

Introductory Survey

Bernard Mallmann and Jan-Heiner Tück

*“Christianity is indissolubly bound to Judaism.
If it breaks away from it, it ceases to be itself. . .”¹*

Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger

THE VIENNA SYMPOSIUM, which facilitated discussion between representatives of the Messianic Jewish movement and Jesus-believing Jews on the one hand and Christian theologians on the other, was entitled *Jesus—the Messiah also for Israel?* The theme of the symposium was deliberately formulated as a question rather than a thesis. Jesus is the Messiah *from* Israel, that is certain (cf. John 4:22; Matt 1:116; Rom 1:3), but whether he is also the Messiah *for* Israel is an open and much discussed question. In addressing this question, it cannot be ignored that there are more and more Jews who come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel without missionary activity on the part of the Church. This is no cause for Christian triumphalism. On the contrary, it would be absurd to declare Judaism in its various forms a living anachronism and to consider a Torah-pious lifestyle obsolete in terms of salvation history. Paul, a Jesus-believing Jew, already emphasizes the lasting theological significance of Israel with the words that all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26) and that the gifts of grace and the calling of God are irrevocable even during the period when Israel’s mainstream identity has no place for Jesus (Rom 11:2829). Christian theology cannot and must not overlook this. It has to reject all forms of replacement theology that declare Israel to be an obsolete quantity in the history of salvation, and must self-critically work through and eradicate anti-Jewish traces in theology, liturgy, and catechesis. Christian theology—especially after the Shoah—must defend and protect the permanent election of Israel against hostility. Pope John Paul II expressed the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in these much-quoted words in the synagogue in Rome in 1986:

The Church of Christ discovers her “bond” with Judaism by reflecting on her own mystery [cf. *Nostra Aetate* 4]. The Jewish religion is not something “external” for us, but belongs in a certain way to the “interior” of our religion. We thus have relations with it like with no other religion. You are our privileged brothers and, one could say, our elder brothers.²

The Jewishness of the Church is part of her own identity. What the Second Vatican Council thus recalls was not always a matter of course in the history of the Church. Today, however, many dialogue forums are committed to this claim and, in respect for one another, they work hard to find the path that God’s promises have given to his people of Jews and Gentiles. The person of Jesus Christ is not only the link, but also the point of contention in striving for the depth of God’s riches, wisdom, and knowledge (Rom 11:33). Who do Jews and Christians consider this Jesus of Nazareth to be?

Jesus’ Jewishness has become a fixed topos in contemporary Christology.³ The horror of the Shoah has led to a rethinking in Christian theology and step by step to a *purificazione della memoria*.⁴ It was mainly baptized Christians who committed the atrocities against Jewish fellow citizens under National Socialism. Not infrequently, Church dignitaries sympathized with the Nazi regime. Vienna, the venue for the conference, also provides a thought-provoking example of this in the person of Cardinal Theodor Innitzer. The Archbishop of Vienna welcomed the so-called Anschluss of Austria in the spring of 1938 and signed a greeting note with “Heil Hitler.” Even though Innitzer subsequently distanced himself from Hitler and in October 1938 in St Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna called Christ “our Führer,” his role remains historically controversial.⁵ During the war, the Viennese cardinal founded the Archbishop’s Aid Office for Non-Aryan Catholics in December 1940, which provided material, social and pastoral care for baptized Jews. Several hundred Jews were able to emigrate abroad with this support. In the decades

after World War II, the Catholic Church gradually became aware of her moral debts. The Second Vatican Council in particular provided a decisive impetus with the declaration *Nostra Aetate*:

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

This short passage (in section 4)⁶ may rightly be regarded as a turning point in the relationship between Judaism and the Catholic Church and is still the basis of many dialogue efforts today. However, the declaration on Judaism was not a vote of the preparatory commission of the Council nor a wish of bishops, but it goes back to Pope John XXIII himself, who had been in personal contact with Jews since his time in Bulgaria and Turkey.⁷ It is reported of the Roncalli Pope “that when he saw the pictures of the bulldozers pushing Jewish corpses into mass graves in the Nazi death camps that had just been liberated, he exclaimed: ‘This is the body of Christ.’”⁸ As a particular impetus, it is worth recalling here a conversation with the Jewish-French historian Jules Isaac (1877–1963) who, in the run-up to the Council, made three requests to the Pope: (1) all unjust statements about Israel in Christian doctrine should be subjected to a critical revision; (2) the erroneous legend that the Diaspora, that is, the dispersion of the Jews, was considered a punishment for the crucifixion of Jesus should be set right; and (3) the statements from the Trent Catechism should be recalled, which attributed the guilt for the death of Jesus not to the Jewish people but to “our sins.” *Nostra Aetate* responded to these requests and thus gave an important impetus to post-Conciliar theology. Present-day exegesis particularly emphasizes that it is not what stands out from the Judaism of the time that is to be considered authentic to Jesus, but rather what is in continuity with the Jewish faith. Christian theology, especially of the Catholic tradition which is committed to the Second Vatican Council, is thus obliged to reject any form of substitutionary theology.

