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A Covenantal Christology

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A Covenantal Christology

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Abstract

One of the major theological questions confronting the post-*Nostra Aetate* Church is how to relate the Christian conviction in the universal saving significance of Jesus Christ with the affirmation of the permanence of Israel's covenanting with God. The meanings of covenant, salvation, and the Christ-event are all topics that must be considered. This paper proposes that covenant, understood in a theological and relational sense as a human sharing in God's life, provides a useful Christological and soteriological perspective. Jesus, faithful son of Israel and Son of God, is presented as covenantally unifying in himself the sharing-in-life between God and Israel and also the essential relationality of God. The Triune God's covenanting with Israel and the Church is seen as drawing humanity into an ever-deepening relationship with God through the *Logos* and in the Spirit, with both Israel and the Church having distinct duties in this relational process before God and the world.

KEYWORDS: Christology, covenant, salvation, Christian-Jewish Relations

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“A Covenantal Christology”

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1. The Question and Some of Its Parameters

An enormous theological topic in the ongoing renewal in Catholic-Jewish relations is how to understand the relationship between the universal saving significance of Christ with the post-*Nostra Aetate* Church's appreciation of the Jewish people's ongoing covenantal life with God. As Cardinal Walter Kasper expressed it at Cambridge University in December, 2004: "How can the thesis of the continuing covenant be reconciled with the uniqueness and universality of Christ Jesus, which are constitutive for the Christian understanding of the new covenant?"¹ The question is: how should Catholics understand the links between Christ and Israel's covenanting? Let us consider some of the parameters of this question.

A. The Unicity of Christ (and of the Church)

Catholic teaching, as expressed by the 2000 declaration *Dominus Iesus*, rejects a religious relativism in which "one religion is as good as the other" because "Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute."² Therefore, "the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one

Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church."³

This does not mean, as some claim, that the Catholic Church holds that personal baptism is necessary for salvation.⁴ To continue with the words of *Dominus Iesus*:

For those who are not formally and visibly members of the Church, "salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church, but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit"; it has a relationship with the Church, which "according to the plan of the Father, has her origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit." With respect to the way in which the salvific grace of God — which is always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the Church — comes to individual non-Christians, the Second Vatican Council limited itself to the statement that God bestows it "in ways known to himself." Theologians are seeking to understand this question more fully.⁵

It must be noted that *Dominus Iesus* did not address the reality of the unique relationship between Judaism and Christianity,⁶ a uniqueness acknowledged by Pope John

¹ Walter Cardinal Kasper, "The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," Address delivered at the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge, England, Dec. 6, 2004, §5. www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Kasper_Cambridge_6Dec04.htm.

² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "*Dominus Iesus*, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church" (2000), III, 15. www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/cdf_dominusiesus.htm.

³ *Ibid.*, VI, 20, citing Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

⁴ N.B., *Dominus Iesus*, note 82: "The famous formula *extra Ecclesiam nullus omnino salvatur* is to be interpreted in this sense (cf. Fourth Lateran Council, Cap. 1. *D Fide Catholica*: DS 802). Cf. also the *Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston*: DS 3866-3872."

⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, 20-21, citing John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 10; Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 2,7.

⁶ See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas" *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 December 2000: "It is evident

Paul II: "The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion."⁷ However, the insistence of *Dominus Iesus* that Christ may not be theologically separated from the salvation of all human beings, including Jews, recalls an earlier statement from the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (PCRRJ):

Jesus affirms that there shall be "one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). The Church and Judaism cannot, then, be seen as two parallel ways of salvation and the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all, while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council declaration, *Dignitatis Humanae*.⁸

that, as Christians, our dialogue with the Jews is situated on a different level than that in which we engage with other religions." [www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/ratzinger.htm]; Cardinal Walter Kasper, "Dominus Iesus," Address delivered at the 17th meeting of the International Catholic Jewish Liaison Committee, New York, May 1, 2001, §2: "Because of its purpose, [*Dominus Iesus*] does not deal with the question of the theology of Catholic-Jewish relations, proclaimed by *Nostra Aetate*, and of subsequent Church teaching. What the document tries to 'correct' is another category, namely the attempts by some Christian theologians to find a kind of 'universal theology' of interreligious relations, which, in some cases, has led to indifferentism, relativism and syncretism." [www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/kasper_dominus_iesus.htm].

