



## Resuming Conflict: Benedict's "Grace and Vocation" and the Limit of Dialogue

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## Introduction

In 1941, the philosopher Leo Strauss wrote one of his most famous texts: "Persecution and the Art of Writing." In it, he addresses the issue of the influence that persecution has on literature and that he considers compels "all writers who hold heterodox views to develop a peculiar technique of writing, the technique which we have in mind when speaking of writing between the lines."<sup>1</sup> It might be generally assumed that one of the most influential, authoritative and, in this sense, powerful persons, namely Benedict XVI, could not be added to the list of potential victims of persecution or that he would employ such a technique. Yet, just such a public figure might have good reasons, as he well knows, at least ever since the intense debate he provoked with his "Regensburg lecture" in 2006, to be very cautious about expressing "heterodox views."

In this paper, I would like to adopt a sort of Straussian reading of his controversial intervention "Grace and Vocation Without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*," published in 2018.<sup>2</sup> I think that this work allows us to discover a more profound dimension behind Benedict's treatise. Indeed, merely by reflecting on it, we are able to detect a more fundamental level of conflict between (Catholic) Christianity and (Rabbinic) Judaism, a level at which the real conflict turns out to concern conflict or dialogue itself, namely the question of its very limits.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Strauss, "Persecution and the Art of Writing," *Social Research* 8:1/4 (1941): 488-504.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, "Grace and Vocation Without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*," *Communio. International Catholic Review* 45 (Spring 2018): 163-84.

## I. The Main Theses and the Debate with Arie Folger

Last year, “Pope Emeritus” Benedict XVI initiated a debate over a highly sensitive and loaded question: the topic of supersession, or the so-called theory of substitution, according to which the covenant with Israel was revoked and Israel as people of God (another loaded topic, of course) was replaced by the Church. For some decades, this issue of supersession seemed to be somehow cleared up by post-Holocaust theology, including Roman-Catholic theology. The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration “*Nostra Aetate*” on the “Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” published in 1965, emphasized that “God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues—such is the witness of the Apostle.”<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II went a step further when, in a speech in Mainz in November 17, 1980, he claimed that the first dimension of the dialogue between Christianity and Judaism is “the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant never revoked by God (Rom 11:29) and that of the New Covenant.”<sup>4</sup>

This formula (“never revoked”) subsequently became important, e.g. it was adopted by the Vatican Commission of the religious relations with Judaism in 2015, which, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “*Nostra Aetate*,” published a document titled “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable.”<sup>5</sup> Benedict, in turn, took this publication as an occasion to write his own text. He completed it on October 26, 2017, and initially intended it as an internal document,<sup>6</sup> but it was then published in the International Catholic Review *Communio* in July 2018. It immediately caused a broad and sometimes highly polemical debate.

Although Benedict initially emphasized that the doctrine of the “never-revoked covenant” was “basically correct” (“Grace and Vocation,” 168), he ends up formulating a very clear critique of it. The text’s very title can already be understood as correcting John Paul II’s term “irrevocable,” which is non-biblical, by “without remorse.” And at the very end of his text, he states:

The formula of the “never-revoked covenant” may have been helpful in the first phase of the new dialogue between Jews and Christians. But it is not suited in the long run to express in an adequate way the magnitude of reality.<sup>7</sup>

With reference to different lexica, but without further justification, Benedict questioned the very existence of a theory of substitution before the Council “as such.”<sup>8</sup> He also criticized the idea of two “Covenants” by emphasizing that Saint Paul did not speak of the “covenant” but of “covenants.” It would thus be “unfortunate” for “our theology” to understand covenant either in the singular or in a strict juxtaposition of Old (First) and New Covenants. For the Old Testament, the word “covenant” described a dynamic reality that was concretized

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the “Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions Nostra Aetate,”* [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html) (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 78.