But does Jesus Christ also mean something to Jews? Or should Christology rather be left out of the Jewish–Christian conversation so as not to awaken unpleasant memories of anti-Judaic and triumphalist Christologies? Since the nineteenth century there has been a history of “bringing Jesus home” to Judaism.⁹ Here, too, there is an awareness that the “brother Jesus” (Shalom Ben-Chorin) lived in and fully shared the Jewish tradition.

The title of the Vienna conference, *Jesus—also the Messiah for Israel?*, alluded to the thesis of the two parallel paths to salvation. That theory says that the first chosen people of Israel is saved through the Torah, but the Church from the nations through Jesus Christ! “We confess that God’s covenant with the Jewish people represents a path to salvation to God—even without the recognition of Jesus Christ,” it says programmatically in a document of the discussion group “Jews and Christians” at the Central Committee of German Catholics.¹⁰ But can there be two peoples of God from a Christian perspective? Should there be two parallel paths of salvation for Israel and the nations in the one history of salvation? Would not God then be, according to a pointed remark by Robert Spaemann, a “bigamist”?¹¹

The common conviction of all participants of the Vienna symposium was that God has chosen Israel and that Israel stands in the unrevoked covenant. Any form of replacement theology or supersessionism is therefore firmly rejected. The thesis of many Church Fathers that Israel has been both punished and rejected, and the old people of God replaced by the Church, the new Israel, is in need of revision. Israel is not rejected, as Paul says in Romans. God cannot be regarded as a remarried divorcee who dismisses his first wife in order to marry a new one, as the exegete Dieter Böhler SJ has noted.¹²

Another conviction of all participants in the symposium was that the widespread canonical narrative of creation, fall, redemption and consummation must be expanded by taking into account the covenant history with Israel. This covenant history is not the outdated prehistory of the Church; rather, the enduring theological dignity of Israel as the “apple of God’s eye” must be recognized.¹³ The history of the chosen people of Israel has theological significance for the Church.

The conviction that the Jew Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah for Israel and for the nations also carries an aspect of promise: He has come—and he will come again to unite what has been separated and to establish the kingdom of consummation. Even if the *how* and the *when* are subject to the uncertainties of eschatology, there is hope for Jews and Christians that God's promise will be fulfilled and that he will be "all in all" (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

Closely intertwined with this is the conviction that the Church of the beginning was a Church of Jews and Gentiles. The *ecclesia ex gentibus*, however, marginalized the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* more and more already in the first centuries and finally excluded and forgot about her. The return of the repressed Jesus-believing Jews in the nineteenth century and the Messianic Jewish movement in the twentieth century is therefore a sign in need of interpretation, which needs to be further considered in the common conversation between Messianic Jews and Christian theologians. Here again it was a common conviction of the participants that we cannot restore the Church of the beginning—*ex gentibus* and *ex circumcisione*—through a theological conversation, but its original pattern calls for a fruitful togetherness that takes into account our intervening and often traumatic history. How exactly Messiahbelieving Jews are to be located with regard to the Church is a controversial question that needs to be further explored.

Now, such a conversation is by no means a matter of course. When word got around that an international symposium with Messianic Jews was planned at the University of Vienna, there were frowns and critical questions among colleagues. Messianic Jews, it was objected, are no longer recognized as Jews by other varieties of Judaism, they have a reputation for proselytizing other Jews.¹⁴ Most established Churches reject institutional mission to the Jews for theological reasons, believing that Israel stands fully in the saving grace of God. But there are also vehement reservations on the part of Judaism. Abraham J. Heschel's words to Augustin Cardinal Bea that the mission to the Jews is "spiritual fratricide" should be remembered. Most recently, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism once again underlined its rejection of a mission to the Jews in 2015:

