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NOSTRA AETATE IN LIGHT OF THE OLD AND NEW COVENANT: THE IRREVOCABLE BLESSING (GENESIS 12:1–3)

NOSTRA AETATE À LUZ DA ANTIGA E DA NOVA ALIANÇA: A BÊNÇÃO IRREVOGÁVEL (GÊNESIS 12,1-3)

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Abstract

This article offers a theological rereading of Genesis 12:1–3 in dialogue with Nostra Aetate, the declaration promulgated sixty years ago by the Second Vatican Council. Drawing on the concept of "covenant" and the related terms "land," "name," and "people" found in the LORD's promise to Abraham, the study seeks to highlight both the continuity and fulfillment of this promise from the perspective of divine faithfulness. It aims to discern, in the LORD's address to Abraham, a sign of the enduring nature of the promises made to Israel, in connection with Pauline theology regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles. In this context, Nostra Aetate stands as a historical and theological milestone, inaugurating a new phase — both spiritual and tangible — in Christian–Jewish relations.

Keywords: Nostra Aetate. Covenant. Abraham. Pauline Theology. Blessing.

Resumo

Este artigo oferece uma releitura teológica de Gênesis 12,1-3 em diálogo com Nostra Aetate, a declaração promulgada há sessenta anos pelo Concílio Vaticano II. Baseando-se no conceito de "aliança" e nos termos relacionados "terra", "nome" e "povo" encontrados na promessa do Senhor a Abraão, o estudo procura destacar tanto a continuidade quanto o cumprimento dessa promessa da perspectiva da fidelidade divina. O objetivo é discernir, no discurso do Senhor a Abraão, um sinal da natureza duradoura das promessas feitas a Israel, em conexão com a teologia paulina sobre a inclusão dos gentios. Neste contexto, a Nostra Aetate surge como um marco histórico e teológico, inaugurando uma nova fase — tanto espiritual quanto tangível — nas relações entre cristãos e judeus.

Palavras-chave: Nostra Aetate. Aliança. Abraão. Teologia Paulina. Bênção.

Introduction

Sixty years after its promulgation, the declaration Nostra Aetate remains a decisive milestone in interreligious relations, especially between Christians and Jews. Drafted during the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the document expresses a renewed posture of the Catholic Church toward other religious traditions, with particular emphasis on recognizing the Jewish heritage within Christianity. Paragraph 4 of Nostra Aetate, in particular, acknowledges

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the strong bond between Christians and Jews, affirming that Christian faith is rooted in the biblical tradition of ancient Israel, as the text declares: “The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy established the Ancient Covenant” (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Nostra Aetate, 1965, no. 4).

In this context, God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 acquires a paradigmatic value. It is a foundational passage that expresses the central themes of land, name, and people—three elements that structure both the identity of Israel and its vocation within the salvific plan. Pauline theology, in rereading this promise in light of the mystery of Christ, does not annul it but rather expands it, while remaining faithful to the Hebrew roots of Christian faith. Thus, the promise made to Abraham constitutes a point of convergence between the Old and the New Testaments, revealing continuity rather than substitution between the two covenants.

This article proposes a rereading of paragraph 4 of Nostra Aetate in light of Genesis 12:1–3, using as a guiding thread the continuity between the Old and the New Covenant. The theological-exegetical study of the terms “land,” “name,” and “people” will make it possible to highlight how this biblical triad, far from being surpassed, unfolds throughout the Scriptures, reaching its fullness in the New Testament without losing sight of the election of the people of Israel. Such an approach seeks to emphasize the advances introduced by the Second Vatican Council not only in doctrinal terms, but also as a foundation for strengthening interreligious dialogue in both academic and pastoral dimensions, through the mutual recognition of Jews and Christians as brothers and sisters in faith.

By emphasizing the permanence of the Covenant, Nostra Aetate inaugurates a new theological and pastoral horizon in which the promises made to the patriarchs are reaffirmed. This recognition has borne concrete fruit, such as the shared interest of both Christians and Jews in collaborative biblical studies, as well as the creation of various pastoral initiatives aimed at fostering fraternity and mutual respect. In a time of polarization, marked by the risk of identity loss and by exclusionary discourses, the Abrahamic promise, interpreted through the lens of fraternity, emerges as a path of reconciliation and hope between these two faith traditions, which recognize themselves as heirs of the same God.

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The promise in Genesis 12:1–3: key vocabulary

"The history of Israel is not merely the result of chance [...]. The figure of Abraham has unique value [...], he is the first among all the patriarchs. His experiences are foundational and possess enduring significance" (Ska, 2018, p. 22).

