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**How do you teach it (In our day)?  
Examining Portrayals of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Religious Education.**

**Abstract**

Today, more than 50 years after the Second Vatican Council issued *Nostra Aetate* (1965), how well do Catholic RE curricula present Jews and Judaism? To answer that question this paper examines Catholic RE curriculum documents from 2 jurisdictions. It finds that their representations of Jews and Judaism, no matter how well meaning, rely on structures of thought, reinforced by normative Catholicism, that enable the conditions to reproduce supersessionist thinking and attitudes. Its conclusion argues that current Catholic RE curricula must confront the question of how to coordinate strong and generous presentations of Jews and Judaism with Christian teachings on fulfillment. No less, they must also confront the question of how to consider Judaism and Christianity as different only in kind, and not by degree.

**Introduction**

Contemporary Catholic religious education (henceforth: RE) sits within a context where the Church's attitude toward Jews and Judaism has changed. Possibly the greatest informant of Catholics' contemporary attitudes toward this relationship extends from the Second Vatican Council's (1962-65) *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate* [henceforth NA], 1965). This document sets aside past attitudes that disparaged Judaism and emphasizes instead that "God holds the Jews most dear," there is a common "spiritual patrimony" between them and Christians, and "the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures".<sup>1</sup> The educational implication here is that Catholic school curricula should present Jews and Judaism generously and in their strongest forms, but one of the challenges to meeting that goal involves confronting the topic of *supersessionism*.

The term *supersessionism* descends from the Latin phrase "to sit upon".<sup>2</sup> In the context of Jewish-Christian relations, that phrase applies to claims that Christianity has "'sat upon' Judaism by claiming to be the 'true Israel.'"<sup>3</sup> Its "hard" form boldly claims that Christianity is the "true

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<sup>1</sup> NA, #4.

<sup>2</sup> Vlach 2009, 58.

<sup>3</sup> Carroll 2001, 58.

Israel”<sup>4</sup> and has supplanted Judaism, the now allegedly “false Israel”.<sup>5</sup> Its “soft” (or “mild”) form, by contrast, relates a belief that “God has not annulled his everlasting covenant with the Jewish people, neither past nor present nor future”.<sup>6</sup> While Catholic teaching follows the “soft” variety, supersession remains problematic because no matter how one conceives of it, all varieties retain some notion that Christianity is an evolutionary graduate of Judaism.

The Catholic Church’s<sup>7</sup> supersessionist views, and its authorizing their expression in Catholic school curricula, is of interest to Jews, Catholics, and religious educators. They concern Jews because supersessionism depends on Catholic-centered portrayals of Judaism that impede considering how Jews define themselves.<sup>8</sup> This concern, in turn, obstructs Catholics’ ability to encounter Jews as religious persons, and so sits in tension with their institutional Church’s hope to engage Jews in inter-religious dialogue. Supersessionist content may be relatively subtle, as are claims that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament (henceforth OT), or it may be as strong and explicit as what the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states in its document, *Dominus Iesus*:

This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism “characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that ‘one religion is as good as another’” (*Redemptoris Missio*, #36). If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation* in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.<sup>9</sup>

As will be shown below, this attitude follows an assessment that Judaism is holy but purportedly ‘stalled’ behind Catholicism on the single path toward (Catholic-defined) salvation. Adopting this point of view, both within RE and beyond it, makes Catholic-initiated dialogue with Jews a disrespectfully one-sided proposition.

Catholics today are participants in today’s inter-religious world. This fact strongly implies that the most epistemically and morally adequate Catholic RE needs to attend directly to its inter-religious dimension. If Catholic RE proceeds without recognizing how Catholicism’s normative supersessionism positions Catholics in relationship with Jews, then Catholic RE risks falling into a soggily maintained pluralism. This paper examines two curricula from distinct contexts within

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<sup>4</sup> Michael 2008, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Michael 2008, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Novak 1999, 17.

<sup>7</sup> In this paper I use *church* to indicate its institutional expression through documents and authoritative offices. This delimitation excludes the whole People of God as another and distinct conception of *church*, and so does not answer the empirical question of how much and in what ways Catholics and sub-groups within Catholicism are aware of and respond to these institutional expressions.

<sup>8</sup> This point follows Mary Boys’ criticism of how *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* treats Jews and Judaism (2013, 102).

<sup>9</sup> CDF 2000, #22, italics original, my underlining.