It is easy to understand that the so-called "mission to the Jews" is a very delicate and sensitive matter for Jews because, in their eyes, it involves the very existence of the Jewish people. This question also proves to be awkward for Christians, because for them the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ and consequently the universal mission of the Church are of fundamental importance. The Church is therefore obliged to view evangelization 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.¹⁵

All dialogue partners must therefore be aware that an official mission to the Jews cannot be justified theologically, nor Christologically. Against this background, it is not unproblematic that there are efforts within the Messianic Jewish movement to conduct formal missions to the Jews. They not only want to bear witness to Jesus as the Messiah before their fellow Jews, which is a duty for individual believers in Messiah, but they also actively advocate the turning of the whole of Judaism toward the confession of Christ. The theologian and rabbi Mark S. Kinzer stands out all the more among Messiah-believing Jews. In his book *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, he explains from Jewish sources why Messianic Judaism can and must see itself as a Judaism that has gone beyond the mission to the Jews.¹⁶ Messianic Judaism should not be proselytizing its own brothers and sisters who are in fidelity to the Torah, but solely bearing witness to Messiah.

Another objection to the symposium was that Messianic Judaism is a heterogeneous group that unites different, often evangelical currents within itself. The academic exchange with them jeopardizes the state of Jewish-Christian dialogue that has been reached, and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and Special Relations with Judaism has not yet established official relations with Messianic Jews. The rethinking that began in the Churches after the shock of the Shoah had finally turned enemies into brothers and sisters. This must not be jeopardized.

Our response to these objections, which are understandable at first glance, was that Messianic Jews agree with us Christians in confessing Jesus as Messiah, as Christ. This is a fundamental common bond

that should not be excluded or ignored for reasons of dialogue strategy. Moreover, the multifaceted Messianic Jewish movement has been growing steadily since the late 1960s and can no longer be ignored in terms of the sociology of religion alone—estimates put the number of followers at 150,000–250,000. Furthermore, with Johann Baptist Metz, the founder of the new political theology, the principle of anamnestic solidarity with the Jewish victims is to be taken seriously.¹⁷ Messianic Jews also lost family members in the Shoah; they too are to be included in the horizon of anamnestic theology. Christians should not promote the exclusions and stigmatization that Messianic Jews often experience; it cannot be their task to duplicate the inner-Jewish conflict. A theology of exclusion and contempt has existed in the Churches for far too long! It is indeed a memorable phenomenon, even an “eschatological sign” according to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (1927–2022), that more and more Jews are coming to believe in Jesus, the Messiah for Israel and for the nations, without the influence of the Christian Churches. As early as 2000, therefore, Pope John Paul II (1978–2005) set up a theological study group, which first began its work under Cardinal Georges Cottier (1922–2016), then continued under Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, who was in charge until 2020. Vienna was therefore chosen as the venue for the conference, where Peter Hocken and Johannes Fichtenbauer have been doing valuable preliminary work for the dialogue with Messianic Jews for years. Finally, the Vienna symposium corresponds to the express wish of Pope Francis to deepen the conversation between Christian theology and the Messianic Jewish movement in terms of content.

The topics discussed at the symposium, as can be seen more precisely from the table of contents, after an introduction to Messianic Judaism from the different denominations,¹⁸ touch on questions of Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

(1) Jesus, the “King of the Jews,” was at the same time a “servant to the circumcision,” as Paul writes in Romans. What does Jesus’ Jewish identity mean for Christology? The Jewishness of Jesus has long been suppressed, especially in German-speaking theology, or even explicitly denied at the time of the Third Reich, when constructions of an “Aryan Jesus” emerged. Christian theology must feel committed to the statement that Jesus became “Jewish flesh.”¹⁹ This has implications for exegetical and systematic Christology.