Abraham obeys the LORD in response to a promise of blessing made to him in a passage traditionally known as the Call of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3). The blessing in verse 3 is framed in stark contrast through the use of two verbs placed at opposite semantic poles: "בָּרַךְ (to bless)" and "קָלַל (to curse)". Alongside these pivotal terms, the structure of the promise also features three fundamental semantic cores: "land (אֶרֶץ)," "name (שֵׁם)," and "people/nation (גּוֹי)". These literary elements help shape the identity of Israel, while also revealing a divine plan with universal scope. The opposition between בָּרַךְ (bless) and קָלַל (curse) frames the promise around the themes of life and trust in the LORD, the God of Israel.

אֶל־אַבְרָם יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר	1a	The LORD said to Abram
מֵאַרְצְךָ לְךָ־לְךָ	1b	Go from your land
אָבִיךָ וּמִבֵּית וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ	1c	From your kindred and your father's house
אַרְאֶךָּ אֲשֶׁר אֶל־הָאָרֶץ	1d	To the land I will show you
גָּדוֹל לְגוֹי וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ	2a	I will make of you a great nation
וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ	2b	I will bless you
שְׁמֶךָ וַאֲגַדְּלָה	2c	I will make your name great
בְּרָכָה וֶהְיֵה	2d	And you shall be a blessing
מְבָרֲכֶיךָ וַאֲבָרֵכָה	3a	I will bless those who bless you
אָאֹר וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ	3b	And the one who curses you I will curse
הָאֲדָמָה מִשְׁפְּחֹת כֹּל בְּךָ וְנִבְרְכוּ	3c	And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

The two opposing verbs — בָּרַךְ (bless) and אָרַר (curse) — create a striking semantic dynamic within the context of verses 3a–c. The LORD's promise of blessing to Abraham is not merely a positive affirmation that he and his descendants will be blessed but also implies direct opposition to those who resist this covenant. Thus, blessing and curse become two sides of the same divine principle, distinguished not in essence but in degree.

Blessing and curse: a theological paradox

The LORD's blessing in Genesis 12:3 is conditional, depending on the attitude and behavior of other peoples toward Abraham and his descendants, which in turn determines the divine response. The LORD declares: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." There is an internal parallelism in this verse: the words "to bless" and "to

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curse" convey antagonistic concepts that express a divine principle of justice. The LORD's response will therefore be direct and proportional to the human attitude of those who oppose Abraham and, consequently, Israel.

The verb בָּרַךְ (to bless) is frequently found in parallel structures throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to express divine action that grants life, prosperity, and fullness to human beings (Gen 1:22, 28; 5:2; 22:17; 26:3–4; 24:35; 26:12, 24; 28:14). At the beginning of the Book of Genesis, the LORD creates human beings — male and female — blesses them and grants them both fruitfulness and responsibility over Creation (Gen 1:22, 28; 5:2). In the second narrative block of Genesis, the LORD's blessing to Abraham is extended to his descendants, beginning with his son Isaac (Gen 22:17; 26:3–4). In the account of Isaac's marriage, Abraham's servant tells Laban how much the LORD had blessed, enriched, and prospered his master (Gen 24:35). Isaac, in turn, sows and reaps a hundredfold, for the LORD had blessed him (Gen 26:12, 24). Likewise, the LORD reaffirms His blessing to Jacob, Abraham's grandson (Gen 28:14), with the same features of the blessing initially given to Abraham. The LORD speaks to Jacob at Bethel and changes his name to Israel, reaffirming the blessing He Himself had previously given to Abraham (Gen 35:9–13).

In summary, when the LORD promises to bless those who bless Abraham, within the Old Testament context, He demonstrates His concrete intervention on behalf of His chosen ones. In this sense, the peoples and nations who recognize the LORD's covenant with Abraham and his descendants will also be favored by the LORD. When, in Genesis 12:3a, the LORD says, "I will bless those who bless you," He establishes a covenantal relationship that transcends the patriarch Abraham and embraces all those who stand in solidarity with him. According to von Rad "this prophecy in ch. 12.3b reaches far out toward the goal of God's plan for history" (von RAD, 1972, p. 160). The blessing, therefore, is not only a privilege but a mediation. It inaugurates a relational structure in which the election of the one entails responsibility for the many.

On the other hand, the verb אָרַר (to curse) carries a semantic force that goes beyond the mere utterance of condemnation. It conveys exclusion from divine blessing and indicates not only a rupture of communion with God but also a weakening of the relationship between the chosen people and the nations that reject their way of life and values. When, in Genesis 12:3, the LORD declares, "I will curse the one who curses you," a theological antithesis is established with the blessing promised to Abraham. When in Genesis 12:3 the LORD says, "I will curse the one who curses you," a theological antithesis is established with the blessing promised to Abraham.