English-speaking Catholicism where Catholic schools receive public support: the Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education curriculum from Australia,<sup>10</sup> and the Ontario Elementary and Secondary Catholic Religion curriculum from Canada,<sup>11</sup> for the purposes of comparing and contrasting how two different approaches to religious education encounter supersessionism. The close reading of these documents examines when and how they introduce Jews and Judaism, with what purpose, with what effect, and whether they present Jews and Judaism in their strongest and most generous terms. The findings from this examination lead to a conclusion that Catholic RE curriculum needs to be more attentive to supersessionism and its consequences.

### Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In her 2016 lecture, *Foundations and Debates in Anthropology*, anthropologist Paige West describes the major shift her field took away from comparatively ranking cultures and toward studying them in their own right.<sup>12</sup> This shift – *the ethnographic turn* – includes rejecting evolutionary frameworks that elevate the colonizer’s viewpoint and culture over Others. She relates an historical account of several thinkers whose models grade cultures from less to more ‘advanced,’ including proposals that they evolve through distinct stages of *savagery*, *barbarianism*, and *civilization* and cannot regress along this sequence: that is, they “are either moving forward or stalled” in their condition.<sup>13</sup> Anthropologist Catherine Pelissier shows how these modes of thought found congruence with Darwinism: “Judgments of superiority (of Western modes of thought) on the one hand, and deficiency or irrationality (of ‘primitive’ modes), on the other ... were part and parcel of evolutionary frameworks that employed the comparative method, whereby existing ‘primitives’ were held to represent our ancestors ... [who] are capable of ‘evolving’ to a ‘civilized’ state.”<sup>14</sup> One famous example of these models is Auguste Comte’s belief that cultures progressed through three theological stages – fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism – for explaining temporal phenomena before moving on to metaphysical and finally scientific modes.<sup>15</sup> William Hart observes a similar hierarchy in philosopher Georg Hegel’s pre-Darwinian belief that:

... Judaism is the Sublime Religion and Christianity is the Consummate Religion. Before and behind these religions, to the south and to the east, are the pre-Christian religions: (1) “Immediate or Natural Religion,” where Spirit has yet to extricate itself from nature—Spirit being the proper measure of “man”; (2) Mediated Religion, where the spiritual is elevated above the natural; and (3) Consummate Religion,

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<sup>10</sup> Brisbane Catholic Education (henceforth *Brisbane*) 2019. Brisbane Catholic schools receive approximately 80% government funding (Brisbane Catholic Education 2014, 2).

<sup>11</sup> Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (henceforth *ACBO*) 2012 & 2016. Ontario Catholic schools receive 100% government funding.

<sup>12</sup> West, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> West, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Pelissier 1991, 1991, 76-77.

<sup>15</sup> Macleod 2019, 148.

“religion that is for itself,” which is self-conscious, which can take itself as an object of inquiry.<sup>16</sup>

Pelissier attributes the turn away from these modes to Franz Boas’ revolutionary contention that cultures should instead *be understood in their own terms*, rather than in terms of grand narratives like evolution.<sup>17</sup> This revolution does some work to disrupt and displace Euro-centrism, and when applied to Christian-centric comparative understandings of religions (or what colonizers sometimes mistook as religion), it problematizes Christianity’s supersessionist claims.

### *Analyzing Supersessionism*

The distinction between “hard” and “soft” supersessionism, introduced above, can be analyzed further. Hard supersessionism has two kinds: *punitive* and *economic*, while *structural* supersessionism aligns with “soft” supersessionism.<sup>18</sup> Punitive supersessionism relies on a belief that “God has rejected the Jews because of their disobedience and their rejection of Christ,”<sup>19</sup> while economic supersessionism, by contrast, holds that Israel expires only because Jesus *arrives*, and not because he was *rejected*,<sup>20</sup> hence asserting Judaism’s irrelevance post-Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Finally, structural supersessionism “renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping Christian convictions about how God’s work as Consummator and as Redeemer engage humankind in universal and enduring ways.” Within Catholicism this feature is consistent with the fact that the Second Vatican Council rejected “[t]he notion of two independent paths to salvation.”<sup>22</sup> Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt thus maintain that: “Keeping with this [supersessionist] theology, the Christian exegesis, liturgy, and catechesis have represented the relation between the first and second testament in terms of old and new, temporary and definitive, shadow and reality.”<sup>23</sup> However, this implication is problematic because it takes for granted a static, first-century CE conception of Judaism. David Novak points out that today’s Judaism is different from the Second Temple Judaism of Jesus’ time: “In truth,” he writes, “*both* Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism come out of, and thereby supersede, a religion based on the Hebrew Bible, plus ... Second Temple theology ... [that] could be called ‘Hebraic Monotheism,’”<sup>24</sup> hence Jews and Judaism are not ‘stalled’ anywhere.

