

The Logos at Sinai: Orthodox Christianity and the Covenant That Was Never Revoked

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I. Opening: A Different Kind of Latecomer

Let me begin with an acknowledgement that might seem like an unpromising way to open a paper.

Orthodox Christianity has been slower than Rome and the Protestant churches of the German-speaking world to engage in formal, sustained theological dialogue with Judaism. The reasons are well documented: a decentralised ecclesiology with no single authority capable of speaking for the tradition as a whole; the suppression of theological life under communist regimes across much of the Orthodox world for most of the twentieth century; the political entanglements of minority Christian communities in the Middle East, for whom the Arab-Israeli conflict makes certain theological conversations almost impossible to have; and a deep traditionalism regarding the patristic inheritance, which contains texts whose relationship to Judaism is, to put it carefully, complicated.

All of this is real, and none of it should be minimised.

But I want to resist the frame that follows almost automatically from this acknowledgement, the frame in which Orthodox theology is a latecomer that needs to catch up, that needs to reach the level already achieved by the Second Vatican Council and *Nostra Aetate* on the one hand,¹ and by the German Protestant churches' reckoning with the Shoah on the other. Those are specific trajectories, shaped by specific histories: the institutional machinery of the Roman Catholic Church, the particular guilt of German Christendom, the post-war Western European context in which Jules Isaac and Pope John XXIII had their decisive conversation.² They are not universal starting points, and they are not the ceiling of what is possible within this dialogue.

Orthodox Christianity brings a different genealogy, different resources, and a different set of questions. I want to suggest in this paper that the contribution of Orthodox theology to Jewish-Christian dialogue is not to approximate what others have already achieved, valuable as that achievement is, but to do something that none of the other traditions is fully equipped to do. Not because Orthodoxy is superior, but because it is different, in ways that turn out to matter enormously for the questions this dialogue most needs to address.

The thesis I want to argue is this. Orthodox Christianity understands itself to stand in direct continuity with the apostolic church of the first centuries, and it is that continuity, together with the Logos theology, the ecclesiology, and the mystical inheritance it has preserved, that gives it the resources for a claim that Christian theology has not yet fully articulated: that Jewish existence, worship, and Torah observance are not superseded, but are Israel remaining Israel before God, and that this enduring life is not incidental to the church, but the very condition of its own existence as the nations gathered to worship Israel's God.

II. Naming the Real Problem

To understand why that thesis matters, we need to look at what post-Shoah Jewish-Christian dialogue has actually been trying to solve.

¹ *Nostra Aetate* §4, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Second Vatican Council (28 October 1965).

² Jules Isaac met Pope John XXIII on 13 June 1960 to present his research on Christian anti-Jewish teaching and to request a revision of Catholic doctrine on the Jewish people. The conversation is widely regarded as a proximate cause of the inclusion of the declaration on the Jews in the Council's agenda.

The dominant frame has been Jules Isaac's *enseignement du mépris*, the "teaching of contempt": that centuries of Christian theological contempt for Judaism had conditioned the cultural soil in which modern racial antisemitism took root and flourished.³ An entrenched Christian anti-Judaism meant there was no resistance when the murderous machinery arrived. This diagnosis drove the remarkable transformation of official Catholic teaching at the Second Vatican Council, and of Protestant teaching in the German churches in the decades that followed.

But the teaching of contempt is a symptom. Behind it lies a more fundamental question, one the post-Shoah reckoning has sometimes addressed and sometimes deflected: what do we actually believe about God's covenant with Israel, and what is the church in relation to that covenant? If the church's long history of contempt was not simply a moral failure but a theological one, then the remedy is not only repentance for the rhetoric but recovery of the truth the rhetoric obscured.

Within Orthodox Christianity specifically, that recovery has been complicated by a genuine debate. One position argues that supersessionism is too blunt an instrument: the patristic tradition, read carefully, is far more complex than a flat supersessionism model allows. Fulfilment, for the fathers, is not forgottenness. That argument is important and I largely accept it. But the reality of a diminished theological status for post-biblical Judaism is present in the tradition and must be honestly faced. The question is what account we can give, from within Orthodox theology, of the ongoing life of the Jewish people before God: not covenantal status in the abstract, but Jewish existence as it is actually lived. That is the question Ruth Langer, a Jewish liturgical scholar in long conversation with Orthodox theologians, has identified as the one Orthodox theology has not yet fully resolved.⁴ I want to suggest that the resources to resolve it are already present in the inheritance, waiting to be drawn out.

