

Nostra Aetate and the Future of Jewish-Christian Relations¹

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Nostra Aetate [henceforth, NA] is the shortest of the Vatican II documents that emerged from the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-65)—it is only 41 Latin sentences.² As its English subtitle notes, the document reexamines the “Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” although almost half of NA concerns “the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock.”³ This focus reflects the problematic attitude of Christianity toward Judaism over the ages, and a desire to forge a new path, which is laudable, even sixty years later. For example, it observes that “The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant.” This is a tacit recognition of the continuing importance of what Jews call the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible, and reflects a rejection of the early Church figure Marcion, who rejected the OT as part of the Christian canon, and understood the God of the OT as fundamentally different and inferior to that of the NT. Even though he was excommunicated for his views, his perspective continues to be voiced.⁴

Many other elements in NA are positive—for example it notes “Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues”—and indeed NA opened the door to inter-religious dialogue and fostered later, more constructive documents. Many of these come from the Vatican’s *Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews*, which was set up as a result of NA. NA’s most important claim that “what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today”

¹ This article is a revised version of a lecture given on October 28, 2025, at Queens University of Charlotte, North Carolina, as part of the Greenspoon Center’s Interfaith Event to Celebrate 60th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate and 2025 Upstander Award. I would like to thank Mary Boys for commenting on an earlier draft of this talk.

² For recent literature on the council, including NA, see Massimo Faggioli and Catherine E. Clifford, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

³ All translations of NA are from https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

⁴ See <https://ehmanblog.org/christian-stereotypes-of-the-god-of-the-old-testament-marcion-is-alive-and-well-and-well-and-what-to-do-about-it-guest-post-by-marc-zvi-brettler/>.

and “the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God” countered centuries of Church teachings. In fact, this claim contradicts the way that a variety of NT texts had been interpreted, most especially Matthew 27:25: “Then the people as a whole answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’”⁵ Thus, NA’s claim that it “decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone” is very significant.

Yet, NA contains some claims that are less commendable. For example, the statement, taken from Ephesians, that “Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles making both one in Himself” seems to make Judaism disappear. “God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers” shows no appreciation for contemporary Judaism. And finally, the claim that “the Church is the new people of God” is supersessionist, reflecting replacement theology—an issue that I will engage later.

In terms of accomplishments and problems of NA, Mary Boys, the American Catholic Sister and Skinner and McAlpin Professor of Practical Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York, observed: “Nostra Aetate’s importance lies in what it inspired and initiated.”⁶ Yet, as she points out, it omits any reference to the Shoah (holocaust), and offers no sense of Christian culpability for that or for persecution of Jews over time.

Jewish-Christian relations did not end 60 years ago with NA: Many Catholic colleges now have chairs in Jewish studies, and many Jewish-Christian institutes have been formed. The Vatican has produced various subsequent documents and statements that concern Jews and Judaism.⁷ One that is less-known, and is often not considered when discussing Jewish-Christian relations, is the 1994 Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.”⁸ The head of the commission was the extremely learned Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI. Much of the document was written by the great American scholar, Father Joseph Fitzmyer, who taught for many years at Catholic University, who also produced a version of it with a brilliant Rashi-like commentary.⁹

This document presents a clear and forceful endorsement of the standard academic historical-critical study of the Bible—so-called “biblical criticism,” made possible by Vatican II. Its claims contrast strongly with those of Pope Pius X, who in 1907 called modernism, which included historical-critical study of the Bible “the

⁵ All NT translations follow the NRSVue.

⁶ Mary C. Boys, “Nostra Aetate at Sixty: Reviving a Moribund Decree,” at <https://geii.org/et-article/ital-icnostra-aetate-italic-at-sixty-reviving-a-moribund-decree/>. This entire article is excellent and important.

⁷ See esp. Gavin D’Costa, *Catholic Doctrines on the Jewish People after Vatican II* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁸ <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/interpretation-of-the-bible-in-the-church-2319>

⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission’s Document “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”*: Text and Commentary (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993).

synthesis of all heresies.”¹⁰ It also goes much farther than the 1965 “*Dei Verbum*” of the Second Vatican Council, which had claimed: “The principal purpose to which the plan of the old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ.”¹¹

In two places this 1994 document deals extensively with Jews. The first concerns different methods of biblical interpretation, which includes a section on Jewish biblical interpretation. This is remarkable, given how often non-Jewish biblical interpretation ignores Jewish scholarship, especially the difficult to comprehend medieval Jewish interpretation.