<sup>5</sup> Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable*, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20151210\\_ebraismo-nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html) (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Kurt Koch, “Foreword to Benedict XVI’s “Grace and Vocation without Remorse,” *Communio* 45 (Spring 2018), 161-162.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, “Grace and Vocation Without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*”: 184.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

in an unfolding series of covenants.<sup>9</sup> Finally, according to Benedict, the question of substitution "arises not only in relation to the whole of Israel as such; it is made concrete in the individual elements in which the election presents itself"<sup>10</sup>: (1.) Cultic laws, which include the temple cult, and so on.; (2.) the cultic laws that concern individual Israelites; (3.) the legal and moral instructions of the Torah; (4.) the Messiah; (5.) the promise of land. Benedict then goes on to analyze these five essential elements of promise and examines how the concept of substitution could be applied to each of them. The temple cult is substituted in Christianity by the Eucharist, the expectation of the Messiah by the "messianic identity of Jesus"<sup>11</sup>, the promise of land by "the future world".<sup>12</sup> By contrast, the "moral instruction in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is, in the end, identical and (...) there can be no actual "substitution" here."<sup>13</sup>

Benedict's critics focused mostly on two points: That his position undermined the doctrine of the "never-revoked covenant," to such an extent that, ultimately, the reestablishment of the Sinai covenant of God with Israel "is replaced, that is, substituted by the covenant of Christ."<sup>14</sup> Other reviewers also criticized that Benedict would assess historical events very differently: On the one hand, it was observed that Benedict reaffirmed a classical Christian position, according to which the destruction of the temple and the scattering of Israel had theological meaning. On the other, he denied any such meaning for the Zionist return or for the state of Israel.

One of the most relevant reactions for our purposes came from Rabbi Arie Folger. Shortly after the publication of "Grace and Vocation," he published a reply in the *Jüdische Allgemeine*. His article is interesting for two reasons. First, he is not only a major Jewish-orthodox representative of "Jewish-Catholic-Dialogue," but as such is also a co-author of *Between Jerusalem and Rome*,<sup>15</sup> which is, according to Folger, the first and "most important" Jewish document on the dialogue between Jews and Catholics,<sup>16</sup> undersigned by three of the largest (the conference of European rabbis, the rabbinical council of America), and most authoritative (the chief rabbinate of the state of Israel) Jewish religious organizations. Second, his article provoked the very thing that some had missed in Benedict's article: a dialogue between Christianity and Judaism. In response to his article, Benedict wrote him a letter,

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<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, 181.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 169 ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>14</sup> Christian Rutishauser, *No way around Christ*, trans. The Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations (CCJR). <https://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/no-way-around-christ> (accessed June 12, 2019). The CCJR provided unofficial translations of the major texts of the debate around Benedict's text (<https://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope>). Unless otherwise stated, I will quote herein from these translations.

<sup>15</sup> CER, RCA, and Chief Rabbinate of Israel, "Between Jerusalem and Rome. Reflections on 50 Years of Nostra Aetate," (2017) [https://www.ccsr.us/images/From\\_Jerusalem\\_to\\_Rome.pdf](https://www.ccsr.us/images/From_Jerusalem_to_Rome.pdf) (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Arie Folger, "Un incredibile viaggio. Prefazione del rabbino Arie Folger," in *Benedikt XVI and Arie Folger, Ebrei e Cristiani*, ed. Elio Guerriero (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2019), 10.

Folger replied, and the correspondence<sup>17</sup> led to a personal encounter in early 2019 between Folger, two other Rabbis, and Benedict.<sup>18</sup>

This harmonious development was not foreseeable, given that in his first article, Folger had called Benedict's neglect of the existence of the "theory of substitution" "ahistorical revisionism."<sup>19</sup> And, like many others, he also sensed that Benedict's text implicitly assumed that Jews could only obtain salvation thanks to Jesus. Significantly different from some Christian voices,<sup>20</sup> however, this did not appear to him particularly scandalous:

What do we expect from a Pope? Do we Jews really expect that the Church accepts Judaism as a legitimate detour around Church doctrine? We do not need confirmation from the Church in order to believe the Truth of Judaism. (...) We are two different and independent confessions.<sup>21</sup>