III. The "Within Judaism" Scholarship and Its Orthodox Resonances

The theological resources I want to draw on are old, but the scholarly conversation that has made them newly visible is recent. Over the past three or four decades, a significant body of New Testament scholarship has converged on a set of claims about Christian origins that are, taken together, both historically compelling and theologically transformative. The scholars associated with this work, Mark Nanos, Paula Fredriksen, Amy-Jill Levine, Matthew Thiessen, and many others, are sometimes grouped under the description of the "within Judaism" school, and it is their work I want to draw on here.⁵

The foundational claim is at once obvious and, once genuinely received, completely disorienting. The New Testament is not a post-Jewish collection of documents. It is the largest surviving body of Jewish literature from the late Second Temple period. Every one of its authors, as far as we can tell, was Jewish. The communities it addresses were composed of

³ Jules Isaac, *L'Enseignement du mépris: vérité historique et mythes théologiques* (Fasquelle, 1962); English translation: *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, trans. Helen Weaver (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

⁴ Langer made this point as part of a Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology conference: "Jewish-Christian Relations and Orthodox Theology: Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology 2023," 9 June 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Kwnk-ZZZzs>. See also, among her works, *Cursing the Christians? A History of the Birkat HaMinim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ Representative works include: Mark Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle and His Interpreters* (Fortress, 2015); Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagan's Apostle* (Yale University Press, 2017); Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (HarperOne, 2006); Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Jews and gentiles navigating together what it meant to worship the God of Israel in the light of the conviction that the messianic age had arrived. The earliest Jesus movement was not a breakaway from Judaism. It was a movement within Judaism, a messianic Jewish movement in the process, protracted, contested, and historically complex, of incorporating non-Jewish members.

This requires a methodological shift that is demanding to internalise. In Mediterranean antiquity, what we call religion and what we call ethnicity were not separable categories: they were two names for the same complex of identity. To be a Jew was to observe the ancestral requirements of Torah, and those customs were simultaneously the expression of devotion toward Israel's God and the marks of Jewish belonging. When Paul insists that his gentile communities abandon the worship of their ancestral gods and honour the God of Israel alone, he is not offering a law-free gospel. He is demanding the most socially conspicuous and politically dangerous of all Jewish commitments: exclusive loyalty to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Paul did not convert from Judaism to Christianity. There was, in the first century, no Christianity to convert to. He came to understand that what he had always expected as a faithful Jew was now happening: the Messiah had come, and the age foretold by the prophets, in which the nations would at last be gathered to worship the God of Israel, had begun. His mission to the gentiles was not the founding of a new religion. It was the announcement that the eschatological moment had arrived.

The ecclesiological consequence of this reading is far-reaching. The church is not Israel's replacement. It is what the prophets of Israel foretold when they envisioned the nations streaming to Zion: the fulfilment of Zechariah's vision of ten people from every nation taking hold of a Jew's cloak and saying, "Bring us to your God" (Zechariah 8:23), and of Isaiah's mountain to which all the nations will come (Isaiah 2:2–4). The nations enter the people of God as nations, grafted among Israel's branches, not in the place of them.

That last point is textually precise. Paul's extended allegory of the olive tree in Romans 11 has been consistently misread in ways that import supersessionist assumptions into the text. When Paul describes what has happened to certain natural branches, he uses the Greek verb *eklaō*, bent, cracked, or broken in such a way that the branch remains attached, as a fractured limb that has not been severed. When he warns the wild olive shoot against arrogance, he reaches for a different and unmistakably harsher word, *ekkoptō*, to lop off, to fell. Most translations have imported the severity of the second word back into the first, transforming a passage about temporary dislocation into one about permanent excision. Read with the Greek distinction restored, the natural branches are bent aside, temporarily, to allow the wild shoot to be inserted among them: the literal meaning of *en autois*, despite its frequent mistranslation as "in their place."⁶ Israel is present on the tree, sheltered while the nations are being gathered, the gathering itself being, in Paul's word, a mystery, something whose fullness has not yet been revealed.