That section is followed by “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.” The segue to that section reads:

But, above all, the church reads the Old Testament in the light of the paschal mystery--the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ--who brings a radical newness and, with sovereign authority, gives a meaning to the Scriptures that is decisive and definitive (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 4). This new determination of meaning has become an integral element of Christian faith. It ought not, however, mean doing away with all attempts to be consistent with that earlier canonical interpretation which preceded the Christian Passover. One must respect each stage of the history of salvation. To empty out of the Old Testament its own proper meaning would be to deprive the New of its roots in history.

In other words, Jewish interpretive tradition, which looks at the Tanakh without recourse to the NT, is legitimate. The document later notes: “Jewish biblical scholarship in all its richness, from its origins in antiquity down to the present day, is an asset of the highest value for the exegesis of both Testaments, provided that it be used with discretion.” This section concludes very honestly by noting the fundamental differences between Jewish and Christian beliefs, yet claiming: “These two diverse starting points create, as regards the interpretation of the Scriptures, two separate contexts, which for all their points of contact and similarity are in fact radically diverse.” I do not hear a kumbaya moment here, where we all agree, but more importantly, an honest recognition of differences that must be taken into account with respect.

The section “Relationships Between the Old Testament and the New” is equally laudable and honest in its claim: “All this serves to show that within the one Christian Bible the relationships that exist between the New and the Old Testament are quite complex.”

“The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” concludes with a central point of historical-critical thought that emphasizes how problematic it is to say I am certainly right and you are certainly wrong, for there is rarely only one perspective on fundamental religious issues:

¹⁰ https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html

¹¹ https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, #15.

Finally, it is worth adding that within the New Testament, as already within the Old, one can see the juxtaposing of different perspectives that sit sometimes in tension with one another. . . . One of the characteristics of the Bible is precisely the absence of a sense of systematization and the presence, on the contrary, of things held in dynamic tension. The Bible is a repository of many ways of interpreting the same events and reflecting upon the same problems. In itself it urges us to avoid excessive simplification and narrowness of spirit.

I will later return to this very important claim, which also stands at the basis of my relationship as a practicing Jew to the Jewish Bible, the Tanakh: This work is an anthology, with many different opinions on almost every issue, and we must always ask: How do we decide, as individuals or a community, which text to accentuate, and which to minimize?¹²

I now turn to a better-known work on Jewish-Catholic relations, the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible," published in 2001.¹³ This is a long and very dense document, comprised of 87 sections with 353 footnotes. It corrects many of the deficiencies of NA; for example, it speaks explicitly of the "abominable crimes subjected to the Jews to a terrible ordeal that threatened their very existence throughout most of Europe" and "the extermination of the Jews (the *Shoah*) during the Second World War," and is honest from its very beginning about supersession in the NT and Christian tradition. It repeats from the 1994 document that "the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one." Most significantly, it acknowledges the problematic nature of the depiction of Jews in the NT, claiming that such statements do not make truth claims about all Jews for all times.

This document is not easy reading, but is rewarding—for it goes much further than NA. It notes, for example, that within the NT, "To the questions of whether the election of Israel remains valid, Paul gives two different answers." In other words, this document does not endorse or highlight the idea that Israel has been replaced or superseded by the early Christ-believers, one possible reading of sections of Paul. It goes further, explicitly stating: "The NT never says that Israel has been rejected," noting that the new covenant of the NT "is in continuity" with the Old and that "Israel continues to be in a covenant relationship with God because the covenant-promise is definitive and cannot be abolished."

The final section, "Pastoral Orientations" is especially laudatory. It says: "Real anti-Jewish feeling, that is, an attitude of contempt, hostility and persecution of the Jews as Jews, is not found in any New Testament text and is incompatible with its

¹² Concerning this issue, see Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 279-283 ("Afterward: Reading the Bible as a Committed Jew") and Marc Z. Brettler, "Biblical Authority: A Jewish Pluralistic View," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 25-36.