### *Analyzing Normative Catholicism*

In light of the above exposition on supersessionism, this following presentation of three documents issued in 1974, 1985, and 2015 by the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (henceforth CRRJ) represents the normative Catholic view toward Jews and

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<sup>16</sup> Hart 2002, 564.

<sup>17</sup> Pelissier 1991, 77.

<sup>18</sup> D’Costa 2017, 101.

<sup>19</sup> Vlach 2009, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Vlach 2009, 62.

<sup>21</sup> D’Costa 2017, 100.

<sup>22</sup> D’Costa 2017, 101.

<sup>23</sup> Moyaert & Pollefeyt 2010, 159.

<sup>24</sup> Novak 2019, 30.

Judaism. These documents have lengthy titles, and so for the sake of brevity I refer to 1974 as *Guidelines*, 1985 as *Notes*, and 2015 as *Reflection*.<sup>25</sup> To varying degrees, all three place Judaism within an evolutionary framework that depends on some kind of supersessionism. *Guidelines* reinforces NA's rejection of punitive and economic supersessionism and echoes its caution against misinterpretations of the OT that lead to distortions of Jews and Judaism: "The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition founded upon it must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbor (cf. Deut 6:5, Lev 19:18, Mt 22:34-40)."<sup>26</sup> It goes on to present a portrait of Judaism which is notable for acknowledging its ongoing vitality but then qualifying it against a distinctively Christian belief: "The history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem, but rather went on to develop a religious tradition. And, although we believe that the importance and meaning of that tradition were deeply affected by the coming of Christ, it is still nonetheless rich in religious values."<sup>27</sup> This phrasing sustains NA's remarkably fresh and positive change away from centuries of Christian anti-Judaism. At the same time, one should not allow its welcoming language to numb their critical reception; while this perspective acknowledges Judaism's holiness and prominent place in Christianity's past, its allusion to Jesus' profoundly changing that rich tradition retains the stance of structural supersessionism.

*Notes* continues using welcoming language to express sensitivity for Judaism as a living religion: "This concern for Judaism in Catholic teaching has not merely a historical or archaeological foundation. As the Holy Father [John Paul II] said, ... 'To assess [Judaism] carefully and in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people *as they are professed and practiced still today*, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church.'"<sup>28</sup> Alongside this statement, however, the CRRJ strongly rules out any idea of multiple paths toward salvation, stating: "Church and Judaism cannot then be seen as two parallel ways of salvation."<sup>29</sup> This position becomes clear in the next section, which provides a Christianized teleology for Jews by stating: "the definitive meaning of the election of Israel does not become clear except in the light of the complete fulfilment (Rom 9-11) and election in Jesus Christ."<sup>30</sup> Then later, it states that both Christians and Jews are preparing for this same event, where "the people of God of the Old and New Testament are tending towards a like end in the future: the coming or return of the Messiah, even if they start from *two different points of view*."<sup>31</sup> Here it is imperative to see how acknowledging "two different points of view" is consistent with rejecting the "two parallel ways" proposition. This linear formulation, where both members are at different places on the same path, can only work if one member sits closer to the path's end. Understanding the difference between Judaism and Christianity in this way – by *degree* instead of by *kind* – plainly aligns with an evolutionary model.

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<sup>25</sup> See full titles in the bibliography.

<sup>26</sup> CRRJ 1974, 7; see NA, #4.

<sup>27</sup> CRRJ 1974, 7; see also CRRJ 1985 at #15.

<sup>28</sup> CRRJ 1985, I at #3, emphasis added in original; see also IV at #1F.

<sup>29</sup> CRRJ 1985, I at #7.

<sup>30</sup> CRRJ 1985, II at #1.

<sup>31</sup> CRRJ 1985, II at #10, emphasis added.