The "within Judaism" scholarship has done the exegetical work of recovering Paul's actual argument. What it has not done, because it is not its task, is to answer the question that follows from within a Christian theological framework: if Israel remains Israel, if its covenant is irrevocable, if the nations have been welcomed into the worship of Israel's God without displacing those who were already there, then what account can Christianity give of the

⁶ On the Greek distinction between *eklaō* and *ekkoptō* in Romans 11, and the translation issues surrounding *en autois* (11:17), see Mark Nanos, "'The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable' (Romans 11:29): If So, How Can Paul Declare that 'Not All Israelites Truly Belong to Israel' (9:6)?" *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 11(1) (September 2016).

ongoing religious life of the Jewish people? Not only their covenantal status in the abstract, but the synagogue, the Torah reading cycle, the daily prayers? Do these have ongoing theological validity from within a Christian framework, or are they honoured expressions of a living tradition that Christianity can only regard with respectful incomprehension?

Before I try to answer that question, I want to note that Orthodoxy receives the “within Judaism” scholarship not reluctantly, as an uncomfortable revision of familiar assumptions, but naturally, as the recognition of something already present in its own inheritance. Orthodox liturgical life has never treated the Exodus as a superseded prelude: Pascha re-enacts the passage through those same waters, Pentecost stands in conscious continuity with Sinai, the type is not discarded but specified. And unlike Rome, Orthodoxy carries no single magisterial pronouncement that has closed the question of Israel’s covenant in a supersessionist direction. The recovery I am proposing requires no repudiation of binding doctrinal commitments, only the willingness to follow the tradition’s own logic further than it has previously been taken.

Orthodox ecclesiology, with its emphasis on unity-in-diversity among the local churches, already makes room for the idea that different peoples can worship the one God while retaining their distinct identities: unity does not require uniformity. The nations do not become Israel; Israel does not become the nations. Each retains what it is, within the one household of the God of Abraham.

But it is in the patristic Logos theology that the most decisive resource lies, and it is there that I want to turn now.

IV. Three Distinctively Orthodox Resources

1. Logos Theology: The Christological Foundation

Orthodox patristic theology confesses something that is, on reflection, quite extraordinary, and whose implications have not yet been fully drawn.

It confesses that the second person of the Trinity, the Word (in Greek the Logos, in Aramaic the Memra), is the one who called Abraham out of Ur and made a covenant with him. The Logos is the one who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, who spoke from Sinai and gave the Torah, who addressed the prophets, who was present with Israel throughout the entire breadth of the biblical narrative. This is a foundational conviction of patristic Christology, expressed with particular clarity in Justin Martyr’s argument from the theophanies,⁷ extensively developed by Irenaeus,⁸ and made structurally central by Athanasius in his defence of Nicene faith.⁹ When Paul writes that “the rock that accompanied Israel in the wilderness was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4), he is expressing what becomes a core premise of patristic theology: every encounter between God and Israel in the Scriptures is an encounter with the pre-incarnate Logos.

The Incarnation, on this account, is not the moment at which the Logos enters Israel’s story. It is the moment at which the Logos, who has been present in Israel’s story from the beginning, becomes visible in a new and decisive way, becomes flesh, enters fully into human vulnerability, and enacts in his own person the recapitulation of all that Israel’s story had been moving toward. The continuity is absolute. The Logos who gave the Torah is the one who, in the fullness of time, was born of a Jewish woman in a Jewish land.

⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapters 56–62.

⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* IV.7.4; IV.10.1; IV.20.9–11.

⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Orations against the Arians*, especially I.11–13; II.22; II.78–82.

This has a consequence that Orthodox tradition has been remarkably slow to draw, perhaps because drawing it fully requires a certain courage. If Torah was given by the Logos, then faithfulness to Torah is faithfulness to Christ, whether or not the one who is faithful identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnation of that same Logos. The Jewish person who keeps covenant with the God of Israel, who studies Torah as the word of the living God, who observes the commandments as the form of a covenantal relationship that the Logos himself established, is in a real and theologically precise sense in relationship with the one whom Christians confess as the Son of God.