(2) The Church of the beginning was a Church of Jews and Gentiles. Mary, the Twelve, and Paul were Jews who lived Torah-observant lives. But the *ecclesia ex gentibus* marginalized the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* in the first centuries, even gradually excluding her with disciplinary measures. What does it mean that the Messianic Jewish movement and Jesus-believing Jews now bring back what was forgotten and lost? The disappearance of the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* is not just a phantom pain, but a gaping wound in ecclesiology. How can it be healed? The “parting of the ways” is a history of mutual disqualification and demarcation that has led to constructions of Judaism and Christianity. The historical boundary markers can be reconsidered with a view to the biblical witness. The Church’s constitutive reference back to Israel must not disregard the question of the place of Jesus-believing Jews in the Church. As a Church that breathes with two lungs, can it be more closely defined with Mark Kinzer as a “bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel”?²⁰

(3) Finally, Messianic Jews, like charismatic Christians, live in joyful expectation that Jesus, the Messiah, will soon return. They interpret the return of many Jews to the land of Israel and the growing presence of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem as portents of the Parousia. Without slipping into a political messianism that thinks it can spell out the final scenario of salvation history, the newly emerging expectation of Parousia is a productive irritation for the Christian Churches, where the cry of “Maranatha” has almost fallen silent. Augustine taught that the thousand-year kingdom was the time of the Church between the first and second coming of Christ. With this thesis he domesticated chiliasm, and his position has found its way into magisterial statements. But is Christian theology not called upon to reconsider this position? Are historical events such as the founding of the State of Israel and the return of many Jews to the land of Israel not also significant in terms of historical theology? Can they be interpreted as God’s faithfulness to Israel?

The contributions presented at the symposium are preceded by an in-depth conversation with Cardinal Walter Kasper. The long-time President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity was intensively involved in the conversation with Judaism. He is recognized as a specialist in

Jewish–Christian dialogue and has dealt intensively with questions of Christology and ecclesiology in his theological works.²¹ From this perspective, he illuminates the controversial topics that were addressed at the symposium.

The symposium *Jesus—also the Messiah for Israel?* was the first academic forum in Europe to address the multifaceted phenomenon of Messianic Judaism on an interdenominational basis. Naturally, it was not possible to reap the harvest of a discussion process, but rather to draw attention to the importance of the discussion between Jesus-believing Jews and Christians and to survey the thematic fields of theological discourse. The present volume, an interim result of these dialogue efforts, offers an opportunity for further consideration of the authors' contributions. A next step will be to institutionalize the dialogue format. For the Christian Churches, dialogue with Judaism in its various forms is not a variety of interreligious dialogue, but has an ecumenical dimension. The engagement with those Jews who confess Jesus as the Messiah of Israel can enrich this conversation and even unlock the hope that the “original schism,” of which Erich Przywara spoke, can possibly be overcome. What all Jews and Christians have in common is their belief in the one and true God, in whom true unity is found (cf. Deut 6:46; Zeph 3:9).

1. “Das Christentum ist unlöslich an das Judentum gebunden. Löst es sich davon ab, so hört es auf, es selbst zu sein . . .”—Jean-Marie Lustiger, “Christentum unlöslich an Judentum gebunden,” in Jean-Marie Lustiger, *Wagt den Glauben. Artikel, Vorträge, Predigten, Interviews 1981–1984*, trans. Hans U. v. Balthasar (Theologia romanica, 14; Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1986): 79–86, at 84.

2. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/de/speeches/1986/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19860413_sinagoga-roma.html (accessed April 11, 2025).

3. Cf. Helmut Hoping, *Jesus aus Galiläa – Messias und Gottes Sohn* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2nd edn 2019); Josef Wohlmuth, *An der Schwelle zum Heiligtum. Christliche Theologie im Gespräch mit jüdischen Denkern* (Munich / Vienna / Zürich: Schöningh, 2007); Jan-Heiner Tück (ed.), *Die Beschneidung Jesu. Was sie Juden und Christen heute bedeutet* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2020); Kayko Driedger Hesselein, *Dual Citizenship: Two Natures Christologies and the Jewish Jesus* (London: T&T Clark, 2015); Barbara U. Meyer, *Jesus the Jew in Christian Memory: Theological and Philosophical Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Susannah Heschel, *Der jüdische Jesus und das Christentum. Abraham Geigers Herausforderung an die christliche Theologie* (Berlin: Jüdische Verlagsanstalt, 2001); Ulrich Laepple, “Judenchristen, Messianische Juden und die EKD im christlich-jüdischen Gespräch von 1945 bis heute,” *Theologische Beiträge* 50 (2019): 431–54.

4. Cf. Internationale Theologenkommission, *Erinnern und Versöhnen. Die Kirche und die Verfehlungen in ihrer Vergangenheit*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller (Freiburg i. Br.: Johannes-Verlag, 2000).

5. Cf. Jan-Heiner Tück, *Crux. Über die Anstößigkeit des Kreuzes* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2023): 258–69.