*Reflection* is the only one of these documents that grapples directly with the supersessionism topic. Following NA, it disavows the punitive and economic varieties of this concept,<sup>32</sup> but its other statements remain consistent with *Guidelines*' and *Notes*' implications of structural supersessionism. *Reflection* also clearly reinforces *Notes*' rejection of the "two parallel ways" suggestion, stating that, "there are not two paths to salvation according to the expression, 'Jews hold to the Torah, Christians hold to Christ.'"<sup>33</sup> Although the Commission does not go so far as to announce its evolutionary commitment, other parts of *Reflection* easily reveal it. For instance, its article #32 argues that the OT presents a history of covenants that progressively supersede each other, from the Noahide to Abrahamic to Mosaic and the prophets.<sup>34</sup> The covenant of Jesus would simply fall naturally into this line, with the glaring fact that Jews do not adopt it. The Commission speaks to this fact by simply stating: "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 mystery."<sup>35</sup>

The most generous assessment of this weak appeal to "mystery" is that the Commission is unaware of its evolutionary attitude, and so struggles in this way to express its understanding of Judaism. Alternatively, it is also certainly possible that the CRRJ is aware of its evolutionary mindset but also recognizes the theological, moral, and political imprudence of declaring it. In this frame, it is notable that when considering "The Church's mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism," the Commission writes: "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."<sup>36</sup> In this context, that use of "unfathomable mystery" in reality only euphemistically disguises the Commission's supersessionist attitude. So sadly, Christians who assent to this document's teaching must either approach Jews with a determination to share this unwelcome judgment with them, or else paternalistically withhold it while tacitly allowing it to guide their attitudes and actions in relationship. Neither way is honourable.

## Methods

My close reading of the Brisbane and Ontario curricula analyzed them for three features. The first two are specific references to OT and World Religions (henceforth WR), and the final is what I term supersessionist *crisis points*. As the treatment of OT text is also treatment of the Hebrew Bible, these curricula's approaches to it strongly indicate their approach to Judaism.<sup>37</sup> The more each curriculum treats the OT in its own terms, the more this treatment implies a commitment to considering Judaism in its own terms. Treating it in Catholic terms and framing it as inevitably leading toward New Testament (henceforth NT) and Catholic teaching, by contrast, implies a tendency toward a (stronger) supersessionist ideology. This interpretive approach also guided the references to WR. Presenting Jews and Judaism in their own terms

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<sup>32</sup> CRRJ, 1985, #17.

<sup>33</sup> CRRJ 2015, #26.

<sup>34</sup> CRRJ 2015, #32.

<sup>35</sup> CRRJ 2015, #36.

<sup>36</sup> CRRJ 2015, #40.

<sup>37</sup> See notes 23 and 26 above.

suggested an effort to avoid supersessionism, while framing them in terms that led toward Catholic teaching as the lesson's goal, or as secondary features of a lesson where Catholic teaching is the primary topic, suggested a (stronger) supersessionist approach. Finally, the *crisis points* indicate moments where the curricula find that their efforts to treat Jews *in their own terms* or *with respect* clash with topics like fulfillment and inter-religious dialogue. The findings presented here do not exhaust all instances, but were selected to reflect the clearest examples of how each curriculum treats each feature.

## Findings

### *Archdiocese of Brisbane P-12*

Of the two curricula, this one represents the most careful approach to presenting Jews as they define themselves. It places much emphasis on grounding students' knowledge of Catholicism in terms of the scriptural and the historical contexts of the Ancient Near East. It presents OT material in every year, and connects its concerns with parallel contemporary events and students' experiences.<sup>38</sup> It also contains a significant WR strand for all years that even focuses exclusively on Judaism until Year 6. This focus is particularly important for complementing and supporting the OT strand. The Prep Year<sup>39</sup> clearly states that students will learn that "Jesus was a Jew. He lived in a Jewish family and Mary was his mother."<sup>40</sup> The Prep and Year 1 objectives then move into anthropological territory, asking students to "Investigate and report what Jewish families were like in the time of Jesus" (Prep)<sup>41</sup> and "Explore and record some aspects of Jewish daily life at the time of Jesus (including meal times, leisure times, observing the Sabbath, praying, food laws)" (Year 1).<sup>42</sup> In Year 4 the curriculum makes a strong effort to avoid any reductive portraits of Judaism, and instead stresses its vibrancy and internal diversity: "Judaism is a dynamic religion. Groups within first century Palestine reflected the dynamic nature of Judaism."<sup>43</sup> This orientation recalls Novak's point (above) that today's Judaism is not the same as that of the first century CE. The OT strand in Year 8 clearly extends early Christianity's Jewish context past Jesus' lifetime: "Some early followers of Jesus, as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles, continued Jewish practices as part of their way of imitating the life and teaching of Jesus."<sup>44</sup>