It is important to be clear about the direction of this claim. It is addressed to Orthodox Christians, not to Jewish people: it is a theological imperative for how Orthodox Christians must understand and relate to their Jewish neighbours, not an assertion about how Jews should understand themselves. Its practical consequence is significant: if this account is correct, Orthodox Christians should not merely tolerate Jewish communities or extend them formal respect, but actively seek their safety and security, befriend them, and learn from them.

This is emphatically not religious pluralism, the claim that all sincere religious practice leads to the same generic divine reality. My own confession of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, the Word made flesh, is the centre of my faith and my life, and I hold it without reservation. The claim I am making concerns this people, this covenant, this Torah: the particular people through whom the Logos chose to work, and whose covenantal relationship with the Logos was established long before the Incarnation and was not dissolved by it.

Paul makes the point with striking clarity from the gentile direction. In Ephesians, writing to gentile believers, he reminds them of what they had been before: “Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). The logic of the contrast is unmistakable: those who were already near, Israel, already possessed all these things. The Logos had been with them all along.

2. The Recovery of Bilateral Ecclesiology

What I have just described has deep historical roots. The tradition once knew it, and then, through a specific and traceable catastrophe, it was lost.

The earliest community gathered around the conviction that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel was, by every historical measure, a Jewish community. The Jerusalem *ekklēsia* under the leadership of Jacob (James), the brother of the Lord, whom the Orthodox tradition venerates as the first Bishop of Jerusalem, was thoroughly, observantly, unapologetically Jewish. Its members kept Torah, attended the Temple, and gathered in synagogues. To all of this they added the celebration of the Eucharist and the eschatological conviction that the Messiah had come and was coming again. They were Jews who believed in Jesus. They were not, in any meaningful sense of the term, members of a new religion.

When gentiles began to enter this community, the question debated at the council described in Acts 15 was not whether Jewish members should stop being Jews: no one raised that question. The question was whether gentile members needed to become Jews. The answer was no. Those streaming in from the nations entered the people of God as gentiles, grafted onto the holy root, among the branches, without being required to become the root. The result was Jews and gentiles together in the worship of the one God, each retaining their distinct identity, held together not by the erasure of difference but by the shared acknowledgement of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This bilateral vision was sustained as long as the Jewish *ekklēsia* in Jerusalem remained the living heart of the wider movement. After the Roman expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem following the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE, that centre was lost. The bishops of Jerusalem, whose Jewish names, Jacob, Simeon, Zachaeus, Tobias, Benjamin, had been the visible sign of a community rooted in Jewish identity, gave way to bishops with names like Marcus, Cassianus, and Publius: a shift the Orthodox tradition has actually preserved in its records,¹⁰ though without always drawing the theological conclusion it demands.

What was lost when the Jewish *ekklēsia* was destroyed was not a sociological feature of early Christianity. It was the embodied, visible refutation of the claim that the nations had replaced Israel. As long as a living, Torah-observant Jewish community stood at the heart of the church, that claim could not be made without being immediately confronted by the people whose continued existence gave it the lie. When that community was destroyed, not by theological decision but by Roman military force, the safeguard was removed. The door to replacement was opened not by theology but by empire.

One clarification is needed here. To recover this bilateral vision is not to suggest that the historical separation of Judaism and Christianity was simply a mistake requiring reversal, or that the two communities should somehow be reunited. What can be recovered is the story: the recognition of what the church is and why it cannot understand itself rightly without understanding its relationship to Israel. It is, in that sense, a parting of the story more than a parting of the ways.

The practical consequence for Jewish-Christian dialogue is significant. Orthodox Christians approaching the Jewish community are not approaching members of a rival tradition, or a superseded one, or a tradition that stands in need of completion by what Christians have to offer. They are approaching their elder partners in the single story of God's purposes for the world. It is not, at its deepest level, an interfaith encounter at all, but an encounter between two communities who together constitute the one covenant people of the one God.

3. Jewish Life and Worship as Ongoing Encounter with the Logos

These two foundations, the patristic Logos theology and the bilateral ecclesiology of nations alongside Israel, allow us to state more precisely the claim I introduced at the beginning: that Israel remaining Israel before God is not only not replaced, but forms an ongoing life in relation to the divine Logos, and that this life is the very condition under which the nations are gathered into the worship of Israel's God.

If the church exists as the nations gathered to the God of Israel, then the life of Israel before that God cannot be theologically inert; it must already be a living relation to the one whom Christians confess as the Logos.