Folger placed great emphasis on the mutual recognition of each other's autonomy and seems to consider the most desirable option to be Christian theology's acknowledgment of a "dual covenant,"<sup>22</sup> "one with the Jewish people, who — without faith in Jesus and no New Testament — attain salvation through the complete observance of Halacha" and another "made with Christians mediated by the person and teaching of Jesus."<sup>23</sup> Benedict replied to Folger by emphasizing that, "as far as humans can foresee," this dialogue within ongoing history would "never lead to an agreement between the two interpretations: this is God's business at the end of history."<sup>24</sup> Folger received this statement very positively, because it signified to him that "dialogue is for understanding and friendship but it should not be thought of as a missionary quest or as being about the negotiation of theological points."<sup>25</sup> Benedict also tried, it seems, to clarify some misunderstandings in December 2018 and thus to pacify the debate, which he also sought to do by emphasizing the dialogical character and the specific relation between Christianity and Judaism. While the Christian mission to all the nations was universal, the Jews were the exception, because "they alone among all the peoples

<sup>17</sup> The German original of the correspondence was published as pre-release by *Communio* on [https://www.communio.de/pdf/vorabveroeffentlichung/Briefwechsel\\_Benedikt\\_XVI\\_Rabbi\\_Arie\\_Folger.pdf](https://www.communio.de/pdf/vorabveroeffentlichung/Briefwechsel_Benedikt_XVI_Rabbi_Arie_Folger.pdf) (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> This dialogue seems to have gone well. "In him (Benedict)," Folger said, "I found a very pleasant and profound thinker who is repulsed by anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in all its forms." *Benedict XVI and Folger, Ebrei e Cristiani*, 16 (my translation).

<sup>19</sup> Arie Folger, *Danger for the dialogue?* trans. CCJR, <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/danger-for-the-dialogue> (accessed June 12th, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> The Catholic theologian Michael Böhnke went so far to speak of a "devilish cunning coming in the guise of devout virtue." Michael Böhnke, *The 'R' Method*, trans. CCJR, <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/the-r-method> (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Arie Folger, *Danger for the dialogue?* ["Confessions" is my translation of "Konfessionen" in the original text.]

<sup>22</sup> This option was conceived of already by the Jewish theologian and philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. On this question, see Jacob Taubes, "The Issue Between Judaism and Christianity: Facing Up to the Unresolvable Difference," in *From Cult to Culture: Fragments Towards a Critique of Historical Reason*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Amir Engel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 45-58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Benedict XVI, *Reply to Rabbi Arie Folger, August 23, 2018*, trans. CCJR. <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/benedict-2018aug28> (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Arie Folger, *Reply to Emeritus Pope Benedict, September 4, 2018*, trans. CCJR. <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/folger-2018sept4> (accessed June 12, 2019).

knew the "unknown god".” As a result, there could be no mission of Israel, but instead “a dialogue about whether Jesus of Nazareth is "the Son of God, the Logos," who is expected by Israel — according to the promises made to his own people — and, unknowingly, by all of humanity. Resuming this dialogue is the task that the present time sets before us.”<sup>26</sup>

What initially appeared to various critics to be a sign of regression to old Christian supersessionism and anti-Judaism, and thus an endangering of “Christian-Jewish dialogue,” seems instead to have been another positive step toward a better understanding of Christianity (Catholicism) and Judaism, one based on the mutual agreement that both are related through a common reference (the Bible), but are otherwise separated by different and even insurmountable differences, which, however, thus acknowledged, can ultimately be successfully deactivated.

However, such a harmonizing view easily conceals a serious but not immediately visible divergence in the Folger-Benedict dialogue: In “Grace and Vocation” Benedict writes that, “In the second half of the second century, Marcion and his movement tried to break this unity, so that Judaism and Christianity would have become two opposing religions.”<sup>27</sup> Folger’s support for “two different and independent confessions” in his answer to Benedict accentuated, instead, the distinction between both confessions.<sup>28</sup> Benedict, in turn, reaffirmed in his answer to Folger, at least implicitly, his initial position regarding Marcion and, in consequence, his dissatisfaction with the separation between Judaism and Christianity as “two different and independent confessions” that Folger supported.