The OT and WR strands also focus strongly on the *covenant* topic. The Year 2 objectives relate this as Judaism's ongoing lived experience: "The Jewish people are a covenant people. Their relationship with God is expressed in their daily lives,"<sup>45</sup> while in Year 3 students focus on its scriptural record, learning that "The Jewish people have a special relationship with God. This

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<sup>38</sup> Brisbane 2019, Prep Year Achievement Standard; STNT6.

<sup>39</sup> Early childhood education in Australia that is equivalent to Kindergarten.

<sup>40</sup> Brisbane 2019, BEWR1.

<sup>41</sup> Brisbane 2019, BEWR1- Skills.

<sup>42</sup> Brisbane 2019, BEWR2 - Skills.

<sup>43</sup> Brisbane 2019, BEWR5.

<sup>44</sup> Brisbane 2019, STNT18.

<sup>45</sup> Brisbane 2019, BEWR3.

relationship is revealed through the stories, people and events recorded in the Torah, or written law.”<sup>46</sup> The Year 8 OT strand continues this topic, where students learn that “The theme of covenant, as unique relationship between God and God’s people, is central to understanding the Old Testament.”<sup>47</sup> This topic is very prominent here, for as it encapsulates all the past years’ learning about the Jewish historical context before the time of Jesus, it also carries a greater burden of extending into students’ ongoing learning about the NT and encountering the fact that Christians live according to that covenant, while Jews do not. As Christians believe that the OT is a necessary precursor to the fulfillment Jesus offers, this curriculum frames the OT as apparently insufficient in itself and even outdated in places: conditions that reveal structural supersessionism, and that enable its different treatment from the NT. An example of this difference emerges in Year 10 when students consider the various OT portrayals of God. Under the “skills” section for this objective, the curriculum asks students to “Reflect on, endorse, or *refute* different Old Testament representations of God, in order to evaluate their application for a modern Australian context.”<sup>48</sup> This remarkable appearance of *refute* opens a formally endorsed path for students to repudiate scripture. While this objective has secular merit, and is also consistent with Church teaching that prohibits coercion in matters of belief,<sup>49</sup> its efficacy for engagement with and critical thinking about scripture raises parallel questions of whether students could be invited to refute NT content or even Church teaching in the same way. Those objectives do not exist in this curriculum. Perhaps this curriculum’s authors grant students more freedom to refute the OT conceptions of God because Catholicism’s normative conception of the Trinity claims to have supplanted them, and so such actions therefore do not threaten the New Covenant.

In addition to its laudable presentations of the OT and Judaism, however, the Brisbane curriculum nonetheless contains moments where supersessionism plainly emerges. This curriculum’s *crisis points* present features of Christianity that stand in sharp contrast with the curriculum’s concurrently generous, welcoming presentations of the OT and Judaism. The critical points here converge on the claim that Jesus and the NT are the fulfillment of the OT, because it implicitly raises questions regarding Christianity’s relationship with Jews and Judaism. The first crisis is in Year 6, which states that “For Christians, the New Law as given by Jesus is a law of love, a law of grace, and a law of freedom.”<sup>50</sup> The independent merits of this claim notwithstanding, the fact that it relies upon an unstated parallel claim about the Old Law, raises the question of whether students are supposed to infer that it has no messages about love, grace, and freedom. For example, in earlier years students have learned ‘The Greatest Commandment’ (Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:26-28)<sup>51</sup> and ‘Good Samaritan’ stories (Lk 10:25-37).<sup>52</sup> Revisiting those stories in light of this lesson about love, grace, and freedom could establish the OT and Judaism – including its 613 *mitzvot*, Pharisees, Priests, and Levites – as the legalistic, outdated, and caricatured foils from (and against) which Christianity evolves.

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<sup>46</sup> Brisbane 2019, BEWR4.

<sup>47</sup> Brisbane 2019, STOT13.

<sup>48</sup> Brisbane 2019, STOT 15 – Skills, emphasis added.

<sup>49</sup> Vatican Council II 1965b, #2.

<sup>50</sup> Brisbane 2019, CLMF10.

<sup>51</sup> Brisbane 2019, Prep STCW1; CLMF1.