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Biblical tradition presents the use of אָרַר in decisive contexts in salvation history. In Genesis 3:14, the curse falls upon the serpent: אָרוּר אַתָּה (“Cursed are you”). The LORD utters this curse as a consequence of the serpent’s role in instigating the disobedience of the first couple. The serpent will crawl and eat the dust of the earth all the days of its life, having sown the seed of evil in Eve’s heart. Later, in Genesis 3:17, the ground is cursed because of Adam’s transgression. The LORD curses the soil due to Adam’s disobedience and introduces laborious toil as the new existential condition of human life. Adam would have to cultivate the ground with difficulty obtaining sustenance. Here, the curse does not fall directly upon the human being but upon his environment, revealing its impact on all of Creation.

Another emblematic case appears in Genesis 4:11, when God sentences Cain, who had shed the blood of the righteous Abel: אָרוּר אַתָּה (“Cursed are you”). In ancient Israel, blood symbolized life, as in Leviticus 17:11: “the life of the flesh is in the blood.” Thus, the LORD hears the voice of Abel’s blood crying out from the ground for justice, demanding a divine response. As a result, Cain is condemned to exile and wandering — classic signs of the loss of blessing and divine protection. In this case, the curse manifests as a destabilization of the human relationship with the land, with others, and with the LORD. In the biblical context, curses uttered by the LORD often carry devastating consequences. That is, the curse can result in defeat, destruction, and the absence of divine presence.

Von Rad comments: “This prophecy, which points to a fulfillment lying beyond the old covenant, was especially important to the retrospective glance of the New Testament witnesses. We find it cited in Acts 3:25f.; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8, 16” (von Rad, 1972, p. 161). In this sense, Peter addresses the Israelites regarding the promise made to Abraham, immediately after the healing of a paralyzed man, which had left the crowd astonished. Peter speaks to them as children of the prophets and of the covenant, for in Abraham’s offspring “all the families of the earth shall be blessed”, provided that each one turns from their wickedness (Acts 3:26). Therefore, those who bless Abraham are associated with the fullness of divine promises, while those who curse him are excluded from the covenant and its salvific benefits.

On a theological level, the curse signals human disconnection from the order of Creation and from the LORD’s salvific design. The blessing, by contrast, is a sign of the divine presence that generates life, communion, fruitfulness, and peace. From Genesis 12:1–3 onward, the blessing conferred upon Abraham becomes a paradigm of the LORD’s saving action, the God of Israel, for through Abraham’s descendants, “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (v. 3c). This points to a future fulfillment that goes beyond the old covenant — that is, within the scope of the new covenant, inaugurated in Jesus Christ according to Christian faith.

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The relational dynamics between blessing and curse

The narrative of Genesis 12:3 is striking for introducing a relational dialectic between blessing and curse. This narrative dynamic carries implications that go beyond the figure of Abram and directly affect the relationship between the LORD, the God of Israel, and the nations. The formula “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse” (vv. 3a–b) articulates an ethical and theological tension, not as a sign of divine arbitrariness, but as a proportional response to the nations’ attitude toward the covenant established with Abraham.

The nations are thus called to take a stance in relation to Abraham, who becomes a sign of God’s presence and promise in the world. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Abraham’s election is presented from the outset not as an ethnic privilege, but as a vocation to mediate blessing between God and the peoples. As Birch et al. affirm: “Gen 12:1-3, namely, that there should be blessing beyond the household of Israel” (Birch et al., 2005, p. 71). This reading is confirmed by Gerhard von Rad, who observes: “Abraham is assigned the role of a mediator of blessing in God's saving plan, for "all the families of the earth." (von Rad, 1972, p. 160). The election, therefore, is not aimed at exclusion, but at inclusion. From the beginning, the Abrahamic call bears a universalist and missionary intent. The relational dialectic between the LORD and Abraham is thus marked by a universal covenant.

This semantic structure implies a conditional relationship, in which the human response to the bearer of the promise becomes the criterion for divine action. Blessing and curse are not automatic or magical mechanisms, but expressions of divine judgment in response to human freedom. The nations are thus summoned to take a position with regard to Abraham. In this sense, the relationship with Abraham acquires a universal symbolic and theological value; that is, one's attitude toward him—his descendants and his mission—becomes a barometer of one’s relationship with God Himself.

Far from rendering the blessing exclusive, this conception underscores the centrality of the covenant as the theological axis of the history of salvation. The biblical text itself reinforces this universal openness when it states: “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (v. 3c), indicating that Abraham’s calling, though particular in its origin, has an inclusive and far-reaching aim. As von Rad observes: “the promise that is given concerning Abraham something is again said about God's saving will and indeed about a salvation extending far beyond the limits of the covenant people to "all the families of the earth" (ch. 12.3)” in (von Rad, 1972, p. 154).