This leads to a claim that, as far as I am aware, no Orthodox theologian has yet stated in quite these terms, but which follows with something approaching logical necessity from what the tradition already confesses: that the Jewish people's ongoing existence before God, their life gathered around Torah, their transmission of the covenant across the generations, their worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has genuine theological standing from within a Christian framework, not simply as a matter of historical continuity or moral recognition, but as an ongoing life before the Logos himself.

¹⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* IV, chapters 5 and 6. Eusebius notes the transition explicitly and names both the Jewish bishops and their gentile successors. Eusebius explicitly distinguishes the fifteen earlier "bishops of the circumcision" in Jerusalem from the later gentile bishops established after Hadrian's suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt and the exclusion of Jews from the city.

On the basis of the Logos theology I have described, that existence is not a relic, not a superseded preparation, not a noble but theologically inert survival. It is an ongoing life within the covenant that the Logos himself established, sustained by the same divine presence that accompanied Israel through the wilderness, spoke from Sinai, and addressed the prophets. When a Jewish family gathers around the Seder table, when a community assembles for morning prayer, when a scholar bends over the Torah, they are not simply maintaining an ancestral tradition. They are, in a real and theologically precise sense, living before the one whom Christians confess as the Son of God, within the relationship that God initiated with this people and has never revoked.

An obvious question follows. Does this render the identity of Jesus as the Messiah theologically irrelevant? It does not. The Incarnation is not the precondition for the Logos being with Israel: the Logos was with Israel long before the Incarnation. But the Incarnation is the revelation of who the Logos is, the full disclosure of the divine identity to and through human flesh, the moment at which the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob becomes visible in the face of a particular human being, and through that visibility opens the knowledge of God to the nations of the world. We from the nations have arrived at the knowledge of the one true God by this road and not by any other, and we cannot abstract that knowledge from the particular history of Jesus of Nazareth without losing it. But Israel's relationship to the Logos does not depend on that road, because Israel has been on the road with the Logos from the very beginning. To treat Jewish existence as a deficiency requiring Christian completion would be, to borrow Paul's image, to imagine that the cultivated olive tree needs to be replaced by the wild shoot that has been grafted among its branches. It would be a category error of the most fundamental kind.

The apophatic tradition adds one further dimension: the insistence that the fullness of God exceeds every human grasp of it, that the divine mystery is ultimately approached in unknowing rather than in propositional mastery. This creates the theological space within which Jewish and Christian life before God can be held together without either being dissolved into the other.

Jewish life moves toward a different eschatological horizon than Christian life. The synagogue looks toward messianic restoration in terms that do not include the confession of Jesus as the Messiah; the church looks toward the return of the one it already confesses. But the apophatic tradition invites us to hold this difference with humility. Both communities are, in the patristic image of the Exodus, still on the way, still in the wilderness between the Red Sea and the promised land, still being formed into the likeness of the God who called them, travelling toward a fullness that neither has yet fully apprehended, and which will, when it comes, be larger and more luminous than either has imagined.

There is, on this basis, a genuine conversation to be had between the mystical traditions of the two communities: between Orthodox *theosis* and Jewish *devekut*, between the sanctification of time in the liturgical office and in the Sabbath, between the traditions of Hesychasm and Kabbalah. These are not merely interesting parallels or accidental family resemblances. Alexander Golitzin, whose work on the Jewish roots of Eastern Christian mysticism is the most thorough we have, argues that the core vocabulary of Orthodox mystical theology, including *theosis* itself, the trinitarian images first articulated by first-century Jewish followers of Jesus, the Macarian interiorisation of Ezekiel's chariot-throne vision, and the language of divine light and glory, was not merely influenced by Jewish sources but was built from them.¹¹ The connection between Hesychasm and Kabbalah is not, on this account, a

¹¹ Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita* (Patriarchikon Hidryma Paterikon Meleton, 1994) and "Recovering the 'Glory of Adam': 'Divine Light' Traditions in the Dead

matter of two traditions that happened to develop similar ideas in parallel. It is a matter of two traditions drawing from a common well: the Second Temple mystical literature that fed both the synagogue and the church, and that neither has exhausted. These are the traces of that common source, carried forward by the one Logos who called Abraham, gave the Torah, became flesh, and remains the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

V. Conclusion: What Recovery Looks Like

I want to close with a word about what I am and am not proposing.