⁷ "Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome," April 13, 1986, §4. <http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/johnpaulii/romesynagogue.htm>.

⁸ PCRRJ, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" (1985), I.7. www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/Vatican_Notes.htm.

This rejection of comprehending Judaism and Christianity as "two parallel ways of salvation" stems from the Christian conviction that the salvific effect of the "Christ event" is definitive for all, and so any understanding of Israel's covenanting that is totally disconnected from Christ would be untenable. Indeed, it could be argued that such would be a form of Marcionism since it risks disengaging Jesus and the Church from their roots in biblical Israel.

B. Israel's Covenanting as Saving

Beginning with *Nostra Aetate's* present-tense citation of Romans 9:4 – "to them belong the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law" – and of Romans 11:28-29 that Jews are beloved of God and have received an irrevocable calling, Catholic teaching has increasingly valued the covenantal relationship between God and the People Israel. In addition to John Paul II's frequent references to the permanency of that relationship, for example, as one of "partners in a covenant of eternal love which was never revoked,"⁹ there have been other ecclesial recognitions of its ongoing vitality.

The Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews has extolled post-biblical Judaism for bringing "to the whole world a witness – often heroic – of its fidelity to the one God"¹⁰ and urged Christians to "strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their

⁹ "Address to Jewish Leaders in Miami," Sept. 11, 1987. See also his addresses to: "Representatives of Jewish Organizations," Mar. 12, 1979; "The Jewish Community in Mainz, West Germany," Nov. 17, 1980; "Experts Gathered by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews," Mar. 6, 1982; "Jewish Leaders in Warsaw" June 14, 1987; "At Mount Sinai," Feb. 26, 2000. See also his "Prayer at the Western Wall," Mar. 26, 2000 and *Ecclesia in Europa* (June 28, 2003), II, 56. For relevant texts from John Paul II see: www.bc.edu/research/cjl/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/johnpaulii/.

¹⁰ PCRRJ, "Notes" (1985), VI, 25.

own religious experience.”¹¹ It also reminded Christians that Judaism has known “a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times ... so much so that ‘the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church’ (John Paul II, 6 March 1982).”¹²

The Pontifical Biblical Commission has made an important hermeneutical affirmation concerning the vitality of Judaism’s ongoing covenantal life with God:

Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Each of these two readings is part of the vision of each respective faith of which it is a product and an expression. Consequently, they cannot be reduced one into the other.¹³

This “irreducible” quality of the two traditions relates to the Commission’s earlier observation that “Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulus to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like them, we too live in expectation. The difference is that for us the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already

¹¹ Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, *Nostra Aetate* No. 4” (1974), Prologue. www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/Vatican_Guidelines.htm.

¹² PCRRJ, “Notes” (1985), VI, 25.

¹³ *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2001), II,A,7 - §22. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_fr.html.

present and active among us.”¹⁴ This acknowledgement that the covenantal life of Israel will endure until the eschaton, in distinction from but related to the Church’s covenantal life, is a further example of the Catholic respect that has been unfolding since *Nostra Aetate* for the living, post-biblical Jewish religious tradition.¹⁵

The recognition that Israel’s covenanting with God will develop until the End of Time, combined with an awareness that a covenantal relationship is an intimate interaction of mutuality, also has implications for how Christians understand the “salvation” of Israel. Cardinal Walter Kasper has touched on the topic in two recent addresses:

[T]he Document *Dominus Iesus* does not state that everybody needs to become a Catholic in order to be

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II,A,5, §21.

¹⁵ Cardinal Avery Dulles seems to disagree with this mainstream post-*Nostra Aetate* trajectory of Catholic thought; see his, “The Covenant with Israel,” *First Things* 157 (November 2005):16-21. The essay ignores the documents of the PCRRJ to implement *Nostra Aetate*, §4, including the 1974 directive quoted earlier (see fn. 11 above). Thus, the article discounts Jewish self-understanding as apparently irrelevant to Christian theologies of Judaism. It adds the odd opinion that, “The Second Vatican Council, while providing a solid and traditional framework for discussing Jewish-Christian relations ... left open the question whether the Old Covenant remains in force today” (p. 16, italics added). One wonders what “traditional framework” Dulles had in mind since *Nostra Aetate* §4 rejected the “traditional” idea that Jews were cursed by God. Dulles seems to fear that an affirmative answer to “whether the Old Covenant remains in force today” would produce a theology of an ongoing Jewish covenant that is isolated from Christ. He is apparently worried about seeing “the Old and New Covenants as two ‘separate but equal’ parallel paths to salvation, the one intended for Jews, the other for gentiles” (p. 21). This would indeed be problematic (cf. fn. 8 above), but it is neither inevitable nor necessary. N.B. that the present paper’s phrases “Israel’s covenantal life” or “Israel’s covenanting” intend to assert *both* that the covenantal bond between God and the Jewish people has never been revoked *and* that this bond is organically united to the Church’s covenanting in Christ.