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According to von Rad, then, the LORD's promise to Abraham transcends the boundaries of a family narrative to embrace the history of humanity—even if this promise remains conditional, with an implied clause of exclusion for those who reject the covenant.

For the Old Testament authors, election implies responsibility rather than exclusive privilege. Birch et al. highlight that "covenants are not just something the Deity says to an individual. They are virtual contracts— rooted in the discourse of real-life economic, political, and social transactions." (Birch et al., 2005, p. 69). In this sense, Israel's election as the people of promise entails responsibility: being the chosen people is not a privilege of superiority but a commission—bearing witness before the LORD and among the nations. As Deuteronomy declares: "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deut 4:6). And again: "I have made you a covenant for the people, a light to the nations" (Isa 42:6). Amos reinforces this: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). These biblical parallels multiply and affirm the covenant between the LORD, the God of Israel, and His people. Ultimately, this is about divine action that seeks to reach all nations through the testimony of a people called to live according to justice and faithfulness.

The Christian tradition also acknowledges this dimension of election oriented toward service. Lumen Gentium declares: the "messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race" (Lumen Gentium, 1965, n. 9). [1] In the same spirit, Nostra Aetate, when addressing the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people, affirms that God "does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls" (Second Vatican Council, Nostra Aetate, 1965, n. 4), echoing Paul's letter to the Romans 11:29. The conciliar declaration recognizes that the election of Israel remains valid as a sign of God's universal salvific plan.

It is important to emphasize that this dynamic is not a matter of divine arbitrariness or punitive election. On the contrary, it invites the nations to a moral and spiritual responsibility within God's plan. Blessing and curse function here as relational and pedagogical responses, whose purpose is to lead the nations to the recognition of the God of Abraham and to participation in the promise of life.

[1] *Lumen Gentium* ("Light of the Nations") is the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Church, promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in 1965. The document presents the theological understanding of the Church as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the light of the nations.

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In this sense, the prophetic tradition also reflects this reciprocity, for the nations that recognize God's action in Israel will be welcomed (cf. Isa 2:2–4; Zech 8:20–23), while those who rise against the covenant people will experience judgment (cf. Joel 4:1–3; Jer 30:16). Accordingly, the relationship of the nations with Israel becomes a path of either drawing near to or distancing from the very presence of God.

Land: gift and challenge in the biblical tradition

In Genesis 12:1 we read: "The LORD said to Abram: 'go from your land, your kindred, and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" The Hebrew term land (אֶרֶץ, ʾéreṣ) appears as the first element of the divine promise. More than a reference to physical territory, the land becomes a visible sign of divine faithfulness and of the identity of the chosen people. Throughout the Old Testament, the Promised Land is a symbol of blessing and of the presence of the LORD in the midst of His people.

Notably, the term "land" in Genesis 12:1–3 is both promise and vocation. According to Jean-Louis Ska (2015, p. 38), the beginning of Israel's history contrasts with that of many other nations, for "in general, the history of a people begins with the founding of a city, of a dynasty, or with the conquest of an empire by a brave man." Israel's history begins, on the contrary, with the calling of a nomadic shepherd who leaves his land and "visits all the important places in the promised land" (Ska, 2015, p. 39). In this sense, it may be said that Abraham is the founder of Israel's history, for he is "the first biblical figure who believes in God's promises (cf. Gen 15:6)" (Ska, 2015, p. 40). His journey and the building of altars to the LORD in the promised land are expressions of his faith and obedience, as when the LORD appears to him and reaffirms the promise: "to your descendants I will give this land" (Gen 12:7). Thus, Abraham becomes a paradigmatic model of faith and obedience.

The land is therefore a gift of God's faithfulness, but also a space of ethical responsibility and the practice of justice. Throughout the Pentateuch and the prophetic literature, possession of the land is always conditional on the observance of the covenant: remaining in the promised territory depends on the people's faithfulness to the LORD (cf. Deut 28–30; Isa 1:19–20; Jer 7:3–7). According to Leviticus 25:23: "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants," underscoring that it is not an absolute possession, but rather a space of life that demands fidelity, justice, and solidarity.

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In the New Testament, the concept of land is reinterpreted in light of the Kingdom of God. It does not disappear but acquires an eschatological horizon: it is no longer merely a geographic location, but the fullness promised in Jesus, the Christ. Thus, Jesus proclaims in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:5), thereby reaffirming and deepening the ethical dimension of the promise. The Letter to the Hebrews affirms that the patriarchs, though they did not receive the promise's full realization, welcomed it from afar, desiring a heavenly homeland (cf. Heb 11:13–16). The Book of Revelation, in turn, projects the promise of the land into eschatology: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1), a sign of the definitive covenant between God and humanity.