¹³ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html

teaching,” claiming that the passages that condemn Jews and Judeans in the NT do so for rhetorical value within a particular historical context, and are not condemning Jews and Judaism for eternity. Much of the document’s concluding paragraph merits quotation:

The fact that the New Testament is essentially a proclamation of the fulfilment of God’s plan in Jesus Christ, puts it in serious disagreement with the vast majority of the Jewish people who do not accept this fulfilment. The New Testament then expresses at one and the same time its attachment to Old Testament revelation and its disagreement with the Synagogue. This discord is not to be taken as “anti-Jewish sentiment” ... Although profound, such disagreement in no way implies reciprocal hostility. ... Dialogue is possible, since Jews and Christians share a rich common patrimony that unites them. It is greatly to be desired that prejudice and misunderstanding be gradually eliminated on both sides, in favour of a better understanding of the patrimony they share and to strengthen the links that bind them.

The final Catholic document that I will comment on was written by the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews and published a decade ago: “‘THE GIFTS AND THE CALLING OF GOD ARE IRREVOCA-BLE’ (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of ‘Nostra aetate.’”¹⁴ It moves beyond NA in significant ways, even wondering if the relationship between Jews and Christians is so close that the term “interreligious dialogue” might not be an appropriate term. It tweaks the position of NA, and the Catholic Church, concerning replacement theology:

23. The Church is called the new people of God (cf. “*Nostra aetate*”, No.4) but not in the sense that the people of God of Israel has ceased to exist. The Church “was prepared in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant” (“*Lumen gentium*”, 2). The Church does not replace the people of God of Israel, since as the community founded on Christ it represents in him the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel. This does not mean that Israel, not having achieved such a fulfilment, can no longer be considered to be the people of God. “Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or cursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures” (“*Nostra aetate*”, No.4).

¹⁴ <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crrr/documenti-della-commissione/en.html>

See the discussion of the annotated version of this document in Philip A. Cunningham, “The Sources Behind the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 12 (2017): 1–21, and the discussion of its central text in Mark D. Nanos, “The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable: Romans 11:29 and Christian-Jewish Relations,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 11 (2016): 1–20.

In places where some inevitable conflict between Judaism and Christianity is imagined to exist, it evokes the image of “divine mystery.” For example, it claims: “That the Jews are participants in God’s salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery.”¹⁵ All of these clarifications of NA are most welcome from a Jewish perspective.

As the recently published *A Documentary History of Jewish-Christian Relations: From Antiquity to Present Day*¹⁶ illustrates, the Jewish community has produced many fewer documents than the Christian community. In her chapter dealing with 1948-1978, Karma Ben-Johanan includes a text by Martin Buber as her second document—the well-known passage from Buber’s *Two Types of Faith*, where he notes: “From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother.”¹⁷ The small number of Jewish sources is partially explained by her tenth source, R. Joseph Ber Soloveitchik’s famous “Confrontation” article from 1964, published in the Orthodox Jewish journal *Tradition*—during the time the Second Vatican Council was convening, while NA was being discussed.¹⁸ There, he eschews, and some would say, prohibits, in the wake of the Shoah, Jewish-Christian dialogue on theological matters. He concludes by stating “I hope and pray that our friends in the community of the many will sustain their liberal convictions and humanitarian ideals by articulating their position on the right of the community of the few to live, create, and worship God in its own way, in freedom and with dignity.”¹⁹ In other words: Dear Christians: Please leave us, a beleaguered, recently decimated, religious minority, alone.

Given the tremendous prestige of Soloveitchik, especially within the Orthodox world, his proclamation was very influential for decades, especially within Orthodoxy. But not all Jewish scholars agreed with him; in 1966 R. Abraham J. Heschel published “No Religion is an Island”²⁰—the title itself suggests his differences with Soloveitchik. Heschel argues “We must choose between interfaith or inter-nihilism” And “Parochialism has become untenable,” and, most remarkably, “In this aeon diversity of religions is the will of God.”²¹

As Mary Boys shows in her chapter in *A Documentary History of Jewish-Christian Relations*,²² the last fifty years have seen more engagement by Jews with interfaith matters; she includes, for example, the 2020 book I co-wrote with Amy-Jill Levine: *The Bible With and Without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the*

¹⁵ It uses the term “mystery” a total of nineteen times!