saved by God. On the contrary, it declares that God's grace, which is the grace of Jesus Christ according to our faith, is available to all. Therefore, the Church believes that Judaism, i.e. the faithful response of the Jewish people to God's irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them, because God is faithful to his promises.¹⁶

But whilst Jews expect the coming of the Messiah, who is still unknown, Christians believe that he has already shown his face in Jesus of Nazareth whom we as Christians therefore confess as the Christ, he who at the end of time will be revealed as the Messiah for Jews and for all nations. The universality of Christ's redemption for Jews and for Gentiles is so fundamental throughout the entire New Testament (Eph 2,14-18; Col 1,15-18; 1 Tm 2,5 and many others) ... that it cannot be ignored or passed over in silence. So from the Christian perspective the covenant with the Jewish people is unbroken (Rom 11,29), for we as Christians believe that these promises find in Jesus their definitive and irrevocable Amen (2 Cor 1,20) and at the same time that in him, who is the end of the law (Rom 10,4), the law is not nullified but upheld (Rom 3,31). ... This does not mean that Jews in order to be saved have to become Christians; if they follow their own conscience and believe in God's promises as they understand them in their religious tradition they are in line with God's plan, which for us comes to its historical completion in Jesus Christ.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kasper, "Dominus Iesus," §3.

¹⁷ Kasper, "The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavour of the Catholic Church," address delivered at Boston College, Nov. 6, 2002, §III. www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Kasper_6Nov02.htm.

It is noteworthy that in both these formulations, "salvation" is seen as a characteristic quality of Israel's covenantal life with God, though not unrelated to the redemptive work of Christ. We have thus come full circle to the question with which this article began: how are Catholics to understand the relationship between the universal "saving" significance of Christ with the post-*Nostra Aetate* Church's appreciation of the Jewish people's ongoing covenantal life with God? Or to put it crudely, "How are Jews saved?"

C. Summary

Our discussion thus far has set forth some significant guiding parameters. A Catholic theology of Israel's covenanting must affirm that:

1. Israel's distinctive covenantal life with God will continue until the Eschaton;
2. Jesus Christ has a unique, universal significance for the "salvation" of all humankind; and
3. An "intrinsic" bond exists between the covenanting peoples of Israel and the Church.

2. Defining Our Concepts

To pursue the question of how Christians should see Israel's covenanting in relation to Jesus Christ, one must grapple with the definitions of some key Christian concepts:

A. "Salvation"

There are many ways that "salvation" is understood in Christian tradition. How one thinks about "salvation" will shape how the soteriological status of Jews is comprehended.

In a recent essay entitled “What Does It Mean to Be Saved?” Clark Williamson has helpfully sketched out a variety of traditional approaches.¹⁸ He posits that all approaches to salvation involve being brought by God *from* a dire situation *to* a new and transformed situation. How these two situations are understood informs the definition of salvation. Thus, he sets forth the following Christian approaches to salvation:

Salvation as redemption: rooted biblically in the notion of “buying back,” this approach understands salvation as a rescue: the Israelites being saved from slavery to freedom or Gentiles being freed from bondage to idols to freedom in Christ. “We are liberated from sin and evil and liberated to love the neighbor.”¹⁹

Salvation as reconciliation: this approach stresses that being “saved” is principally being justified: brought or restored to full relationship with God and others. It is a transition from estrangement and hostility to intimacy and affection.

Salvation as sanctification: this approach stresses the entering into a life of holiness, a life grounded in ethics and a Christian character that is lived out with gratitude to God. “Salvation as sanctification means that the God who calls us forward into the future that God has in mind for us ... is a God who is never finished with us. Nor are we ever finished with God who is the ground of all possibilities and ever calls us forward into a future of blessing and well-being.”²⁰

¹⁸ In Philip A. Cunningham, ed., *Pondering the Passion: What's at Stake for Christians and Jews?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 119-128.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

Salvation as everlasting life: grounded in the Christian experience of Christ's resurrection, this approach thinks in terms of “salvation from death, from being utterly forgotten, from final meaninglessness and salvation to life everlasting with God.”²¹ It points beyond the world as we know it to the ultimacy of God's steadfast live.