God's promise to Abraham is reiterated in several passages, such as Genesis 15:18: "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates." This implicitly signifies a good and fertile land, as it lies between great rivers, symbols of abundance and breadth. In Deuteronomy, this land is described as fertile, abundant, and good—a place where the children of Israel may eat their fill and bless the LORD, always remembering the One who gave them this land: "for the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land [...] where you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing" (cf. Deut 8:7–10). The Psalms also express confidence in this promise: "the righteous shall possess the land and dwell in it forever" (Ps 37:29), indicating that the possession of the land is intrinsically linked to the practice of justice.

Thus, the land is simultaneously a gift and a challenge: a gift of divine faithfulness, and a space for ethical responsibility and commitment to justice. In the eschatological horizon of the New Testament, the land is transformed into a figure of the Kingdom of God, a promise to those who live according to the new righteousness of the Kingdom.

Name: existential dimension

The promise of a great "name" (שֵׁם, šēm), expressed in Genesis 12:2c — "I will make your name great" — stands in direct contrast with the narrative of the Tower of Babel, where human beings attempt to build their own fame autonomously: "Let us make a name for ourselves" (Gen 11:4). This opposition highlights the contrast between the exaltation granted by the LORD and the human pursuit of self-assertion.

According to Gerhard von Rad, the "name" granted to Abraham expresses God's sovereignty over history and human destiny. In particular, the change of name from Abram to Abraham, narrated in Genesis 17:5, is interpreted by von Rad as a divine act that confirms the

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promise and inaugurates a new identity and mission. In “the substance of God's address” the narrator “describes the divine promise further by combining a change of name with the making of the covenant”. Abram will become “father of a multitude of nations’” (VON RAD, 1972, p. 199).

In Semitic culture, a name is not merely an identity marker; it carries an existential dimension, expressing one’s mission, dignity, and posterity. When the LORD changes Abram’s name to Abraham — “father of many nations” (Gen 17:5) — the universal scope of the promise is revealed. This divine gesture inaugurates a missionary dimension within the patriarchal vocation.

Sacred Scripture presents other figures who receive the promise of having a great name, such as David: “I will make your name great, like the names of the great ones of the earth” (2 Sam 7:9). In this way, the LORD establishes continuity between the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, both oriented toward mediating divine blessing to humanity.

In the New Testament, Pauline theology takes up and radicalizes this same theme: “therefore God exalted him and gave him the Name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9). Thus, Paul affirms the greatness of the Name of Jesus, which manifests the fullness of divine revelation and authority. Christian tradition sees in the glorification of the Name of Jesus the definitive fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, for in Christ “all the nations shall be blessed” (cf. Gal 3:8, 16).

To possess a “great name” therefore means to be recognized and blessed by the LORD before humankind, and to embrace a mission of service and mediation. The promise made to Abraham (Gen 12:2c) carries both blessing and responsibility: it does not aim at self-exaltation, but at the realization of God’s salvific plan. Contrary to the failed attempt at Babel, where human beings sought to build a name for themselves through arrogance (Gen 11:4), the name bestowed by the LORD upon His servants is associated with fidelity and a universal vocation.

People: vocation and mediation

The third dimension of the promise in Genesis 12:2a refers to the formation of a “people” (גּוֹי, gôy): “I will make of you a great nation” (וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל). The Hebrew terms גּוֹי (gôy) and עָם (ʿām) present complementary nuances throughout the Scriptures. Gôy (גּוֹי) refers to national or political entities, including both Israel (Gen 12:2; Deut 4:6) and other peoples (Gen 10:5; Ps 117:1), while עָם (ʿām) emphasizes Israel’s internal identity as a religious and cultic community (Exod 3:7; Deut 7:6).

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This distinction appears clearly in Numbers 23:9: "Here is a people עָם (ʿām) who dwells apart and does not reckon itself among the nations גּוֹיִם (gôyîm)," highlighting the singular vocation of Israel's עָם ʿām in contrast to the indistinct multiplicity of the גּוֹיִם (gôyîm). Israel's separation is, therefore, a calling to otherness, not exclusion.

Deuteronomy 4:6 synthesizes this dual identity: "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Israel is עָם ʿām by covenant and גּוֹי gôy among the nations, recognized not by military power but by its wisdom drawn from the Torah.

This understanding of Israel resonates with the teaching of the Church. The document The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible affirms the enduring validity of God's faithfulness to Israel's election: "the successive generations of Israel will enjoy all the promises made to their ancestors, provided that they choose firmly 'life and blessing'" (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2001, p. 153). Israel as a "people set apart" (בָּדָד עַם) is therefore a vocation to be a sign of the covenant and of divine justice among the nations.