¹⁶ *A Documentary History of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

¹⁷ Karma Ben-Johanan, “The State of Israel to the Election of Pope John Paul II,” in *A Documentary History of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 397-451; the quote is from 405.

¹⁸ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” *Tradition* 6, no. 2 (1964): 5–28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion Is an Island,” *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review* 21, no. 2 (January 1966): 117-134.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 119, 119, 126.

²² Kessler and Wenborn, eds., *A Documentary History of Jewish-Christian Relations*, 452-504.

Same Stories Differently.²³ Two documents stand out from this recent period, and show how far we have come from Soloveitchik's demand of isolationism.²⁴

The first deserves its own anniversary celebration—this is the 25th anniversary of *Dabru Emet*:²⁵ A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity, promulgated on Sept 10, 2000.²⁶ It was written by four professors, David Novak of University of Toronto, Peter Ochs of the University of Virginia, the late Michael Signer of Notre Dame, and the late Tikva Frymer-Kensky of the University of Chicago, and signed by over 200 rabbis and Jewish academics. It opens by speaking of “a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish and Christian relations.” It in many places mirrors Catholic and other Christian statements, stating, for example:

Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book — the Bible (what Jews call “Tanakh” and Christians call the “Old Testament”). Turning to it for religious orientation, spiritual enrichment, and communal education, we each take away similar lessons: God created and sustains the universe; God established a covenant with the people Israel, God’s revealed word guides Israel to a life of righteousness; and God will ultimately redeem Israel and the whole world. Yet, Jews and Christians interpret the Bible differently on many points. Such differences must always be respected.

The claim that the disagreement about who the true redeemer, “will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other; nor by exercising political power over the other” is especially remarkable, given that many Jews have claimed over the ages that Christological interpretation of the Tanakh is simply wrong.

Fifteen years later, in December 2015, a group of 25 Orthodox rabbis promulgated “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians”; subsequently, other Orthodox rabbis have signed this text. It is not as far-reaching as *Dabru Emet*, but is noteworthy, especially given R. Soloveitchik’s “Confrontation” essay. It opens:

After nearly two millennia of mutual hostility and alienation, we Orthodox Rabbis who lead communities, institutions and seminaries in Israel, the United States and Europe recognize the historic opportunity now before us. We seek to do the will of our Father in Heaven by accepting the hand offered to us by our Christian brothers and sisters. Jews and Christians must work together as partners to address the moral challenges of our era.

²³ See the excerpt on pp. 499-500.

²⁴ For a discussion of rejection of Soloveitchik by his own students, see Daniel Ross Goodman, *Soloveitchik's Children: Irving Greenberg, David Hartman, Jonathan Sacks, and the Future of Jewish Theology in America* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2023), 107-121.

²⁵ This is Hebrew for “speak truth.”

²⁶ <https://www.cjir.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/jewish/dabru-emet>

It took half a century for some part of Jewish Orthodoxy to “accept the hand offered to us by our Christian brothers and sisters,” but it did happen. Like the Catholic documents to which it responds, it focuses on precedents to justify this change.

Several very recent academic publications also deserve particular celebration in the context of the Sixtieth anniversary of NA. Here I will mention only four, all from the last five years.

The first is *The Pharisees*, edited by Father Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine.²⁷ The Pharisees are often viewed negatively in Christian popular imagination, as I learned after a student of mine called my attention to the children’s song, “I don’t wanna be a Pharisee’ Cause a Pharisee ain’t fair, you see.” This scholarly but readable book even contains a chapter by the late Pope Francis; it offers an important corrective to the popular notion of Pharisees as arch-villains, but I doubt that the song will be revised in light of this book.

The second book is the 2022, *Protestant Bible Scholarship: Antisemitism, Philosemitism and Anti-Judaism*.²⁸ It offers many examples of antisemitism in Protestant scholarship—including in some of the most fundamental research tools in the field that continue to be widely used, such as the *TDNT*, edited by the Nazi Gerhard Kittel. These articles are chilling to read. And I would note that the recent issue of the biblical journal *Interpretation*, dedicated to Antisemitism, offers contemporary examples of antisemitic biblical scholarship, including an opening essay by Amy-Jill Levine and me, “Antisemitism in Biblical Interpretation: Causes, Examples, Suggestions.”²⁹ I applaud this journal’s editor, Samuel Adams, for putting together this thematic issue.