Another aspect of Benedict’s critique of Marcionism is the separation of anti-Judaism from the Catholic tradition. Since the beginning of modern times, he writes, the subject of morality and worship had been overshadowed by the anti-Judaic thinking of Luther, for whom, following his “Tower experience,” the rejection of the law became essential (“*existenzprägend*”). This experience “combined with the thinking of Marcion to produce a pseudo-religious Marcionism.”<sup>29</sup> And although it is not evident what Benedict is referring to here, it seems clear that he is attributing primarily to Marcion, or to Marcionism, as well as to the Lutheran tradition, the heritage of anti-Judaism — that is, to two relevant others within Christian and Catholic tradition, which are here, at least implicitly, related to one another, given that Marcion and Luther shared a certain antinomianism.

However, the connection between Marcion and anti-Judaism might be, upon a closer look, more problematic than it first appears. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly true that Marcion, by identifying Judaism with a radically devalued God of the Old Testament, also radically devalued Judaism. Thus, if the institutionalization of Christianity is established on a rejection of Marcion, then Christianity appears as anti-anti-Jewish. Things are, however, more complicated, at least if we follow Steve Mason:

Marcion had also sought to separate following Jesus from Judaeen law or history, attributing the latter to a lesser God, but that solution was

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict XVI, *Not Mission, but Dialogue*, trans. CCJR <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/not-mission-but-dialogue> (accessed June 12, 2019)

<sup>27</sup> Benedict XVI, “Grace and Vocation Without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*”: 165.

<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Folger does not seem to understand it as reciprocal, at least he does not say anything about the possibility that Judaism might also acknowledge such a dual covenant, i.e., Christianity as a legitimate covenant. And wouldn’t this subvert the very ground of the difference and respective autonomy that is so relevant for Folger?

<sup>29</sup> Benedict XVI, *Reply to Rabbi Arie Folger*.

unacceptable to Tertullian because it left to the *Ioudaioi* an ongoing vitality—continuing with their laws as they awaited their Messiah (Mark 3.23; 4.6). Marcion recognized the ongoing culture of the Judaeans and tried only to divorce his faith from it. For Tertullian, *Iudaismus* ended in principle with the coming of Jesus, and it survives only vestigially.<sup>30</sup>

In other words: not only did Marcion already provide the clear division between Christianity and Judaism that Folger is aiming for and Benedict is rejecting by rejecting Marcion. But further, if we follow Mason, this division opens up a possibility by which Judaism can continue, whereas for Tertullian such was not something he could so easily accept. In consequence, it is less clear that the anti-Judaist tradition can be so quickly attributed to Marcion only and not also, in a different manner, to Tertullian.

Indeed, it is quite striking that the very same author who wrote one of the earliest texts against Marcion, Tertullian, also initiated the Latin tradition of “adversus Iudaeos” texts. And while his own text *Adversus Iudaeos* is still moderate towards Judaism and not particularly polemical,<sup>31</sup> it is, at least according to the common contemporary understanding, inextricably linked to the tradition of Christian anti-Judaism. Doesn’t this mean that Benedict, since he seems determined to attribute the tendencies of anti-Judaism mainly to the tradition of Marcion and Luther, had necessary to reevaluate this tradition of “adversus Iudaeos” or “De Iudaeis,” in particular its founding figure Tertullian? And wouldn’t he be forced to proceed exceptionally carefully, given the wide consensus with which this tradition seems discredited nowadays as anti-Jewish?

## II. Which Treatise?

“(…) the potential philosophers are to be led step by step from the popular views which are indispensable for all practical and political purposes to the truth which is merely and purely theoretical, guided by certain obtrusively enigmatic features in the presentation of the popular teaching—obscurity of the plan, contradictions, pseudonyms, inexact repetitions of earlier statements, strange expressions, etc. Such features do not disturb the slumber of those who cannot see the wood for the trees, but act as awakening stumbling blocks for those who can.”<sup>32</sup>

One important point of Benedict’s paper was already suggested by him in the very title, where he substituted the “never revoked” of John Paul II with “without remorse.” Indeed, this was the most discussed point in the debate. Correspondingly, one might assume that the subtitle, “Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*,” (in the German original: “Anmerkungen zum Traktat “De Iudaeis””) might be similarly relevant and would, therefore, have become a matter of concern as well. Curiously enough, however, it remained almost wholly undiscussed.