<sup>52</sup> Brisbane 2019, Prep CLMF1; Year 4 STNT10.

Within the same year 6, though, students concurrently learn positive messages about the OT that emphasize its historical context and uplifting messages. It asks students to “Communicate an understanding of some key Old Testament prophets, taking into account their context,” and offers examples of their messages that are congruent with Christianity, like “repent and turn back to God, act justly, care for others in particular the poor and marginalized, observe the Law, God is compassionate and forgiving, God is always faithful.”<sup>53</sup> This fact raises a concurrent problem of coordinating the 2 covenants: *How is the OT necessary but allegedly insufficient?* A teacher may offer some answers to that question during their interactions with students in Year 6, but from a documentary perspective, the normative Catholic answer to that question of sufficiency arises only in Grade 8. There students are asked to “interpret Old Testament covenant narratives and the actions and messages of some Old Testament prophets; identifying the unique relationship between God and God’s people ... [and] select evidence from Scriptural texts to show how God’s saving plan for all creation was accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>54</sup> Here the curriculum remains silent on its parallel assumption that because Jews do not participate in this saving plan, they remain ‘stalled’ in a praiseworthy but relatively deficient state on this point.

*Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario 1-8 (2012) and 9-12 (2016)*

This curriculum sits in 2 separate but mutually consistent volumes for the elementary (2012) and secondary (2016) levels. Where Brisbane’s approach tends, however imperfectly at points, toward the disinterested study of religion, Ontario’s is predicated upon promoting belief in Catholicism, and is grounded in the Church’s program of “New Evangelization,” which is intended to re-invigorate the Church,<sup>55</sup> but which relegates to second place any learning about how Jews define themselves.

The elementary curriculum is organized according to 6 strands: Believing, Celebrating, Living a Moral Life, Living in Communion, Living in Solidarity, and Praying,<sup>56</sup> and of these 6, 3 are of interest to this study. First is *Believing*, which encompasses study of scripture from the perspective that as “a primary source of God’s revelation, the Bible records the covenantal relationship between God, the Jewish people and the Christian Church,”<sup>57</sup> and so for comparative purposes stands in parallel with the Brisbane curriculum’s OT strand. Second, the *Living a Moral Life* strand is of interest because its concern is religious pluralism, where “the modern world is characterized by a multiplicity of values, philosophies, and ideologies. In the democratic, pluralistic, society that is Canada, these perspectives may creatively interact and reinforce one another, or they may compete with and contradict one another.” While the Church embraces diversity, this embrace is qualified by a concern that “What is potentially lost amidst this plurality is the singular revelation of God through Jesus Christ and his Church,”<sup>58</sup> a stance that depends on refuting relativism, which Ontario’s Catholic schools perceive negatively

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<sup>53</sup> Brisbane 2019, STOT10.

<sup>54</sup> Brisbane 2019, BEHE8.

<sup>55</sup> ACBO 2012, 2-3; 2016, 6-10.

<sup>56</sup> ACBO 2012, 24.

<sup>57</sup> ACBO 2012, 26.

<sup>58</sup> ACBO 2012, 28; 2016, 28.

pervading contemporary society.<sup>59</sup> Finally, when describing the *Living in Solidarity* strand, the curriculum states that “In teaching children the importance of witnessing to the faith, ‘it is also necessary to address interreligious dialogue if it renders the faithful capable of meaningful communication’ (General Directory for Catechesis, #86) ... the diversity of Canadian society demands we educate children and youth *to respect* and appreciate the good that is within all religions.”<sup>60</sup> The five strands of the secondary curriculum follow a similar pattern: Scripture, Profession of Faith, Christian Moral Development, Prayer and Sacramental Life, and Family Life.<sup>61</sup>

The elementary curriculum emphasizes being Catholic and learning Church teachings, but does not contain the same direct emphasis on the OT and WR that the Brisbane curriculum does. If these are present, it is not for their intrinsic value, but to lead toward an eventual understanding of Catholicism. In grade 1 students learn OT content as a means to the end of knowing they have a relationship with God. Its *believing* strand uses OT references to state: “God reveals himself [*sic*] to humankind in creation, our first parents, in the promise of salvation and in his covenant with Noah, Abraham and Moses.” Notably, that statement is oriented in progression toward a subsequent objective, where students eventually learn that “The fullness of God’s self-revelation is manifested in the incarnation of God’s Word; the person of Jesus who is truly God and truly human.”<sup>62</sup> This structure spirals into grade 8, where students learn that “In the New Testament, Jesus the Messiah fulfills the Covenant of the Old Testament,” and they do this by “Explain[ing] the theological connection between the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament (Christ fulfills the promise of the Covenant).”<sup>63</sup> This spiraling continues throughout the secondary level. The grades 9 and 12 scriptures strands reinforce the message that the various OT covenants lead to the NT covenant.<sup>64</sup> This is a worthy objective, but it comes at the expense of learning about the OT in its own right.