The third book, *Judeophobia and the New Testament: Texts and Contexts*, was published a few months ago.³⁰ The editors chose a brilliant cover: Albrecht Dürer’s 1506 *Christ Among the Doctors*, which illustrates the Jews as aged, outdated, grotesque, and other; its essays covering every book of the NT and some additional early Christian material argue that in many cases these early sources are not themselves antisemitic, although they are traditionally interpreted as so. The contributors make this argument to varying degrees of success, but this accessible book’s main goal, to alleviate antisemitism, is praiseworthy.

And finally, I would like to note that the third edition of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* will be published in the first half of 2026, with new and additional articles that bear on Jewish-Christian relations.

I would like to conclude by briefly addressing the issue of Christian supersessionism, which has been widely discussed in NT scholarship, and in Jewish-

²⁷ Joseph Seivers and Amy-Jill Levine, eds., *The Pharisees* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

²⁸ Arjen F. Bakker, René Bloch, Yael Fisch, Paula Fredriksen, and Hindy Najman, eds. *Protestant Bible Scholarship: Antisemitism, Philosemitism and Anti-Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

²⁹ Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, “Antisemitism in Biblical Interpretation: Causes, Examples, Suggestions,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 79, no. 3 (July 2025): 220–233.

³⁰ Sarah E. Rollens, Eric M. Vanden Eykel, and Meredith J. C. Warren, eds., *Judeophobia and the New Testament: Texts and Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2025).

Christian Dialogue.³¹ I am critical of this fundamental Christian idea, which in its strongest form erases me, an observant Jew, as superseded or replaced. But first, I would like to cite a principle—not original to me, and central to all interreligious dialogue: It is fair and important to criticize the other—only that brings honest dialogue and understanding, BUT—only after you have engaged in soul-searching and have shown a willingness to criticize your own tradition.³²

It is therefore important to note that Christian supersessionism is one of two elephants in the room while discussing Jewish-Christian relations. The other is the Jewish claim of chosen-ness. This theological idea is deeply embedded in the Bible; it is expressed most clearly in Deuteronomy, especially in Deuteronomy 14:2 “For you are a people consecrated to the LORD your God: the LORD your God chose you from among all other peoples on earth to be His treasured people.”³³ It is often emphasized in the Jewish liturgy; the Friday night *kiddush*, the blessing over the wine, for example, reads: “Blessed are You God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments and was pleased with us. And His holy Sabbath, with love and pleasure, He gave us for a heritage, a commemoration of the work of creation. . . . For us have You chosen and us have You sanctified from among all the peoples. And Your holy Sabbath with love and pleasure You gave us for a heritage.”³⁴ The many liturgical examples expressing chosen-ness are so important because these are oft-recited words that enter the psyche.

And I will admit that these texts make me squirm, for they often imply, or might imply, some sort of innate Jewish superiority.

In the last few centuries, and especially the last few decades, I have good company in my discomfort. Some of the liberal liturgies have removed or revised these references.³⁵ Several Jewish thinkers, such as Jon Levenson and the late David Hartman, have viewed chosen-ness not as implying that Jews are better, but having

³¹ A good starting point for defining and examining supersessionism in Jewish-Christian relations is R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism” and “Post-Supersessionism,” and Peter Ochs, “Replacement Theology,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 350–351, 389–391, 412–414. For more recent treatments, see Gavin D’Costa, “Supersessionism: Harsh, Mild or Gone for Good?” *European Judaism* 50, no. 1 (2017): 99–107; David Novak, “Supersessionism Hard and Soft,” *First Things*, February 2019; Matthew A. Urdanette, “Progressive Supersessionism,” in *Christian Theology and the Status of the Jewish People: A New Way Forward?*, ed. E. J. Levine and Mark S. Kinzer (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), 115–132; and Matthew Burdette, “Progressive Supersessionism,” *First Things*, October 1, 2024.

³² Marc Zvi Brettler, “What Bible, Whose Bible: Studying the Scripture of Others,” *SCJR* 19/1 (2024), available at <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/scjr/article/view/18855>.

³³ I have used the NJPS translation for all passages from the Tanakh.