These four approaches that Christians have used over time make it clear that “salvation” is a wonderfully multi-faceted concept. It ought not to be collapsed into a single, one-dimensional formula. Any working definition of salvation should be expansive enough to incorporate the rich diversity conveyed by Williamson's schema.

For the purposes of this discussion, then, salvation is defined as being in a relationship with God that involves the ongoing acceptance, as individuals and communities, of God's invitation to participate in God's unfolding plans for the world, plans that will lead to the Reign of God, the Age to Come. Relationships with God that generate this participation are “salvific.” People are “saved” from sin, meaninglessness, and death by this sharing-in-life with God and are set on a path of reconciliation, holiness, and steadfast love. And, as will be seen below, all divine invitations that bring salvation are bound up with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

B. Jesus as “Christ”

Although the term *Christ* comes from the Greek word meaning “anointed one,” it means much more than that in the life of the Church. “Christ” is above all the term that expresses the Church's experience of God's *Logos* incarnated in the human life, death, and resurrection of the

²¹ *Ibid.*

first-century Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.²² The *Logos*, the “Word” of God, is that *hypostasis* of the Triune God that the Church knows as constantly revealing God and inviting people into relationship with that One. After the experience of the resurrection, the embryonic Church began to understand that the *Logos* was incarnated in Jesus. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) has put it, “This [Christian] faith has its origins and progressive growth in Jesus’ resurrection; it was an event of salvation introduced among people who already shared the religious experience of diverse Jewish communities.”²³ Ongoing reflection on the meaning of this recognition of Jesus as “Christ” and how he relates to the Father and the Spirit also led to the eventual development of Trinitarian thought. Thus, all distinctively Christian understandings of God are “christomorphic,” they are shaped by the Church’s experience of God as mediated through Christ.

Sometimes Christians think of “Christ” and the “*Logos*” as co-extensive terms, but this is imprecise. *Dominus Iesus* emphasized that “With the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he has assumed for the salvation of all people. ... Therefore, the theory which would attribute, after the incarnation as well, a salvific activity to the *Logos* as such in his divinity, exercised ‘in addition to’ or ‘beyond’ the humanity of Christ, is not compatible with the Catholic faith.”²⁴ This means that from within the human perspective of linear time, ever since the incarnation everything that the divine *Logos* does is done in unity with the humanity of

²² Since the revelation of the *Logos*’ Incarnation in Jesus is a post-resurrectional development, the name “Jesus” herein refers to the human nature, human self-awareness, and human life and activities of that Nazorean Jew.

²³ PBC, *The Scripture and Christology* (1984), 1.2.3.

²⁴ *Dominus Iesus*, II, 10.

Jesus, which, since the resurrection, is a glorified humanity. What this does not mean is that anyone who glimpses the continuous activity of God in their lives, even if it includes a specific perception of the divine *Logos* at work, will therefore be able to glean the involvement of the transcendent Jesus since the experience of Jesus as Christ – as the *Logos* incarnated, ministering, dying, and being raised – is a precondition for such an identification. Christians experience the *Logos* as Christ, but others may experience the *Logos* in non-christomorphic ways even though the Church understands that Christ is always involved.

C. God as “Triune”

A factor that likely impedes the development of a theology of Israel’s covenanting in relationship to Christ is a tendency in the West toward Christomonism, by which I mean an inclination to consider the significance of Christ’s work without keeping a Trinitarian perspective in the forefront of our theological imaginations.

The God with whom the Church covenants christomorphically is a Triune God. The God of Israel is known by Christians as constantly and simultaneously creating and sustaining existence, revealing and inviting people into relationship, and enabling people to perceive that continuous invitation and empowering them to accept it. These three “ways of interrelated being” or *hypostases*, known in Christian tradition as Father, Son or Word, and Spirit, are concurrently participating in a resonating dynamism in all of God’s deeds in historic time. Therefore, from a Christian perspective, all human interactions with God always involve interacting with all three of the divine *hypostases* because of “their” eternal interrelationship.