This vocation is reaffirmed in Romans 9–11. Paul acknowledges that "they are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises" (Rom 9:4), and concludes: "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). Even in the face of unbelief, Israel's election has not been annulled. "All Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26) expresses the eschatological hope for Israel's reintegration.

The Magisterium of the Catholic Church echoes this understanding in Nostra Aetate, affirming that "through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy established the Ancient Covenant". Furthermore, it is from this people that the Church has received "the revelation of the Old Testament," and that in God "the gifts and the calling are irrevocable" (Second Vatican Council, Nostra Aetate, 1965, no. 4). In the same spirit, the document of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (2015) explicitly states that "the Church does not replace the People of God of Israel" and acknowledges that the mission of the Jewish people remains valid within the divine plan (The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable, 2015, §23).

Within this framework, the use of the term גּוֹי (gôy) in Gen 12:2a suggests the formation of a visible nation that goes beyond a religious clan: it is a people destined to be a channel of universal blessing (Gen 12:3). The use of גּוֹי gôy rather than עַם ʿām underscores the historical and universal scope of the promise. However, as the biblical story unfolds, this people were also shaped by its cultic election as עַם ʿām, the people of the covenant and the Torah (Cf. von Rad, 1972, pp. 154, 158–161).

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The term עַם ʿām, although absent in Gen 12:2, appears frequently in passages that emphasize the intimate bond between Israel and its God. In Exodus 3:7, we read: "Then the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people עַמִּי (ʿammî) who are in Egypt…," reinforcing this people's belonging to the LORD. The choice of גּוֹי gôy in Gen 12:2 may signal the Abrahamic promise's genuine openness to a universal vocation, which does not contradict Israel's later formation as עַם ʿām. In fact, גּוֹי gôy in the Old Testament designates a national entity, and the promise that Abraham's descendants will become a גּוֹי gôy (Gen 12:2; 17:5; 18:18) presupposes Israel's future national formation, which reaches fullness with territorial conquest and political centralization under David.

Israel's identity as גּוֹי gôy, however, is not reduced to demographic or political criteria, as suggested in Num 23:9, but includes a unique religious constitution. This is expressed in Exodus 19:6, where Israel is called a "holy nation" "גּוֹי קָדוֹשׁ (gôy qādôsh)" and a "kingdom of priests" מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים (mamlekhet kohanîm). After the exile and the division of the kingdom, the designation of Israel as gôy becomes rarer, reflecting the loss of unity and sovereignty. Nevertheless, texts like Ezekiel 37:22 preserve the hope for Israel's restoration as a single גּוֹי gôy before God and the nations (Cf. Botterweck & Clements, 1977, vol. 2, pp. 429–431).

The terms land אֶרֶץ (ʾereṣ), name שֵׁם (šēm), and people/nation גּוֹי (gôy) in Genesis 12:1–3 carry dense symbolic and theological significance. These words structure the promise made to Abraham and reappear in various contexts throughout Scripture, tracing a continuous arc between the Old and New Covenants. This analysis reveals that Israel's identity, from its origins, is marked by a fruitful tension between separation and mission, between exclusive belonging and universal openness. Even when deprived of land and political sovereignty, Israel remained "עַם (ʿām) — God's people and family — and it is from this foundational belonging that hope is nourished for the full restoration of its condition as גּוֹי (gôy), a holy nation before others (Cf. Clements, 1977, vol. 2, p. 433).

The continuity of the promise in the new covenant

The dynamic between blessing and curse introduced in Genesis 12:3 permeates the pages of Sacred Scripture and receives new light in the covenant inaugurated by Christ. In the New Testament this promise is re-read in the light of Paschal faith, without severing its Hebraic roots. The apostle Paul, thoroughly versed in Israel's Scriptures, recognizes in Jesus of Nazareth the heir to the blessing promised to Abraham, declaring in Galatians 3:8-9.14 that "All the

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nations shall be blessed in you," and applying that promise to the justification of the Gentiles by faith.

Christ, as the descendant of Abraham (Gal 3:16), is presented as the mediator of divine blessing—now open to all who believe, Jew and non-Jew alike—without suppressing Israel's election but rather reaffirming it in its vocation to be "light to the nations" (Isa 49:6). Redemption in Christ is thus understood as the unfolding and fullness of the promise to Abraham, a promise that continues to generate life and hope. As James D. G. Dunn summarizes, "the centrality of Christ — as showing what God is like, as defining God's Spirit, as the channel of Israel's blessing for the nations [...] is simply inescapable in the theology of Paul the apostle." (DUNN, 1998, p. 729).