³⁴ Translation follows https://www.sefaria.org/Siddur_Ashkenaz%2C_Shabbat%2C_Shabbat_Evening%2C_Kiddush.8?lang=bi.

³⁵ The Reconstructing Judaism (formerly “Reconstructionist”) movement, for example, replaces the blessing traditionally recited before reading or studying the Torah, “who chose us from all the nations” with “who has drawn us to Your service.” The 1895 Reform *Union Prayer Book* omitted this blessing, although the more recent Reform *Mishkan T’filah* (2007) has restored it.

special obligations.³⁶ Yet, to my mind, this does not comport well with the majority of the Tanakh and classical rabbinic texts, where chosen-ness is a central notion, and reflects the idea of “better-than.”

But—and this is a very central “but” that I alluded to earlier, the Tanakh is an anthology—just like the NT—and it contains texts which downplay or perhaps even polemicize against the notion of Israelite chosen-ness. The clearest of these is Amos 9:7: “To Me, O Israelites, you are just like the Ethiopians—declares the LORD. True, I brought Israel up from the land of Egypt, but also the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir.” Israel here is not at all special or chosen.

In the same way, I think it is best to acknowledge that supersessionism is a big part of the NT and Christian tradition, as Amy Jill Levine does in “Supersessionism: Admit and Address Rather than Debate or Deny.”³⁷ We can put supersessionist statements in their historical context, and can use scholarly terms to debate just how supersessionist, e.g., Matthew, or John, or Hebrews, or Romans is; we can decide if terms like “soft, progressive, or mild” supersessionism—to choose three that have been used—are appropriate or not.³⁸ But supersessionism is present in the NT, and certainly in later Christian tradition—and it is not always merely rhetorical.³⁹ But, as illustrated by the body-language of the modern statue from Saint Joseph’s Seminary, “Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time”⁴⁰ erected in honor of the 50th anniversary of NA, we can overcome supersessionism. That statue is especially remarkable for its contrast to the medieval tradition of the triumphant church versus the downcast synagogue.

Non- or even anti- supersessionist traditions are found in the NT, and in later Christian tradition. Romans 11 for example, opens: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” Later in the chapter, Paul notes; “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”—a verse used in the title of the Vatican document of ten years ago. So—Judaism and Christianity share a dilemma: What do you do when your central text is contradictory: Judaism contains texts adumbrating chosen-ness and those insisting that Israel is like all the other nations; Christianity insists that Israel both has and has not been superseded.

I am a biblical scholar, not a theologian. But I think that the correct solution in both cases is to (1) admit that our traditions contain certain problematic theological

³⁶ See esp. Jon D. Levenson, “Election and the Problem of Particularity” in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 137–154, and David Hartman, whose reinterpretation of chosen-ness, emphasizing responsibility and ethical obligation rather than privilege, is articulated in *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1997), 45–68.

³⁷ Amy-Jill Levine, “Supersessionism: Admit and Address Rather than Debate or Deny,” *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 155, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020155>. Note especially her comment: “It might be better for Jewish-Christian relations were each group to admit that their texts are in many places supersessionist rather than engage in exegetical gymnastics to have the texts say otherwise.”

³⁸ See n. 31, above.

³⁹ See esp. Levine, “Supersessionism.”

⁴⁰ <https://www.sju.edu/college-arts-and-sciences/ijcr/synagoga-ecclesia>

ideas;⁴¹ (2) to show the full range of traditions and counter-traditions; (3) to explain why this diversity exists;⁴² and (4—and most importantly) to argue that we, in 2025, need to follow the “better” traditions, even if they are minority traditions. That is how, I believe, we can best celebrate the work begun in NA and the following Christian and Jewish statements, and can have an ethical, honest, and constructive interreligious dialogue. Such dialogue is especially important now, given that, as noted in the title of a recently published book, antisemitism has been, and still is, an American “tradition.”⁴³

⁴¹ For this and the following point, see my “Destroying Amalek” at <https://futureofthepastlab.com/2024/07/06/destroying-amalek/> and Brettler, “What Bible, Whose Bible” n. 32, above.

⁴² This is the tremendous power and importance of historical-critical study of scripture.

⁴³ Pamela S. Nadell, *Antisemitism, an American Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2025).