As Anthony Saldarini has explained,

The triune Christian God is one reality with inner relations among three subsistents, the begetter, the begotten and the spirated one. ... In all else, in all activity, in all relationships with humans, God is, acts, loves and saves as one, indivisibly. To say that God saves humans means that the Father saves as do the Son and the Spirit. To say that Jesus the Son of God saves is to say that God saves. When God saves Israel, in the Christian understanding of God, the Spirit of God and the Son of God as well as God the Father save Israel. ... At the most fundamental level of theology Christians need to emphasize God more than they have and Jesus Christ as savior within the context of God's relationship to humanity. Christians too frequently center everything on Jesus to the detriment of the God who sent him, guided him and sustained him.²⁵

Thus, the Incarnation, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus – the Jew in whom the divine *Logos* is incarnated – all occurred in “cooperation,” with the dynamic involvement of the Father and the Spirit. Trinitarian thinking requires this or God is no longer One, but three. Likewise, humans experiencing a divine self-disclosure – even though revelation is fittingly attributed to the distinctive activity of the *Logos*, the Word – are always engaging all three *hypostases* inasmuch as their mortal existence is sustained by God the Father, their mortal existence is being addressed by God the Son, and their mortal existence is being empowered by God the Spirit to discern God.

D. The “Christ-event” as Universally Saving

With these perspectives, then, how are the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, sometimes collectively referred to as “the Christ event,” to be understood as universally and uniquely important for all humanity?

Again, as with other foundational questions, there are a variety of approaches that have been utilized in Christian history. Eastern Christianity, for instance, has tended to focus on the incarnation, while Western Christianity has tended to stress Jesus' death and resurrection. Even with an emphasis on the death of Jesus, there are numerous understandings of its meaning and significance just within the pages of the New Testament itself.²⁶

Without attempting to delineate all the richness of the Christian tradition in this regard, and with a view to the discussion of salvation above, I propose that the salvific importance of Christ be understood as springing from the totality of the “Christ-event,” (i.e., not concentrating on the incarnation or the ministry or the crucifixion or the resurrection to the exclusion of the other aspects of Jesus' life) and that the biblical model of “covenant” provides a very useful approach to understanding Christ's universal significance.

The biblical writers adapted the language of “covenant” (*b'rit*) from the various types of legal relationships in ancient societies and applied it to different moments of interaction between God and humans (e.g., with Noah, Abraham, at Sinai, etc.). Indeed, it could be argued that “covenant” is the Bible's favorite term for describing divine-human

²⁵ Anthony J. Saldarini, “Christian Anti-Judaism: The First Century Speaks to the Twenty-first Century,” Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Jerusalem Lecture, April 14, 1999. <http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/saldarini.htm>.

²⁶ In the New Testament, e.g., Jesus' death is understood as the vindication of the righteous sufferer (Lk 24:47), the death of the ultimate martyred prophet (Lk 13:33), the justification of humanity (Rom 4:25), the hour of Jesus' glorification (Jn 17:1), the supreme sacrifice (Heb 10:12), and the revelation of Jesus as God's Son (Mk 15:39).

interrelationships. Thus, “covenant” can be understood in a theological sense as God and humans walking through life together in a relationship of mutual responsibilities. This concept of covenant as an ongoing, active sharing-in-life offers a primary biblical metaphor for Christians to understand the unity of the divine *Logos* with the Jew Jesus: a covenantal Christology.

Thus, it is the Church’s experience that Jesus Christ incarnates both Israel’s covenantal relationship with God and God’s constant divine self-revealing *Logos* that brings people into relationship with the Triune God.

By embodying Israel’s covenantal life with God, Jesus, the faithful Son of Israel, epitomized what life in covenant was and is all about. Israel’s experience of being in covenant with God and of trying to walk in God’s Way has included times of disaster and suffering that were brought about by a combination of internal failings and external Gentile hostility. However, the people of Israel have also experienced restorations and revivals after these calamities.

For Christians, Jesus walked God’s Way with perfect fidelity and epitomized the perfect Jewish covenantal partner. Like Israel, he suffered for his faithfulness to God. He also experienced a divine covenantal restoration after his suffering that was uniquely eschatological in nature, a raising up to transcendent life that showed that death itself would be defeated in the inevitable Reign of God.