When Paul affirms that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13), he does not oppose Law and grace in simplistic fashion; rather, he draws on Israel's prophetic and sapiential tradition, where suffering can assume redemptive value, as seen in the figure of the "Servant of the LORD" in Isaiah 53. This reading, deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, expresses the Christian conviction that in Christ the universal blessing is manifested—without annulling the dignity or the enduring vocation of the Jewish people, as the Second Vatican Council recognizes: "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls" (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Nostra Aetate, 1965, no. 4).

This conviction was reiterated by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, which acknowledged that the Church is called to view herself as included in God's salvific plan together with the Jewish people (Cf. COMMISSION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS, 2015, §35). Already in the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons viewed the history of salvation as a continuous process in which God did not revoke the Old Covenant but expanded and fulfilled it in Christ, since there is one author and one goal for both testaments (Cf. IRENAEUS OF LYONS, Against Heresies, IV, 12,3).

Far from marking a rupture, the continuity between Old and New Covenant constitutes a theological and ethical axis of convergence, allowing Christians—with gratitude and reverence—to recognize the permanence of the promise made to Israel and its extension, in Christ, to all humanity. As Nostra Aetate teaches, "Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets" (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Nostra Aetate, 1965, no. 4). The irrevocable blessing of God thus remains a bridge between the covenants, opening paths toward deeper mutual recognition between Jews and Christians.

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Theological Implications for Jewish–Christian Dialogue

In the context of Jewish–Christian dialogue, the tension between blessing and curse carries significant theological implications. The Magisterium of the Catholic Church, through the Nostra Aetate Declaration, unequivocally affirms that God's covenant with the people of Israel has not been revoked, but remains alive and effective within the divine plan of salvation. The promise of blessing made to the descendants of Abraham is not annulled by the coming of Christ but is fulfilled in a new and universal manner. This recognition constitutes a theologically relevant milestone, as it reaffirms both the enduring election of Israel and the irrevocable validity of the promise made to the patriarchs (cf. Gen 12:1–3; 22:17; 26:3–4.12.24).

The Abrahamic blessing, in light of Christ's coming, is not abolished but reinterpreted and expanded, without denying its original foundations. The promise made to Abraham remains valid both for the Jewish people and for Christians. The new covenant in Christ does not contradict the former but brings it to fulfillment within a broader perspective of salvation history. As acknowledged in the document The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible, this perspective respects the continuity of the covenant, the diversity of religious traditions, and the integrity of Jewish identity within God's salvific plan (cf. COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS, 2005, pp. 86–90).

The notion of "curse," in turn, should not be understood as a divine condemnation directed toward any people or religious group, but rather as a reference to the human rejection of God's revelation and love—something that can occur in any historical, cultural, or social context. Historically, misinterpretations of certain biblical texts—though not officially promoted "by the Church"—have contributed to hostile attitudes toward the Jewish people, culminating in expressions of antisemitism. The document We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah (1998, no. IV) reaffirms what Nostra Aetate declares: ""The Church ... mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews and motivated by the Gospel's spiritual love and by no political considerations, deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of antisemitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source". The Church thus recognizes that antisemitism—even when manifested in Christian contexts—stands in radical contradiction to the Gospel and distorts the witness of Jesus of Nazareth, who himself was a faithful Jew obedient to the Torah.

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The polarity between blessing and curse (Gen 12:3a–c), when read deeply, reveals itself as an expression of the LORD's unconditional fidelity and an ongoing call to human response. It evokes a living and dialogical relationship between God and humanity. The manner in which individuals and nations respond to the LORD's promise to Abraham requires spiritual, ethical, and theological discernment. This re-reading offers a vital lens through which to reflect on contemporary Jewish–Christian dialogue and allows for simultaneous recognition of both Israel's election and the universal openness of God's blessing to all nations. Post-Nostra Aetate theology expresses the desire to integrate the covenants in a way that fosters reconciliation between Jewish and Christian traditions. As the PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION asserts, "the Israelites remain 'beloved' by God" in their unique and unrepeatable vocation within salvation history (2001, p. 164).

The contrast between blessing and curse in Genesis 12:3 should therefore be understood not as a simplistic binary of reward and punishment, but as a dynamic that reflects the interaction between divine fidelity to the promise and human response to it. This perspective contributes to a contemporary reflection on how peoples and individuals position themselves in relation to salvation history—especially with regard to Jewish–Christian relations and the continuity of divine promises.