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<sup>30</sup> Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 472f.

<sup>31</sup> Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Iudaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.-11. Jh.)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1999), 216.

<sup>32</sup> Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History”: 503f.

This is all the more peculiar since the sub-title is anything but clear. The simple question is: Which treatise does Benedict exactly mean? Is he just referring to his own text? This is what the few interpreters who mention the sub-title seem to assume. Cardinal Koch called it a "humble subtitle," adding: "Thus, the narrow focus of his reflections is clearly signaled."<sup>33</sup> According to Christian Rutishauser, "Benedict just wanted to write the "treatise on the Jews" after *Nostra Aetate*."<sup>34</sup> Daniel Krochmalnik, for his part, noticed that fundamental contradiction followed from this assumption: "It is called "About Jews," yes, "*De Iudaeis*," but it is an in-house text, and it is basically about the Christians—their attitude to the Old Testament, their promises to the New Testament."<sup>35</sup> Yet, this contradiction did not make him question an underlying assumption, which is that Benedict is referring here to his own text. And yet, it would appear more than odd to refer to his own text with the expression: "Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*" ("De Iudaeis" is in quotation marks in the German original).

Now, if we assume instead that Benedict is commenting the text of another author, a treatise called "De Iudaeis," the question arises: Which treatise? In beginning, Benedict refers to the declaration "Nostra Aetate" from 1965 in a way that makes it possible to understand it as the treatise in question. "With the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council provided the first basic indications. To be sure, we first have to specify what the treatise on the Jews is about."<sup>36</sup> And the English translation further supports such a reading, since it adds, after "the treatise on the Jews," in square brackets "[De Iudaeis]."

However, upon a closer look, it does not seem plausible that Benedict would have used the term "De Iudaeis" for "Nostra Aetate." It is true that Pope John XXIII initially wanted to promulgate a "tractatus de Iudaeis," but it was finally decided to take into account all "world religions" in "Nostra Aetate."<sup>37</sup> Thus, neither the final document "Nostra Aetate" as a whole, nor its fourth part, which deals with Judaism, was ever called "de Iudaeis."<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the few paragraphs of this relatively short text "Nostra Aetate" that deal with Judaism were indeed not accurately designated by the term "treatise" ("Traktat" in German).

The next solution seems to lie in the sentences immediately afterward, where Benedict mentions Franz Mußner. Indeed, in 1984 Mußner wrote *Traktat über die Juden* (*Treatise on the Jews*), a book intended to be a theological treatise *pro Iudaeis* and to replace the erstwhile tradition of the *Tractatus Adversus Iudaeos*.<sup>39</sup> Benedict, however, only mentions Mußner in order to distance himself from his book:

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<sup>33</sup> Cardinal Kurt Koch, *Information about Self-Understanding: Not calling into question but deepening the dialogue with Jews*, trans. CCJR. <https://www.cjcr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/koch-2018aug14> (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>34</sup> Christian Rutishauser, *No way around Christ*, trans. CCJR. <https://www.cjcr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/no-way-around-christ> (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Daniel Krochmalnik, "Reactionary views" or "important text"?, trans. CCJR, <https://www.cjcr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/reactionary-views-or-important-text> (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI, "Grace and Vocation Without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*": 163.

<sup>37</sup> Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. *The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable*. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20151210\\_ebraismo-nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html) (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Instead: "Mysterium Ecclesiae perscrutans, Sacra haec Synodus meminit vinculi, quo populus Novi Testamenti cum stirpe Abrahae spiritualiter coniunctus est," see *Nostra Aetate*, 4, lat. Version, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_lt.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_lt.htm) (accessed June 12, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Franz Mußner, *Traktat über die Juden* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1979).

The justly-praised book by Franz Mußner on this theme is essentially a book about the enduring positive meaning of the Old Testament. This is undoubtedly very important, but it does not correspond to the theme *De Iudaeis*. For “Judaism” in the strict sense does not mean the Old Testament, which is essentially common to Jews and Christians. (163f)

Accordingly, aside from this little indication at the beginning, “Grace and Vocation” does not deal with Mußner’s book, so the question remains: To what does the subtitle “Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*” refer?