The revelation of this exaltation discloses to the Church the identity of Jesus as the Triune God’s Word that invites people into relationship. Through Christ, through the Crucified and Raised Jew, the Church continuously encounters God’s sustaining invitation to and empowerment of covenantal life. Jesus Christ brings the Church into ongoing covenantal life with Israel’s God. God’s will for the

Church, now become a Gentile assembly rooted in Israel’s story, is made known through its Christ-shaped encounter with God.

If Jesus Christ is understood as personifying Israel’s covenanting with God, and thereby making possible a similar if distinctive life for the Church, then Israel’s covenanting with God in biblical times and down to the present must be permanent and vital. This would explain why the Church knows its own covenanting with God through Christ to also be permanent and vital. If Israel’s covenanting could be obsolete or inert, then as Jesus the Jew, Christ would be mediating and inviting the Church to a relationship with God that is also susceptible to being rendered outmoded by God. This is unimaginable. It would be contrary to character of the God of Israel and of Jesus to establish a covenantal bonding that was not founded upon divine fidelity and empowerment.²⁷

There is a further dimension to this realization. If salvation is being in a relationship with God that involves the ongoing acceptance, as individuals and communities, of God’s invitation to participate in God’s unfolding plans for the created world, then Israel’s covenanting life with God has always been “salvific.” Although as fallible humans, the people of Israel have not always been faithful to their covenantal duties, nonetheless their covenantal life with God

²⁷ N.B. Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *God’s Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching* (Washington, D.C.: US Catholic Conference, 1988), 8: “[F]alse or demeaning portraits of a repudiated Israel may undermine Christianity as well. How can one confidently affirm the truth of God’s covenant with all humanity and creation in Christ (see Rom 8:21) without at the same time affirming God’s faithfulness to the Covenant with Israel that also lies at the heart of the biblical testimony?” www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/NCCB_Gods_Mercy.htm

has endured and has contributed – and continues to contribute – to God’s plans for the world. Despite failures, Israel prays for God’s mercy and recommits itself to doing God’s will. Christ’s embodiment of Israel’s covenantal life, now mediated to the Church in its covenanting, is saving as well. One might say that Christ epitomizes “saved existence.” Both Israel and the Church fail in their covenantal duties, both pray for God’s mercy, and both recommit themselves to doing God’s will. The salvation brought through the Christ-event by the Church into the whole world is an invitation to enter into covenanting life with God in service to God’s Reign and thus Israel’s saving work in the world is enhanced.

The eschatological perspective introduced by reference to the Reign of God is important in this Christological approach. The “Exodus-event” (i.e., the escape from slavery, the giving of the Torah) can be understood as a point on the journey of humanity through history toward the Age to Come. Israel enters into covenanting life to participate in the unfolding of God’s plans. The “Christ-event” (i.e., the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus) is an essential additional point on that journey, one that both intensifies Israel’s covenanting with God and universalizes it in the distinctive covenanting of the Church.

By incarnating God’s self-revealing Logos, Jesus unites in himself the covenanting life of Israel with the inner relationality of the Triune God. Through the covenanting life of the post-resurrectional Church, humans are invited into a sharing-in-life with God that mirrors on a mortal scale God’s own Triune being. Christians might say that the divine invitation that the Church finds embodied in Jesus Christ draws people into the very way of life of the Triune God. This concept is essentially the mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*) formulation of the Gospel of John. That text portrays the Father, Son, and Spirit as “abiding in” one another. In

Johannine terms eternal life is a sharing in the love-relationship between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. It is a love-life that transcends human death, as shown by the resurrection of Jesus.

Indeed, it is the love-life of the Trinity that transforms the rather routine Roman execution of one more Jew judged to be seditious into an event of universal significance. The utter self-giving of God in the Incarnation in the Jew Jesus, itself a deepening of divine intimacy with Israel for the benefit of humanity, is reflected in the self-giving of Jesus to Israel and all humanity through his death in service to God’s Reign. As Louis Roy expresses it:

More than [only] a human being, it is the Son equal to the Father who undergoes the passion. In this way, Jesus’ movement of love is identical to the movement of the eternal Son. He constantly gives back to the Father everything he receives from him. This offering is not only that of the man Jesus, but inseparably that of the eternal Son. The Father is the source. He gives himself entirely to his Son and he gives us the incarnate Son as well as their mutual Spirit. The Son returns this gift without reserve. [W]hat salvation makes accessible is participation in the Trinitarian life.²⁸

The Resurrection of Jesus, which “introduced [him] into ‘the world to come’”²⁹ is thus both a foretaste of the fullness of life of God’s Reign and an essential step in making it inevitable. Indeed, both the Incarnation and Resurrection can be understood as “proleptic” (early intrusions or preliminary eruptions into historic time) manifestations of the Age to Come when God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

²⁸ Louis Roy, “Why is the Death of Jesus Redemptive?” in Cunningham, *Pondering the Passion*, pp. 137-138.