The elementary curriculum discusses WR under the strand “Living in Solidarity,” and the secondary level contains a whole course on this topic in Grade 11 called *Faith and Culture: World Religions*. In all cases, the curriculum’s mission to evangelize causes it to see other religions only in Catholic terms. Beginning in grade 4, and repeated in grades 6 and 7, this strand follows the general themes that “God has placed the desire for God in the human heart and calls all people to God,” and that “People of various Christian churches and other religious faith traditions share a desire to deepen their relationship with God the Creator of all.”<sup>65</sup> From one perspective these statements inclusively welcome Catholic students’ encounters with religious Others, and especially coordinate with their learning that “as Christians we can enter into dialogue with the world’s major religions concerning common elements (i.e. sacred space –

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<sup>59</sup> Mulligan 2005, 74-5. See McDonough’s (2018, 232) critique of how normative Catholicism conflates relativism with pluralism.

<sup>60</sup> ACBO 2012, 32, emphasis added. See note 68.

<sup>61</sup> ACBO 2016, 66.

<sup>62</sup> ACBO 2012, 63.

<sup>63</sup> ACBO 2012, 172.

<sup>64</sup> ACBO 2016, 72-3; 195 & 199.

<sup>65</sup> ACBO 2012 166: see also 117 & 149.

places of worship, rituals, prayers, symbols and beliefs).<sup>66</sup> However, they also elide the questions of ‘whose God’ or ‘whose conception of God’ informs these objectives, which leaves untroubled the fact that the God spoken of here is the Catholic one, and that initiating inter-religious dialogue under that pretext is problematic. Consistent with the curriculum’s evangelizing aim, the WR course teaches students to know religious Others in Catholic terms. Perhaps the most explicit statement of this fact sits on page 138, which offers a research topic of the student’s choosing, but with one criterion for its worthiness as a selection being, “Does this topic correlate to the Catholic faith and its tradition?”<sup>67</sup> As not all students in Ontario’s Catholic schools are Catholic, Christian, or even religious, this question would require them to orient any work on their own tradition or beliefs within the school’s dominant evangelistic framework.

The grade 4 strand of “Living in Solidarity” presents objectives that first universalize Jesus’ message within the evangelization context, teaching students to “Understand that God wants all people to receive the gift of salvation (i.e. Jesus Christ, the Gospel) and in order to do this we are *to respectfully* invite other religions to know Jesus.”<sup>68</sup> Alongside the tasks of identifying the biblical justification for those statements, students are also asked to prepare an evangelization plan, where they “Describe how God can help people who do not know Christ to develop a faith in God and Jesus Christ (through signs and other diverse religious practices) and suggest ways Christians can help people of other faiths to come to know Jesus (by openly sharing what we believe, through small acts of charity, through acceptance and friendship, by praying for their conversion to Christ).”<sup>69</sup> Within the scope of this study, the problems here are the epistemic one of why a Jewish person should accept a claim that Christianity is preferable to their own tradition, and the moral one of how one can genuinely respect Jews while leading them toward the Gospels and praying for their conversion. Consistent with evolutionary supersessionism, this conception of *respect* is at best a paternalistic condescension to those whom this curriculum’s authors can only regard in a state of religious deficiency. Based on these documents alone, one can only speculate as to how much, if at all, the 9 and 10 year olds who will learn this topic in grade 4 (and the 11 and 12 year olds who receive it again at its spiraled recapitulation in grade 6)<sup>70</sup> could be critically aware of these objectives’ implications. Where the Brisbane curriculum encounters crises at moments where generously presenting Jews clashes with Christian beliefs about fulfillment, the Ontario curriculum has crisis moments where its evangelization aim crosses its admonition *to respect* other religions and cultures.<sup>71</sup> In short, this clash calls into question how *respect* coordinates with a view that Judaism and other religions are deficient, and hence whether the ultimate purpose of evangelization and inter-religious dialogue could be anything other than converting students to Catholicism.