An analysis of the verbs "to bless" and "to curse" helps to reveal the depth and seriousness of the covenant established by God with Abraham—one whose implications transcend the people of Israel and reach out to other nations, as manifested in the fulfillment of the promise in the new covenant in Christ. The blessing of Abraham remains a key to interpreting the salvific plan of the God of Israel, as well as the theological place of the Jewish people and the ethical imperative for interreligious dialogue. This imperative is especially relevant in times marked by polarization and historical amnesia. The LORD's fidelity to His promise is also a summons to human fidelity—on the path of mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between Jews and Christians, bearing witness together to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

Conclusion

This theological rereading of Genesis 12:1–3, in dialogue with the Nostra Aetate declaration and Pauline theology, reveals that the promise made to Abraham constitutes not only the starting point of the biblical narrative but also a fundamental hermeneutical axis for the entire economy of salvation. The three central elements — land, name, and people —

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transcend their original configuration, assuming a progressively universal dimension throughout Scripture (cf. von Rad, 1972, p. 200). The promised land is projected onto the eschatological horizon of the Kingdom of God; the name, as an expression of mission, culminates in the exaltation of the Name above every name (cf. Phil 2:9). In this sense, the people, initially defined by lineage, expand by faith with a strong call to the nations to come to know the one God.

The blessing promised to Abraham is structured around opposing poles: bārak (to bless) and qālal (to curse). God's choice is clear: to establish a path of blessing that extends to “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3). This universality is reiterated by Paul, who affirms that “the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham: ‘In you shall all nations be blessed’” (Gal 3:8). The tension between blessing and curse, therefore, does not express a punitive dualism, but rather an ethical appeal in response to the irrevocable gift of the covenant (cf. Westermann, 2004, pp. 97–99).

Viewed through the lens of Nostra Aetate, especially its paragraph 4, a theological correction becomes evident: “the Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy established the Ancient Covenant” (VATICAN II COUNCIL, Nostra Aetate, 1965, no. 4). This statement echoes Pauline theology, according to which “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29), even in the face of Israel’s resistance. The image of the olive tree, used by Paul (Rom 11:17–24), reinforces that the Church is grafted onto the Jewish root—it does not replace it. This metaphor is further developed in the 2015 document: “Paul coined the expressive image of the root of Israel into which the wild branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rom 11:16-21). One could say that Jesus Christ bears in himself the living root of the "green olive tree"” (COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS, 2015, no. 34). It is worth reading number 27 of the same document in full.

> The covenant that God has offered Israel is irrevocable. "God is not man, that he should lie" (Num 23:19; cf. 2 Tim 2:13). The permanent elective fidelity of God expressed in earlier covenants is never repudiated (cf. Rom 9:4; 11:1–2). The New Covenant does not revoke the earlier covenants, but it brings them to fulfilment. Through the Christ event Christians have understood that all that had gone before was to be interpreted anew. For Christians the New Covenant has acquired a quality of its own, even though the orientation for both consists in a unique relationship with God (cf. for example, the covenant formula in Lev 26:12, "I will be your God, and you will be my people"). For Christians, the New Covenant in Christ is the culminating point of the promises of salvation of the Old Covenant and is to that extent never independent of it. The New Covenant is grounded in and based on the Old, because it is ultimately the God of Israel who concludes the Old Covenant with his people Israel and enables the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Jesus

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> lives during the period of the Old Covenant, but in his work of salvation in the New Covenant confirms and perfects the dimensions of the Old. The term covenant, therefore, means a relationship with God that takes effect in different ways for Jews and Christians. The New Covenant can never replace the Old but presupposes it and gives it a new dimension of meaning, by reinforcing the personal nature of God as revealed in the Old Covenant and establishing it as openness for all who respond faithfully from all the nations (cf. Zech 8:20-23; Psalm 87)

The hope expressed in Nostra Aetate for the day when "all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice" (cf. Zeph 3:9) unites both traditions in a single covenant in progress. The divine blessing announced in Gen 12:1–3 is not a past event, but a perennial promise—foundational both for the covenant with Israel and for its Christological reinterpretation in Jesus Christ (cf. Dunn, 1998, pp. 525–530). As the Apostle Paul affirms, Israel's rejection is not final: "What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Rom 11:15). Such understanding rejects any theological reading that would regard the Jewish people as contrary to divine blessing.

Sixty years after the promulgation of Nostra Aetate, the rereading of Gen 12:1–3 invites both Christians and Jews to recognize themselves as heirs of a common promise. The memory of this promise — land, name, people — remains a foundation for dialogue, respect for otherness, and the construction of paths toward reconciliation. The blessing of Abraham continues to resonate as a universal calling for all who walk before the one God, source of life and peace. The Old and the New Covenants illuminate one another, revealing one single, faithful divine plan. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old" (CCC, 2000, no. 129).

By recognizing the irrevocability of Israel's election, the Church reaffirms her rootedness in salvation history and her vocation to universal blessing. This fidelity also constitutes an appeal to humanity—especially the Christian community—to walk paths of listening, respect, and cooperation with the people of the promise. United in the memory of Abraham, Jews and Christians are called to bear witness together to the God of Israel, source of life and peace.

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