I am not proposing that Orthodox Christianity has, until now, been secretly post-supersessionist, and that all we need to do is dust off the tradition and present it in a better light. The history is too painful for that kind of apologetics. Orthodox Christians have perpetrated and enabled grievous harm against Jewish communities: pogroms, persecutions, forced conversions, and a theological rhetoric that did not cause the Holocaust but did nothing to prevent it, and in some places actively prepared the ground for it. A post-Shoah recalibration is not optional for Orthodox Christians. It is a matter of faithfulness to the truth of our own tradition, which means, among other things, the honesty to acknowledge that the tradition has been used in ways that betray it.

Nor am I proposing that the argument I have made in this paper is simply waiting, fully formed, in the patristic texts, needing only to be read more carefully. The reality of a diminished theological status for post-biblical Judaism is genuinely present in the inheritance, not merely projected onto it by careless modern readers. The polemical sharpening of the *adversus Iudaios* tradition, the anti-Jewish animus that runs through portions of Byzantine hymnography, the liturgical texts that set Jewish rejection against gentile praise: these are real, and they have had real consequences. The answer is not to jettison these texts but to distinguish, carefully and honestly, between the theophanic and covenantal core of the tradition and the polemical distortion that accreted around it in historical circumstances that are no longer ours. That work of distinction is demanding, and it has barely begun in most Orthodox communities.

What I am proposing is something more modest and, I think, more lasting: a direction of travel that allows the tradition's own deepest resources to be brought to bear on the question. The argument I have tried to make is not imported from elsewhere. It does not depend on accepting post-Shoah Catholic institutional developments, or the specific trajectory of German Protestant theology, valuable as both are. It arises from within Orthodox theology itself, from the Logos Christology of the Fathers, from the bilateral ecclesiology of the earliest Jerusalem community, from the apophatic tradition's resistance to premature resolution.

The claim this paper has tried to make, that the life of the Jewish people, their life gathered around Torah, their transmission of the covenant across the generations, their worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has ongoing theological validity not despite but because of what Orthodox Christology confesses, is not a claim that Orthodox theology has formally made. I do not think it requires a council to make it, because it does not require anything new to be confessed. It requires only the willingness to follow what is already confessed to its logical destination. The Logos called Abraham. The Logos gave the Torah. The Logos accompanied Israel. The Logos became flesh. The Logos remains the same, yesterday, today, and for ever. If those sentences are true, and Orthodox Christianity confesses that they are,

then what happens when a Jewish family gathers around the Seder table is an encounter with that same God, in the forms that God established, within the covenant that God has never revoked.

In the present moment, it is impossible to ignore that Jewish-Christian dialogue is increasingly shaped by political crises, not least in the aftermath of the seventh of October, and the descent into war, violence, and displacement that has followed throughout the region. These realities press urgently upon the conversation, and rightly so. But there is a danger in allowing the most difficult questions to set the terms of dialogue before the deeper theological narratives have been clarified. What I have tried to argue is that unless we first recover a truthful account of Israel, the church, and our shared life before God, we will inevitably misname the crises we are trying to address, and so risk speaking past one another at precisely the moment when clarity matters most.

This has a consequence for how Orthodox Christians understand themselves, not only for how they understand their Jewish neighbours. To recognise the synagogue as a place where the God we worship is worshipped is to recognise something about the church: that it is not the whole of God's covenant people, but a part of it, the part drawn from the nations, welcomed into a story that was already underway, sustained by a root it did not produce. The humility this recognition demands is not self-deprecation. It is theological accuracy. And it is, I think, the beginning of a dialogue that is genuinely mutual: not the stronger tradition generously extending recognition to the weaker, but two communities, shaped by a shared inheritance and a shared God, learning from each other what neither can fully see alone.

That mutuality has a name in the book of Zechariah. Ten people from every nation take hold of a Jew's cloak and say: bring us to your God. Not: we have arrived and will now explain your God to you. Not: your tradition is honourable but ours has superseded it. Simply: bring us. We from the nations are still, in that sense, on the way. We are still learning what it means to worship that God. We need Israel for that. We always have.