At the secondary level, the problem of supersessionism emerges most strongly in Grade 12. It is at this level, for 17 and 18 year olds, where the curriculum introduces a teacher prompt where they may ask students, “How would you respond to those who say that Jesus’ death was

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<sup>66</sup> ACBO 2012, 167.

<sup>67</sup> ACBO 2016, 138.

<sup>68</sup> ACBO 2012, 118, emphasis added. Recall note 60.

<sup>69</sup> ACBO 2012, 119.

<sup>70</sup> ACBO 2012, 151.

<sup>71</sup> ACBO 2012, 106, 117-19, 133-4.

for nothing?”<sup>72</sup> This prompt is interesting because it indirectly quotes chapter 2 of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, which shows that supersessionist claims are as old as Christianity itself and have scriptural backing. In that chapter, Paul emphatically argues against Jewish law, claiming: “we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ ... because no one will be justified by the works of the law” (Gal 2:16, NRSV). His argument concludes by tying this faith to the meaning of Jesus’ crucifixion, “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, *then Christ died for nothing*” (Gal 2:21, NRSV).<sup>73</sup> Of interest here is that students who agree with Paul have ready access to scriptural and formal institutional support, consistent with Catholic evangelization. Others would be free to disagree,<sup>74</sup> but to support their views they would have to rely on extra-curricular sources, which would only re-inscribe their religious deficiency from a normatively Catholic perspective.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The facts that both curricula have bishops’ approval, and they clearly diverge on their treatment of Jews and Judaism, indicates significant interpretive variations within the Catholic magisterium about what is important within Catholic teaching and how that importance influences pedagogical purposes. The Brisbane curriculum evidently takes pains to present Judaism from a perspective that avoids Catholic-centrism, and the fact that this approach suddenly breaks down at certain crisis points only indicates its authors’ otherwise attempt to steer it away from supersessionism. The Ontario curriculum’s evangelistic approach, by contrast, mitigates against awkward surprises like Brisbane’s, because it consistently presents Jews and Judaism in Catholic terms. Its internal consistency and lack of a ‘Brisbane break down’ on this score is not a substantive credit, but only a consequence of its stronger supersessionism.

This study finds that colonial structures remain a prominent feature of normative Catholicism’s attitude toward Jews. Despite the major changes NA announced, Catholicism’s institutional post-conciliar attitude consistently claims that Judaism is deficient. The curricula examined here do not exhibit any punitive or economic supersessionism of the pre-conciliar time, but they do reveal the softer, more subtle structural supersessionism expressed through the language of fulfillment. The general implications are that the authors, teachers, and students of these curricula must realize how some aspects of Catholicism remain structured on a colonial epistemology, and that this fact should cause them to ask what it means to be Catholic person today in relationship with non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians, and non-religious persons.

There are two further specific implications for students’ lives. The first concerns life in school, where students who are non-Catholic, non-Christian, or non-religious will immediately (Ontario) or eventually (Brisbane) encounter a presentation of their religious tradition’s deficiency. Catholic students in Brisbane will engage with a curricular structure that eventually sets them up for the bewildering task of coordinating positive pictures of Judaism on its own

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<sup>72</sup> ACBO 2016, 203.

<sup>73</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>74</sup> Vatican Council II 1965b, #2; see also note 49.

terms with talk of a fulfilled covenant in the NT. Any Jews present in Ontario's Catholic schools will learn that they believe in something Catholicism considers only a tentative good that awaits acceleration into something better. Catholic students in Ontario will receive a message that they possess the superior belief, and should approach religious Others with a view that condescendingly 'respects' them. If their exposure to this curriculum is their only or best source of information on how to relate to religious Others, these Catholic students will unfortunately develop a learned deficiency in this area because their inter-religious attitude will be hampered by an outlook of superiority that is unable to appreciate how religious Others define themselves.

Ultimately, this study points to larger questions of what it means to be Catholic in our time, and more specifically, how is it possible to regard Judaism and Catholicism as different only in kind, and not by degree, when the institutional Church currently does not support this orientation. These questions are both theoretical and empirical ones that are beyond the scope of this paper. They are nonetheless important to state here for showing both how the Church's normative commitments have great implications in practice, and how simply ignoring them will present an inaccurate picture of what the institutional Church actually believes.

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