transcendent truth, his thought scales “heights unthinkable to human intelligence.” Rightly, then, he may be called an “apostle of the truth.” Looking unreservedly to truth, the realism of Thomas could recognize the objectivity of truth and produce not merely a philosophy of “what seems to be,” but a philosophy of “what is.” But the same encyclical also makes it clear that different philosophical approaches could provide what is required. My real concern in the book was not to provide this metaphysical account, but to assume cognitive reference and metaphysical realism for the argument to work.

On the second point made by Dr. Echeverria, I think we are in agreement: revelation contains propositions. While I think that he and I would both hold that revelation is primarily the person of Jesus Christ, first and foremost, and the Holy Spirit and the Father of

¹³ See *Theology and Philosophy: Faith and Reason*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp, Gavin D’Costa, Mervyn Davies, and Peter Hampson (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Jesus Christ, I would wish to emphasize that the Trinity is not first a proposition, but a divine mystery and reality known in history, and also known through propositions. I do not discount a wide variety of ways in which God makes himself known: natural laws, moral laws, the history of revelation begun in and with Israel, and so on. And in each of these instances, propositions are part of the reflective process (as one reflects on the natural and moral laws) or indeed, part of primary history (the teachings of the prophets).

I would like to thank the three respondents and the editors of this journal for paying attention to my book. It is an immense privilege, and I hope I have done justice to the generosity of my respondents.

N-V