Luckily, there is a further option. A little further on in the text Benedict again mentions a treatise called “De Iudaeis”:

At this point, the question arises as to how the two separate communities, united by a common Bible, judge one another. Here we encounter the treatise *De Iudaeis*, often called *Adversus Iudaeos* and conceived in a polemical context. The negative judgments about the Jews, which also reflect the political and social problems of coexistence, are well known and have repeatedly led to anti-Semitic failures. On the other hand, as we saw earlier, the Church of Rome, with its rejection of Marcion in the second century, made it clear that Christians and Jews worship the same God. The holy books of Israel are also the holy books of Christendom. The faith of Abraham is also the faith of the Christians; Abraham is also for them “the father of faith.”<sup>40</sup>

Benedict, though well known for the sharpness of his intellect, is unfortunately very vague here. He mentions no author at all, which by no means facilitates our search for the text. Even the qualification “the treatise *De Iudaeis*, often called *Adversus Iudaeos*” does not get us much further, since it is not easy to find in the literature any particular treatise called “*De Iudaeis*” and also called “*Adversus Iudaeos*.”

Nevertheless, a few reasons might suggest that Benedict had one specific text in mind: Tertullian’s “*Adversus Iudaeos*.” First of all, this text fits the context. Immediately prior Benedict mentions Marcion, so that chronologically it would make sense to go on to Tertullian. Secondly, Tertullian’s *Adversus Iudaeos* was extremely important for the whole Christian-Jewish-dispute; it was actually the first Latin text written against the Jews and it founded a genre that would last many centuries.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, with Tertullian begins, according to Steve Mason, “a new use of *Ἰουδαϊσμός* and *Iudaismus*, now indeed to indicate the whole belief system and regimen of the *Ioudaioi*: a true “-ism,” abstracted from concrete conditions in a living state and portrayed with hostility.”<sup>42</sup> Tertullian’s text appears in reaction to the separation of the two (Christian and Jewish) communities and deals with Jews and not with the Old Testament.

In consequence, we can conclude that Tertullian’s text fits best with the treatise mentioned in the subtitle as “De Iudaeis.” However, it appears also possible, though perhaps slightly less likely,<sup>43</sup> that Benedict did not want to designate only this specific treatise, but the whole genre initiated by Tertullian, i.e., a specific Roman-Catholic tradition of texts regarding Jews.<sup>44</sup> This has the consequence that Benedict, while acknowledging that Tertullian’s specific treatise

<sup>40</sup> Benedict XVI, “Grace and Vocation Without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*: 166.

<sup>41</sup> Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Iudaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.-11. Jh.)*, 217.

<sup>42</sup> Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History”: 471.

<sup>43</sup> If Benedict meant to speak of the textual genre “de Iudaeis,” then he would probably not have used the formulation “the Treatise,” which seems to indicate a specific text.

<sup>44</sup> If Benedict meant to speak of the textual genre “de Iudaeis,” then he would probably not have used the formulation “the Treatise,” which seems to indicate a specific text.

and/or the tradition that he inaugurated entail "negative judgments about the Jews," these are explained with "political and social problems of coexistence," and thereby understood as not inherently "anti-Jewish" or even "anti-Semitic," but only as a cause for "anti-Semitic failures" by others.

### III. Some Conclusions

If our interpretation is correct, it has some consequences for both the understanding of Benedict's intervention and, more generally, for the "conflict" between Christianity and Judaism.

First of all, we can discover a deeper aim behind a correction of John Paul II's "irrevocable formula," or even the restoration of the concept of substitution in the shape of a "re-establishment of the Sinai covenant in the New Covenant in Jesus' blood."<sup>45</sup> What Benedict already indicates with the sub-title is an attempt to renew and re-affirm the "Adversus Iudaeos" or "de Iudaeis" tradition which started with Tertullian and seemed, over recent decades at least, to have been more or less discredited as anti-Jewish and as a root-cause of modern anti-Semitism. This interpretation would be consistent with Benedict's apologetic tendency in general, both in his text "Grace and Vocation," and in his conversation with Folger, during which he relates anti-Jewish thought with currents external to the Catholic Church. Moreover, given the profoundly *heterodox* character of such an apology of a widely discredited "de Iudaeis" tradition, this would explain why Benedict would have had good reasons to be very cautious, to remain vague, and to use techniques as indicated by Leo Strauss.