²⁹ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Bible and Christology*, 1.2.6.2.

All of this should make it clear that the “Christ-event” is “unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute.”³⁰ By it, the transcendent life of God that will pervade existence at the Eschaton entered into human history proleptically, thereby making the full realization of God’s intentions inevitable. What a covenantal approach ensures is that this “event” is related to Israel’s covenanting in ways that affirm and complexify Israel’s ongoing covenantal life.

3. Propositions toward a Christology in Relation to Israel’s Covenanting

So how, then, are Catholics to understand the relationship between the universal “saving” significance of Christ with the post-*Nostra Aetate* Church’s appreciation of the Jewish people’s ongoing covenantal life with God? It might be most useful to set this forth by means of a series of Christian theological propositions:

1. The One God is Triune. The inner relationality among the Three in the One God is operative in all divine-human interactions.
2. God desires and invites human beings to participate in God’s unfolding plans for the establishment of God’s Reign throughout all existence.
 - A. This continuous work of God redeems, reconciles, sanctifies, and shares divine life with the human participants.
3. God’s invitation to the people of Israel has produced a covenantal sharing-in-life between God and Israel that will endure until the Age to Come.

³⁰ *Dominus Iesus*, III, 15.

4. As part of God’s unfolding plans, God’s revealing and inviting *Logos* was incarnated in a son of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth.
 - A. As son of Israel, Jesus embodied Israel’s covenanting life with God.
 - i. Therefore, it could be said that the Holy One’s intimacy with Israel attained an even greater degree of intensity in the circumcised flesh of Jesus.
 - ii. Therefore, Israel’s covenanting life with God must be ongoing and vital if Jesus Christ is to mediate such a covenanting life to the Church.
 - B. As divine *Logos*, Jesus embodied the relationality of the Triune God.
 - i. Therefore, the relationality of God entered into human history in a unique way through the ultimate union of the divine with humanity.
5. The “Christ-event” – Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection – was a proleptic manifestation of the life of the Age to Come into human history and had these effects:
 - A. The Church was called into being and began a covenanting sharing-in-life with God in service to the Age to Come. The Church’s covenanting is “christomorphic.” It is mediated and sustained through Christ, the Church’s experience of the divine *Logos* in his life, death, resurrection, and transcendent life.

- B. Christ personifies Israel's covenanting life for the Church. He is the exemplar of human life in covenant with God.
 - C. All humanity is invited to enter into the salvific participation in the unfolding of God's plans for creation.
 - D. The "Christ-event" both anticipates and was necessary to make inevitable the ultimate establishment of God's Reign.
6. Since Israel covenants with God until the Age to Come, then Israel dwells in intimate relationship with the Holy One whom Christians know as Triune.
- A. Therefore, from a Christian point of view, Israel knows God's revealing and inviting *Logos*, not christomorphically, but in Jewish grapplings with the Torah, both written and oral.
7. Therefore, Jews are "saved" by their ongoing covenantal participation in God's unfolding plans for the created world, a covenanting that from a Christian point of view involves an intimate relationship – since the Holy One is Triune – with the eternal *Logos* unified with the son of Israel, Jesus.
- A. Therefore, it could be said from a Christian point of view, that Jesus Christ "saves" Israel by virtue of his epitomizing and deepening of Israel's life with God, although, since Israel does not covenant with God christomorphically, the Jewish people are correct not to perceive their covenanting in this Christian way.

- B. Jewish covenanting with God is intended by God to render a non-christomorphic service on behalf of the Age to Come.

Therefore, to paraphrase John Paul II, the Catholic people have a relationship with the Jewish people which we do not have with any other religion. Judaism is not extrinsic to us, but intrinsic.³¹ Perhaps Christians might say something similar concerning Israel's relationship to the divine *Logos*, and so to Jesus, son of Israel and *Logos* Incarnate. He is not extrinsic to Israel's covenanting, but intrinsic to it.

³¹ John Paul II, "Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome," Apr 13, 1986, §4. See: <http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/johnpauliii/romesynagogue.htm>.