6. On the meaning and limit of *Nostra Aetate* 4, cf. Stefan Schreiber and Thomas Schumacher (eds.), *Antijudaismen in der Exegese? Eine Diskussion 50 Jahre nach Nostra Aetate* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2015).

7. Cf. Dorothee Recker, *Die Wegbereiter der Judenerklärung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Johannes XXIII., Kardinal Bea und Prälat Österreicher – eine Darstellung ihrer theologischen Entwicklung* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2007): esp. 103–200, as well as the chapter “Gottes Konsul,” in Peter Hebblethwaite, *Johannes XXIII. Das Leben des Angelo Roncalli* (Zürich et al.: Benziger, 1986): 215–56.

8. “. . . daß er, als er die Bilder von den Bulldozern sah, die in den gerade befreiten Nazi-Todeslagern die jüdischen Leichen in Massengräber schoben, ausgerufen habe: ‘Das ist der Leib Christi’”—Michael Wyschogrod, “Inkarnation aus jüdischer Sicht,” *Evangelische Theologie* 55 (1995): 13–28, at 24.

9. Cf. Walter Homolka, *Der Jude Jesus – Eine Heimholung* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 5th rev. edn 2021).

10. “Wir bekennen, dass der Bund Gottes mit dem jüdischen Volk einen Heilsweg zu Gott darstellt – auch ohne Anerkennung Jesu Christi”—Gesprächskreis “Juden und Christen” beim Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken, ed., *Nein zur Judenmission – Ja zum Dialog zwischen Juden und Christen* (on 9 March 2009): 5. Cf. Hubert Frankemölle, “Nein zur Judenmission – Ja zum Dialog: Zur Erklärung des Gesprächskreises ‘Juden und Christen’ beim ZdK von 2009,” *Catholica (Münster)* 64 (2010): 212–29; Wilhelm Breuning, “Nein zur Judenmission – ja zum Dialog zwischen Juden und Christen,” in *Im Angesicht der Anderen. Gespräche zwischen christlicher Theologie und jüdischem Denken*, ed. Florian Bruckmann and René Dausner Festschrift for Josef Wohlmuth (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013): 125–40.

11. Robert Spaemann, “Gott ist kein Bigamist,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 20, 2009.

12. Cf. Dieter Böhler, “Durften die Christen Israel gegen die Kirche austauschen?,” in *Sind Religionen austauschbar? Philosophisch-theologische Positionen aus christlicher Sicht*, ed. Johannes Arnold (Münster: Aschendorff, 2011): 1–25.

13. Cf. Jan-Heiner Tück, *Gottes Augapfel. Bruchstücke zu einer Theologie nach Auschwitz* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2nd edn 2016).

14. Cf. Peter von der Osten-Sacken, “Ein Empfehlungsbrief Christi? Zur Debatte um Judenmission, Judenchristen und

messianische Juden,” in *Das Heil der Anderen. Problemfeld “Judenmission,”* ed. Hubert Frankenmölle and Josef Wohlmuth, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, 238 (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2010): 77–112.

15. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “*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), para. 40, in <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-conl-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en.html> (accessed April 11, 2025).

16. Cf. Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005).

17. Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft* (Gesammelte Schriften, 4; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2017).

18. Cf., e.g., Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, ed., *Judenchristen – jüdische Christen – “messianische Juden.” Eine Positionsbestimmung des Gemeinsamen Ausschusses “Kirche und Judentum” im Auftrag des Rates der EKD* (2017), https://www.ekd.de/ekd_de/ds_doc/Messianische_Juden.pdf (accessed April 11, 2025).

19. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik IV/1: Die Lehre von der Versöhnung* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, 1953): 181. As early as 1946, Barth says, against theological efforts to deny Jesus’ Jewish roots: “Jesus was necessarily Jewish” / “Jesus war notwendig Jude”—Karl Barth, *Dogmatik im Grundriss* (Lectures held in the summer semester of 1946 at the University of Bonn; Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, 1947): 87.

20. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (see note 16), ch. 4; Antoine Lévy, *Jewish Church: A Catholic Approach to Messianic Judaism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2021).

21. Cf. Walter Kasper, *Jesus der Christus* (Walter Kasper – Gesammelte Schriften, 3; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2007); Walter Kasper, *Kirche und Gesellschaft* (Walter Kasper – Gesammelte Schriften, 16.1–2; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2019); Walter Kasper, *Juden und Christen – das eine Volk Gottes* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2020).