However, and beside the apologetic motivation: Why reestablish this tradition in the first place? Why would Benedict want to revive a polemical tradition?

Jan-Heiner Tüeck described Benedict's text as an attempt to "re-explore the relationship with Judaism."<sup>46</sup> I would rather speak here of an attempt to resume a conflict or *machloikes* on an interreligious level. First of all, we know how concerned Benedict was with contemporary relativism. Shortly after he became Pope, he held his famous "Regensburg Lecture," based on the assumption that God and the *logos* were not completely separated and that faith and reason belonged together. Religions, because oriented toward God, should thus be able to, and prepared to, struggle for truth, instead of constituting enclosed or "autonomous" realms of "relative truths."

This close relationship between God and (Greek) *logos*, however, was undoubtedly formative for the mainstream of Orthodox and Catholic Christianity, but not for other relevant traditions inside Christianity (Nominalism, Voluntarism, significant currents within Protestantism) nor outside it, such as Islam, or Judaism. It was certainly no coincidence that the excellent representative of a (Jewish) "Hellenization" of the Biblical tradition, who God and the *logos* very early on related, namely Philo, became relevant for the Christian tradition, but was more or less ignored by (Rabbinic) Judaism.

And precisely this very same divergence seems still effective in the current debate. I had already quoted a passage by Folger, but against this background, the decisive point becomes more perceivable: "the dialogue is for understanding and friendship but should not be

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<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, "Grace and Vocation": 184.

<sup>46</sup> Vatican News. *Theologian Tüeck comments on a new text by Benedict XVI*, trans. CCJR., <https://www.cjrr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-today-s-dialogue/emeritus-pope/theologian-tueeck-comments-on-a-new-text-by-benedict-xvi> (accessed June 12, 2019).

thought of as missionary *or to negotiate theological points*.”<sup>47</sup> And the relevant difference of Benedict’s approach too can now be perceived clearer: “To Israel, therefore, there was not and still is not a mission, but rather the dialogue *about whether Jesus of Nazareth is “the Son of God, the Logos”* (...). Resuming this dialogue is the task that the present time sets before us.”<sup>48</sup> It turns out that the acceptance of whether or not a dialogue on “theological points” can and should take place might already be an object of disagreement.

Jacques Rancière famously defined his notion of disagreement as follows:

Disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness.<sup>49</sup>

Appropriating this definition, and in light of what was said up to now, we can conclude that the real disagreement between Benedict and Folger, and — at least this might be a hypothesis for future research on Jewish-Christian conflict — for contemporary (Catholic) Christianity and (Rabbinic) Judaism in general, is not the one between “mission” or “dialogue,” but between “dialogue” and “dialogue.” Christianity says dialogue and Judaism also says dialogue but does not understand the same thing by it. The real disagreement lies in the question about whether or not a dialogue should have specific theological limits or not. And this disagreement very likely presumes a disagreement about the *logos* of this *diálogos* as well: Do we understand it as limitless, because it is inseparably related to God (according to the Christian, and especially Johannine, tradition), or as separated from God? Interreligious questions and disagreement reveal here an epistemic dimension which might, therefore, be adequately addressed by an inter-epistemic approach.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Arie Folger, *Reply to Emeritus Pope Benedict* (my emphasis).

<sup>48</sup> Benedict XVI, *Not Mission, but Dialogue*.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), X.

<sup>50</sup> This is one primary aim of the current subproject 1: “Disagreement Between Religions. Epistemology of Religious Conflicts” within the interdisciplinary and international project “Religious Conflicts and Coping Strategies” at the University of Bern. See [https://www.religious-conflicts.unibe.ch/individual\\_projects/index\\_eng.html](https://www.religious-conflicts.unibe.ch/individual_projects/index_eng.html) (accessed June 22, 2019).

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